

The Predictive Power of Vocabulary Knowledge, Syntactic Awareness and Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies in Reading Comprehension of EFL Learners (Jiga 11th Grade Students in Focus)

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Abstract

This paper explores whether vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies are strong predictors of reading comprehension. It also addresses the relationship among vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness reading strategies and reading comprehension achievement. To attain this objective, descriptive research using a correlational research design was employed. 100 participants were selected from a population of 250 11th grade Jiga preparatory school students using simple random sampling. The participants were asked to respond to a MARSQ developed by Taraban, Kerr and Ryneason (2004) and researcher-made tests of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and reading comprehension. Pearson product moment correlation and stepwise multiple regression analysis were used in data analysis. The results of the correlation analysis showed that among the three predictor variables namely, EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies, vocabulary knowledge is highly correlated with reading comprehension; there is strong positive correlation between vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness; the same high correlation holds for the relationship between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension, but there were no significant correlation with metacognitive awareness reading strategies. The stepwise multiple regression analysis results also revealed that EFL students' vocabulary knowledge plays a significant role in predicting their reading comprehension achievement compared to syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies. Finally, some useful implications and recommendations which are of significance to educators, teachers and researchers are proposed based on the research findings. Accordingly, the result contends that instructions on developing reading comprehension should put vocabulary knowledge competencies in priority and then focus on activation of background knowledge and use of reading strategies together with the development of syntactic awareness for the success of reading comprehension. As EFL vocabulary knowledge was found to be the strongest significant predictors of reading comprehension, teachers and parents should also pay special attention to students' vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary Knowledge, Syntactic Awareness, Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

1 Background of the Study

English has become the dominant language in many countries including Ethiopia, because it is an international language and many referenced materials are written in it, so for effective communication using the target language, the four language skills: (speaking, writing, listening and reading) including the sub skills like grammar, vocabulary and translation need to be well practiced. Among these skills reading comprehension is one of the most important skills to be acquired during a language course. Moreover, one requires the integration of these linguistic units and other reader-based variables (i.e., interest level, relevant background knowledge of the topic, foreign language abilities, and awareness of the reading process etc.) in the process of reading comprehension. Hence, readers actively participate in the construction of knowledge in a complicated manner. To learn English well, one must be able to read well. As comprehension is a personal creation of meaning, reading comprehension is considered a problem that students of English as a foreign language (EFL) face.

Reading comprehension involves a complicated cognitive process. Because comprehension is an internal process that requires thoughtful and deliberate interaction between readers and text (Nation, 2001). Readers must concurrently process various information to understand the context of reading. In EFL/ESL learning, cognitive theory explains how the human brain processes existing or prior language knowledge and then applies that information to a reading text. Smith (2004) claimed that the knowledge a reader needs in order to understand written language must be stored in the long-term memory.

It is believed that reading comprehension is a cognitive structure. In other words, reading comprehension is a process by which the readers utilize their prior knowledge and transfer it to the written text. According to Mitchell and Myles (2004), a cognitive theory has two main approaches. These are the processing approach and

the constructionist approach. The processing approach focuses on language learners' ability to process linguistic information and their language. Learners store language information in their long term and short-term memories, and then utilize this information when necessary (Mitchell and Myles 2004). Constructionists believe that learners acquire language "through usage, by extracting pattern and regularities from the input, and build ever-strong association in the brain" (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p. 98). ESL/EFL reading comprehension is not easy because most learners need sufficient time to develop their cognitive ability. Success in reading comprehension is usually seen as fundamental to success in academic performance (Chen, 2009).

Though currently in Ethiopian school system English is taught as a foreign language beginning from kindergarten and is used as a medium of instruction for some subjects from grade seven to all subjects in secondary, preparatory and higher education institutions, EFL teachers complain that quite a lot of students after many years of study have low performance in English. This may be due to the fact that they are not given opportunities to read a lot. Most of the class time is devoted to learning about the language: that is, learning grammar and learning to read through translation. Students are taught in traditional way (i.e., teaching about the language or usage, rather than teaching the language itself for practical use or communicative purpose). They approach their reading comprehension assignment by putting all their efforts and concentration into the passages they read. They carefully read the passage word by word. When reading and encountering unfamiliar word, they stop reading and looking up the meaning of the word in a dictionary. This reading behavior hinders their reading comprehension. Hailemichael cited in Birhanu (2010) indicates nearly at all class levels, the English language proficiency of Ethiopian students is low. Most EFL secondary school teachers complain that English language competence of high school students in general and their reading comprehension in particular is limited and it is not adequate to the level required for effective comprehension. Moreover, research conducted in different contexts also indicated the causes of this incompetence in the target language, particularly in reading comprehension are attributable to limitations, such as vocabulary knowledge, syntactic or grammatical knowledge and metacognitive awareness reading strategies the reader possess in the processes of reading comprehension (Chen, 2009; Guo, 2008).

Davis (1944) states that in first language (L1) research, there is ample evidence that vocabulary knowledge accounts for the largest percent of variance in reading comprehension. Likewise, second language (L2) research has also highlighted the importance of vocabulary knowledge. McWhorter (2004) claims that ESL students' vocabulary knowledge has significant role in their reading comprehension. In addition, Becker cited in Unaru, (2004) explains that inadequate vocabulary knowledge could be a factor to the failure of students in reading comprehension. Similarly, regarding the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension (Laufer cited in Coady and Huckin, 1997) says, "No text comprehension is possible either in one's native language or in a foreign language without understanding the text's vocabulary" (p. 20). Moreover, Laufer (1997) indicated that the larger the vocabulary that learners have, the fewer the number of words that will appear to be "deceptively transparent" to the learner (p.31). Hence, without understanding the meaning of words, ESL/ EFL readers have difficulty in developing reading comprehension.

Most researchers believe EFL/ESL learners have lack of understanding reading texts because of their limited level of vocabulary knowledge (Laufer, 1998; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). For instance, researchers like Nation (2001) in a study conducted on Japanese high school learners' reading comprehension and found ESL/EFL learners lack of reading comprehension attributable to their limited vocabulary knowledge. Since then, these scholars started measuring the vocabulary knowledge which is necessary for ESL/EFL readers to achieve certain levels of reading comprehension. For native speakers, Laufer (1998) suggested that learners need around 5,000-word families to achieve comprehension successfully. Word families refer to a set of words that are closely related in meaning. For example, walk, walked, walking and walks are considered as a word family. Nation and Waring (1997) claimed that second language learners need to know 3,000 to 5,000-word families in order to read for pleasure. In addition, Hazenberg and Hulstijn (1996) suggested a person who learns English as a second language or a foreign language may need 3,000-word knowledge and 95% coverage as the vocabulary threshold for academic reading (i.e., the students are expected to know 95% of words from the reading text for successful in reading comprehension); whereas, 10,000 base words may be needed for university studies.

Understanding of rules of grammar and sentence structure also plays an important role for reading comprehension (Bowey, 1986; Tunmer et al 1987). The importance of syntactic awareness in reading comprehension of EFL learners has also been established by (Carlisle et al 1999). Some studies indicated that syntactic knowledge might not affect second language learners' reading comprehension (e.g. Ulijn, 1984; Ulijn & Strother, 1990). However, other studies have shown that knowledge of grammar structures plays a critical role in affecting reading comprehension (Perfetti, 1989; Rayner, 1990; Tannenhaus, 1988).

In addition, Grabe (1991) stated that the degree of syntactic knowledge that second language learners have may influences their reading comprehension. In other words, learners who lack syntactic ability seems not be able to achieve a higher level of reading process and readers' need of L2 syntactic knowledge to integrate their background knowledge and word meaning (Koda, 2005). For example, when a person reads articles or

newspapers or other academic texts in an EFL/ESL, in order to verify one's own background knowledge and to predict the content, he/she needs to have knowledge of both the vocabulary and the grammatical structures of the text.

Currently in Ethiopia, EFL students have been encouraged to guess meanings of unknown words when they are involved in reading comprehension activities as communicative language teaching approach ascribes to do so. Based on the idea that a large amount of vocabulary is required to comprehend texts, EFL teachers tend to focus on teaching vocabulary rather than syntax. This is not meant that, the role of grammar or syntax is neglected; rather much emphasis is given to EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge than syntactic knowledge. Although students like to use vocabulary more often than syntax to determine the context of reading, some researchers believe that teaching only vocabulary will not help students enhance their reading comprehension (Johnson, 1982; Park, 1986; Huang, 2002). The traditional reading approach emphasizes teaching vocabulary and the use of grammar in reading comprehension. Thus, it may be time for teachers and EFL/ESL learners to reconsider the traditional ways of teaching reading, since vocabulary knowledge/syntactic competences are equally important in reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is a process that involves the orchestration of the readers' prior knowledge about the world and language. It involves such as predicting, questioning, summarizing, determining meaning of vocabulary in context, monitoring one's own comprehension, and reflecting. The process also involves such is governed by a specific context, and it is independent on social interaction. It is the integration of all these processes that accounts for comprehension. They are not isolable, measurable sub factors. They are holistic processes for constructing (Weaver, 1994, p.44).

Most Ethiopian EFL students could not master reading comprehension adequately. This lack of reading comprehension has repercussions for the whole educational system. Reading whether L1, EFL or ESL is considered as a cognitive enterprise that entails three components including, reader, text and activity (Guo, 2008). Thus, readers must utilize metacognitive awareness and invoke the conscious use of reading strategies, in order to comprehend texts successfully.

Auerbach and Paxtoa cited in Guo (2008) defining metacognitive awareness as the process "entailing knowledge of strategies for processing texts, as the ability to monitor comprehension and the ability to adjust strategies as need" (p. 204-241).

In most cases, the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension has been well documented in L1. However, few studies have recognized the predictive power of these constructs in ESL learners' reading comprehension. Moreover, many EFL students may know a certain number of vocabulary words but may still be unable to comprehend a reading comprehension text. On the other hand, learners may have strong syntactic and metacognitive ability but may also still have difficulty in understanding the reading content. It is necessary to know whether students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies predict reading comprehension or not.

Accordingly, the contribution of EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness reading strategies to predict reading comprehension was chosen particularly for those students learning English as a foreign language.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Reading is one of the four major skills of English as a foreign language and comprehension is generally the ultimate goal of teaching reading and so reading comprehension is the "essence of reading". Accordingly, the development of reading comprehension is also the essence of reading development. Qian, (1999) and Nation, (2006) as cited in Chen (2009) state that many studies have investigated the relationship between ESL and L1 students' vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension and the majority of these studies presented the importance that vocabulary plays in students' reading comprehension. It is further noted that these studies, however, tended to focus more on monolingual students than EFL/ ESL or bilingual learners. In fact, for bilingual or EFL students' vocabulary, syntactic knowledge and metacognitive awareness usually play essential roles for comprehending a reading content (Ibid: 10)

Reading research on the contribution of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies to predict reading comprehension was conducted primarily with native English-speaking population to examine which reading skill components contribute to reading comprehension in L1 with children and adults (Davis, 1944, Tunmer, et al., 1987). Moreover, though in practice, these constructs cannot be discussed separately with regard to reading comprehension, most ESL studies have focused on either the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies separately; few have examined the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness combined when readers are reading. For example, while the vocabulary knowledge studies showed that students liked to use vocabulary rather than syntax to determine the context of reading comprehension. For instance, the cross-

sectional studies conducted on Chinese learners to see the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness in reading comprehension indicated that students used syntactic knowledge more often than vocabulary knowledge (Cain, 2007).

However, in relation to a sociocultural context of EFL learners like in Ethiopia, where English is designated as an EFL in the school curriculum, little is known about how EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies could affect reading comprehension. Teachers of English in such contexts have been frequently confronted with the problems of students' inability to handle difficulty in reading comprehension. Comprehension scores of the students are usually low. Therefore, while there may be some similarities between native speakers and foreign language learners in the arena of which skills predict reading comprehension (Carlo et al. 2005), the unique contribution of EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies to predict reading comprehension remains largely undeveloped in the literature.

Guo (2008) in her research in the field of EFL reading comprehension argues that two major factors account for differences in reading comprehension: language specific factors such as EFL vocabulary knowledge, EFL grammar (syntactic awareness) and general reading knowledge (metacognitive awareness). EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, grammar knowledge (syntactic awareness) and general reading knowledge (metacognitive awareness) usually play essential predictors for comprehending a reading content (Chen, 2009). Metacognitive awareness is considered a component of general reading knowledge that may be transferred from L1 to ESL/EFL reading (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995). When comprehension breaks, especially in a foreign language or second language, students need to repair their comprehension. This is where the importance of metacognitive awareness reading strategies comes in, so as to facilitate the reading comprehension process and give students a clear sense of what they are reading (Sasson, 2010). In addition to EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness, EFL students' metacognitive awareness reading strategies could be a major problem we are coping with is that EFL learners when reading certain texts. This is because it is believed that metacognition enhances the reader's own understanding, of comprehension strategies, and of monitoring, evaluating and relating comprehension during reading (Fitzgerald, 1995; Pressley, 2002).

Thus, some researchers claim that good first language or second language readers should also be good EFL readers (Schoonent, 1998). In the same vein, Bernhardt cited in Guo (2008), suggested that more research is needed to examine the interplay among vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness of reading strategies in EFL reading comprehension achievement. Therefore, in order to fill this gap, the researcher wanted to investigate the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension of EFL learners in an Ethiopian context.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the problem and purpose of this study, the following research questions are addressed.

1. What is the relationship among EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness and their reading comprehension achievement?
2. Do EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness reading strategies predict reading comprehension? If so, which predictor variables (i.e., vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies) strongly predict the criterion variable (reading comprehension achievement)?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this study were:

1. Investigating the correlations among each construct with reading comprehension.
2. Investigating the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension success of EFL learners.

Research Methodology

3. Research Design

This study employed a correlational research design to investigate the predictive power and relationships of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension of EFL learners. This design was chosen to clarify our understanding of important phenomena through the identification of relationships among variables and to test the strengths of these predictor variables included in the study.

3.1 Research Setting and Participants

Jiga Preparatory Secondary School, which is found in Jabitehinan Woreda, Jiga town in West Gojjam Zone in Amhara Regional State of Ethiopia was the focus of this study. This school was chosen for the study because it is

the place where the researcher taught for two years (2009-2010) and access to cooperation from teachers and students would be possible for the researcher. In addition, the reason the researcher selected 11th grade was that they stayed in school throughout the year and this provided the researcher with the opportunity to get sufficient information during data collection. Besides, he thought, grade 12 students though they are appropriate, they could be busy preparing themselves for the national entrance exam. Thus, there was a threat that they might not give enough information to the proposed study.

In addition, reading is highly emphasized in Ethiopian EFL learners' context, particularly beginning from secondary to tertiary levels. Hence, the researcher believed that 11th grade students were advanced enough in comprehending the given texts better than 9th grade and 10th grade students and the information that might be gained from these participants may provide adequate information to investigate the proposed research problem.

3.4 Sample Population and Sampling Techniques

The total population from which the samples were selected comprised 250 grade 11 students of the school enrolled in the academic year 2011/2012. The students were grouped in five sections. From the total population of the target group, 40% of them were randomly selected using simple random sampling (lottery system), because the number of participants were not too large and this randomization technique is used to avoid researcher's bias and to have equal chance of the population being selected. In doing so, each participant has 0.4 or 40% probability to be selected rather than being selected at the discretion (personal judgment) of the researcher. Since there is high probability that all the population characteristics will be represented in the sample, it is the most desirable sampling technique for quantitative research (Yalew, 2005). Therefore, from 250 students, 100 of them were selected and responded to the questionnaire and the tests.

3.6 Data Gathering Instruments

To elicit the necessary data from the participants, two main data gathering instruments were used in the study: questionnaire and tests. Researchers such as Cohen and Manion (1994) and Seliger and Shohamy (1989) have proven these instruments to be more productive in generating information on the language teaching and learning process. In order to collect data on learners' metacognitive awareness reading strategies, a questionnaire was used. Each item of the questionnaire was translated into Amharic version (the mother tongue of the respondents) to avoid communication barrier. The Amharic version of the items was shown to language specialists to check its validity for ensuring the clarity, the wording, the ordering and the proper translation of the questionnaire (see appendix A). In order to evaluate the learners' syntactic awareness, vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension, tests of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and reading comprehension were used. The researcher prepared the tests, then his advisor and colleagues evaluated them.

Questionnaire

1.1 Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies Questionnaire (MARSQ)

The researcher adapted a 20-item questionnaire of the metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire (MARSQ) developed by Taraban, Kerr and Ryneason (2004), as cited in Guo (2006), to measure EFL students' awareness of the uses of reading strategies in the reading process. Participants were asked to rate how frequently they use the strategies listed on a five-point Likert scale (Never use "1" Rarely Use, "2" Sometimes Use, "3" Often Use, "4" and Always Use "5"). The MARSQ has two components: part 1 of the MARSQ (Question 1-9) the analytic-cognitive, which relates to cognition aimed at reading comprehension and part 2 (Question (10-20) the pragmatic-behavioral, which relates to behaviors aimed at studying and academic performance.

In the implementation of the questionnaire, first, a pilot study was conducted with other 10 students who were randomly selected from grade 11 students from another school who did not participate in the main study. After the pilot study Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the reliability of the instrument and it was found to be reliable (i.e. Alpha=0.78). Before the pilot study, the questionnaire for metacognitive awareness reading strategies had 24 items. On the basis of the pilot study, 4 items that showed negative and low index of items correlation and thus these items were discarded. Finally, 20 items were used in the main study (See appendix).

2. Tests

3.6.2.1 Syntactic Awareness Test (SAT)

Using the principles of Hammil, Brown & Larsen (2007), as guideline in designing syntactic awareness test to measure written language abilities (syntactic abilities) for reading comprehension, the researcher prepared the constructs of syntactic awareness test. This could help to measure EFL learners' written language performance and syntactic awareness. Constructions such as knowledge of words, sentence types, tenses, linguistic background, background knowledge and cultural content are mainly considered in the preparation of the syntactic awareness test. The test items were prepared based on the aims of current English for grade 11 course books and in line with the learners' background, cultural content. Then test was evaluated by his advisor and

colleagues.

Then a pilot study was conducted with 10 students who were selected randomly from grade 11 students from another school who did not participate in the main study. After the pilot study Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated to determine the reliability of the instrument and it was found to be reliable (i.e. $\alpha = 0.62$). Before the pilot study, the syntactic awareness test had 30 items. Some items which showed poor index of item total correlation were rejected. Finally, 24 items were used in the main study (See Appendix B).

3.6.2.2 Vocabulary Knowledge Test

In order to evaluate the learners' vocabulary knowledge, 31 vocabulary items (i.e. general vocabulary words and those which students had learned them before and items mentioned on the syllabus and course book were also prepared by the researcher to predict the learners' vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension. An attempt was made to prepare the test items based on the learners' level, background and in line with their course book. In most cases, the researcher constructed each vocabulary knowledge test items to meet the purpose of the test. According to Schmitt (2000) listed four frequently used vocabulary knowledge testing techniques including, multiple-choice tests, matching tests, cloze test items and blank-filling. He argues that these four items only show some partial knowledge of the target words ability. However, he states that, in fact, a test in measuring all possible aspects of the knowledge of the target word seems impossible. The researcher did not include the true-false test items in this vocabulary knowledge test items because as Read (1997) contends that true-false items in vocabulary knowledge measures are decontextualized test items having a negative wash back effect and students will continue studying words in isolation. The test was then piloted with other 10 students who were selected randomly from grade 11 students from another school who did not participate in the main study. Cronbach Alpha was also calculated to estimate the reliability of the instrument and it was found to be reliable ($\alpha = 0.80$ and as a result, 1 item that showed poor index of total item correlation was discarded. Finally, 30 test items were used in the main study (See Appendix C).

3.6.2.3 Reading Comprehension Test (RCT)

Since the primary purpose of the study was to see whether EFL students' reading comprehension skill can be predicted as a result of the predictor variables, comprehension tests were used. The researcher believes a test is relatively the best tool to evaluate reading comprehension achievement. Because it is through test that EFL learners' reading comprehension success (the product level) of reading comprehension could be clearly evaluated. The researcher took two reading comprehension passages directly from the students' course book and directly related to their vocabulary test to measure the students' achievements in reading comprehension. To measure reading comprehension, 30 items of multiple choice questions were constructed by the researcher. The multiple choice criteria by Wolf (1993, in Brantmeier, 2003) was followed in order to address the limitations of the tool: (1) all items should be passage dependent; (2) some of the items should require the reader to make inferences; (3) correct responses could not be determined by looking at the other questions. The items target both the literal and interpretive levels of reading comprehension. There are four choices, with only one correct answer and three distracters which are also plausible answers. The creation of the comprehension test was deemed critical by the researcher for the choice of the assessment task affects a reader's performance in a reading comprehension test (Brantmeier, 2003). It is worth reminding that learners had been taught these two passages before the test was distributed. Each test consists of one passage and 15 questions. The questions were all objective types in the form of multiple choice questions. Subjective type questions were not used because they required the ability to organize and write. From the researcher's experience, it is perceived that not all students are good at writing. This might adversely affect the validity of the results. Thus, only objective type items were constructed based on the Pearson and Johnson (1978) classification of question type. In view of that, text-explicit questions answer explicitly mentioned in the text; text implicit questions-answer is inferred by integrating information presented in text; script implicit questions answer is inferred by relating text to prior knowledge concerning the topic is developed. The contents of the tests include macro and micro skills of reading. According to Hughes (1991), the distinction between these two levels of sub-skills is not made explicit, but it appears that the term 'macro skills' refers to understanding the general ideas of the text. (E.g. Information, gist, argument) while 'micro skills' refers to recognizing and interpreting the linguistic features of the text, (e.g., referents, word meanings, discourse indicators). Hence, the test consists of questions asking gist, details, word meanings and referents.

Generally, in reading comprehension test, an attempt was made to prepare the items based on the aims of current grade 11 English students' textbook. Originally, the passages had 33 objective items altogether. After the pilot study, items that showed negative index of item correlation were discarded. Cronbach Alpha was also calculated to estimate the reliability of the instrument and it was found to be reliable ($\alpha = 0.60$). And finally, 30 test items were used in the main study (See Appendix D).

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

The development of the tests and questionnaire underwent the following processes. First, on the basis of the

objectives of the study, the existing ELT literature and instructional objectives stated in the learners' course book for grade 11, the researcher constructed the items. Then drafted items were given to two prospective graduate students of TEFL and two English instructors at Bahir Dar University to comment on them. Taking their comments and suggestions into account and with the consultation of his advisor, the researcher reshaped the tools. Some items were modified, some were added, and some items that seemed not essential were dropped. Then, to assess the content, logical flow, clarity and reliability of the items, a pilot study was conducted.

The researcher and his two colleagues participated in administering the instruments during the main study. They were well informed about their respective roles before the instruments were administered. Specific time and place for the instrument administration was set. Since it was hot in the afternoon, the administration process was implemented in the morning. Based on the sample selection, students were assigned in two sections with 50 students in each section. Then, they were informed that participation was voluntary and that any information about the students was considered confidential.

The instruments were administered in two sessions. During session one, the reading comprehension test, vocabulary knowledge test, and syntactic awareness test and in session two, the metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire was administered. The metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire was administered after the reading comprehension test so that readers would not be prompted to use strategies during comprehension test that they might not typically use. The actual maximum time spent on each instrument was strictly controlled and kept identical on all occasions and on the average, vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and reading comprehension sessions took 1:30 hours and 1:00 for metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire in order to ensure the reliability of the results. Then all the participants handed over questionnaire and tests papers to the data collectors before they left the room.

3.8 Validity of the Instruments

A number of measures were taken to ensure instruments validity, which is defined as, “the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assess the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure” (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p.109). The idea of validity to questionnaire and tests design refers to the steps taken by the researcher to ensure clarity, wording and ordering of the questions. After receiving the comments and corrections, the questionnaire and tests were edited for validity. One measure of validity as described by Smith and Glass (1987) is that of face validity. In describing face validity, the researcher attempted to support the interpretation of the measurements and its connection to the construct by seeking professional judgment that there is, for instance a plausible connection between the surface features of the measures content and the construct as theoretically defined. To ensure face validity, the researcher gave the questionnaire and tests to colleagues, English teachers and his advisor. They were given the first version of the instruments to comment on the clarity of items and suggest certain changes. Some of changes were regarding to the wording of the statements, their order, clarity and content. Accordingly, all necessary changes were made to the final draft (see appendix A, B, C, D). Content validity was achieved by submitting the questionnaire to experts in the field of Ethiopian languages and literature (experts like Dr.Tesfaye Abera, W/t Aster Asrat and Emebet Birhanu, graduate students) as to how the Amharic version of the questionnaire was valid in comparison with the English version. The tests were given to experts in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and Educational Psychology (experts like, Ato Chanyalew Enyew and Ato Betegiorgies Ph.D candidates) and his advisor Dr. Emily Boersma to examine and evaluate the contents and the formats of the tests before the final version were sent out to the participants.

3.9 Reliability of the Instruments

Reliability refers to the degree to which the instrument measures phenomena in a consistent manner. According to Oppenheim (1966, p.10), reliability refers to “consistency; obtaining the same results again”. This consistency can itself be measured in the form of a statistical coefficient of reproducibility, often Cronbach alpha, which is similar to a correlation coefficient. Cronbach Alpha test was run to measure the internal consistency and the reliability of the questionnaire and tests.

3.10 Methods of Data Analysis

The data that the researcher gathered from the students through different instruments were organized, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted using quantitatively and computed using SPSS software. Pearson product - moment correlation coefficient was performed to investigate the connections among variables. Likewise, to assess the predictive power of EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension, stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis were used.

3.10.1 Analysis and Results of the Pilot Study

After the scores on the tests and questionnaire were obtained, the researcher carried out certain statistical analyses.

- Computation of means, ranges and standard deviations of the scores on the instruments to obtain

information on the distribution of the scores.

- Pearson product- moment correlations among scores on the tests and questionnaire with a view to determining the intercorrelations among scores on the RC, VK, SA and MARS and
- Computation of reliability coefficients of the instruments using Cronbach Alpha coefficient reliability formula, in order to ensure that the reliability coefficients of the instruments were all at acceptable levels.

Table 1 below presents the summarized descriptive statistics of the variables included in the pilot study (i.e., the means, ranges and standard deviations, the possible scores) of the scores on the RC, VK, SA and MARS in the pilot study. The reason for conducting the pilot study was to ensure that the instruments to be used in the main study were acceptable levels of reliability and to find out how the intercorrelations among the scores on the RC, VK, SA and MARS would look. However, it should be cautioned that because of the small size of available learners, the statistical results listed in Table 3 could only provide some preliminary profiles rather than serve as meaningful indicators. Multiple regression procedures were not used in the pilot study because the sample size was too small for the purpose.

Table 1: The pilot study (N=10): Learner Means, Standard Deviations, and Score Range

Instruments	Mps ^a	M	SD	Score Range
RC	30	16.80	3.360	13-21
VK	30	22.20	4.709	11-25
SA	24	16.50	3.719	11-22
MARS	20	74.80	6.233	20

Mps= Maximum possible score

Note: VK= Vocabulary Knowledge, SA= Syntactic Awareness,

MARS= Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategies

RC= Reading Comprehension

Table 2: Pilot study with EFL learners (N=10) Cronbach Alpha Coefficients Reliability for the Instruments

Instrument	Number of items	Coefficients Reliability
RC	30	0.60
VK	30	0.80
SA	24	0.62
MARS	20	0.78

The reliability coefficients appearing in Table 2 were determined for the researcher's purpose. The r values of the VK and MARS were very high i.e., 0.80 and 0.78 respectively. The r values of the RC and SA which had been expected to yield a higher value were however relatively low at alpha= 0.60 and alpha=062 respectively. These levels, however, were still at acceptable levels.

Table 3: Pilot study with EFL learners (N=10): Intercorrelations among the RC, VK, SA and MARS.

Variables	Mean	SD	VK	SA	RC	MARS
VK	22.20	4.709	1	0.17	0.31	-0.017
SA	16.50	3.719		1	0.29	0.38
RC	16.80	3.360			1	-0.12
MARS	74.80	6.233				1

The intercorrelation analysis was used to know whether there was or not an association among RC, VK, SA and MARS. The result in Table 3 indicates that there was positive correlation between VK and SA ($r = 0.17$,

$p > 0.05$), VK and RC ($r = 0.31$, $P > 0.05$), SA and RC ($r = 0.29$, $P > 0.05$), and SA with MARS ($r = 0.38$, $P > 0.05$), but the intercorrelation was not significant. While there was inverse correlation between VK and MARS ($r = -0.017$, $P > 0.05$), and RC and MARS ($r = 0.12$, $P > 0.05$).

In summary, the results of the reliability coefficient of the pilot study were generally satisfactory. However, the values of the coefficients obtained through Pearson product-moment correlations were not revealed an acceptable level of relationship among scores on the RC, VK, SA and MARS. However, because of the small size of available learners (i.e., to see the interrelation among variables, there is a rule of thumb that the number of learners should be ≥ 30), the result only provides some preliminary profiles rather than serve as meaningful indicators.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

The main focus of this study was to investigate the predictive power of EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension.

Accordingly, data were gathered through questionnaire and tests in order to:

1. investigate the correlations among EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness reading strategies and their reading comprehension
2. investigate whether each predictor variable i.e. (vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies) predicts EFL students' reading comprehension.

The first objective of the study was to see the relationship among EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, and metacognitive awareness reading strategies and reading comprehension. To do this, Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Means, Standard Deviation and Interrelations of Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	RC	VK	SA	MARS
RC	12.48	3.198375	1	.55(**)	.46(**)	0.14
VK	14.09	6.666476		1	.67(**)	0.036
SA	11.27	5.469653			1	0.090
MARS	66.99	13.38245				1

(N=100),

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The mean score of 100 participants for RC, VK, SA and MARS were revealed in Table 4 above. Hence, MARS was 66.99 and obviously the highest among the other variables and its standard deviation was 13.38. Results of Pearson product-moment correlation analysis displayed in Table 4 above show that there was significantly positive correlation between EFL students' reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge ($r = 0.55$, $P < 0.05$), reading comprehension and syntactic awareness ($r = 0.46$, $P < 0.05$). Likewise, there was statistically a positive and significant relationship between EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and their syntactic awareness ($r = 0.67$, $P < 0.05$). In other words, it can be seen that reading comprehension score was correlated with vocabulary knowledge score at .55. This could be interpreted that the learner's reading comprehension score might increase if they scored higher on the vocabulary knowledge. It can also be seen that reading comprehension score was correlated with syntactic awareness score at .46. This could be interpreted that the learners' reading comprehension score might increase if they scored higher on syntactic awareness. This means the correlation between vocabulary knowledge score and syntactic awareness score was .67. It can also be seen that the learners' vocabulary knowledge score might increase if they scored higher on the syntactic awareness score and also the correlation between EFL students' reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness reading strategies was positive but not significant ($r = 0.14$, $P > 0.05$). Moreover, there was no significant correlation between EFL students' metacognitive awareness reading strategies with their syntactic awareness ability.

Some variables treated in the study were positively and significantly related to each other and some variables did not have significant correlation. In other words, some variables show that a change in one variable may contribute to a change in the other variables in the same direction whereas some variables do not. Evidences

suggest that when two variables (or sets of data) fluctuate in the same direction, i.e., as one increases so does the other, or as one decreases so does the other, a positive relationship is said to exist. For example, as Table 4 above reveals, a change in reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge may bring a change in syntactic awareness. But some variables like metacognitive awareness reading strategies with vocabulary knowledge and metacognitive awareness reading strategies with syntactic awareness might not bring a change in one another as they might not have correlation among them.

The other major intention of this study was to investigate whether or not EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies predict reading comprehension.

To do this, the stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis were performed. The reason that the stepwise procedures were used in this study was to select predictors of reading comprehension among vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies. The results of the stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis of EFL Students' VK, SA and MARS in EFL Reading Comprehension.

Variables	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-Value	Unstandardized Coefficients	Std Error	Standardized Coefficients	t-test	P-value
				Beta(β)		Beta(β)		
(Constant)	0.327	0.306	15.72	6.805	1.453		4.667	0.00
VK				0.213	0.054	0.445	3.941	0.00*
SA				0.087	0.066	0.150	1.321	0.19
MARS				0.025	0.020	0.105	1.256	0.21

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Stepwise multiple regression analysis was run to identify variables that predict EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. The stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis results in Table 5 above indicated that predictor variables (i.e. vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies) jointly predicted 32.7% of variance in EFL students' reading comprehension ($R^2=0.327$, $F=15.72$, $P<0.05$). That means 32.7% of variations in reading comprehension can be accounted for the variation of the combined predictor variables. The remaining 67.3% the variances in reading comprehension can be attributed to other variables which were not treated in the study. Like interest level, purpose for reading, relevant background knowledge of the topic, EFL abilities, awareness of the reading process and level of willingness to take risks etc. likely happen to be other major variances in reading comprehension achievement. Hence, as the t-test values showed that from each significance Beta (β) level, EFL students' vocabulary knowledge has a significance contribution to reading comprehension achievements.

This shows that the more EFL students have good vocabulary knowledge; they tend to score high in reading comprehension. On the other hand, EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies was found to be not statistically significant to EFL students reading comprehension. Moreover, using stepwise procedure of multiple regression analysis, the study examined which predictor variable(s) had significant predictive power to the criterion variable (reading comprehension). The stepwise procedure was thus used to remove from the equation any predictor variable that did not qualify as predictors of the criterion variable.

Hence, results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis in Table 5, revealed that vocabulary knowledge (Beta= 0.445, t-value=3.941, $P<0.05$) had significant positive effect of EFL learners' reading comprehension and hence the strongest predictors of text comprehension. Likewise, when EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge increased by 0.445 then their reading comprehension ability is increased by 21.3%. But EFL students' syntactic awareness (Beta= 0.150, t-value=1.321, $P>0.05$) and metacognitive awareness reading strategies (Beta=0.105, t-value=1.256, $P>0.05$) failed to significantly predict their reading comprehension success. As it revealed from Table 5, the p-values of these two variables namely, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies might not be predictors of reading comprehension success which was found to be ($P>0.05$) for both

syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies. Therefore, on the basis of the results revealed under standardized coefficient Beta, (β) it is found that EFL students' vocabulary knowledge played greater predictive power (β -value) than syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies though the number of items in each variable was not equal (i.e., VK=30; RC = 30; SA=24; MARS=20). Therefore, each measure has different number of items. However, after they had been changed into Beta (β), they could be compared the independent contribution of each predictor variable (i.e. VK, SA and MARS) to the criterion variable (RC). And so, the stepwise procedure of multiple regression results revealed EFL students' vocabulary knowledge played a significant predictive power to predict their success in reading comprehension compared with syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies. Hence, EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies were not significant predictors of their success in reading comprehension.

In addition to this, as the stepwise procedure of multiple regression analysis results in Table 5, showed that the adjusted R^2 could not show significant difference from the R^2 (i.e. $R^2= 0.327$ and Adj. $R^2= 0.306$). This means that the sample of the target population and the number of predictor variables were at an appropriate level in that the adjusted R^2 could not show significance difference from the total of R^2 and the number of predictor variables is three and above and the number of participants becoming above 30. But if the adj. R^2 showed a real difference from R^2 , it might be believed that not only due to the characteristics of the data but also the different traits of the participants portrayed in the study.

To sum up, among the three predictor variables, EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies failed to qualify as predictors of their success in reading comprehension. Only EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge qualified as distinctive reading comprehension predictor.

4.2 Discussions

4.2.1 The Results and Discussions of Interrelations among Variables

An investigation of the relationship among the variables with Pearson product-moment correlation analysis (see Table 1 page 59) revealed that there were a positive and significant correlations among EFL learners' reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge ($r = 0.55$, $P < 0.05$), reading comprehension and syntactic awareness ($r = 0.46$, $P < 0.05$) and vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness ($r = 0.67$, $P < 0.05$). And also, the correlation between reading comprehension and metacognitive awareness reading strategies was positive, but not significant ($r = 0.14$, $p > 0.05$). However, there was no significant correlation between metacognitive awareness reading strategies with vocabulary knowledge and metacognitive awareness reading strategies with syntactic awareness. This results also lends support to Mousefeld's (1978) notion that compared with native speakers, EFL/ESL learners have greater awareness of cognitive process (i.e., metacognitive awareness process of reading strategies). This issue is consistent with the view Vygotsky (1962) that learning a foreign language or a second language is "conscious and deliberate from the start". The fundamental difference is that EFL/ESL learners utilize additional reading strategies, such as translation, and cognate awareness, which is the ability to use cognates for understanding foreign or second language during the reading comprehension. Among those variables, the highest correlation ($r = 0.67$, $P < 0.05$) was observed between EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness score.

Therefore, the results revealed that vocabulary knowledge was most highly correlated with syntactic awareness. This finding, however, may appear to contradict with other findings of previous studies suggesting that vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness are separate constructs (Shiotsu and Weir, 2007). Contradictory results might be caused due to the difference in the methods of measuring syntactic awareness and vocabulary knowledge. Shiotsu and Weir (2007) pointed out that a test of syntactic knowledge should attempt to reduce the need for semantic processing as far as possible and keep contextualization to a minimum. The measures syntactic awareness in this study involved the ability of vocabulary knowledge. The participants of EFL learners with limited vocabulary knowledge may have difficulty in combining sentences and articulating what the rules of syntax are in English. Thus, as a correlation results showed that this is a likely reason for vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness were not distinguished as separate factors in this study. The results also confirmed the notion that the knowledge of vocabulary and syntactic awareness are the most important factors in reading comprehension (Schmitt, 2000).

Cooper (1984) also described vocabulary knowledge as being key ingredient to successful reading comprehension. Others also argue that no text comprehension is possible either in one's native language or a foreign language without understanding the texts vocabulary (Laufer, 1997, 20). As Nation (2000) noted, lack of adequate metacognitive awareness reading strategies are no more obstacles than the lack of sufficient vocabulary and their syntactic awareness. Therefore, it can be said that students' vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness affect their reading comprehension greatly as they cannot understand the text without knowing what most of the words mean and how they are grammatically organized to make sensible sentences and paragraphs. Thus, regarding the relationship between learners' vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness, the results of

the study was related with Rabia's and Siegel's (2002) study that assessed the role of syntactic awareness in reading comprehension of bilingual readers and found the correlation of .57. This study assessed the role of syntactic awareness in reading comprehension of EFL learners and found the correlation .46.

Moreover, Gottardo et al (1997) also pointed out the relationship between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension of EFL/ESL readers and this was determined on the basis of the judgment tasks that are given to the EFL readers. And according to the judgment tasks of syntactic awareness test given them there was a positive and significant correlation among reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge ($r = 0.55, P < 0.05$) and reading comprehension and syntactic awareness ($r = 0.46, P < 0.05$) of Jiga 11th grade EFL learners in this study. The strong association found between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension of this study in some way supports the instrumental hypothesis in reading research, which claims that vocabulary knowledge directly affects reading comprehension (Anderson and Freebody, 1981). According to Nagy (1999), it is believed that good vocabulary supports good reading comprehension. If we know the vocabulary, then that is about all we need to be able to read and comprehend successfully. This means that according to the correlational results of the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension revealed that vocabulary knowledge is a major prerequisite and causative factor in reading comprehension of Jiga 11th grade EFL learners.

4.2.2 The Results and Discussions of Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis

The stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis revealed that all the predictor variables i.e., vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies jointly predicted 32.7% of EFL students' reading comprehension score. This shows that these predictor variables affect EFL students reading comprehension, but what about the 67.3%? One factor that can possibly account for the majority of the variance is prior knowledge (Spires and Donley, 1998). Constructivists describe the reader as active, extracting information and making a representation of the text's message to comprehend (Mckeown, Sintakar and Loxterman 1990). Readers' knowledge base is regarded as a powerful, pervasive, individualistic and modifiable tool. That is advantageous when undertaking a reading task. In order to comprehend, a reader with low prior knowledge will primarily depend on the information that is explicitly written on the text (McNamara, 2001). After all, Carell (1989) found more proficient EFL/ESL readers to be global (i.e. used background knowledge, text gist, and textual organization) or top-down model. The findings in this study report the predictive power of EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in the reading comprehension of Jiga grade 11 students in a selected school. The study has probed which factor, whether vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness or metacognitive awareness reading strategies, is a better predictor of EFL learners' reading comprehension performance.

When the direct contribution of each predictor variable was computed using Beta (β), the highest independent contribution was found to be vocabulary knowledge and it made a significant contribution to explaining the variance of reading comprehension. As can be predicted from the study, one's vocabulary knowledge affects the level of text comprehension greatly. The results of the present study lend support to Nation's (1990) and Schmitt's (2000) notion that emphasis on vocabulary knowledge as the most fundamental aspect of reading comprehension. The results of the study were also in line with Carter and Mc Carthy's (1988) and Coady's (1997) findings that indicated vocabulary difficulty as the most significant predictor in overall reading comprehension ability. These results serve as large evidence that linguistic knowledge (mainly EFL vocabulary knowledge) is important for successful EFL reading comprehension, as Alderson (1984) and Gelderen et al. (2004) suggested. In contrast, EFL learners' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies did not make a significance contribution to predicting their reading comprehension. This may mean that though students are good at syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies, they may not be successful in their reading comprehension due to lack of adequate vocabulary knowledge.

Comprehension is far more than recognizing words and remembering their meanings. It is a complex cognitive process that cannot be understood without a clear awareness of the role and meaning of the vocabulary in a passage of text. However, if a student does not know the meanings of a sufficient proportion of the words in the text, comprehension is impossible. Here experts also agree that adequate reading comprehension depends on a person already knowing between 90 and 95 percent of the words in a text (Hirsch, 2003). Readers who do not recognize at least 90 percent of words will not only have difficulty comprehending the text, but they will miss out on the opportunity to learn new words.

The stepwise multiple regression results also confirmed what Stanovich, (1986) termed "Matthew Effects", the idea that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, to the field of reading. It contends that the rich readers, those students with well-developed vocabularies have an advantage in reading comprehension due to their vocabulary abilities and ability to easily read more and, as a consequence, learn more words. Meanwhile, poorer readers, those with limited vocabularies, have disadvantage in comprehending text because of their lack of vocabulary knowledge.

To sum up, an examination of the predictive power of vocabulary knowledge via stepwise multiple regression analysis confirmed that scores on the vocabulary knowledge was relatively unique and distinctive

predictor of reading comprehension scores and that the vocabulary knowledge scores had the capacity to improve the prediction of EFL reading comprehension scores. As it has been stated on the statement part of the study, currently in Ethiopia EFL context, EFL students have been encouraged to guess meanings of new words when they are involved reading comprehension activities as communicative language teaching approach ascribes to do so. Based on the idea that a large amount of vocabulary is required to comprehend texts and so, EFL teachers tend to focus on teaching vocabulary more often than syntax. This likely to be the reason that Jiga 11th grade students' vocabulary knowledge becomes the strongest predictor of reading comprehension achievement.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents the summary, conclusion, recommendations and suggestions for future research which were drawn from the findings revealed via questionnaire and tests.

5.1 Summary

This study was carried out with the aim of investigating the predictive power of EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension

To accomplish this objective, the following research questions were posed:

1. What is the relationship among EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness and their reading comprehension achievement?
2. Do EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, metacognitive awareness reading strategies predict their reading comprehension? If so, which predictor variables (i.e., vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies) strongly predict the criterion variable (reading comprehension achievement)?

To answer these research questions, the vocabulary knowledge test of 30 items, the syntactic awareness test of 24 items and the reading comprehension test containing 30 items and the metacognitive awareness reading strategies questionnaire of 20 items were prepared and administered to 100 grade 11 students of Jiga Preparatory School at Jabitehinan Woreda in the academic year 2011/2012. The students were randomly selected from the aforementioned school. Before the data collection, the questionnaire and tests were piloted and some necessary improvements were made to the instruments before using them in the main study. The questionnaire was designed in 5-point Likert type, and it entails 20 items which were adapted from Guo (2008). These items explore students' metacognitive awareness reading strategies use (see Appendix A). The tests of vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and reading comprehension were all researcher made tests.

The raw data obtained from these instruments were organized and summarized systematically for further analysis. In doing so, Pearson product moment correlation and stepwise procedures of multiple regression analysis were performed to analyze the respondents' responses in both questionnaire and tests. After the data were collected, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and stepwise multiple regression analysis were performed.

Based on the data analysis obtained through questionnaire and tests, the following major findings were obtained:

1. With respect to the interrelations among variables, there was a positive and significant correlation among reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge ($r = 0.55$, $P < 0.05$), reading comprehension and syntactic awareness ($r = 0.46$, $P < 0.05$) and vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness ($r = 0.67$, $P < 0.05$). This means EFL students' vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness were found to be significantly and positively correlated with their reading comprehension performance. In other words, it can be seen that reading comprehension score was correlated with vocabulary knowledge score at .55. This could be interpreted that the learners' reading comprehension score might increase if they scored higher on the vocabulary knowledge test. It can be also seen that reading comprehension test score was correlated with syntactic awareness test score at .46. It could be analyzed that the learners' reading comprehension test score might increase if they scored higher on syntactic awareness tests. Likewise, it can be seen that vocabulary knowledge score was correlated with syntactic awareness test score at .67. Moreover, this could be interpreted that the learner's vocabulary knowledge test score might increase if they score higher on the syntactic awareness test score.
2. With regard to the prediction power of EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies, the results of stepwise multiple regression analysis revealed that EFL students' vocabulary knowledge was found to be the highest independent predictor of their reading comprehension performance. This shows that the more words the EFL learners know, the more easily they comprehend the texts. On the other hand, EFL students' syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies were found to be not significance independent predictors of their reading comprehension.

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5.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions could be drawn:

With regard to the interrelations among variables, there was a significant positive relationship between EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge and their reading comprehension achievement employed by the participants in the targeted school. More specifically, EFL learners' syntactic awareness and reading comprehension, syntactic awareness and vocabulary knowledge showed a significant positive relationship. Therefore, these variables, namely vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness should be developed and inculcated as much as possible in EFL classroom for the success of students' reading comprehension. Likewise, the findings reveal that as one variable increases, the other variable directly shows significant increase. Thus, it can be concluded that the learners' reading comprehension success might increase if they score higher on their vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness test. And their vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness score within predictor variables also significantly correlated with one another and hence, the learners' vocabulary knowledge score might increase as they scored higher on the syntactic awareness test.

Furthermore, there was no significant correlation between EFL students' reading comprehension achievement and metacognitive awareness reading strategies and with vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness. This likely happens as stated by different scholars, EFL/ESL learners have greater awareness of cognitive process compared with native speakers and they are also conscious and deliberate from the start. Hence we can conclude that Jiga grade 11 students reading comprehension score was highly attributed in their vocabulary knowledge; also a lesser extent in their syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies. In other words, what the correlational results showed that though different metacognitive awareness

reading strategies were implicitly and explicitly stated on the learners' textbook, in the process of reading comprehension and could not differentiate which metacognitive awareness reading strategies are necessary according to their reading purpose. This may happen because teachers give less attention to help their learners in using different metacognitive awareness reading strategies during reading comprehension. This might lead to say the lack of using metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension, as some scholars say, might be attributed to other factors such as parents' educational background, lack of the use of extensive reading programme, or the adequate provision of materials in the school. Concerning the relevance of the reading comprehension text in fostering EFL in using metacognitive awareness reading strategies highly depends on the teachers' perspective. In a countries like Ethiopia, which English is used as an EFL, everything is relies on the classroom teacher to show how, what, where their learners' employee the metacognitive awareness reading strategies in the reading processes because learners could not know what strategies they use while they are reading the text for different purposes. If students are aware of the array of strategies that they can use, they can learn to select the appropriate strategies that can help them in obtaining meaning from the text they are reading. One way to create awareness in using metacognitive awareness reading strategy is group work. It comprising of mixed ability students can also be organized so that poor readers may learn to use some of their existing strategies more efficiently and learn to employ new strategies from the good readers. Likewise, grade 11 EFL learners are highly expected to use top-down (higher level thinking) reading strategies than bottom-up reading comprehension processes though they are equally needed. To bring this concept driven knowledge to their reading comprehension process, EFL learners face difficulties and to alleviate these problems EFL teachers should be committed to take risk for their learners' problems. Moreover, the amount of reading comprehension texts and activities inviting learners to use their own metacognitive awareness reading strategies in the textbook are designed to practice for limited reading comprehension strategies.

Furthermore, raising awareness on the role of metacognitive awareness reading strategies are also important. To help students become strategic readers, teachers should raise students' strategic awareness, allowing them to become more aware of reading strategy use while reading comprehension. It is essential for teachers to help EFL learners build a repertoire of reading strategies and then provide various reading materials for students to try out different reading strategies through explicit explanation and modeling. Therefore, reading strategy training is important because it enhances students' motivation to read, knowledge of strategies and aim at developing comprehension monitoring skills in EFL. Peer teaching and reading strategy training could also be carried out so that learners can become competent readers in EFL.

In addition, with regard to the predictive powers of Jiga grade 11 EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension, the stepwise multiple regression analysis pointed out that their vocabulary knowledge had significant positive effect on EFL learners reading comprehension and hence the strongest predictor of comprehension. Therefore, it can be concluded that Jiga 11th grade students' reading comprehension performance is highly predicted by the vocabulary knowledge they posses in their English reading comprehension. By building EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge as revealed from the findings, teachers can help their students' to be effective in their reading comprehension achievement.

Generally, this study presents the predictive power of EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension achievement, which supports the notion that vocabulary knowledge instruction is a necessary component of reading comprehension for EFL learners. Furthermore, to make vocabulary knowledge instruction effective in improving reading comprehension, vocabulary instruction may be more powerful when it includes the component of syntactic knowledge. However, though the findings revealed that EFL students' vocabulary knowledge become a significant predictor and their syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies could not show significant predictions, the integration of vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness as well as metacognitive awareness reading strategies may be crucial for the success of EFL reading comprehension.

In sum, although vocabulary instruction is very common in foreign language classroom in Ethiopian context, most textbooks provide explicit instruction of relatively basic English vocabulary. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to find ways to increase students' vocabulary knowledge. For example, the teacher can provide or encourage students to do extensive reading beyond the classroom requirements. When students do extensive readings, they will be able to build new vocabulary and background knowledge in multiple subjects. The development of vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge will in turn help students with their reading comprehension.

5.3 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations may be forwarded:

1. Since the study indicated significant relations among EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness with reading comprehension, teachers should consider the contribution of their students'

vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness to be successful in reading comprehension performance and this helps them develop more appropriate classroom English tests that can actually assess students' reading comprehension.

2. The high correlation found in this study between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension clearly corroborates the argument by Pressley (2000), which contends that instruction on developing reading comprehension should put word knowledge competencies in priority and then focus on activation of background knowledge and use of reading strategies. Roughly speaking, Jiga 11th grade EFL teachers will be better off if they consider the results of this study as a starting point from which to pay due attention to vocabulary knowledge for the success of their reading comprehension .

3. As vocabulary knowledge was found to be the strongest significant predictor of reading comprehension, teachers and parents should give priority to students' vocabulary knowledge development (e.g., provide supplementary materials and fostering extensive reading programme and equip students with strategies for working out word meaning). This can be accomplished through incorporating graded readers series likely to lead to vocabulary expansion in an organized way of their students. Thus, EFL teachers should educate their students about the role of extensive reading and assign large and balanced amount of outside reading materials. It is widely believed that incorporating graded readers in the EFL curriculum will satisfy two important objectives: expanding vocabulary knowledge and providing opportunities for extensive reading.

4. Given the predictive power of EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in their reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge received much more emphasis in EFL classrooms. So, teachers should use materials including graded readers, word lists, vocabulary cards, definitions and all pedagogically sound vocabulary activities to expand EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge to assist their reading comprehension.

5. As stated in the review part, EFL teachers should consider the top-down, bottom-up and interactive models of reading as three important components of EFL syllabus to improve students' reading comprehension. So, EFL teachers should introduce synonyms and polysemy of words besides their primary meaning. EFL teachers should also focus on the collocational relations of words with each other since they play important roles in comprehension of English texts.

6. One of the issues in the way some EFL teachers approach reading is that vocabulary knowledge is often times ignored and students are continually asked to use words as they run into them. This chronic attitude has led to the impoverishment of EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge which in effect has given rise to learners' difficulty in comprehending texts. As this attitude turns into a habit for students, their tendency to add up to their vocabulary subsides leaving them with very poor vocabulary knowledge. Entering colleges and universities later necessitates having the capability to comprehend reading passages. Reading comprehension language skill which is inevitably influenced by the schema theory and constructivism. The students should actively participate in the process of constructing knowledge. Therefore, it is the teachers and parents' responsibility to design reading classes and implement the dispositions suggested by the philosophies of reading comprehension such as constructivism.

7. The results of the study indicate that EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge becomes an important predictor of their reading comprehension performance. Therefore students' vocabulary knowledge and instruction should be a focus of EFL English course especially at preparatory school levels in order to prevent the Matthew effect that poor readers read less and acquire fewer words, while better readers read more and learn more words from their reading.

Finally, further research is needed to be investigated by other researchers. In the light of this study, it would be interesting to add other factors that may possibly contribute to reading comprehension. Thus, another direction of future research is to develop syntactic awareness measures for EFL learners which would allow vocabulary knowledge and syntactic awareness constructs to be separately identified. In addition to this, this paper focuses on the roles of these predictor variables (i.e., EFL students' vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness and metacognitive awareness reading strategies in reading comprehension achievement (i.e., on the product). In light of this study, it would be relevant to conduct further research on the roles of these predictor variables on their reading comprehension level and process.