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Exploring FL Readers' Metacognitive Beliefs: Narrations from Learner Diaries

Abstract

Metacognition is a complex construct widely investigated in SLA studies, also those that focus on reading skills and reading comprehension. Ample research points to metacognition as a strong predictor in developing foreign language reading skills, thus promoting metacognitive strategies in FL education is highly recommended. This paper presents a report on a study in which Polish FL learners kept a diary for a period of one month and wrote comments in reference to the reading classes in which they participated. The data obtained from the students' narrations allowed to examine the learners' metacognitive beliefs defined in the study as knowledge about cognition, consisting of three components: person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategy knowledge (Flavell, 1981). The diary data were analyzed in a global narrative way, which enabled the researcher to examine a complex character and a dynamic nature of metacognition in relation to the reading lessons. The findings underline a double role that learner diaries played in this study: as a research tool useful in investigating learners' metacognition and an effective task that seemed to facilitate the learners' reflection skills.

Keywords: metacognition, strategy training, reading strategies, diaries, student beliefs

Metacognitive strategies "appear to have 'ecological validity'; that is, they are recognizable components in 'real-life situations'" (Brown, 1980, p. 454). When one checks the outcomes of an activity against certain criteria of effectiveness or common sense, one applies a metacognitive strategy. Although metacognition seems to be such an omnipresent aspect of everyday life, researchers have found it rather fuzzy and difficult to define.

The present article discusses metacognition in relation to reading skills. Plenty of different frameworks have been developed for the purpose of investigating this contract; however, they all seem to resonate with Flavell's (1978, 1981) conceptualizations of metacognition. At the beginning, the paper analyzes

the models suggested by Flavell in 1978 and 1981, and proceeds to revise several examples of reading studies that drew on Flavell. Next, the paper presents an overview of metacognition studies into differences between effective and less effective FL/L2. The last section of the theoretical part discusses several models of reading strategy training. The empirical part of the article is a report on a study which has explored Polish students' metacognitive beliefs as revealed by the learners in the diaries they kept during a reading strategy training. The training involved explicit strategy training, raising learners' metacognitive awareness, and developing their interactive skills. The analysis of diary data brought interesting results and implications concerning educating FL readers and conducting further metacognition studies.

Literature Review

Metacognition and Its Various Conceptualizations

The term "metacognition" was first defined by Flavell in 1978 as a result of his studies in the field of educational psychology. In a nutshell, metacognition means "knowledge that takes as its object or regulates any aspect of any cognitive endeavor" (cited in Baker and Brown, 1984, p. 353). This concept encompasses two aspects of metacognition: knowledge about cognition and regulation of cognition. In 1981, Flavell extended his view of metacognition and suggested a model consisting of metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive experiences, strategy use, and cognitive goals. In this section, the later perspective is discussed in more detail as it was implemented in the study.

Knowledge about cognition is defined by Baker and Brown (1984) as "a person's knowledge about his or her own cognitive resources and the compatibility between the person as a learner and the learning situation" (p. 353). *Regulation of cognition* involves self-regulatory strategies used by the learner when performing a task, such as checking the result of any learning action, planning one's next step, monitoring the effectiveness of any attempted action, as well as testing, revising, and evaluating one's learning strategies. Regulation of cognition is present in the conceptualization developed by Paris and Lindauer (1982), who explored three categories in the context of reading: evaluation, planning, and regulation. Evaluation involves analyzing task characteristics and one's personal abilities that can effect comprehension. Planning entails selecting particular strategies which can help the reader to reach the aims that have been set earlier. Regulation is a process of monitoring and redirecting one's activities during the course of reading to reach the desired goals.

In the later version of metacognition developed by Flavell (1981), knowledge of cognition has been extended into the concept of metacognitive knowledge. *Metacognitive knowledge* is the knowledge we possess about ourselves, the tasks we are to perform and the strategies we apply. In the literature, it is usually called *person*, *task*, and *strategy knowledge*. Knowledge about tasks is usually related to task difficulty, for example, texts with unfamiliar words may be more difficult than those with familiar vocabulary. Knowledge about strategies involves the ability to choose the strategies that may appear more useful in particular situations, for example, previewing the title of the articles may aid comprehension. Flavell (1981) stresses the fact that these three variables, that is, person, task, and strategy knowledge, are highly interactive. For example, while completing a summary task a reader invents a topic sentence and, by doing so, employs a combination of task and strategy knowledge.

Flavell (1985) discusses an important question whether metacognitive knowledge is declarative or procedural. He assumes that metacognitive knowledge is qualitatively similar to any other kind of knowledge, for example, knowledge about computers or elephants. Therefore, he claims that some metacognitive knowledge is declarative, and some is procedural. In fact, the concepts of declarative and procedural knowledge in relation to cognitive knowledge have been adopted by several researchers, among others, Cross et al. (1983), Paris et al. (1983), Desoete and Roeyers (2003), Veenman (2005). For example, in their study on strategic reading, Cross et al. (1983) categorized cognitive knowledge in three ways: declarative, procedural, and conditional. *Declarative knowledge* about reading includes information about one's individual knowledge as a learner and awareness of the factors that might affect reading ability. *Procedural knowledge* reflects an awareness and management of cognition, including knowledge about strategies. Finally, *conditional knowledge* is knowledge of why and when to use a given strategy.

Person, task, and strategy knowledge, identified by Flavell (1981) as components of metacognitive knowledge, serve as a base for *metacognitive experiences*, another component in Flavell's (1981) metacognition model. Metacognitive experiences may occur before, during and after reading. The before-reading knowledge relates to person knowledge, for example, learners' awareness about their strengths to perform the task; the during-reading knowledge can be strategy information, that is, knowledge about how to perform the task; the after-reading knowledge is task information, namely, knowledge about the difficulty of the task. Flavell (1981) claims that metacognitive experiences are likely to occur when cognition processes fail. Such cognitive failures may be noticed or not by the learner. When they are detected (e.g., by the feeling of confusion in performing a task), metacognitive experiences may lead to the activation of metacognitive knowledge and, consequently, help to solve the detected problem. However, when the reader is not aware of their cognitive failure,

this situation may be followed by metacognitive failure. For example, we may be reading a text daydreaming, gradually understanding less and less without realizing what is happening (Markman, 1981). In other words, metacognitive experiences function as insights or perceptions that one experiences during cognition and can serve as "quality control" checks that can induce readers to revise their cognitive goals.

The next component in Flavell's (1981) conception of metacognition is *strategy use*, which involves applying cognitive and metacognitive resources. Flavell (1979, as cited in Garner, 1988) assumes that "cognitive strategies are involved to make cognitive progress, metacognitive strategies to monitor them" (p. 20), thereby emphasizing the interrelation of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The last element in the model, *cognitive goals*, seems to be the most practical. For example, in reading a text accompanied by questions, the goal could mean performing a concrete task to find information in the text necessary to answer a specific question.

Summing up, in Flavell's (1981) model all the components of metacognition form a sequence and can prompt each other. Metacognitive knowledge serves as a basis for metacognitive experiences, which in turn invoke the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies, and encourage the learner to revise their metacognitive knowledge and cognitive goals.

Metacognition in Reading

Although the term "metacognition" may be relatively new, this type of knowledge in relation to reading has been recognized since the beginning of the 20th century (e.g., Dewey, 1910; Huey, 1968; Thorndike, 1917). Dewey calls for inducing reflective thinking in reading, which today may be named metacognitive training. Thorndike defines reading as reasoning; he describes understanding a paragraph as similar to a math problem: "It consists of selecting the right elements of the situation and putting them together in the right relations […] [the mind] must select, repress, soften, emphasize, correlate and organize, all under the influence of the right mental set or purpose or demand" (Thorndike, 1917, p. 329, as cited in Brown, 1988). All the enumerated authors emphasize the role of metacognition in reading.

One of the aims of metacognition studies has been to explore differences between effective and less effective readers. As regards reading in L1, numerous studies point to certain differences in metacognitive knowledge and strategy use between the two groups of readers. The results of FL/L2 research are reminiscent of L1 reading studies. More skilled FL readers demonstrate greater awareness of the reading process (Geladari & Konstantinos, 2010). They are more consistent and effective in monitoring their reading (Yang & Zhang, 2002).

In fact, a significant positive correlation between strategy use and reading achievement has been found (Rastegar et al., 2017; Yang & Zhang, 2002; Zhang & Seepho, 2013). More effective readers are more sensitive to inconsistencies in the text and respond to them appropriately (Yang & Zhang, 2002). They also show more effective self-evaluation skills and use a wider range of "top-down" strategies (Kusiak, 2001). Devine (1988), Hosenfeld (1977) and Wang et al. (2009) point to a crucial role of perceptions that FL readers hold of reading and themselves as readers and explain the relationship between readers' perceptions and their performance. Successful readers view reading more as a meaning-oriented process than a decoding exercise. They also show more confidence in their abilities. Not surprisingly, in comparison with L1 studies, the results of FL/L2 studies underline the importance of readers' language competence in reading. Zhang (2002) found that more advanced learners demonstrated greater awareness of the strategies they use in reading.

To sum up, studies into the features of good and poor readers have resulted in interesting results. They gave rise to numerous investigations concerning the effectiveness of strategy training, whose aim is to equip learners with "good reader" knowledge and skills.

Strategy Training

Studies into FL/L2 reading instruction provide evidence that strategy instruction can bring promising results. Training can enhance reading performance (Carrell et al., 1989; Dabarera et al., 2014). It can result in developing an appropriate use of reading strategies (Fung et al., 2003). The instruction was found successful in sensitizing students to the facilitating role of top-down strategies (Kusiak, 2001; Salataci & Akyel, 2002) and improving learners' self-evaluation skills (Kusiak, 2001). Strategy instruction was also effective in raising strategy awareness (Brown et al., 1996; Dabarera et al., 2014).

In ESL pedagogy, several instructional models have been found effective, for example, the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach—CALLA (Chamot & O'Malley, 1986) and the Forsee Approach—Communication, Cognitive Academic Language Development and Content Instruction in the Classroom (Kidd & Marquardson, 1994). In the instruction, the self-control stage is implemented by encouraging learners to evaluate their work by means of learning strategy logs and checklists. Both programs proved successful in developing students' content knowledge, language proficiency, and learning strategy use. The CALLA was effective in developing FL reading comprehension as demonstrated by Cubukcu (2008), and Nejad and Mahmoodi-Shahrebabaki (2015).

It is important to emphasize that contemporary strategy instruction has taken a social turn; reading motivation and engagement have attracted research attention as factors contributing to reading achievement. Koukourikou et al. (2018) investigated the effectiveness of *Collaborative Strategic Reading* (CSR), which drew on reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1986) and cooperative learning, and found this teaching perspective successful in developing reading performance of FL students. Collaborative techniques recommend developing peer interaction, for example, by involving students in group discussions about reading strategies (Hennessey, 1999). This way of teaching helps students to develop "metacognitive" discourse and is likely to provoke conceptual conflict, which in turn can assist learners in the construction and refinement of their concepts and attitudes (i.e., metacognitive knowledge). Changes in this area of metacognition prepare learners for the next step in their metacognitive development—the integration of metacognitive knowledge with regulation of cognition (Schraw & Moshman, 1995).

Other examples of contemporary reading strategy instruction are *Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction* (CORI), which was applied in elementary and middle school classrooms, for example, by Guthrie & Klauda (2014) and Wigfield et al. (2014), as well as the engagement model of reading comprehension development suggested by Guthrie and Klauda (2016). In the engagement model, reading comprehension is viewed as the consequence of an extended amount of engaged reading, which is defined as motivated, strategic, knowledge driven, and socially interactive. Taboada Barber & Klauda (2020, p. 28) assume that

> reading motivation produces reading engagement, which promotes achievement. That is, when students set reading goals, value reading, and believe in themselves as readers, they more willingly and fully engage in reading activities. In turn, consistent, active reading engagement helps individuals build the varied cognitive processes requisite to deep reading comprehension.

As a summary of the interrelated dimensions of the model, the acronym SMILE has been suggested. The letters stand for the following aspects of reading practice:

> S for sharing or the social dimension; M for me, or the referent of the self-efficacy dimension; I for importance, a key aspect of the value dimension; L for liking, which reflects the intrinsic dimension; and E for engagement, which comes last as a product of each of the preceding dimensions but also engendered by additional specific supports. (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2017, p. 28)

Since this model was implemented in the strategy training which is the core of the study presented in this paper, it will be discussed in more detail in the empirical section of this text.

The Study

Participants and the Context of the Study

The subjects in the study were 60 secondary school students of EFL. They participated in a reading strategy training, which took place over eight lessons of 45 minutes each. The students' competence in English was at the B1 level, as was measured by the learners' teacher based on the syllabus and the tests administered before the training. In the course of their education, the learners had already been exposed to some forms of strategy training that had the features of blind training.[1]

The Training

The training which was conducted by the author of this paper was inspired by the engagement model of reading comprehension (Guthrie & Klauda, 2016). The main aims of the instruction were: (1) to present or revise a selection of strategies readers can use when dealing with different types of texts; (2) to create a variety of opportunities so that students can practice the strategies and reflect on themselves as readers; (3) to create a positive classroom atmosphere in which the participants would be willing to share their opinions and observations; (4) to introduce basic terms connected with the strategies discussed. The principles, goals, and content of the training are presented in Table 1. They are organized according to the acronym SMILE suggested by Guthrie and Wigfield (2017, p. 28). It is important to note that the following activities presented in Table 1 were completed by the learners at two stages, that is, first individually, then in pairs or groups: semantic mapping of expository text structures (Carrell et al., 1989), activating background knowledge by means of the ETR, that is, experience, text, relationship method[2] (Carrell et al., 1989), making predictions

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[1] Blind training, as described by Brown et al. (1986), does not require learners' strategic consciousness. Students are instructed what to do (which corresponds to their declarative knowledge of strategies), but are given no explanation why they should perform certain tasks.
[2] The ETR consists of three stages. At the *experience* stage, learners discuss their knowledge and experiences related to the text to be read, for example, on the basis of the title of the text.

and developing monitoring skills by means of the Directed Reading-Thinking Activity[3] (Stauffer, 1969), answering reading comprehension questions, guessing the meaning of unknown vocabulary, making inferences and cohesion awareness exercises.

It was believed that the learners would be prepared for this kind of instruction and that the training would motivate the participants to express their reflection in their diaries.

Table 1

The SMILE Aspects of the Strategy Training

Aspects of the training	Aims	Examples of activities
S – sharing	– to encourage cooperation among students; – to show students that "shared" reading can mean deeper and less difficult reading.	– reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 1986); writing a diary; sharing observations about the way of reading; thinking aloud when working on a text in a group; observing the reading of the peers; students' generated questions.
M – me	– to foster students' reading self-efficacy by making texts more "reader friendly"; – to foster students' feelings of success by suggesting a variety of strategies.	– writing a diary; think aloud exercises; observing one's reading; self-questioning strategies; guided discovery and metaphor-based activities.
I – importance	– to make learners reflect on the importance and usefulness of reading; – to develop positive attitudes to the strategies recommended in the training.	– discussions about the role of reading in education and everyday life; discussions about the usefulness of the strategies practiced, e.g., study strategies, such as underlining and note taking; advance organiser exercises; discovery activities.
L – liking	– to create a supportive classroom atmosphere; – to give learners a choice, e.g. in texts and homework tasks.	– giving the students a choice: (1) a variety of texts: essays, blogs, narrative; (2) homework tasks; (3) partners in groupwork activities.
E – engagement	– to enhance learners' reflection on their development as readers.	– class discussions.

At the *text* stage, students read the text. At the *relationship* stage, they seek relationships between the content of the text (as developed at the *text* stage) and their outside knowledge and experience (as discussed at the *experience* stage).

[3] The Directed Reading-Thinking Activity consists of three steps. First, students are encouraged to make predictions about the text on the basis of the title of the text, headings, etc. Then, learners read the text part by part and evaluate their predications. At the final step, students read the whole text again and by referring to the text explain if their predictions were correct or not.

Aims of the Study

The study aimed to explore metacognitive beliefs that the participants of the training expressed in their diaries. It was assumed that metacognitive beliefs correspond to metacognitive knowledge, which is reflected in its three components, that is, person knowledge, task knowledge, and strategy knowledge as defined by Flavell (1981). In the present study, the term "metacognitive beliefs" refers to the following beliefs: (1) *Beliefs in relation to the learners (BL)*: the beliefs that the students revealed about themselves and other students as FL learners and readers as well as their opinions about the learning process in general and about reading; (2) *Beliefs in relation to the tasks (BT)*: the learners' opinions about the tasks they performed during the training as well as the students' knowledge concerning the information and resources they needed to complete the activities; (3) *Beliefs in relation to the strategies (BS)*: the learners' opinions concerning the strategies that were recommended to the students during the training as the resources that they may apply when reading texts.

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

(1) What are the students' beliefs in relation to the learners themselves (BL) as expressed in their diaries?
(2) What are the students' beliefs in relation to the tasks they performed during the training (BT) as expressed in their diaries?
(3) What are the students' beliefs in relation to the strategies presented during the training (BS) as expressed in their diaries?

Research Method

The diary method is the main methodology used in the present study. A diary study involves asking people to keep a regular record of their experiences and activities in which they are involved (Bartlett & Milligan, 2015). Diaries can be used in a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, medicine, economics, and second language acquisition. In SLA "[d]iary studies are case studies in which language learners or teachers keep an intensive journal using introspection or retrospection and self-observation over a period of time" (McKay, 2009, p. 235). When diarists are L2 learners, data can provide valuable insights into affective factors, learning strategies, motifs, and perceptions concerning the process of learning—"facets of the language learning experience which are normally hidden or largely inaccessible to an external observer" (Bailey & Ochsner, 1983, p. 189). It is worth noting that despite undeniable advantages, diaries can pose problems such as difficulties in analyzing subjective data and the reluctance of informants (Dörnyei, 2007; Wilczyńska & Michońska-Stadnik, 2010).

In SLA, research diaries have been used for a number of purposes, which can be categorized into three groups: pedagogical purposes, course evaluation, and research (Howell-Richardson & Parkinson, 1988). However, as observed by McKay (2009), there are not many published studies that have utilized diaries as a research technique to explore L2 learning and teaching, the fact which makes a comparison of research findings difficult. Although in the last decade in SLA studies, the diary technique has been gaining popularity, there is still a need for more research especially in relation to metacognition of L2 readers, the gap which the author of the present study intends to address.

In relation to metacognition, diaries have been used mostly for pedagogical purposes, usually as a teaching technique to raise learners' and teachers' self-awareness and self-reflection. In the present study, diaries served two purposes—as a tool to raise learners' reflection and as a research technique to collect data on students' beliefs concerning their metacognitive knowledge. Diaries were distributed to the students before the training. They took the form of traditional notebooks and contained a short introduction and some prompt sentences. The introduction and the prompts were in the learners' native language, that is, Polish (below a translated version of the prompts is presented). The students were asked to write their comments at home and sign their diaries with nicknames.

A: I think during this lesson I have learnt ………….…..
B: I consider it ……….….….… (necessary, unnecessary, interesting, boring) because ……………..
C: It is a pity I have not learnt ………….……..
D: Other comments ………….……..

Analysis of Diary Data

Following the advice of Pavlenko (2007), to obtain a comprehensive interpretation of the data, three aspects of the diaries were examined: (1) *the content*, that is, what the informants reported; (2) *the context*, that is, where they reported, and (3) *the form*, that is, how they reported. As regards the content, diary data can be analyzed in two ways: an analytical one, which can allow for detailed quantitative calculations of strategies reported by subjects, and a global narrative way, which provides researchers with qualitative data and enables them to examine motivational and attitudinal factors (Oxford & Leaver, 1996). In the present study, the latter approach was adopted. Thematic analysis of the content took two steps. The first one entailed reading the entries and deciding which type of metacognitive beliefs the data under inspection reflected: those related to learners, tasks or strategies. The second step involved rereading all the

fragments concerning one type of metacognitive beliefs and identifying themes which reoccurred in them. The examination of the form of diaries focused on the structure of the entries and the elements of the language used by the students which were considered crucial in the analysis of the content of diaries. As regards the context of diaries, in the interpretation of the results, two factors were taken into account: the learning background of the informants (a macro-level factor) and the location in which writing diaries took place (a micro-level factor).

Results
General Comments on the Form and Content of the Diaries

Thirty out of 60 students submitted the diaries after the training. The participants of the training were asked to write diaries in Polish; while some did so in English. The diaries varied in content, form, and length; some took the form of reflective diaries, others—short notes. It seems that 22 diaries were kept systematically; entries were written after each meeting. Eight diaries seem incomplete; some were written as summative reflections after the training, the others included very sparse comments. The length of one comment concerning one lesson or one two-lesson meeting varied from 250 words to one short sentence; the average was approximately 50 words per comment. The average length of a diary was approximately three A5 pages. A preliminary analysis of the content of the comments showed that although not all the students explicitly answered the prompt questions provided in the instruction, the prompts must have directed their reports.

An analysis of the content is presented below; it is organized according to the three components of metacognition specified in the research questions: Beliefs in relation to the learners (BL), Beliefs in relation to the tasks (BT), and Beliefs in relation to the strategies (BS). The analysis is illustrated with samples taken from the students' diaries. The structure of the entries and the language used by the informants are discussed as well.

Beliefs in Relation to the Learners (BL): Research question #1

In the diary data, a number of themes were identified related to this type of metacognitive knowledge. Most of them illustrate the learners' opinions concerning various aspects of the training and demonstrate in what way the training encouraged the students to reflect on their learning and themselves as learners. The themes are discussed in detail below.

The Training as a Surprising Experience. It seems useful to start this discussion with the following diary entry:

> During the first lessons I was surprised that there is someone who is interested in how I (and others) learn; what was even more interesting is why someone is doing it.[4]

The quotation shows that the learner was aware of one of the main aims of the training, which was to encourage the learners to reflect on certain aspects of reading and to raise their awareness about how they learn. Comments about the students' learning appeared at the very beginning of their diaries.

The Training as a Factor Enhancing the Learners' Understanding of the Reading Skill. An ample amount of data is related to the students' learning. It is possible to distinguish several types of students. The first type are those who claimed that the training had enhanced their understanding of what reading texts involves. Some students realized that the way of reading they had applied before the training was inefficient; this opinion is demonstrated in the following entry.

> I think that the first classes revealed before me a completely new discovery how one should read English texts. This fact really surprised me. Till then I had been almost certain that my failures were due to not knowing single words of a text. Therefore, I didn't work hard enough to provide correct answers to reading comprehension questions. Till then none of my English teachers had shown me any clues how to cope with this problem.

There were students who wrote that before the training they had never reflected on the way they read. They expressed their opinions in relation to the activities they had performed during the training, which is shown in the quotations below.

> Personally, I have never thought about such exercises, but now I will try to make up for it.

> Besides, I have never realized that the way texts are organized […] may help to answer reading comprehension questions.

The Training as an Unnecessary Practice of Previously Learnt Skills. There were students who claimed that the training had not taught them anything new. They had already been familiar with the techniques presented to

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[4] For the sake of this paper, the entries that the learners produced in Polish were translated into English.

them and found it difficult to relate them to their learning. In many cases, the students wrote as if in the name of the whole class, probably with the intention of strengthening their personal point of view. For some examples, see the entries below.

> During the first lessons I was surprised that there is someone who is interested in how I am familiar with everything that you tried to present to us.

> It's a pity but after 5 minutes of the lesson I gave up. I realized that I would not benefit from this lesson. […] We are 18 years old. You should realize that we can read with understanding in a satisfactory way.

Relating the Training to Previous Learning Experiences. The students related the training to their former learning experiences. Some students saw the training as a completely new learning experience; they complained that their regular school classes lacked direct instruction on how to read English texts. The other learners stressed the fact that the training activities were similar to the English courses or private lessons that they were attending or had attended before. Several students explained that they did not find reflective activities particularly helpful as it was sufficient for them to read texts without being aware of how they did so. The following entries illustrate this finding.

> I'd like to write about us analyzing the steps of reading during answering the reading comprehension questions. Well, during my short life I have been forced quite a few times to do similar analyses (also when attending various language courses) and nothing has ever come of it (perhaps because there was never any continuation).

> I do realize that understanding the main idea of the text is important, and only then details and message of every paragraph—but I never think about such things when I read a text. I simply read it and try to understand.

Reporting on the Process of Learning during the Training. The students reported on the process of learning they experienced during the training. Very often they began their diary entries with describing the class activities in which they were engaged. Then, the students focused on the reading strategies that the tasks aimed to demonstrate (it is an aspect of students' metacognition classified as strategy knowledge, which will be discussed later). The students also described what they thought they were learning when completing the tasks, for example, beginning to pay attention to certain aspects of reading, learning how to read faster, improving certain skills, etc. In many cases, the students diagnosed their learning difficulties, evaluated their skills and reflected on possible remedies, which can be seen in the two examples presented below (written by

the same student). The comments indicate that the training was successful in encouraging the students to reflect on the difficulties they encountered when reading texts.

> I had slight difficulties about the titles; I didn't know, I was not sure if the sentence I wanted to select would reflect the content of the whole text.

> I still don't know which things are more crucial, and which are less crucial. What distracts me is the fact that I don't understand the meaning of all the words in a text.

Disagreeing with the Advice Suggested during the Training. In some cases, the comments took the form of personal judgements, for example, the students took issue with the "theories" suggested by the teacher. This is reflected in the entries presented below.

> Reading a text and then writing a map to this text is perhaps interesting as a task itself. But nobody really does it every time one reads a text, anyway I don't do it.

> I don't agree with the theories announced during the lesson. I think it makes no sense.

Reflections on the Sense of Improvement and Success. Some of the students reflected on their feelings of improvement and success. They felt that the aspects of reading they had found difficult before seemed easier. Many students reported that the activities helped them to improve concentration during reading. The learners saw a positive impact of the training on their sense of confidence. It was attributed to certain tasks and the overall atmosphere of the training. In some diaries, it is possible to observe how the students evaluated their progress in the course of the training and how their evaluation evolved. The quotations below are taken from the diary of the same student.

> I manage to understand more and more at the lesson.

> I've done the homework well. It proves that I'm managing to understand more and more. At the beginning I couldn't.

> I'm disappointed with the results of the test.

> I liked this lesson a lot. I participated in it more actively than usual.

> I've managed to do the homework without any problems. I'm proud of myself.

Beliefs in Relation to the Tasks (BT): Research Question #2

This component of metacognition knowledge is reflected in the comments in which the students referred to the activities conducted during the training. The learners were able to describe the activities they performed; they were also able to successfully identify and name the aims of the activities. They commented on the difficulty of the tasks and reflected on the abilities they needed to perform the tasks efficiently. There were students who did not find the advice concerning skillful reading useful and, in a persuasive way, explained their point of view. A more detailed examination of this part of the students' metacognition knowledge is presented below.

Commenting on the Tasks. Two forms of comments were identified. In the first one, the learners focus on the task they found representative of the whole lesson, which is followed by an explanation as to why they found this activity useful in their learning. In the second type, the students narrow down their report to the skill that, in their opinion, a particular lesson helped them to practice. The examples are provided below.

I think that the exercises with cartoons and sentences help to ignore details in reading texts.

I learnt how to answer the questions in a direct way, without beating about the bush.

The Link between Theory and Practice. There were comments that concern what some students called "the link between theory and practice." The entries reflect the learners' views on the usefulness of the tasks in real-life situations. The learners commented on the reading strategies (often called by them "principles") that were modelled in the tasks. Some students related the "principles" to their own abilities and described the situations in which the strategies can be applied. A few examples of such comments are presented below.

The most important thing I learnt at this lesson is the fact that in most texts the first paragraph is the most crucial one. I consider this piece of information very useful, because it facilitates reading and helps to understand a text faster.

I think that during the lesson I learnt how to pay attention to so called details in a completely unknown text. I regard it as very useful when one has to deal with a big amount of information, e.g., during a visit in a foreign country. It makes such attempts fast and skillful.

The way of taking notes is a kind of task that requires from everyone a maximum amount of concentration on a text. What is necessary is a sort of creative thinking, which helps to analyze notes in an efficient and skillful way.

There were students who criticized the training because of its overly theoretical character. They claimed that the "theories" presented during the training were not fully developed in the tasks. The two extracts produced by the same student are an example of this opinion.

Taking notes in a graphical way could be very useful. I think, however, that we should learn more about how to do such notes. We saw the examples of such notes, now it would be good to see a text which was used to produce such notes. We could see some pattern which can be used to take notes in this way. It could make life easier.

All the things that I lacked last time were done today! Well done!

These comments indicate that the students distinguished two aspects of their knowledge of English: theoretical and practical. It is also clear that the students were aware of the link between the two.

The Usefulness of the Skills Practiced. The students found the training helpful in developing reading skills, writing (e.g., taking notes) and speaking (e.g., planning a speech). Also, some more general cognitive skills were mentioned such as creative and logical thinking. In most of the diaries, the students emphasize the usefulness of the strategies practiced for school tests and exams, for example, the secondary school leaving exam or FC exams.

Arguing with the Advice Suggested during the Training. In many cases, the students argued with what they thought the classes had sought to teach them, as demonstrated in the following extracts.

I do understand that the topic is important in reading, but in 80% of the cases it has nothing to do with the content of a text. Only in 20% a topic goes with the content of a text—it is in the case of serious texts, scientific texts, and sometimes articles. A good text has a topic only slightly connected with itself; and it is possible to understand a topic only after reading a text, and sometimes even this can be difficult. Therefore, I think that paying attention to a topic and then to the content of a text may lead to irreparable results; i.e., incomplete comprehending of the text.

It is true that a title can give us certain clues, but it also creates in our mind certain inclination about the passage, the effect which I consider a mistake. It limits our horizons in a very peculiar way; it narrows our imagination regarding the idea expressed in the title. This inability to move our fantasy is restricted by the ideology of reading with understanding (practiced before). When a clever reader is not able to immerse in a text in a free and complete way (because of the earlier limitations), one loses a lot. And it is how [...] (not clear in the diary) evaluations about the purpose and meaning of a text are made.

The last extract is a very clear example of how the student reacted to one of the lessons and how the reading strategies presented in class challenged their "philosophy of reading." The comment is a response to the lesson about skimming, for example, identifying the topic of a text before reading the text in a more detailed way. It is interesting to observe the author's emotional involvement in their "fight" with the arguments presented during the training.

Beliefs in Relation to the Strategies (BS): Research Question #3

This component of metacognition knowledge is reflected in the comments in which the students referred to the strategies presented by the teacher. The students' BS along with the language used in the diaries are discussed below.

Language Used by the Students to Write about the Strategies. When writing about the tasks, the learners pointed to the strategies presented during the training. The students named the strategies; the words that they used to refer to the reading strategies are: "principles," "techniques," "methods," "ways," "mechanisms," and "strategies." Another way of writing about the strategies was recalling them in a general way, that is, "we learnt how to find important information." The students used a rich range of metalanguage; words such "main idea," "topic," "synonyms," "main message" or "content," "details," "text organization," "context," "key words," etc. It is worth noting that English terms were used also in the diaries written in Polish, which could be due to the fact that the classes were conducted in English.

Opinions about the Strategies. All the students expressed their opinion about the strategies; they either accepted or rejected them—in both cases the students explained their views, usually in relation to their abilities and learning experiences. Two examples of such comments are provided below.

I think that it's useful to give names/titles for texts. If I'm able to give the title, it means that I know what the text is about.

Mind-mapping a text is a stupid method. It may make taking notes more effective, but it is very uncomfortable to use it to repeat the information expressed by means of it. One loses the sequence and logical links and relationships among the facts.

Evaluating one's Abilities and Specifying Problems. The students reflected on their abilities to cope with certain aspects of reading and evaluated their progress. Some students extrapolated to other out-of-training reading situations. It is worth highlighting that vocabulary knowledge was reported as the most common factor causing problems in comprehending texts. For an example of such opinions, see the entry below.

I experience difficulty in catching the main message expressed in the answers. I find it easier to formulate the main idea in my own words. However, there are texts that are really difficult. I think my difficulties are connected with not understanding key words.

Discussion and Conclusions

The diaries elicited rich information, which enabled the author to answer the research questions concerning the students' metacognitive beliefs in relation to the learners themselves (BL), the tasks (BT) and strategies connected with the training (BS).

As regards BL, the results of the analysis show that the learners differed in their views on reading in a FL. For some students, the training was a kind of eye opener as it created a unique opportunity to "discover" new learning techniques. It seems that the learners appreciated the techniques recommended; they expressed an opinion that reading English texts requires complex skills and using strategies can facilitate this process. There was another group of students that treated reading as a skill that they simply apply when they want to understand a text; in their opinion, strategies are "fuss," which they do not need. The students who did not show much enthusiasm about the training seem to demonstrate the features of fluent readers, whose reading behavior Grabe and Stoller (2002) explain in the following way:

Using strategies effectively does not typically involve conscious decisions on the part of the fluent reader. Strategic readers are able to verbalize consciously the strategies that they use when asked to reflect, but they usually do not think consciously of these strategic choices because they have used them effectively so often. (p. 82)

In other words, a possible reason behind the learners' dissatisfaction with the training is the fact that, as more experienced readers, they had already been using the strategies suggested during the training. It seems that bringing strategies into consciousness was not what they would have expected from this kind of training.

The data point to another important preference concerning reading. For many learners, it is vocabulary that plays a key role in reading comprehension. Similarly, not knowing vocabulary in the text is a common problem reported by many learners. It suggests that for some students, vocabulary knowledge is one of the most important aspects of FL competence that they would like to develop. A possible explanation of this finding could be the influence of the students' learning background, namely, not many opportunities to get engaged in awareness-raising activities and to test the effectiveness of this type of learning. While lexical exercises, also those that accompany reading comprehension tasks, are popular in an EFL classroom, strategy-based tasks are still rare.

When it comes to the research questions which concern BT and BS, the analysis revealed that comments on the tasks and those regarding the strategies intertwine. Therefore, in this discussion the findings reflecting both aspects of students' metacognitive knowledge are presented together. The diaries show that the students were able to identify the objectives of the tasks that they were asked to complete. They were also able to identify and name the strategies that the training demonstrated. The learners evaluated the difficulty of the tasks and discussed the effectiveness of the strategies involved in the tasks. There are several skills that the learners emphasized as resources which they utilized while performing the reading tasks. Apart from vocabulary knowledge, they stressed the importance of the skill of concentration, the use of creative thinking and analytical reasoning. As regards the usefulness of the strategies presented, it seems that it is not possible to point to one strategy evaluated by all the learners as the most helpful. This finding indicates that strategy knowledge is individual. Different students can approve of different strategies for different reasons.

As regards the information and resources the students used in order to complete the tasks, some learners found it very beneficial to draw on their earlier learning experiences. They recalled similar tasks that they had performed in their school or out-of-school learning. It seems that this group of learners took

the "high road" of learning (in contrast to the "low road"), which according to Chamot and O'Malley (1994) means recognizing similarities between familiar tasks and new tasks, and being able to utilize the strategies that one used to apply in the past. It is probable that among the participants of the training, there were also learners who took the "low road"; they did not remember the previous use of strategies and viewed them as new ones. It is worth adding that the process of diary keeping offered the learners an opportunity to verbalize their strategy use; this unique experience could have equipped them with the metacognition knowledge necessary to recognize familiar situations and strategies in their future learning, as suggested by Paris and Winograd (1990) and Pressley et al. (1992).

It was interesting to observe the learners' emotional engagement with what the training had to offer, especially to follow changes in the reactions and attitudes throughout the training. For example, students who at the beginning did not understand the purpose of the classes changed their attitudes during the training.

To sum up, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The training encouraged the learners to reflect on themselves as learners and participants of the classes as well as the activities in which they were engaged.
2. The diary proved to be an effective elicitation technique.
3. The students differed in their opinions related to the effectiveness of the training, which may reflect the fact that they were at different levels of reading strategy development.
4. For most of the students, vocabulary seems to play a crucial role in reading comprehension.
5. Participating in the training seemed to be an emotional issue.
6. The opinions and attitudes of the students evolved during the training.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

There are several issues which were elucidated by this study and call for further investigation. They are discussed below.

The results indicate that although the participants were at the same level of general language competence (B1), they represented different levels of reading strategy development. By way of revision, the students varied in their opinions concerning the strategies presented during the training and probably in their experience in strategy use. At this point of discussion, it seems useful to quote Pressley (2001), who advances the following suggestion to educators:

Although much is known about how to teach comprehension strategies when students are first learning them, very little is known about how teaching should occur as students are internalizing and automatizing strategies. (p. 9)

In the future, more research attention should be devoted to the students who are at the stage of internalizing and automatizing strategies. Additionally, it would be useful to explore in more detail the specificity of teaching reading strategies to mixed ability classes, i.e., those that consist of more and less experienced learners as far as strategy use is concerned.

In the analysis of diary data, certain aspects of the language used by the informants were examined. As pointed out in the theoretical section of this paper, developing "metacognitive" discourse is a very important part of strategy training as it can facilitate the process of restructuring beliefs and constructing new metacognitive knowledge. Thus, in future studies it can be beneficial to follow changes in learners' discourse and look at the relation between such changes and students' metacognitive beliefs.

Pavlenko (2007) points out that in analyzing narrative data, it is crucial to "consider not only what was said or written but also what was omitted and why" (p. 274). One of the aims of the SMILE training (see Table 1) was to create an atmosphere conducive to the exchange of knowledge and experiences. However, it was found that not many comments in the diaries focus on the social side of the teaching/learning situation. Although many students valued the atmosphere of the training, there are no comments regarding the learners' participation in groupwork activities, which may indicate that the learners did not appreciate a facilitating role that such tasks may play in their learning. This finding implies a suggestion that teachers devote more time to sensitizing learners to the usefulness of interactive activities. As regards research, it would be valuable to explore in more detail the "caring and sharing" aspects of a FL classroom, as emphasized by Gabryś-Barker (2016).

The study has a number of limitations, which should be taken into consideration by those who would like to conduct a similar investigation. Different prompt statements could elicit different narrations. For example, more open questions can allow learners more freedom to express their opinions. In the present study, the students were instructed to write entries at home. Asking them to complete diaries in class may elicit more introspective reports. Adopting a different mode of diary keeping, such as recording narrations on smartphones, can be more motivating for learners in the era of developing technology, as suggested by Bartlett and Milligan (2015).

In the present study, diary data were analyzed by means of thematic analysis. An alternative way could be to look at the diaries with a narrative lens. The narrative research perspective would enable researchers to treat learners' individual reports as stories and students as story tellers, which would mean

gaining more insight into the dynamic nature of metacognition knowledge. Another possible change in the procedure of the study can be the use of other research methods along with diaries. To ensure methodological triangulation, that is, the use of different research methods to investigate the same issue, interviews with informants can be conducted as well.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss other advantages of strategy training and diary keeping, such as their impact on learners' reading and writing skills, and metalinguistic knowledge. It is the belief of the author of the paper that the present study contributes to the picture of metacognition in EFL teaching and will encourage both teachers and academics to explore the benefits of introspective techniques in their future research.

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Metakognitive Überzeugungen über das Lesen in einer Fremdsprache auf der Basis von Einträgen aus Schülertagebüchern

Z u s a m m e n f a s s u n g

Der Artikel befasst sich mit der Metakognition und metakognitiven Strategien in Bezug auf das Leseverstehen. Obwohl metakognitive Strategien ein fester Bestandteil der kognitiven Handlungen sind, die jeder Mensch alltäglich vornimmt, z. B. bei Bewertung der Wirksamkeit des eigenen Handelns, stellt das Konstrukt nach wie vor eine Herausforderung für die Forschung dar, auch im Bereich der Lesekompetenz. Im Artikel werden die von Flavell (1978, 1981) vorgeschlagenen theoretischen Ansätze dargelegt und ein Überblick über die Forschung zur Metakognition bezogen auf das Lesen in einer Fremdsprache gegeben, wobei ein besonderer Schwerpunkt darauf gelegt wird, die mehr und weniger „effektiven" Leser in die Untersuchung miteinzubeziehen. Des Weiteren werden die Unterrichtsprinzipien geschildert, welche auf die Entwicklung von Lernstrategien abgezielt sind, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Lesekompetenz. Der theoretische Teil des Artikels bildet eine Einführung in den empirischen Teil, in welchem über ein von der Autorin durchgeführtes Forschungsprojekt berichtet wird. Ziel der Studie war es, die metakognitiven Überzeugungen und Meinungen (eng. *metacognitive beliefs*) der Teilnehmer am Lesestrategietraining herauszufinden, die von den Schülern in den im Rahmen des Unterrichts geführten Tagebüchern

(eng. *diaries*) formuliert wurden. Die Analyse der Tagebucheinträge führte zu einigen interessanten Schlussfolgerungen, die bei der Entwicklung von Lernstrategien bzw. bei der Durchführung ähnlicher Untersuchungen zur Metakognition hilfreich sein können.

Schlüsselwörter: Metakognition, Strategietraining, Lesestrategien, Tagebücher, Überzeugungen der Schüler