Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.
CAUSAL METACOGNITIVE-MOTIVATIONAL MODELS OF READING COMPREHENSION IN READING DISABLED AND NORMAL ACHIEVING READERS

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN PSYCHOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary models of reading indicate that reading achievement and impairment are the products of the complex interaction of motivational, cognitive and metacognitive processes. Most previous research has relied on correlational studies to examine the links amongst these variables. Given the complex relationships of these variables, research designs which examine these constructs simultaneously and which establish causal relationships are needed. The dearth of interactive research with different populations is surprising considering that reliable and theoretically meaningful models that are generally invariant across subpopulations would contribute much towards theoretical parsimony and progress of educational research.

In light of the above considerations, the present study was designed with the primary goal of replicating and extending a previous test of a structural model of reading achievement. The main goal was to explain and predict both reading achievement and impairment from the complex and multicomponential perspective of a model of metacognition. Specifically, this involved an examination of the causal influences of young adolescent students’ attributional style, and self-efficacy on metacognitive knowledge and their use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In addition, these same variables were examined to see how they related to their reading comprehension performance and how the relationships differed in normal achieving (NA) and reading disabled children (RD). A secondary goal of this study was the investigation of variables that would distinguish between RD and NA readers.

There were three phases involved in the present study. Phase 1 concerned sample selection and involved administration of a short-form of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised. Selection of RD children was based on a six-stage multidimensional approach. A sample of NA readers with reading achievement consistent with their age was also identified. A total of 203 NA readers and 204 RD readers were selected to participate in this study.

The data were collected in Phases 2 and 3. Phase 2 involved administration of two self-report questionnaires which examined children’s attributional style, use of strategies, metacognitive knowledge, and self-efficacy for reading. Phase 3 involved individually administered reading interviews. All questionnaires and reading interviews were administered within a two week period.
The relationships among general intellectual ability, attributions, self-efficacy, metacognitive knowledge, metacognitive/cognitive strategy use, and reading comprehension in NA and RD children were evaluated using four models. The results were analyzed using structural equation modelling procedures. The proposed models provided a statistically adequate fit for the obtained data, accounting for about 60% of the variance in student performance. Several structural relationships were similar across groups suggesting that the metacognitive-motivational systems of NA and RD children were rather similar. For instance, the relationships between attributional style (as a single latent construct), efficacy, metacognitive knowledge, cognitive strategy use and metacognitive strategy use were similar across groups.

Nearly all of the structural correlations and the direct and indirect coefficients were in the theoretically expected direction. In both groups, students' adaptive attributional beliefs significantly predicted self-efficacy and metacognitive knowledge. However, when the separate effects of attributional style were examined for each outcome, the results revealed that adaptive attributional style for failure was the only significant predictor of metacognitive knowledge. Furthermore, the attributional components varied in their impact on self-efficacy and these differential effects also varied across groups.

An important contribution of this study was the incorporation of "strategy use" in the model. When combined strategy use (both metacognitive and cognitive) was included in the model, metacognitive knowledge no longer had a direct impact on reading performance (comprehension), instead combined strategy use played a significant role in mediating this relationship. Self-efficacy as well as metacognitive knowledge predicted combined strategy use which in turn predicted reading comprehension. Closer examination of the components of combined strategy use revealed that only "metacognitive strategy use" directly predicted reading comprehension across groups. The mediating role played by cognitive strategy use in the relationship between metacognitive knowledge and comprehension performance differed across groups. Self-efficacy directly and positively predicted metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive/cognitive strategy use.
The results suggested that attributional style plays a pivotal role in the metacognitive development of both NA and RD children. A number of causal paths distinguished good from poor readers. They were the paths between ability and success/failure attributions, ability and performance, success/failure attributions and efficacy, cognitive strategy use and performance, and efficacy and performance. On the whole, motivational variables were more important in determining comprehension for RD children whilst metacognitive and cognitive strategy use variables were more important for achieving readers. The failure to develop an enriched metacognitive system in RD children was ascribed partially to the effects of their self-defeating attributions.

Attributional beliefs, self-efficacy, metacognitive knowledge, and cognitive strategy use uniquely discriminated between NA and RD children. These findings suggest that metacognitive and motivational variables combine effectively to distinguish between RD and NA readers. The results also provide support for the utility of adopting a multidefinitional approach in defining RD children.

The findings from this study advance the argument that reading achievement and impairment should be studied using a multicomponential framework. The implications of this study’s research findings for classroom practice and research methodology are reviewed. Limitations of the present study were also discussed.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of

my Mother, Thelma A. Pereira
my Father, Anthony P. Pereira
and my Big Papa, Elias P. Pereira
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table/Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1 Identifying some concerns in the achievement literature                   | 1    |
1.2 Overview of the research to be undertaken                                  | 4    |
1.3 Outline of chapters                                                        | 5    |

## CHAPTER 2 DEFINITIONS OF LEARNING AND READING DISABILITY

2.1 A definition that receives current consensus                              | 7    |
2.2 Prevalence of learning disabilities                                       | 9    |
2.3 The concept of reading disability                                         | 10   |
2.3.1 Differences between reading disabled (RD) and poor readers             | 11   |
2.3.2 Variability of terms to describe reading disability                     | 12   |
2.4 Common elements or assumptions across definitions                         | 12   |
2.4.1 Intrinsic problem                                                       | 13   |
2.4.2 Ability-achievement discrepancy                                         | 13   |
2.4.3 Exclusionary criteria                                                    | 14   |
2.4.4 Uneven growth pattern                                                   | 15   |
2.4.5 Specificity of academic problem                                         | 15   |
2.4.6 Low academic achievement                                                | 16   |
2.5 Discrepancy approach to defining reading disability                       | 16   |
2.5.1 Limitations of the discrepancy-based approach                           | 17   |
2.5.1.1 Limitations of using IQ in the assessment of discrepancy              | 17   |
2.5.1.2 Construct validity of the discrepancy approach                       | 19   |
     (i) Replicability of nonnormal distribution                               | 19   |
     (ii) Validity of differentiating learning disabilities based on IQ discrepancies | 20   |
2.6 Multifaceted approaches to defining reading disability                    | 21   |
2.7 Conclusion                                                                | 23   |

## CHAPTER 3 METACOGNITION AND COGNITION AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO READING

3.1 Definition of metacognition                                               | 24   |
3.2 Theoretical issues concerning metacognition                               | 25   |
3.2.1 The concept of strategy                                                | 26   |
3.2.2 Distinction between components of metacognition                         | 27   |
3.2.3 Distinction between cognition and metacognition                         | 27   |
3.2.3.1 Activities involved in cognitive and metacognitive strategies       | 28   |
     (i) Reading for meaning and reading for remembering                      | 29   |
3.2.4 Conceptual difficulties in linking metacognition to reading disabilities| 30   |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1.2.4</td>
<td>The effect of self-efficacy on strategy use and performance</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.2.5</td>
<td>The influence and relative impact of cognitive and</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>metacognitive strategy use on performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1.2.6</td>
<td>The relative impact of success and failure attributions on efficacy</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and metacognitive knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Hypothesized Models</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1</td>
<td>Proposed General Model 1</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.1.1</td>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2</td>
<td>Proposed General Model 2</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.2.1</td>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.3</td>
<td>Proposed General Model 3</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.3.1</td>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.4</td>
<td>Proposed General Model 4</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2.4.1</td>
<td>Hypotheses:</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Secondary goals of study</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1</td>
<td>Differences in motivational, cognitive, and metacognitive</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>variables across groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1.1</td>
<td>Hypotheses:</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 7  STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>An introduction to structural equation modelling and the</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LISREL model</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.1</td>
<td>Model specification</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.1.1</td>
<td>Measurement model</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.1.2</td>
<td>Structural model</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.2</td>
<td>Other parameter matrices of LISREL</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.3</td>
<td>Types of model parameters</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.4</td>
<td>Model identification</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.5</td>
<td>Parameter estimation</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.6</td>
<td>Model evaluation</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.6.1</td>
<td>Goodness-of-fit indices</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Measures of overall fit</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Detailed measures of fit</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1.6.2</td>
<td>Comparison of nested models</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Multisample model</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Justification for LISREL-type models</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>LISREL formulation of reading performance models</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1</td>
<td>Specification of Model 1 for the single sample situation</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1.1</td>
<td>Measurement model</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1.2</td>
<td>Structural model</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1.3</td>
<td>Disturbance assumptions</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1.4</td>
<td>Model assumptions</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.1.5</td>
<td>Identification of model</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.2</td>
<td>Method effects in self-report data</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.2.1</td>
<td>Respecification of Model 1 to include correlated errors</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.3</td>
<td>The multisample situation</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4.3.1</td>
<td>Respecification of Model 1 to include the multisample situation</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(i) Measurement model</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Structural model</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Disturbance assumptions</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iv) Identification of model</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CHAPTER 8 METHOD

8.1 Overview .................................................. 141
8.2 Sample .................................................... 141
8.2.1 Selection of reading disabled (RD) sample ......... 142
8.2.2 Selection of normal achieving (NA) sample ....... 145
8.2.3 Demographic information ............................. 146
8.3 Measures .................................................. 148
8.3.1 Pilot tests ............................................... 150
8.3.2 Ability ................................................. 150
8.3.3 Achievement .......................................... 151
8.3.3.1 Academic achievement ............................ 151
8.3.3.2 Reading comprehension performance ............ 151
8.3.4 Causal attribution ..................................... 152
8.3.5 Self-efficacy ........................................... 152
8.3.6 Metacognitive knowledge for reading ............... 154
8.3.7 Strategy use ........................................... 157
8.3.7.1 Self-report measures of strategy use ............ 157
8.3.7.2 Taped concurrent interview: Behavioral measure of strategy use ...... 158
    (i) Passage ................................................. 159
    (ii) Monitoring device (bleep) ........................ 161
    (iii) Interview coding form ............................ 161
8.4 Procedure .................................................. 164
8.4.1 First phase ............................................. 164
8.4.2 Second phase .......................................... 165
8.4.3 Third phase ............................................ 166
8.4.3.1 Training session for using the bleep .......... 167
8.4.3.2 Interview ............................................ 168
8.4.3.3 Reliability .......................................... 169
8.5 Data analyses ............................................. 171

### CHAPTER 9 RESULTS

9.1 Descriptive statistics and correlations .................. 172
9.2 Validation of selection procedures in defining RD children .......... 176
9.3 Model testing ............................................. 178
9.3.1 Preliminary LISREL analyses .......................... 180
9.3.1.1 Model modifications .............................. 181
9.3.1.2 Sensitivity analyses ............................... 183
9.3.1.3 Alternative factor structures for multifaceted constructs ....... 184
    (i) Attributional style .................................. 185
    (ii) Strategy use ......................................... 185
9.3.2 Test of hypothesized models .......................... 186
9.3.2.1 Test of proposed theoretical Model 1 ........... 190
    (i) Measurement model .................................. 190
    (ii) Structural model ................................... 196
9.3.2.2 Test of proposed theoretical Model 2 ........... 201
    (i) Measurement model .................................. 201
    (ii) Structural model ................................... 207
9.3.2.3 Test of proposed theoretical Model 3 ................................................. 211
    (i) Measurement model ............................................................... 211
    (ii) Structural model ................................................................. 216
9.3.2.4 Test of proposed theoretical Model 4 .............................................. 220
    (i) Measurement model ............................................................... 220
    (ii) Structural model ................................................................. 225
9.3.2.5 Summary of findings ........................................................... 230
9.3.3 Supplementary analyses ............................................................ 231
9.3.3.1 Test of impact of ethnicity and gender on hypothesized models .............. 231
9.3.3.2 Replication of results using random sampling technique ....................... 231

CHAPTER 10 DISCUSSION ................................................................. 232
10.1 Brief overview of purpose and findings of study .................................. 232
10.2 Relationships which were consistent across NA and RD groups ................. 234
10.2.1 Relationships between ability, the self-system, and metacognitive knowledge 235
10.2.2 The effects of self-system constructs and metacognitive knowledge on strategy use and performance ......................................................... 238
10.3 Relationships that distinguish NA and RD adolescents ............................. 241
10.3.1 Relationships between ability, self-system constructs, and performance ...... 242
10.3.2 Relationship between strategy use and performance ............................ 243
10.3.3 Relationship between self-efficacy and performance ............................ 246
10.3.4 Summary .................................................................................. 247
10.4 Distinction between metacognitive components and their relationship to cognitive processes ................................................................. 249
10.5 Implications of findings for Borkowski's model of metacognition ............... 250
10.5.1 Implications for causal ordering of variables .................................... 251
10.5.2 Implications for relationships that distinguish between groups ............... 254
10.6 Findings of secondary goals of present study ....................................... 256
10.7 Educational implications .................................................................. 257
10.8 Limitations and strengths of present study .......................................... 262
10.8.1 Limitations ................................................................................ 262
10.8.2 Strengths ................................................................................. 266
10.9 Future research .............................................................................. 268
10.10 Summary and conclusions ............................................................... 270

REFERENCES ................................................................. 273

APPENDICES ......................................................................................
Appendix A Information sheet/consent forms .............................................. 308
Appendix B Reading Questionnaires I and II, TARSUM measures, scoring procedures for TARSUM metacognitive strategies, and definitions of strategies used in TARSUM ......................................................... 311
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Correlation matrices for the four hypothesized models</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>LISREL specification of hypothesized Models 1 through 4</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Description of findings for nested sequence of models for hypothesized Models 1 through 4</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Error variance-covariance matrices for structural Models 1 through 4</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Supplementary analyses: The impact of ethnicity and gender on the four hypothesized models</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Summary of variables, matrices, and terms used in the analysis of covariance structures ........................................... 105
Table 2  Demographic characteristics of reading disabled and normal achieving readers ....................................................... 146
Table 3  Ability and achievement scores of reading disabled and normal achieving readers ..................................................... 147
Table 4  Constructs of interest and their corresponding indicators ....................................................................................... 149
Table 5  Means and standard deviations of variables in the NA and RD reader groups ......................................................... 174
Table 6  Results of discriminant analysis ......................................................................................................................... 177
Table 7  Classification results from discriminant function analysis:
Group membership percentages predicted by the function ......................................................................................... 178
Table 8  Factor loadings and reliabilities of indicators for Measurement Model 1 ................................................................. 193
Table 9  Common metric completely standardized solution of error variances and covariances for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 1 ................................................................. 194
Table 10 Common metric completely standardized variances and covariances of latent constructs for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 1 ................................................................. 195
Table 11 Correlations of latent constructs for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 1 ................................................................. 196
Table 12 Factor loadings and reliabilities of indicators for Measurement Model 2 ................................................................. 204
Table 13 Common metric completely standardized solution of error variances and covariances for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 2 ................................................................. 205
Table 14 Common metric completely standardized variances and covariances of latent constructs for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 2 ................................................................. 206
Table 15 Correlations of latent constructs for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 2 ................................................................. 207
Table 16 Factor loadings and reliabilities of indicators for Measurement Model 3 ................................................................. 213
Table 17 Common metric completely standardized solution of error variances and covariances for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 3 ................................................................. 214
Table 18 Common metric completely standardized variances and covariances of latent constructs for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 3 ................................................................. 215
Table 19 Correlations of latent constructs for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 3 ................................................................. 216
Table 20  Factor loadings and reliabilities of indicators for Measurement Model 4  ........... 222
Table 21  Common metric completely standardized solution of error variances and
covariances for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 4  ...................... 223
Table 22  Common metric completely standardized variances and covariances of
latent constructs for NA and RD readers for Measurement Model 4  ............... 224
Table 23  Correlations of latent constructs for NA and RD readers for
Measurement Model 4  ........................................................................ 225

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  Hypothesized relationships between cognitive, metacognitive, and
motivational variables ................................................................. 5
Figure 2  Borkowski’s model of metacognition (Borkowski et al., 1989, 1990, 1992;
Borkowski & Turner, 1990; Groteluschen et al., 1990) .................................. 60
Figure 3  Carr et al.’s (1991) model of reading performance in achieving and
underachieving readers .................................................................... 72
Figure 4  Hypothesized theoretical Model 1 for NA and RD readers .................. 86
Figure 5  Hypothesized theoretical Model 2 for NA and RD readers ................ 89
Figure 6  Hypothesized theoretical Model 3 for NA and RD readers ................ 91
Figure 7  Hypothesized theoretical Model 4 for NA and RD readers ................ 94
Figure 8  Schematic representation of the general LISREL model ...................... 106
Figure 9  Hypothesized relationships between cognitive, metacognitive, and
motivational, variables in a single sample ............................................. 121
Figure 10 Hypothesized Model 1 respecified to include correlated errors ............. 131
Figure 11 Hypothesized Model 1 respecified for the multisample situation .......... 133
Figure 12 Findings of revised Model 1 for NA and RD readers ....................... 198
Figure 13 Findings of revised Model 2 for NA and RD readers ....................... 209
Figure 14 Findings of revised Model 3 for NA and RD readers ....................... 218
Figure 15 Findings of revised Model 4 for NA and RD readers ....................... 227