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Developing Strategic Readers in the EFL Class

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The present experimental study forms part of the research investigating whether strategy instruction improves learners' reading comprehension and develops their metacognitive awareness (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2014). More specifically, research involving explicit strategy instruction among two homogeneous 16-member groups of experimental and control learners was set up in a Greek State High School. The intervention followed the gradual release of responsibility model involving prediction, previewing, skimming, graphic organizers, visualization, making connections and summarization strategies. The experimental group engaged in all of the stages of the intervention, gradually becoming independent users of the strategies taught. The control group engaged only in the first stage. The findings indicate a clear advantage for the experimental group whose ability to comprehend a text and construct meaning improved significantly following the effective implementation of the strategies taught (Bouchard, 2005; Harrison & Vallin, 2018; Harvey & Goudvis, 2014; Weir *et al.*, 2009). At the same time, their autonomy was enhanced, since they developed a deeper understanding of how to manipulate the reading process (Flavell *et al.*, 2002). Therefore, it appears that reading strategy instruction results in developing strategic readers able to utilize the strategies needed to facilitate understanding and monitor comprehension (Clarke *et al.*, 2014).

Key words: reading comprehension, metacognitive awareness, reading strategies, reading strategy instruction

1. Introduction

Reading is an essential skill in the foreign language classroom. The ultimate goal of reading instruction is to enable learners to construct meaning while reading a text.

Successful reading comprehension is generally thought to entail drawing relevant information from the written text effectively through the employment of reading strategies and the reader's background knowledge (Rativa *et al.*, 2012; Rios & Valcarcel, 2005). The written text does not carry

meaning by itself. Readers engage actively in the reading process, interacting with the text, which provides directions as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning using their prior knowledge (Brown, 2001). To comprehend a text, readers should not only sample it, they should also try to reflect on the reading process by looking at it from the outside (Flavell *et al.*, 2002).

In an attempt to add to the work done on metacognitive strategy development and reading competence, the present article presents an action research conducted in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class at a Greek state school, focusing on cognitive and metacognitive strategy instruction. After presenting the relevant literature and setting the theoretical framework for the employment of reading strategies in reading strategy instruction, I proceed to the methodology employed and the presentation and discussion of the research findings.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Reading

2.1.1 The cognitive view and schema theory

The cognitive theory of reading or top-down processing emerged in the 1960s and had a great influence on the EFL field (Pardede, 2010). According to this method, reading involves the connection of information in a text with the reader's background knowledge (Celikoz *et al.*, 2016). In this sense, reading is an active, cognitive process on the part of the learner whose background knowledge plays a key role in constructing meaning through sampling a text, making hypotheses, confirming or rejecting them, making new hypotheses, and so forth (Asnita, 2013).

Schema theory is closely related to top-down processing. Its fundamental principle is that written text provides directions for readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge. New knowledge is built upon past knowledge of objects, situations, events and procedures of how to retrieve, organize, and interpret information (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988). Therefore, comprehension results from old knowledge interacting with new knowledge as new information is added to the reader's system through restructuring his/her existing schemata (Brown, 2001) namely, a "reader's existing knowledge" ... "packed into units" (Fahriany, 2014, p.17).

Schema theorists distinguish between formal schemata (i.e., the way a text is structured according to its genre) and content schemata (i.e., knowledge about the subject matter of a text) (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Employing background knowledge of both schemata through specific strategies enables readers to predict events and infer meaning from a broader context (Landry, 2002).

According to schema theory, reading entails a constant interplay on two levels (Anderson *et al.*, 1977; Brown, 2001; Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988; Yang, 2013). The first level involves the text and the reader. Regarding the text, in order for L2 reading instruction to be effective, teachers should expose learners to meaningful texts, relevant to their needs, interests and cultural background in order to help them activate pre-existing schemata or build new ones (Nuttall, 2000). The reader is the one responsible for decoding the message and his/her prior knowledge is of paramount importance since comprehension occurs when new information from the text interacts with the reader's old knowledge (Asnita, 2013). To that end, reading instruction should follow the pedagogical pre-, while-, and post-reading stage framework to make sure that learners acquire the relevant schemata for text comprehension, to enhance the interaction between reader and text and to give learners the chance to evaluate their adequacy of interpretation and develop their metacognitive awareness (Grabe & Stoller, 2011; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009).

The second level involves an interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). In bottom-up processing, learners rely on specific data from the text while in top-down processing, they rely on higher-level schemata to make predictions and seek to confirm them through searching on a more specific level (Yang, 2013). As suggested in the literature (Birch, 2015; Grabe & Stoller, 2011), reading comprehension results from the interaction between surface structure and deep structure processing, validating both methods of understanding as well as the strategies that learners use to gain meaning from the text.

2.1.2 The metacognitive view

Since studies have demonstrated that successful reading comprehension depends on a directed cognitive effort (Cakici, 2017), research in the field probes into the control readers exercise while trying to comprehend a text (i.e., metacognition) (Flavell *et al.*, 2002; Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Employing metalinguistic processes helps foreign language learners become aware of the way the new linguistic system works to convey meaning, so that they can solve comprehension problems (Clarke *et al.*, 2014).

Metacognitive knowledge consists of knowledge about cognition and regulation of cognition, allowing the reader to plan, regulate and monitor the reading process. Knowledge about cognition entails recognizing patterns of structure, and organization. Monitoring of cognition involves recognizing information problems in a text or the lack of ability to achieve comprehension (Meniado, 2016; Williams & Burden, 2008).

2.2 Reading comprehension strategies

Reading comprehension strategies involve readers in making deliberate decisions before, during, and after reading in order to make sense of their reading (Brown, 2007; Oxford, 1990). Research has indicated that providing learners with explicit comprehension strategy instruction facilitates reading comprehension and enhances their autonomy (Ediger, 2001; Gooden, 2012).

Comprehension strategy instruction involves explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies through modeling, scaffolding, guided practice, and independent use of strategies aiming at increasing learners' understanding of a text as well as monitoring and repairing their own comprehension (Block *et al.*, 2002; Van Keer, 2004). Urquhart and Weir (2013) emphasize that the distinguishing feature of strategies is that they are intentional. Their intentional nature makes them teachable. Gradually, these conscious processes become unconscious and automatic and turn into skills (Urquhart & Weir, 2013).

Harvey and Goudvis (2014) argue that teaching reading strategies should aim at enabling learners to move from the tacit level of understanding, in which they are not aware of how they think when they read, to a higher level of understanding how to manipulate the reading process. In other words, tacit readers should become strategic readers that is, readers able to utilize the reading strategies needed to facilitate understanding and to monitor comprehension. Iwai (2016) points out that comprehension strategy instruction is most effective during actual engagement with the text.

As suggested in the second language acquisition literature (Brown, 2007), reading strategies are learning strategies since reading is a receptive skill. The learning strategies most frequently employed in reading and the ones employed for the purposes of the present study are cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

Cognitive strategies are mental processes requiring specific actions and goal-oriented cognitive steps employed by learners in comprehending a text (Williams & Burden, 2008). Cognitive strategies relate to specific contexts and learning tasks and involve direct manipulation of the learning material (Brown, 2007).

The cognitive strategies discussed in this article are: a) Prediction. Bouchard (2005) suggests that prediction is a cognitive strategy, which can improve reading comprehension. When learners make predictions, which confirm or disconfirm hypotheses while reading, they set a purpose for reading, and interact more with the text, increasing their interest and improving comprehension (Oczkus, 2003). b) Skimming, involving rapid reading aiming at quickly identifying the main ideas from a text (Harmer, 2007). Obtaining an overview of the text helps learners read in a more focused and efficient way (Weir *et al.*, 2009). c) Using graphic organizers namely, a schematic representation of information in a text using key vocabulary terms whose purpose is to activate students' prior knowledge and relate it to new material to make it more familiar and meaningful (Alvermann, 1981; Jiang & Grabe, 2007).

During reading, readers employ metacognitive strategies purposefully and intentionally in order to plan for learning, monitor comprehension or production and self-evaluate what has been learnt (Zhang *et al.*, 2014). Since the ultimate goal of strategy instruction is to develop learners' ability to use strategies whenever necessary, metacognitive strategy instruction ensures that learners will be able to use these strategies well into adulthood (Meniado, 2016).

The metacognitive strategies employed for the purposes of the present study are: a) Pre-viewing text (i.e., engaging learners in planning the cognitive process through generating questions, and monitoring the cognitive process through seeking the answers, thus building metacognitive awareness) (Bouchard, 2005). b) Visualization, which requires readers to use their senses and create an image of what is read so as to make sense of it (Mokhtari & Reichard 2002; Moreillon, 2007). Learners own a great repertoire of visual images from their everyday experience. Using these images to visualize what is happening helps them remember and retrieve information, monitoring and improving comprehension (Harvey & Goudvis, 2014; Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). c) Making connections engages readers in activating background knowledge related to a topic and connecting it to the text to enhance understanding and repair meaning (McNamara, 2007). Good readers make three types of connections: text-to-self (including connections between the reader's experience and the text), text-to-world (connections between the text and information about the world), and text-to-text (connections between types of texts regarding content, plot, structure and style) (Waller & Barrentine, 2015). d) Summarization, which requires identifying the most important information in a text. Summarizing what one has learnt is an important part of evaluating one's performance resulting in building metacognition through regulating one's cognition (Harrison & Vallin, 2018; Mokhtari & Reichard 2002).

According to Veenman, Van Hout-Wouters, and Afflerbach (2006), it is not easy to distinguish between cognitive and metacognitive strategies since metacognition is knowledge about cognition. In effect, metacognition is dependent on cognition and "metacognitive planning cannot be used without cognitive activities referring to the task at hand" (Mehrdad *et al.*, 2012, p. 3758). In a similar vein, Kasimi (2012) points out that metacognitive reading strategies are sequentially applied by learners in order to control the cognitive activities whose ultimate goal is text comprehension. Consequently, both cognitive and metacognitive elements are required to construct understanding.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Research objectives and nature of the study

The aim of the research was to investigate whether the employment of reading strategies improves learners' reading comprehension and develops their metacognitive awareness in order to enable them to monitor and repair their own comprehension.

The method selected for the purposes of the present study was action research which allows the teacher to gain a deeper understanding of her practice and improve it through using her own instruments to collect, interpret and present data on a cyclical basis which included planning, action, monitoring and reflection (Richards, 2003). At the planning stage, the teacher-researcher decided and planned what needed to be investigated. The action followed was monitored by the teacher-researcher. Finally, the teacher-researcher reflected on the outcome in order to improve her practice.

3.2 Teaching context and participants

The participants of this study were 32 monolingual Greek learners of the waystage/A2 level according to the Common European Framework (Council of Europe, 2001) attending EFL classes in the first grade of Junior High School.

The learners were divided into two homogeneous 16-learner groups: the control and the experimental one. The experimental group participated in the training programme, which lasted a month and was composed of four stages: a) explicit strategy instruction through modelling, b) guided practice, c) collaborative learning, and d) independent practice. The control group engaged only in the first stage of the training programme.

3.3 Data-collection instruments

The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data, in order to provide a deeper understanding of the research problem (Teddie & Tashakkori, 2011) as well as "evidence for the validity of research outcomes" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 45). To that end, both qualitative and quantitative data-collection instruments were designed and employed by the teacher-researcher.

3.3.1 Qualitative research

Pre-, and post-intervention semi-structured interviews were conducted providing the researcher with a comparable set of questions but also allowing participants' perspectives on the issue to unfold since they could raise issues that had not been pre-planned (Adel *et.al.*, 2015). Since qualitative research interviews are time consuming, a representative sample of learners -8 learners from the control group and 8 learners from the experimental group- was randomly selected to participate. The interviews were conducted in Greek in order to establish a relaxing atmosphere.

The pre- intervention interviews primarily investigated the learners' interest in reading texts in English in order to assist the researcher in selecting the appropriate authentic materials for the tests and the training sessions. Then, they probed into the learners' attitudes toward reading in English and their learning styles in order to enhance their autonomy and allow the researcher to adjust the training programme to their learning styles. Finally, the learners' use of and familiarity with cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies were explored.

The post-intervention interviews investigated whether the training programme was effective in assisting the learners in employing the strategies they had been taught.

The second qualitative data-collection instrument employed for the purposes of the present study was observation which helped the teacher-researcher to triangulate the findings derived from the interviews and the tests in order to get insight into what learners really do, instead of relying on what they say they do alone (Dörnyei, 2007). Collecting observational data in a more organized and structured way makes the findings more reliable and comparable (Kawulich, 2012). To that end, observation checklists were designed by the teacher-researcher.

The teacher's observation checklists, designed in the form of five-scale Likert statements ranging from 'never' to 'always', were employed in every lesson of the training programme. Each observation checklist focused on the cognitive and metacognitive strategies taught. Concerning prediction, the teacher-researcher had to observe the learners' ability to use headings, subheadings, pictures and the structure of the text in order to elicit background knowledge and predict content and type of text (Quiroga, 2010). In relation to previewing, the teacher-researcher observed whether the learners could both form questions using the information derived from headings, subheadings, pictures and the first sentence of each paragraph and find the answers to the questions formed (Bouchard, 2005). Regarding skimming, the teacher detected whether the learners were able to get the general idea of a text and confirm or disconfirm their initial guesses through reading headings, subheadings, the introduction, the first sentence of each paragraph, and the conclusion of a text (Asmawati, 2015). Proceeding to graphic organizers, the learners' ability to elicit background knowledge and relate it to new knowledge as well as to organize the information in the text through formulating the main idea of the text and showing its relationship to the supporting details was observed (Hall-Kenyon & Black, 2010; Manoli & Papadopoulou, 2012). Concerning visualization, the teacher-researcher observed whether the learners were able to use their senses to create mental images while reading as well as their ability to draw conclusions or recall details using those images (Harvey & Goudvis, 2014). With regard to making connections, the teacher-researcher had to detect the learners' ability to elicit background knowledge and connect the information in a text to their lives, the real world and other texts (Wahyuni, 2016). Finally, regarding summarization, the teacher had to observe whether the learners were able to distinguish important from less important information and present it in their own words (Harrison & Vallin, 2018).

3.3.2 Quantitative research

A pre- and a post-instruction test were constructed in order to check improvement in the learners' reading comprehension ability and metacognitive awareness (Jang, 2009; Torgesen, 2005). The two tests followed an identical format in order to be comparable. Each test consisted of a pre-, a while-, and a post-reading stage. The pre-reading stage examined the learners' ability first to predict content and type of text and then to plan the reading process through previewing the text.

At the while-reading stage, the learners were first asked to identify the main idea by skimming through the text and then to find the answers to the questions they had formed at the pre-reading stage. The next task engaged the learners in organizing the information in the text visually through a graphic organizer. The final task checked the learners' ability to present the mental images they had created while reading.

At the post-reading stage, the learners' ability to connect the information in the text to their life, the real world as well as other texts was checked. Finally, the learners engaged in summarizing what they had learnt from the text so that they could check their ability to identify the most important information in the text and present it in their own words.

3.4 The training sessions

The training sessions followed the gradual release of responsibility model allowing the teacher to move from teacher knowledge to student understanding (Frey & Fisher, 2007). In the first stage, the strategies were introduced through posters displayed on the interactive board. The learners carried out the tasks themselves and, then, they discussed their answers with the partner sitting next to them. The teacher-researcher acted as a “participant observer” who acted “as a full member of the group” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 179) and completed the observation checklists in order to identify the learners’ weaknesses in applying the strategies. Explicit strategy instruction through modelling followed, where the teacher employed the think aloud technique. Through the think aloud technique the teacher verbalized her thoughts, explained how the strategies are used and cleared up confusion when it occurred while the learners followed the teacher’s flow of thought and learnt how the strategies are employed, constructing meaning collaboratively (Macaro, 2001; Ys *et al.*, 2018).

The second stage involved guided practice, where the teacher acted as a guide and facilitator gradually releasing task responsibility to the learners, on the one hand, but, on the other hand, providing instructional scaffolds to ensure the students’ success. The learners carried out the tasks themselves and discussed their answers with the partner sitting next to them. The teacher-researcher was a “participant observer” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 185) and completed the observation checklists.

The third stage engaged the learners in collaborative learning through applying the strategies while collaborating in groups. This stage allowed the learners to consolidate their understanding before they applied it independently in the next stage. The teacher-researcher acted as a “nonparticipant-observer” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 179) recording the learners’ progress on the observation checklists.

Finally, the fourth stage involved independent practice where the learners applied the strategies on their own, employing the “think aloud” technique, which allowed them to distinguish between reading words and constructing meaning and so developing their metacognitive awareness (Ys *et al.*, 2018). Once again, the teacher-researcher’s role was that of a nonparticipant-observer, recording the learners’ successful application of the strategies on the observation checklists.

Regarding the teaching process, each of the stages of the training programme included two lessons, which followed the pre-, while-, post- reading stage framework in order to activate and build learners’ schemata (Toprak & Almacioğlu, 2009; Harmer, 2007). Following social-constructivist pedagogy, which posits that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (McKinley, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978), all the lessons engaged the learners either in pair or in group work.

The texts for all the lessons were authentic materials, that is “ordinary texts not produced specifically for language teaching purposes” (Carter & Nunan, 2001, p.68), selected based on the learners’ interests elicited through the pre-instruction interviews and class discussion. Employing authentic materials can be effective in many ways since they expose learners to real language and to language input used for genuine communication purposes in the target language (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Nadrag & Tihenea, 2017), and allow them to deal with complete messages in a small amount of print (Nunan, 2005). Furthermore, authentic materials help learners contextualize language learning (Nadrag & Tihenea, 2017), and positively affect their motivation and engagement in the reading process (Guo, 2012) while they connect the classroom to the outside world (Nadrag & Tihenea, 2017). The selection of the authentic materials followed Nuttal’s suggested criteria for classroom employment (as cited by Azri & Rashdi, 2014, p. 251): suitability of content (the degree to which a text is interesting to learners and relevant to their needs), exploitability (the way the text is exploited to develop learners’ competence in reading), and readability (a text’s difficulty in terms of

structures, grammar and vocabulary). Regarding readability, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985), which advocates that learners should be exposed to language slightly above their current linguistic level in order for acquisition to take place, was also taken into account. In addition, following Berardo (2006), the learners were exposed to different types of texts to elicit their interest and increase motivation presented in an authentic context, using pictures, tables, photos and so on in order to make them more appealing to the learners. Finally, the texts were retrieved from the Internet, since authentic materials accessed on the Internet are continuously updated, and, visually, more appealing (Berardo, 2006) while they connect learning to learners' real lives since the Internet forms part of their daily life (Herrington *et al.*, 2014).

4. Research findings

4.1 The qualitative findings

Sixteen learners of the first grade of Junior High School were interviewed before and after the intervention. Based on Dörnyei (2007), the qualitative data was given a textual form through a language-based analysis.

The pre-intervention interviews revealed that most of the learners from both groups did not systematically employ reading strategies. They approached an authentic text by focusing on the recognition and recall of lexical and grammatical forms. In effect, both groups displayed low interest and a negative attitude towards reading in English due to the disappointment, stress and boredom they felt when they could not recognize new words and grammatical structures. Consequently, the majority of learners from both groups were readers of moderate ability since their reading comprehension was impeded by their weakness in vocabulary and grammar.

Concerning learning styles, the learners exhibited diversity in the way they enjoyed reading a text, since the majority preferred reading silently on their own but there were also learners who liked reading in a group, reading aloud and listening to the text.

Finally, both groups read about a variety of topics, such as music, sports, short stories, the environment, the news, and teen columns related to teenagers' problems.

After the training programme, most of the learners from the control group pointed out that there was no change in the way they approached a text. However, there was a change in the way the experimental group approached a text, since, as the learners pointed out, the programme had allowed them to learn how to apply the strategies taught, which helped them comprehend a text and monitor their comprehension. Finally, a few learners stated that they would like more practice in the previewing and summarization strategy.

Proceeding to the teacher's observation checklists, the data obtained allowed the triangulation of the findings deriving from the interviews, and the tests regarding strategy use. More specifically, during the model lessons, the majority of learners from both groups exhibited a major weakness in foregrounding background knowledge and applying the strategies taught. However, in the guided and collaborative practice lessons, the experimental group, which engaged in all of the stages of the programme, displayed a

deeper understanding and a significant improvement in their ability to use the strategies. Finally, the data obtained from the independent lessons showed that all the learners in the experimental group exhibited remarkable progress, since they were able to work entirely on their own without any interference from the teacher and apply the cognitive and metacognitive strategies taught effectively.

4.2 The quantitative findings

A summary of the focal points of the data obtained through the pre- and post- intervention tests is presented separately for the control and the experimental group.

The paired samples t-test (Dörnyei, 2007) and the independent samples t-test (Dörnyei, 2007) were employed to investigate improvement in the learners' reading comprehension ability. The Wilcoxon test for dependent samples (Dörnyei, 2007) and the Mann Whitney test for independent samples (Dörnyei, 2007) were employed to investigate the development of the learners' metacognitive awareness.

With regard to the findings, as Table 1 below reveals, there was no significant statistical difference regarding the reading comprehension scores of the control group [$t(15) = 1.546$, $p = .143$] at the pre- and the post-instruction test. Furthermore, there was no significant difference, statistically, between the two groups' performance at the pre- instruction test [$t(30) = .648$, $p = .522$]. However, the experimental group achieved a significantly higher post-instruction test reading comprehension score compared to the pre- instruction test [$t(15) = -17.757$, $p = .000$]. Therefore, although the starting point was the same for both groups, there was a statistically significant difference between their reading comprehension scores at the post-instruction test [$t(30) = -15.655$, $p = .000$]. What the above analysis suggests is that strategy instruction improves learners' reading comprehension:

	Group			
	Control		Experimental	
	M	SD	M	SD
Pre - instruction test	16.38	8.65	14.53	7.41
Post - instruction test	12.53	8.49	66.75	10.95

Table 1. Differences between the control and the experimental group's pre- and post- instruction reading comprehension test scores

With regard to metacognition, our results indicate a clear advantage for the experimental group. Therefore, as displayed in Table 2, there was no significant statistical difference between the pre- and the post- instruction tests scores of the control group ($z = -.877$, $p = .380$) concerning the previewing strategy. By contrast, the experimental group exhibited a higher post-instruction test score in the previewing strategy compared to their pre-instruction test score ($z = -3.520$, $p = .000$). Furthermore, while there was no significant statistical difference between the two groups at the pre-instruction test ($U = 127.500$, $p = .982$), there was a statistically significant difference regarding the employment of the pre-viewing strategy at the post instruction test ($U = 2.000$, $p = .000$), as expected, suggesting that metacognitive strategy instruction develops learners' metacognitive awareness.

	Group			
	Control		Experimental	
	M	SD	M	SD
Pre - instruction test (Previewing)	1.56	2.80	1.00	1.71

Post- instruction test (Previewing)	1.19	2.14	12.31	4.73
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Table 2. Differences between the control and the experimental group’s pre- and post- instruction tests scores in relation to the ‘previewing’ strategy

Proceeding to the visualization strategy, the data analysis, as presented in table 3, once again shows no significant statistical difference between the pre- and the post- instruction test scores of the control group ($z=-.276, p=.783$). On the other hand, however, the experimental group achieved a significantly higher post- instruction test score ($z=-3.526, p=.000$). So while there was no significant statistical difference between the two groups in the pre-instruction stage ($U=101.000, p=.323$), there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups’ performance in the post instruction test ($U=1.000, p=.000$). The results confirm the hypothesis that learners’ metacognitive awareness can be developed through metacognitive strategy instruction:

	Group			
	Control		Experimental	
	M	SD	M	SD
Pre -instruction test (Visualization)	.56	.81	1.00	1.15
Post instruction test (Visualization)	.63	.72	7.41	2.15

Table 3. Differences between the control and the experimental group’s pre- and post- instruction tests in relation to the ‘visualization’ strategy

Table 4 exhibits a great difference in the employment of the ‘making connections’ strategy between the two groups. More specifically, the control group achieved a higher pre-instruction test score in the strategy compared to the post-instruction test score ($z=-2.207, p=.027$) while the experimental group achieved a substantially higher post- instruction test score than pre-instruction test score ($z=-3.519, p=.000$). Moreover, while there was no significant statistical difference between the two groups’ performance in the pre-instruction test ($U=124.500, p=.897$), there was a significant statistical difference between them in the post instruction test ($U=0.000, p=.000$), implying, once again, that metacognitive strategy instruction can be effective towards developing learners’ metacognitive awareness.

	Group			
	Control		Experimental	
	M	SD	M	SD
Pre - instruction test (Making connections)	1.40	1.81	1.25	1.39
Post- instruction test (Making connections)	.25	.77	7.66	1.76

Table 4. Differences between the control and the experimental group’s pre- and post- instruction tests in relation to the ‘making connections’ strategy

Finally, as demonstrated in table 5, there was no significant statistical difference between the pre- and the post-instruction tests scores of the control group ($z=-.000, p=1.000$) regarding summarization. However, the experimental group’s post-instruction test scores in the strategy were substantially higher than the pre- instruction test scores ($z=-3.500, p=.000$). Furthermore, while there was no significant statistical difference between the two groups in the pre-instruction test ($U= 120.000, p=.780$), a significant statistical difference was observed in the post-instruction test ($U= 0.000, p=.000$) in terms of the effective employment of the strategy, suggesting, once again, that metacognitive strategy instruction enhances the development of learners’ metacognitive awareness:

	Group			
	Control		Experimental	
	M	SD	M	SD
Pre -instruction test (Summarization)	.00	.00	.44	1.75
Post-instruction test (Summarization)	.00	.00	5.87	1.63

Table 5. Differences between the control and the experimental group's pre- and post- instruction tests in relation to the 'summarization' strategy

5. Discussion of the findings

The findings obtained from both the qualitative and quantitative analysis confirm the hypothesis that the employment of reading comprehension strategies improves learners' reading comprehension and develops their metacognitive awareness.

Regarding the use of strategies, the analysis of both the quantitative and the qualitative data collection instruments employed during the pre-intervention stage determined that the learners attempted to comprehend new reading material relying on lexical, word or grammar knowledge, laying emphasis on specific data from the text, with no interference from their background knowledge which would help them identify how new information fits into their existing schema (Brandao & Oakhill, 2005; Hudson, 2007). Moreover, both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis in the pre-intervention stage and in the beginning of the training programme revealed that the learners did not go through any metalinguistic processes, which would assist them in comprehending a text and monitoring their performance (Chamot, 2005; Saricoban & Behjoo, 2017; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001). More specifically, they did not plan the cognitive process using textual cues, visual aids and generating questions in the pre-reading stage. In the while-reading stage, the learners did not monitor comprehension by answering the questions they had formed during the pre-reading stage or creating mental images, which would help them draw conclusions and recall details. Finally, during the post-reading stage, the learners did not draw upon background knowledge to make connections, which would enhance comprehension and repair meaning. Furthermore, they could not evaluate their performance by summarizing what they had learnt from the text. In other words, their metacognitive awareness was not developed.

The data obtained through both the qualitative and the quantitative analysis after the intervention revealed that the training programme was effective in improving the experimental group's reading comprehension and developing their metacognitive awareness. More specifically, the intervention assisted the learners in developing the ability to make predictions (Acosta & Ferri, 2010), to generate questions about a text and find the answers while reading (Bouchard, 2005; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002), to obtain an overview of the text through skimming (Ueta, 2005), to represent information in a text through graphic organizers (Grant *et al.*, 2015), to consciously create an image of what is read in order to make sense of it (Woolley, 2010), to make connections and relate the new to the known (Waller & Barrentine, 2015), and to identify the most important information in a text and present it in their own words (Westby *et al.*, 2010). As a result, the learners' approach to reading a text in English changed dramatically. The interview and the observation checklist analysis confirmed the learners' ability to interact with the text and derive meaning using strategies and linking new to previously acquired knowledge, which resulted in better comprehension (Ozek & Civelek, 2006; Priebe *et al.*, 2012; Rativa *et al.*, 2012). The quantitative data derived from the test results also verified the learners' reading comprehension improvement following the effective implementation of the strategies taught. Regarding metacognitive awareness, the findings of the qualitative analysis revealed the learners' development in planning, monitoring and evaluating the reading process through the effective application of the metacognitive strategies taught (Alsheikh & Mokhtari, 2011; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2004; Zhang & Seepho, 2013). These findings were also verified by the quantitative data analysis. Consequently, the training programme allowed the learners to internalize and employ the cognitive and metacognitive strategies taught effectively, thus improving their reading comprehension and building their metacognition.

6. Conclusion

The study presented in this article focused on action research conducted in a Greek State Junior High School aiming at improving the learners' reading comprehension and developing their metacognitive awareness through cognitive and metacognitive strategy instruction. If we want our learners to become strategic and autonomous readers, we should allow them to exploit texts in a meaningful and purposeful way by laying emphasis on the reading process. To that end, it seems imperative to provide them with strategy instruction (Akkakoson, 2013), which will assist them in interacting with text and deriving meaning as well as in monitoring their performance through thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring comprehension or production, and self-evaluating what has been learnt. Expanding the sample of the present research to encompass a larger number of participants in the context of both state and private language schools could shed further light on the issue of strategy instruction. Finally, further research could be conducted in order to investigate the maintenance of strategy instruction gains regarding reading comprehension and metacognition after intervention withdrawal.

Note

Pre- and post-intervention interview transcripts along with the observation checklists and the lesson plans can be found in the author's Med dissertation hosted in the library of the Hellenic Open University.

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Appendix I

A sample of the tasks included in the pre-intervention test

Name:

Date:

Mark: /100

Time available: 50 minutes

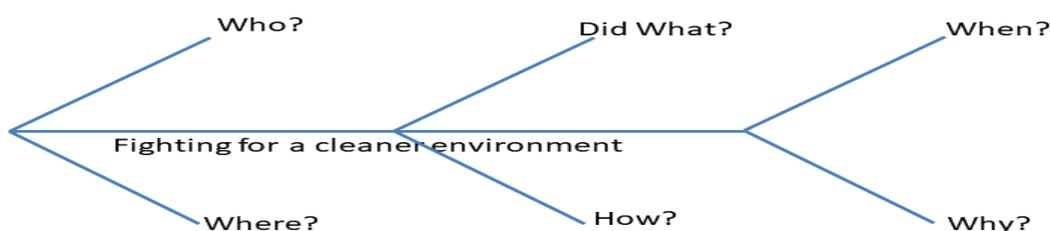
Pre-reading stage

Task: Look at the heading, the subheadings and the photographs.

- a. What do you think the text is about? (/5)
- b. What kind of text do you think it is (letter, poem, article etc.)? (/5)

While-reading stage

Task: Read the text and complete the diagram below. (/30)



Task: What images come to your mind while reading? Use your senses and complete the sentences below. (/10)

- i) I see...
- ii) I hear...
- iii) I taste...
- iv) I feel...
- v) I smell...

Post-reading stage

Task 1: What does the text you have read remind you of? (/10)

Task 2: What have you learnt from the text? (/10)

Appendix II

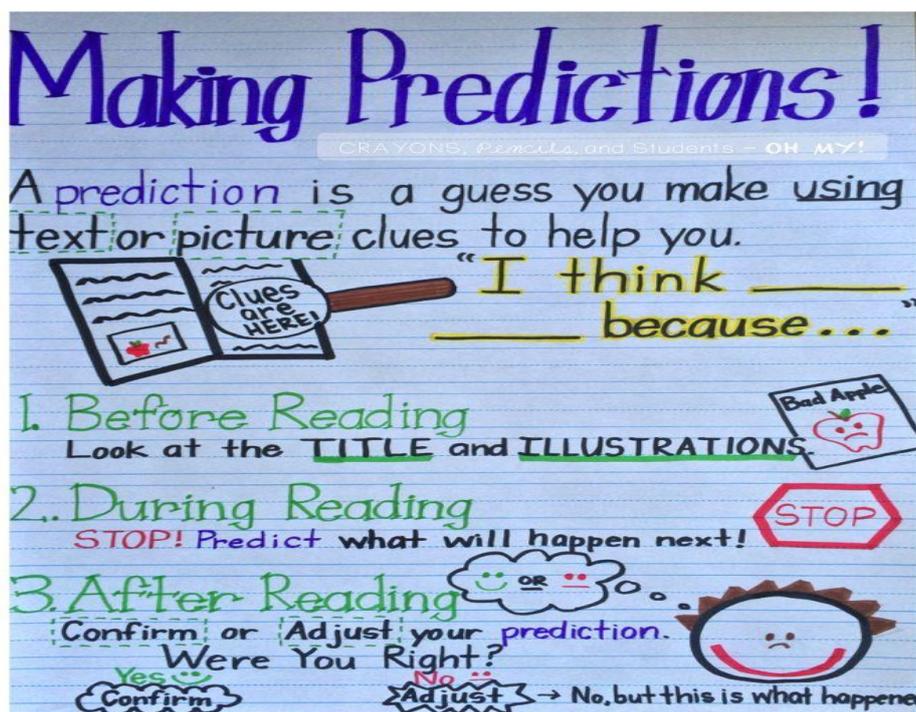
A sample of the tasks included in the lessons

The modelling lesson

Pre-reading stage

Predicting

Predicting Poster



https://www.google.gr/search?q=posters+for+the+prediction+strategy&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=niv&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwi886-7ie3dAhUEiywKHaz8AXwQsAR6BAGGEAE&biw=1536&bih=722#imgrc=ZN6ySm_c80VLDM

Task: Do the following task. Then, listen to me reading the text and modelling the strategy.

a. Look at the heading. What do you think the text is about? Discuss your guess with your partner sitting next to you.

I predict that

b. Look at the heading and the structure of the text. What kind of text do you think it is? Discuss your guess with your partner sitting next to you.

I think that

Post-reading stage

Making connections

Making connections poster

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Making connections is about finding links between yourself and what you're reading.
The more connections we make, the better we are able to understand and enjoy reading.



TEXT TO SELF



Connections can be with my own life, people I know, places I'm familiar with, things I like to do, events that have happened to me, feelings I've experienced.



TEXT TO WORLD



Connections can be with world events, items I've seen on the news, things I've read in newspapers, magazines and on the internet, big issues.



TEXT TO TEXT



Connections can be with other books I've read, movies, TV shows I've seen, non fiction, poetry, newspaper and magazine articles.

Parts of the story to connect with:

- the conflicts
- the 'big ideas'
- the characters

- the choices characters make
- the emotions
- the relationships
- the actions of the characters

- the setting
- the time
- the events

https://www.google.gr/search?q=posters+for+the+skimming+strategy&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwju3f79me3dAhXJiivKHaNXBWUQsAR6BAgGEAE&biw=1536&bih=722#imgrec=7U0lrjKehIJ_M

Task: Do the following task. Then, listen to me reading the text and modelling the strategy.

What does the text you have read remind you of? Make connections to yourself, the world and other texts. Discuss with your partner sitting next to you.

Making connections		
Text to self	Text to world	Text to text
It reminds me of ...	It reminds me of ...	It reminds me of ...

The independent practice lesson

Pre-reading stage

Prediction

Task

a. Look at the heading and the photographs. What do you think the text is about? Discuss with the partner sitting next to you.

I predict that

b. Look at the heading, the photographs, and the structure of the text. What kind of text do you think it is? Discuss with the partner sitting next to you.

I think that

Post-reading stage

Making connections

Task

What does the text you have read remind you of? Make connections to yourself, the world and other texts. Discuss with the partner sitting next to you.

Making Connections		
Text to self	Text to world	Text to text

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