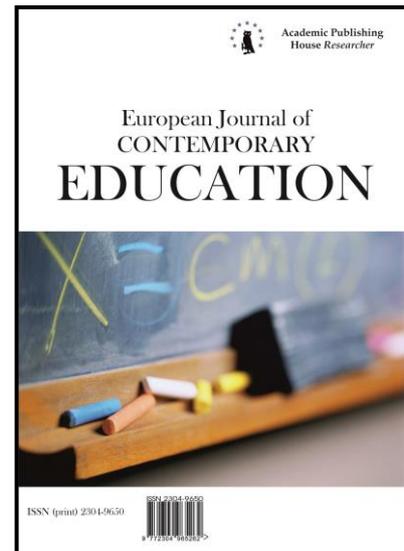




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The Use of Metacognitive Reading Strategies among students at International Burch University: A Case Study

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Abstract

Being notably absent from many classrooms and largely unaware of by many language learners, metacognitive reading strategies have attracted a keen interest of scholars and have been extensively researched in very diverse contexts. Thus, the primary goal of this research is to determine the overall usage of different types of metacognitive reading strategies by non-native English language speakers *at International Burch University*. For that purpose, the Metacognitive Reading Strategies Questionnaire (MRSQ) was employed. The research sample was composed of 140 university-level students studying in two different fields, namely the field of English Language and Literature and Management. The analysis revealed that gender, grade level and study field have a significant effect on the use of metacognitive reading strategies, whereas the effect of nationality on the overall use of metacognitive reading strategies as well as on both of their subtypes is insignificant. Such research findings might largely contribute to a better understanding of different factors impacting reading strategy usage and might help teachers control them and act accordingly. Thus, some possible causes of such results are further explored in the current study and recommendations and directions for similar future field-related research are offered.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, metacognitive reading strategies, L2, analytic reading strategies, pragmatic reading strategies, correlation.

1. Introduction

A profound understanding of text is not acquired automatically, by second or foreign language learners in particular, but is gained gradually by relying on the use of reading strategies, specifically defined as 'deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts

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to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text' (Afflerbach et al., 2008: 368). These self-regulating actions which include planning, monitoring and evaluation are crucial to the reading process, as they increase reading comprehension (Alexander, Jetton, 2000) and thus separate competent from incompetent readers (Paris, Jacobs, 1984; Pressley, Afflerbach, 1995; Sheorey, Mokhtari, 2001). However, self-regulation and strategic behavior accelerate not only the process of reading but the overall learning process, as they enhance attention, memory, communication and learning and ensure development in diverse curricular areas (Paris et al., 1991). Thus, heightened strategy awareness eventually leads to an independent, successful and effective learning process (Anderson, 1991; Chamot, 2005; O'Malley, Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Pressley, Gaskin, 2006), the ultimate goal of education.

Accordingly, raising learners' awareness of strategy use is of immense importance and explicit strategy teaching ought to be accepted and inserted as a part of the curriculum and be present in the classrooms. This not being the case (Beck et al., 1989; Pressley et al., 1998), second and foreign language learners still struggle when processing texts in the target language, academic texts in particular, and commonly use wrong strategies (Wood et al., 1998). Hence, teachers nowadays ought to be trained as to how to accurately and effectively teach strategies and help their students become familiar with using different types of strategies. Since strategy use is related to reading ability (Baker, Brown, 1984), this will lead to students' better reading comprehension and consequently a greater academic success.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country with a long-established tradition of English language teaching (Buckingham, 2016). English is taught through educational institutions and the process begins in the first grade of elementary school and continues all the way till the end of formal education (Rizvić, Bećirović, 2017). Both receptive and productive skills are regularly practiced in the classroom, with reading skills being the second most practiced ones (Ogrić-Kevrić, Dubravac, 2017). Despite the fact that reading is such a prominent skill commonly practiced in the Bosnian educational milieu, the explicit teaching of reading strategies has not been part of the curriculum and the research in reading strategy use is rather scarce. Thus, this paper aims to explore whether students at *International Burch University* employ overall metacognitive reading strategies and their two subtypes while reading academic texts and whether some factors, such as gender, grade level, nationality and study field, exert a significant impact on reading strategy use.

2. Literature review

The classification of reading strategies, and learning strategies in general, has been a highly debatable issue, with various scholars proposing different classifications. A few classifications especially accentuate 'metacognition' as a very important aspect of using strategies, comprising the following components: planning and preparing for effective reading; making decision about when to employ a certain reading strategy; and having the knowledge on how to monitor, direct and evaluate the use of various reading strategy (Anderson, 2003: 10). Thus, O'Malley and Chamot (1990, pp. 44-45) classified strategies into metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective, which are closely related to six types of strategies combined in two groups in Oxford's (1990) classification, namely direct and indirect strategies, where direct strategies include memory, cognitive and compensation strategies and indirect strategies metacognitive, affective and social strategies.

Metacognitive strategies, firstly mentioned in Flavell (1976) and defined as 'one's knowledge concerning one's own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them' (Flavell, 1976: 232), deal with 'planning, monitoring, and evaluation of language learning activities' (Oxford, 1990: 121). They include the awareness and conscious control of the learning process (Schraw, 1998) and are believed to be the most important factor in facilitating reading comprehension (Mokhtari, Reichard, 2002).

Various instruments have been used to explore the use of learning strategies, such as Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) (Oxford, 1989), and reading strategies in particular, such as The Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARS) for native speakers (Mokhtari, Reichard, 2002), The Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) for non-native speakers (Mokhtari, Sheorey, 2002; Sheorey, Mokhtari, 2001), as well as the Metacognitive Reading Strategy Questionnaire (MRSQ) (Taraban et al., 2004). MRSQ was developed to measure the use of metacognitive reading strategies, subdivided into two types, namely *analytic strategies (analytic-cognitive component)*, which pertain to cognition aimed at reading comprehension (Taraban et al.,

2004: 74) and *pragmatic strategies (pragmatic-behavioural component)* related to behaviours aimed at studying and academic performance (Taraban et al., 2004: 74).

The aforementioned instruments were extensively employed in various contexts, such as Indian (Taraban et al., 2013), Indonesian (Vianty, 2007), Iranian (Anjomshoaa et al., 2012; Tavakoli, 2014; Zare, Maftoon, 2014), Japanese (Shikano, 2013), Turkish (Cogmen, Saracaloglu, 2009; Solak, Altay, 2015), Spanish (Martinez, 2008) and have mainly shown that EFL learners use reading strategies to a significant extent, as the use was measured as either medium or high. The results of these studies have also clearly indicated that different factors have a considerable impact on the metacognitive reading strategy use, such as gender, study field, nationality, reading proficiency and have emphasized the need that these and other factors be explored further.

Gender related differences seem to have been thoroughly explored, but at the same time most highly inconsistent, as some studies point to a greater usage of strategies by female participants (Green, Oxford, 1995; Kaylani, 1996; Oxford, Nyikos, 1989; Razi, 2008; Sheorey, 2006; Poole, 2009; Phakiti, 2003), the others by male participants (Baily, 1996), whereas in some studies the differences exist only in the use of specific reading strategy types, with females using some strategies more than males and vice versa (Cogmen, Saracaloglu, 2009; Goh, Foong, 1997; Lee, 2012; Xu, 2004). The studies employing MRSQ instrument have also revealed opposing results. Thus, Razi's (2008) research into the use of metacognitive reading strategies by 205 Turkish university-level students revealed no significant difference in the use of strategies based on gender, as both female and male participants achieved the approximate mean score. On the other hand, Cogmen and Saracaloglu's (2009) study exploring 230 Turkish university-level students' use of analytic and pragmatic metacognitive reading strategies has demonstrated no significant difference on the analytic strategies dimension based on gender but a significant difference on the pragmatic strategies dimension, with females using pragmatic strategies more frequently than males.

The study field seems to be the other factor attracting the interest of many researchers (Oxford, Nyikos, 1989; Peacock, Ho, 2003) and it was shown to have a significant impact on the strategy use as the students in the field of humanities, social sciences and education appear to use more strategies than the students in the other fields (Oxford, Nyikos, 1989). The difference exists among the students in the field of humanities as well. The results of Cogmen and Saracaloglu's (2009) study have shown that the students studying at Turkish Language Teaching Department use reading strategies less frequently than the students studying at Fine Art Education and Primary Teacher Education Department, with the difference between these two groups being significant on the pragmatic strategies dimension and insignificant on the analytic strategies dimension. What is more appealing is that the students studying at English language departments appear to exploit the reading strategy inventory more than the students at some other departments. For instance, Mochizuki's (1999) research into the use of reading strategies by Japanese students demonstrated that English language and literature students used compensation, metacognitive and social strategies more frequently than the science and agriculture students. Similarly, Rong (1999) and Peacock and Ho (2003) also showed that English language students use the reported strategies more frequently than the students in some other fields, such as mathematics, building, engineering, business and others.

The difference in the use of reading strategies based on nationality and study year was also exhibited earlier (Alhaqbani, Riazi, 2012; Anderson, 2002; Karbalaei, 2010; Oxford, Burry-Stock, 1995). Thus, Alhaqbani and Riazi (2012) analysed Asian and African students' awareness of reading strategy use and the findings revealed a significant difference between the two groups, as the African students achieved significantly higher mean scores than the Asian students. In addition, students' strategy use is said to increase with the increase in their study year, as the students from the upper classes are noticed to use more strategies than the students from the lower classes (Cogmen, Saracaloglu, 2009; Oxford, 1994).

3. The current study

In the largely underexplored Bosnian context, metacognitive reading strategies have not aroused a great research interest. In the surrounding countries, on the other hand, the awareness of metacognitive reading strategies has been explored a bit further (Kolić-Vehovec, Bajšanski, 2003; Mijušković, Simović, 2016; Stanojević-Gocić, 2016) as well as some of the factors affecting the strategy use. Those findings have revealed that teaching reading strategies enhances reading

comprehension and that language proficiency and academic achievement are key factors impacting strategy use, as the more proficient foreign language learners and the students with a higher grade-point average (GPA) tend to use strategies more frequently than the less proficient ones and the students with a lower GPA (Mikulec, 2016). Since, to our knowledge, no study addressing the impact of some other demographic factors on strategy usage has been conducted in the given context, the current study might yield a better insight into this topic and deepen the understanding of the factors that can affect and contribute to a greater strategy use and eventually to an enhanced reading comprehension.

Thus, the primary goal of this research is to determine the overall usage of different types of metacognitive reading strategies by non-native English language speakers at *International Burch University*. Aiming to take the matter even further, the study also seeks to explore the use of metacognitive reading strategies across different study groups, different grade levels, different nationalities and gender. Therefore, the following hypotheses were tested.

1. There will be a significant difference in the use of metacognitive reading strategies, including pragmatic and analytic ones, based on students' grade level.

2. The students studying at English Language and Literature Department use metacognitive reading strategies, including pragmatic and analytic ones, significantly more frequently than the students studying at Management Department.

3. Bosnian students will achieve a significantly higher score in the use of metacognitive reading strategies, including pragmatic and analytic ones, than Turkish students.

4. Female participants use metacognitive reading strategies, including pragmatic and analytic ones, significantly more frequently than male participants.

4. Research Sample

The research sample consisted of 140 student participants. The students involved in this study were selected through convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique in which the subjects involved are fully selected based on their accessibility and proximity to the researchers. Thus, the students studying at International Burch University, the most prestigious private university in Bosnia and Herzegovina, were selected. All the participants were undergraduate students at English Language and Literature Department 89 (63.6 %) and Management Department 51 (36.4), with 38 participants being the first-grade students, 35 the second-grade students, 30 the third-grade students and 37 the fourth-grade students. The respondents belonged to two national groups, thus 110 respondents were Bosnian students and 30 respondents Turkish students, among whom 54 were male participants (38.6 %) and 86 female participants (61.4 %). The exact description of the participants is provided in [Table 1](#).

5. Instrument and procedure

The instrument used for data collection was the Metacognitive Reading Strategy Questionnaire (MRSQ) developed by Taraban et al. (2004). MRSQ measures two constructs: (a) the *analytic* cognition aimed at reading comprehension, and (b) *pragmatic* behaviors aimed at studying and academic performance. MRSQ consists of 22 statements, each of which uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("I never do this") to 5 ("I always do this") and participants choose one of the five responses (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always). The validity of the instrument was confirmed by Taraban et al. (2004). The internal consistency reliability of MSRQ was assessed by means of Cronbach α coefficient, which was $\alpha = .86$, $\alpha = .81$ for analytic strategies and $\alpha = .77$ for pragmatic strategies.

The data was gathered on the premises of International Burch University during March and April 2016. The questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of the class, and the participants were asked to read each statement carefully, circling the number indicating the frequency with which they use the reading strategy described in the statement, to be sincere in their answers and to respond to all the questionnaire statements. The questions were further clarified by the researcher where and when necessary. The maximum amount of time needed for completing the questionnaire was 20 minutes, in class and under the researcher's supervision.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of participants

		N	Percent
Study Group	English Language and Literature	89	63.6
	Management	51	36.4
Nationality	Bosnian	110	78.6
	Turkish	30	21.4
Gender	Female	86	38.6
	Male	54	61.4
Grade level	First Year	38	27.1
	Second Year	35	25.0
	Third Year	30	21.4
	Fourth Year	37	26.4

6. Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS (v. 22) software packages. Firstly, the descriptive analysis including means, standard deviations (SD) and frequencies was performed. The internal consistency reliability of the scales was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. General characteristics of the participants were summarized using descriptive statistics and the independent samples T-Test and one-way ANOVA were used to explore the differences in using metacognitive reading strategies based on grade level, gender, study field and nationality.

7. Results

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the use of metacognitive reading strategies among students at different grade levels. There was a significant difference between the students at different grade levels $F(3,136) = 6.23, p = .001, \eta^2 = .121$. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the first-grade students ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.51$) was significantly lower ($p = .05$) than the mean score for the fourth-grade students ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.49$). Furthermore, the second-grade students ($M = 3.34, SD = 0.58$) used metacognitive reading strategies significantly ($p = .023$) less frequently than both the third-grade ($M = 3.75, SD = 0.39$) and the fourth-grade students ($p > .001$), ($M = 3.83, SD = 0.49$). Thus, the results indicate that the use of metacognitive reading strategies increases with the study year, the only exception being the second-grade students, who achieved a lower mean score ($M = 3.34, SD = 0.58$) than the first-grade students ($M = 3.54, SD = 0.51$). Therefore, these findings reveal that grade level has a significant medium, almost high, effect on the use of metacognitive reading strategies. The descriptive results, p value and effect size of metacognitive reading strategies, including their subscales based on grade level, are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive results, significance, and effect size of metacognitive reading strategies based on grade level

Variable	First Grade		Second grade		Third Grade		Fourth grade		Total		<i>p</i>	η^2
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
MRSQ	3.54	0.51	3.34	0.58	3.75	0.39	3.83	0.49	3.61	0.53	.001	.121
Analytic strategies	3.45	0.56	3.30	0.55	3.69	0.41	3.78	0.51	3.55	0.54	.001	.120
Pragmatic strategies	3.80	0.62	3.43	0.88	3.90	0.75	3.98	0.66	3.78	0.75	.011	.079

A one-way between subjects ANOVA showed a significant difference in the analytic reading strategy use $F(3,136) = 6.210, p = .001, \eta^2 = .120$. Post Hoc Tukey test showed that the fourth-grade students ($M = 3.78, SD = 0.51$) use analytic reading strategies significantly ($p = .035$) more than the first-grade ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.56$) and the second-grade students ($p = .001$) ($M = 3.30, SD = 0.55$). Furthermore, the third-grade students ($M = 3.69, SD = 0.41$) use analytic strategies significantly ($p = .017$) more than the second-grade students ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.56$). In addition, grade level has a significant effect on the use of pragmatic reading strategies as well, $F(3,136) = 3.31, p = .011, \eta^2 = .079$. Post Hoc Tukey test showed that the second-grade students use pragmatic strategies significantly ($p = .020$) less frequently than the fourth-grade students ($M = 3.98, SD = 0.66$).

Table 3. Descriptive results, significance, and effect size of metacognitive reading strategies based on study field

Variable	ELL Department		Management Department		<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
MRSQ	3.79	0.45	3.30	0.53	<.001	.99
Analytic strategies	3.73	0.47	3.24	0.52	<.001	.98
Pragmatic strategies	3.95	0.66	3.47	0.81	.001	.64

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the use of metacognitive reading strategies by the students studying at English Language and Literature Department and Management Department. A significant difference $t(138) = 5.652, p < .001, d = .99$ was found between these two groups of students, indicating that the study field has a significant effect, with the large effect size, on the use of metacognitive reading strategies. The students studying at English Language and Literature Department ($M = 3.79, SD = 0.45$) use metacognitive reading strategies significantly more frequently than the students studying at Management Department ($M = 3.30, SD = 0.53$).

Likewise, the study field has a significantly large effect on the use of analytic strategies $t(138) = 5.558, p < .001, d = .98$. The students studying at English Language and Literature Department ($M = 3.73, SD = 0.47$) use analytic strategies significantly more frequently than the students studying at Management Department ($M = 3.24, SD = 0.52$). Similar results have been obtained for pragmatic strategies $t(138) = 3.802, p = .001, d = .64$, but with the medium effect size. The students studying at English Language and Literature Department ($M = 3.95, SD = 0.66$) use pragmatic strategies significantly more than the students studying at Management Department ($M = 3.47, SD = 0.81$).

Table 4. Descriptive results, significance, and effect size of metacognitive reading strategies based on nationality

Variable	Bosnian students		Turkish students		<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
MRSQ	3.616	0.56	3.615	0.43	.990	.002
Analytic strategies	3.55	0.56	3.56	0.45	.909	.019
Pragmatic strategies	3.78	0.80	3.75	0.59	.819	.042

An independent-samples t-test did not show a significant difference $t(138) = 0.012, p = .990$, in the use of metacognitive reading strategies between Bosnian ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.56$) and Turkish students ($M = 3.61, SD = 0.43$). When the use of analytic reading strategies was measured, similar results were obtained $t(138) = -0.114, p = .909, d = .019$, with Bosnian students ($M = 3.55, SD = 0.56$) and Turkish students ($M = 3.56, SD = 0.45$) achieving a close score. As for pragmatic reading strategies, no significant difference was found $t(138) = 0.230, p = .819, d = .042$ between Bosnian and Turkish students. The aforementioned results indicate that nationality does not have a significant effect on the overall use of metacognitive reading strategies including its subscales.

Table 5. Descriptive results, significance, and effect size of metacognitive reading strategies based on gender

Variable	Female		Male		<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
MRSQ	3.75	0.47	3.39	0.55	<.001	.70
Analytic strategies	3.66	0.51	3.37	0.54	.002	.55
Pragmatic strategies	3.98	0.64	3.45	0.81	<.001	.72

Moreover, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to explore gender-based differences in the use of metacognitive strategies. The results revealed a significant difference $t(138) = -4.088, p < .001, d = .70$ in the use of metacognitive reading strategies between female students ($M = 3.75, SD = 0.55$) and male students ($M = 3.39, SD = 0.55$). This suggests that gender has a significant effect on the use of metacognitive strategies and that female students use these strategies significantly more frequently than male students.

Gender-based differences in the use of different types of metacognitive reading strategies were also significant. Thus, a significant difference was found in the use of analytic strategies $t(138) = -3.230, p = .002, d = .55$, with the mean score achieved by female participants ($M = 3.66, SD = 0.51$) being significantly higher than the mean score achieved by male participants ($M = 3.37, SD = 0.54$). Furthermore, a significant difference was also measured in the use of pragmatic strategies $t(138) = -4.342, p < .001, d = .72$, as the females ($M = 3.98, SD = 0.64$) use pragmatic strategies significantly more frequently than the males ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.81$).

8. Discussion and Conclusion

Due to an important role reading strategies have in the learning process, this study aimed at exploring their use across different study groups in the Bosnian context, deep in the heart of Europe, where English is used as an important means of communication and business transactions. The first hypothesis suggesting that there will be a significant difference in the use of metacognitive reading strategies, including the pragmatic and analytic ones, based on students' grade level is supported. The participants from the upper grade level use metacognitive reading

strategies, both analytic and pragmatic ones, significantly more frequently than the participants from the lower grade level. This is, to some extent, in line with Cogmen and Saracaloglu's (2009) results, since their results have shown that the study year impacts strategy use, as their fourth-year students used reading strategies more frequently than their first-year students. However, since the given difference was insignificant on the analytic strategies dimension, but significant on the pragmatic strategies dimension, these findings diverge from our research results which revealed a significant difference on both of these subscales.

The second hypothesis stating that the students studying at English Language and Literature Department use metacognitive reading strategies, both the pragmatic and analytic ones, significantly more frequently than the students studying at Management Department was also supported. The results showed that English Language and Literature Department students pay closer attention to the text they read, which enhances their reading comprehension. Such findings are fully aligned with previous research suggesting that the students majoring in English language and Literature use reading strategies more frequently than the students majoring in other study fields (Mochizuki, 1999; Peacock, Ho, 2003; Rong, 1999). A plausible reason for such results might be a greater English language proficiency of English language students. Being more proficient in L2 and consequently being more successful L2 readers, English language and literature students are expected to be more aware of strategy usage.

A slightly different situation arose with the third hypothesis which initially stated that Bosnian students will achieve a significantly higher score in the usage of metacognitive reading strategies, both the pragmatic and analytic ones, than Turkish students. However, since no significant difference was observed between Bosnian and Turkish students, who employ metacognitive reading strategies, including the two subscales, almost equally frequently, this hypothesis was rejected. This is rather unexpected since different national, culturally diverse groups were found to employ strategies with different frequency (Alhaqbani, Riaz, 2012; Anderson, 2002; Karbalaee, 2010; Oxford, Burry-Stock, 1995), with the difference in strategy use being in some cases statistically significant (Alhaqbani, Riaz, 2012). This might be explained by the fact that all the participants, Bosnian and Turkish alike, study at the same university, namely in the same educational milieu, where similar teaching approaches have been adopted.

The fourth hypothesis suggesting that the female participants use metacognitive reading strategies, both the pragmatic and analytic ones, significantly more frequently than the male participants was supported, as our female participants use both types of metacognitive reading strategies significantly more frequently than our male participants. These results are fully in line with extensive research revealing a greater use of reading strategies by females (Green, Oxford, 1995; Kaylani, 1996; Oxford, Nyikos, 1989; Razi, 2008; Sheorey, 2006; Poole, 2009; Phakiti, 2003). However, they diverge from the other studies employing the same instrument (Cogmen, Saracaloglu, 2009; Razi, 2008), which showed no significant gender-based differences in the use of strategies (Razi, 2008) or a significant difference on the pragmatic strategy subscale and an insignificant difference on the analytic strategy subscale (Cogmen, Saracaloglu, 2009). This seems to confirm the famous language learning folklore 'that women learn languages 'better' than men' (Oxford et al., 1988: 321) and that women are more motivated to learn English as a foreign language (Bećirović, 2017).

This study has some major practical implications. Our research findings can encourage instructors to implement metacognitive reading strategies into their syllabi, taking into consideration the differences that exist among the groups formed based on different factors. Thus, instructors can teach their students how to use metacognitive reading strategies correctly, directly stimulating them to read more effectively and thus accelerate the learning process.

This study aimed to explore the usage of metacognitive reading strategies by university-level students in the EFL context. Specifically, it sought to measure the central aspects of metacognitive reading strategy usage amongst students studying at two different departments, namely Management Department and English Language and Literature Department. The results revealed significant differences in the use of the metacognitive reading strategies between Management and English Language and Literature students, as well as between male and female students and grade levels. Nonetheless, this study proved that no significant differences exist in the metacognitive reading strategy use between the students of different nationalities, i.e. Bosnian and Turkish students.

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