

Metacognitive Strategies in Reading Instruction for German Language Learners- a Literature Review

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Abstract

This literature review investigates the use of metacognitive strategies—planning, monitoring, and evaluating—to support reading comprehension among B1-level learners of German as a Foreign Language (GFL). In the Indonesian educational context, limited exposure to authentic German texts and linguistic differences often hinder learners' ability to understand complex written materials. Metacognitive strategies offer a structured approach to help learners manage their reading processes, build autonomy, and engage more deeply with texts. The review highlights how these strategies can be integrated into reading instruction through pre-reading (goal setting and text prediction), while-reading (clarifying and self-questioning), and post-reading (reflection and summarization) activities. However, the implementation of metacognitive instruction faces challenges, including low student awareness, limited teacher preparation, and a strong focus on exam-based outcomes in classrooms. To overcome these barriers, the paper advocates for sustained, explicit instruction and teacher training that embeds strategic reading into regular classroom practice. It also calls for curriculum and assessment reforms that value process-oriented reading. Ultimately, fostering metacognitive awareness equips learners not only to improve comprehension but also to become more self-regulated, reflective, and confident language users in the long term.

Keywords: *metacognition; reading comprehension; language learning strategies; German as a foreign language; planning; monitoring; evaluating; B1 level*

Introduction

In the context of foreign language education in Indonesia, German is one of the foreign languages that is widely studied, particularly in secondary schools, universities, and language institutions. Its status as a language of science, technology, and international academic exchange has contributed to its sustained inclusion in formal curricula. However, learning German poses distinct challenges for Indonesian learners. The linguistic distance between German and the learners' native language, as well as the geographical and cultural separation from German-speaking contexts, often leads to limited exposure and minimal opportunities for authentic language use. Moreover, the relatively low presence of native speakers in the local environment makes real-world interaction rare. These conditions contribute to the perception of German as a relatively difficult language to acquire,

especially in mastering vocabulary, understanding grammatical structures, and comprehending authentic written texts.

Reading comprehension is a foundational skill in the process of foreign language acquisition, forming a bridge between language input and the development of communicative competence. For learners of German as a Foreign Language (GFL), especially at the intermediate B1 level, the ability to comprehend written texts becomes increasingly vital. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), learners at this stage should be able to understand the main ideas of texts dealing with familiar topics and engage with authentic materials across academic and everyday contexts. Despite these expectations, many B1 learners encounter significant difficulties when reading authentic German texts. These challenges are often rooted in limited vocabulary knowledge, ineffective application of reading strategies, and a lack of metacognitive awareness (Grabe & Stoller, 2019). Without the necessary tools to regulate their comprehension process, learners may struggle to derive meaning, infer context, or repair misunderstandings during reading tasks.

In response to these challenges, metacognitive strategies have gained increasing attention in the field of language education. Metacognition, defined as “thinking about one’s own thinking,” encompasses a range of strategies that enable learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their cognitive processes during reading (Flavell, 1979). These strategies are particularly valuable in helping learners become more autonomous and self-regulated, as they encourage greater control over the learning process itself. O’Malley and Chamot (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990) emphasize the importance of such strategies in foreign language contexts, noting their role in enhancing both comprehension and learner independence.

By equipping learners with tools to manage their understanding before, during, and after reading, metacognitive strategies serve not only to improve reading proficiency but also to foster critical thinking and reflective learning habits. This literature review explores the role of metacognitive strategies in reading instruction for B1-level GFL learners, focusing on the core components of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. It also examines pedagogical approaches that integrate metacognitive training into reading lessons and addresses the challenges of implementation, particularly in the context of authentic texts.

Metacognitive Strategies in Reading

Metacognitive strategies refer to learners’ capacity to consciously regulate and manage their cognitive processes during reading activities. The concept of metacognition was first introduced by Flavell (Flavell, 1979), who distinguished between two central components: metacognitive knowledge—the awareness of one’s cognitive abilities, the nature of the task, and available strategies—and metacognitive regulation—the active coordination and control of learning processes. In the context of reading, metacognitive regulation typically involves three interrelated phases: planning, monitoring, and evaluating (Paris & Winograd, 1990; Schraw & Dennison, 1994). This tripartite framework has become foundational in second and foreign language research as it offers a robust lens through which learners’ strategic engagement with texts can be understood and developed (Phakiti, 2003).

More broadly, metacognitive strategies enable learners to step outside the act of reading itself and consciously reflect on how they approach, process, and respond to texts. They serve as the cognitive scaffolding that supports strategic reading, allowing learners to become more autonomous, self-aware, and adaptable in facing complex or unfamiliar

materials. For instance, a B1-level learner of German tackling a news article might begin by setting a purpose for reading and previewing the title (planning), then pausing to clarify long compound nouns or syntax during reading (monitoring), and finally summarizing the article while assessing whether their comprehension goals were met (evaluating).

The first phase, planning, represents the preparatory stage where learners ready themselves to approach a text with intention and structure. It involves setting reading goals, predicting content based on titles or visuals, previewing the text structure, and activating relevant background knowledge (Zhang & Seepho, 2012). These actions help reduce cognitive load by providing a mental framework for processing new information. Research shows that learners who engage in planning are more likely to employ strategic behaviors rather than rely on passive decoding or word-for-word translation (Duong & Nguyen, 2022). In the context of German language texts—often marked by unfamiliar syntax and cultural references—planning is especially crucial. Okmawati (Okmawati, 2021) note that when students anticipate the genre and structure of a text, they activate prior schema that enhance their ability to engage with meaning beyond the surface level.

The second phase, monitoring, refers to the real-time regulation of comprehension during reading. It encompasses strategies such as re-reading complex sections, annotating key points, clarifying unfamiliar vocabulary, and adjusting reading pace as needed (Schraw & Dennison, 1994). Monitoring also entails the learner's ability to recognize moments of confusion or comprehension breakdowns and to respond by deploying corrective strategies. Rastegar et al. (Rastegar et al., 2017) observed that successful readers frequently assess their understanding while reading, allowing for timely strategic adjustments. Similarly, Jincheng and Rahmat (Jincheng & Rahmat, 2022), through think-aloud protocols, found that high-performing students actively questioned the coherence of texts and monitored their cognitive state throughout the task. It is further reported that learners who consciously monitored their reading process demonstrated greater accuracy and encountered fewer disruptions in comprehension (Deliany & Cahyono, 2020; Pahrizal et al., 2024; Salsyabillah.M et al., 2025). This skill is particularly critical in reading German, where long noun compounds, inverted word order, and embedded clauses can obscure meaning unless carefully parsed. As such, instruction that emphasizes monitoring strategies can play a significant role in supporting comprehension of authentic German texts.

Finally, evaluating occurs after reading and involves reflecting on the overall success of comprehension and the effectiveness of strategies used. Key activities include summarizing the main ideas, comparing outcomes with initial goals, and identifying areas for improvement (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). While this phase is cognitively demanding, it is essential for fostering long-term reading development and strategic flexibility (Paris & Winograd, 1990). Tedjo et al. (Tedjo et al., 2022) found that learners with strong evaluative habits not only scored higher on comprehension tests but also retained textual information more effectively. These learners were able to identify which parts of the text remained unclear—an especially valuable skill when working with authentic German materials, where implicit meaning and syntactic complexity often obscure key information. Moreover, Febriani (Febriani, 2022) emphasized the value of post-reading reflection tasks such as self-questioning or peer explanation, which have been shown to enhance metacognitive accuracy, particularly when interpreting figurative or nuanced language.

Taken together, the phases of planning, monitoring, and evaluating offer a comprehensive model for understanding how learners can gain control over their reading processes. By fostering strategic awareness and reflective thinking, metacognitive strategies

empower learners to become more effective, independent readers—an outcome that is particularly relevant in the foreign language classroom, where learners must navigate linguistic and cultural complexities with limited real-world exposure.

Integration in Reading Instruction

For metacognitive strategies to be effective in enhancing reading comprehension, they must be systematically integrated into instructional practices. Rather than being taught in isolation, these strategies are most beneficial when embedded within structured reading sequences that align with the natural cognitive stages of reading: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading (Hosenfeld, 1977; Kartika & Firmansyah, 2019). This phased approach not only mirrors the tripartite model of metacognitive regulation—planning, monitoring, and evaluating—but also provides learners with scaffolded opportunities to apply strategies in context.

During the pre-reading phase, instruction should focus on fostering planning behaviors. Teachers can guide students to set specific reading goals, activate relevant background knowledge, and make predictions based on headings, visuals, or prior learning. Such scaffolding supports learners in constructing a mental framework before engaging with the text, reducing the likelihood of cognitive overload. For example, a teacher might prompt learners to reflect on what they already know about a topic, or to identify unfamiliar terms they expect to encounter, thereby priming them for strategic reading.

In the while-reading phase, learners are encouraged to engage in monitoring by implementing real-time comprehension checks. Teachers can model or facilitate the use of strategies such as underlining key ideas, annotating margins with questions or summaries, and pausing periodically to clarify vocabulary or sentence structures. Particularly in reading German, where syntactic complexity and morphological features often pose significant hurdles, these strategies can empower learners to detect and address breakdowns in understanding as they occur. Classroom techniques such as guided reading, think-alouds, or reciprocal teaching can provide rich opportunities for learners to observe and practice monitoring strategies collaboratively.

The post-reading phase serves as the platform for evaluation, where learners reflect on their overall comprehension, assess the effectiveness of the strategies they employed, and consider how their goals were met or adjusted. Activities such as writing summaries, engaging in peer discussions, or completing guided reflection prompts can help consolidate understanding and reinforce metacognitive awareness. These reflective practices encourage learners not only to assess their performance but also to generalize successful strategies for future reading tasks.

Rochmawati et al. (Rochmawati et al., 2022) emphasize that metacognitive instruction must be both intentional and sustained over time in order to foster habitual strategic behavior. Short-term interventions may raise awareness, but long-term, consistent integration into classroom practice is necessary to develop internalized habits of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Moreover, embedding metacognitive strategies across reading lessons promotes deeper engagement and critical thinking—both of which are essential for cultivating autonomous and reflective language learners.

Ultimately, integrating metacognitive strategies into reading instruction transforms reading from a passive act of decoding into an active, self-regulated, and purpose-driven process. For learners of German as a foreign language, where linguistic complexity and cultural

unfamiliarity often impede comprehension, such strategic instruction becomes especially crucial in supporting both proficiency and learner confidence.

Challenges and Pedagogical Implications

While the integration of metacognitive strategies into reading instruction offers substantial benefits, particularly for learners of German as a foreign language (GFL), its implementation is not without challenges. One of the most significant obstacles is the limited metacognitive awareness among learners themselves. Many students are unfamiliar with the concept of metacognition, let alone the specific strategies of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. As a result, their reading behaviours are often reactive rather than strategic, relying heavily on surface-level decoding or translation rather than engaging with the text meaningfully. Without explicit instruction and guided practice, metacognitive strategy use remains inconsistent, unconscious, and lacking in intentionality.

A second challenge lies in the pedagogical readiness of teachers. As highlighted by Grabe and Stoller (Grabe & Stoller, 2019), language educators—particularly those teaching German in secondary or non-native settings—often receive minimal training in strategy-based instruction. Curricula in many contexts still emphasise discrete language components such as grammar, vocabulary, or sentence structure, often at the expense of higher-order comprehension skills. Teachers may feel unequipped to design activities that promote strategic thinking, or they may underestimate the value of reflective reading due to time constraints or exam-oriented teaching goals.

Moreover, classroom culture and assessment practices can hinder the development of metacognitive competence. In many educational contexts, particularly in teacher-fronted or test-driven classrooms, students are conditioned to focus on correctness and speed rather than reflection and process. This emphasis can discourage learners from engaging in the slower, deeper work of planning their approach, monitoring their comprehension, or evaluating their outcomes. Without support for a growth-oriented, process-based mindset, students may struggle to adopt metacognitive strategies even when exposed to them.

To mitigate these challenges, several pedagogical implications must be considered. First, professional development for language instructors should explicitly include modules on teaching metacognitive awareness. This includes training on how to model strategic reading behaviours through think-aloud protocols, how to embed reflective prompts into reading tasks, and how to create a classroom environment that values self-regulation and error-tolerant learning. Teachers should be equipped not only with theoretical knowledge of metacognition but also with practical techniques for fostering it across proficiency levels.

Second, curriculum designers and educational policymakers should ensure that metacognitive strategy instruction is embedded within the learning outcomes—particularly from the B1 level onwards, where learners are expected to transition from scaffolded instruction to greater autonomy. At this stage, learners must begin to assume greater responsibility for their own reading processes, and instructional design should reflect this shift by including activities such as goal setting, guided annotation, self-questioning, and post-reading reflection.

Additionally, materials developers can play a pivotal role by integrating metacognitive scaffolds into textbooks and digital resources. These might include reading journals, graphic organisers for planning and reflection, or strategy checklists aligned with text complexity. Assessment practices, too, must evolve to value the process of reading comprehension, not

just the product, by incorporating self-assessment rubrics or peer evaluation of reading strategies.

Ultimately, a sustained and coherent approach—linking teacher training, curriculum design, instructional practices, and assessment frameworks—is essential for embedding metacognitive strategies effectively in GFL instruction. When these components align, students are more likely to develop the metacognitive competence necessary to navigate authentic German texts with confidence, independence, and critical awareness.

Conclusion

Metacognitive strategies—namely planning, monitoring, and evaluating—serve as foundational pillars for enhancing reading comprehension among learners of German as a foreign language (GFL), especially at the B1 level where interaction with increasingly complex and authentic texts becomes central. A robust body of literature supports the assertion that these strategies not only bolster textual understanding but also cultivate learner autonomy, critical engagement, and deeper cognitive involvement in the reading process. However, in the absence of systematic instruction, students' use of such strategies tends to be fragmented, intuitive, and often unconscious, thus limiting their full potential.

To address this, the integration of metacognitive strategy training into language instruction must be deliberate, sustained, and contextually grounded. Teachers require adequate preparation to model and scaffold strategic reading behaviour, and curricular frameworks should explicitly include metacognitive learning outcomes aligned with learners' developmental stages. Furthermore, the increasing availability of digital learning environments presents promising avenues to support metacognitive growth. Tools such as reading platforms with built-in annotations, reflective prompts, and progress tracking could be instrumental in facilitating strategic engagement beyond the classroom.

Future research is encouraged to investigate the longitudinal effects of metacognitive instruction in GFL contexts, including its impact on reading proficiency, learner motivation, and long-term language retention. Moreover, comparative studies exploring how different instructional models—face-to-face, blended, or fully digital—mediate the development of metacognitive awareness would contribute valuable insights into effective pedagogy.

Ultimately, fostering metacognitive awareness through structured and reflective reading instruction does not merely improve immediate comprehension outcomes. It empowers learners to become self-directed, resourceful, and adaptive language users—qualities essential not only for academic success but also for lifelong learning in an increasingly multilingual and information-rich world.

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