TEACHER'S STRATEGIES IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION: A CASE STUDY AT A JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the strategies used by an English teacher in teaching reading comprehension at a junior high school, focusing on how these strategies support students' understanding and the challenges encountered in their application. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The findings reveal that the teacher employed a combination of strategies, including pre-reading vocabulary activation, think-aloud modeling, reciprocal teaching, questioning techniques, and post-reading summarization. These strategies positively influenced students' engagement, comprehension, and metacognitive awareness. However, the teacher also faced several challenges, such as time limitations, diverse student reading abilities, and lack of authentic materials. The study concludes that effective reading instruction requires not only teacher initiative and skill but also institutional support and resources. This research contributes to the understanding of real-life teaching practices and emphasizes the importance of strategy-based instruction in improving students' reading comprehension in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Reading comprehension, teacher strategies, EFL, junior high school, qualitative case study, think-aloud, reciprocal teaching

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English language learning, especially for junior high school students who are expected to understand a variety of texts to support their academic progress. However, reading comprehension remains a major challenge for many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners due to limited vocabulary, lack of reading strategies, and low motivation (Sari & Ningsih, 2020). Therefore, teachers play a pivotal role in designing and applying appropriate strategies to improve students' understanding of texts.

Reading comprehension is an essential component of language learning, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. For

junior high school students, reading is not only a skill required to pass exams but also a gateway to accessing knowledge across disciplines. In Indonesian classrooms, reading is one of the primary focuses in the English curriculum, as stated in the Kurikulum Merdeka, where students are expected to understand various types of texts—narrative, descriptive, recount, and factual. However, despite its importance, many students still struggle with comprehending texts due to insufficient vocabulary, lack of motivation, and inappropriate instructional strategies (Fitriani & Yuliana, 2021).

In this context, the role of the teacher becomes crucial. Teachers are not just knowledge transmitters but also facilitators who guide students through meaningful reading experiences. The choice of strategies employed by teachers significantly influences students' engagement and understanding of reading materials. For instance, a teacher who uses questioning strategies, scaffolding, or think-aloud methods can help students develop metacognitive awareness and critical thinking while reading (Susanti et al., 2021). Effective strategies help students move from literal to inferential comprehension and ultimately foster their ability to read independently.

Strategies are the steps a teacher takes to accomplish the learning objectives, which are established for the teaching process and all of its elements to accomplish the lesson's objectives. Students should be given the skills that will help them understand the text in order for them to do so. When teaching reading, the instructor should employ a variety of techniques, including games, media, and different teaching philosophies to pique students' attention. It is consistent with Brown's (2008) assertion that the main goal of instructional strategies is to facilitate the application of a variety of instructional approaches and techniques.

Students' difficulties with reading comprehension during the teaching and learning process. Since individuals come from various social circles and have varying social levels, the scenario in the classroom is varied. Additionally, their surroundings—their birthplace—have an impact. There are several issues with teaching understanding. Generally speaking, students struggle to understand the text; they frequently struggle to grasp the meaning of the language, and they constantly struggle to understand the challenging words.

The instructor now offers them a chance to consider the issues they are facing. whether they have additional issues that are bothering them, such not grasping the meaning of vocabulary and other things, or whether they are completely not understanding at all. This is due to the vocabulary' ability to understand both the actual meaning and its meaning in sentences with context. Whether the tense is in the past, present, or future, it also affects grammar and tenses. Students occasionally even struggle to understand the text's context because they are still struggling to grasp the tense used in it.

Reading is a cognitive activity that involves the reader and the author having a dialogue via the text. Reading exercises give readers the

knowledge and concepts they need to comprehend while also enhancing their language skills. Making connections between concepts and understanding the meaning of the text is the goal of reading. Reading increases a reader's comprehension of what they read. Through reading exercises, readers may increase their vocabulary in English, acquire the required information, and discover a wealth of new information.

However, many teachers in junior high schools still rely heavily on traditional reading instruction methods—such as translating texts word by word or asking students to answer comprehension questions without prior strategy training. These methods often do not align with students' diverse learning styles and needs. According to Rahmawati and Hidayati (2022), a gap remains between curriculum expectations and classroom practices, which may contribute to students' low achievement in reading comprehension. Furthermore, the latest PISA data (2018) shows that Indonesian students' reading scores remain below the international average, highlighting the need to improve instructional approaches at the classroom level.

Given these challenges, it is essential to explore the strategies used by English teachers in real classroom settings. Understanding how teachers design and implement reading strategies—along with the challenges they face—can provide insight into what works and what needs improvement. A case study approach will allow the researcher to examine authentic teaching practices in depth and document teacher decision-making processes in teaching reading comprehension. This study is expected to contribute to both practical teaching insights and the academic literature on effective reading instruction in EFL junior high school classrooms.

Reading comprehension is a critical skill for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it enables them to access information, develop academic literacy, and improve overall language proficiency. According to Nation (2022), reading contributes significantly to vocabulary growth, grammar acquisition, and language fluency when students engage with texts at the right level of difficulty. In the Indonesian context, reading is often emphasized in national curricula and standardized tests such as the Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum (AKM), which further underlines its educational importance.

Reading comprehension, however, is not simply about decoding words or translating sentences—it involves complex cognitive processes such as identifying main ideas, making inferences, summarizing information, and interpreting meaning in context. Al-Qatawneh and Al-Adwan (2023) state that successful comprehension requires interaction between the reader and the text, mediated by strategies that help construct meaning. Without guidance and strategic instruction from teachers, students may approach texts passively and fail to extract or process key information.

Numerous teaching models and strategies have been developed

to facilitate reading comprehension, especially in EFL settings. The three-phase model—pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading—is widely adopted and supported by research (Brown, 2018). In the pre-reading stage, teachers activate background knowledge, set reading purposes, and introduce key vocabulary. During while-reading, students engage with the text through strategies such as note-taking, highlighting, and answering guiding questions. Post-reading activities involve summarizing, retelling, or discussing the content to deepen understanding.

A range of specific strategies has proven effective for improving comprehension. These include:

a. Reciprocal Teaching: Students take turns leading discussions using strategies like predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing (Palincsar & Brown, 2020). This strategy encourages metacognition and collaborative learning.
b. Think-Aloud Protocols: Teachers verbalize their thought processes while reading, modeling how proficient readers make meaning (Astuti & Salmiah, 2022). This helps students internalize strategic thinking.
c. Graphic Organizers: Tools like concept maps, Venn diagrams, and story maps support comprehension by helping students visualize relationships within the text (Fitriani & Yuliana, 2021).
d. Questioning Techniques: Teachers use literal, inferential, and evaluative questions to guide students through deeper textual engagement (Rahmawati & Hidayati, 2022).

These strategies are aligned with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes the role of the teacher as a "more knowledgeable other" who scaffolds student learning within the zone of proximal development (Wang & Chen, 2020).

Teachers play a central role not only in selecting appropriate strategies but also in adapting them to suit students' needs, text difficulty, and classroom dynamics. As suggested by Richards and Farrell (2019), effective reading instruction requires reflective teaching—where teachers assess student responses and modify instruction accordingly. In junior high schools, students are at a developmental stage where motivation, engagement, and confidence strongly affect learning. Teachers must therefore combine strategy instruction with encouragement and supportive classroom environments.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of teacher agency—the capacity of teachers to make pedagogical decisions based on professional judgment and classroom realities. Susanti et al. (2021) found that teachers who had autonomy and training in strategy use were more effective in promoting comprehension than those who relied on textbook-based routines. Furthermore, teachers who integrated interactive reading practices, such as group discussion and peer questioning, reported better student engagement and learning outcomes.

Despite the availability of research-backed strategies, many teachers face practical constraints that limit their ability to implement them effectively. These challenges include:
a. Large class sizes, making it difficult to manage group activities or provide individual feedback.
b. Time constraints, especially when the curriculum prioritizes coverage of content over mastery.
c. Limited access to resources, such as authentic reading materials or digital tools for visual aids.
d. Students' low language proficiency, which hinders comprehension of even basic texts.

According to Kurniawati et al. (2023), many English teachers in Indonesian junior high schools still use grammar-translation methods due to lack of training or institutional support. This approach may help with vocabulary translation but fails to develop interpretive or critical reading skills. The study urges education stakeholders to provide more professional development opportunities focused on reading instruction strategies.

Moreover, the emotional and psychological readiness of students also plays a role. Students with reading anxiety or low self-efficacy may avoid engaging with challenging texts, limiting their exposure and learning. Teachers must thus balance cognitive demands with affective support—by fostering a positive reading culture in the classroom (Sari & Ningsih, 2020).

While many studies have explored reading comprehension strategies in higher education or private language courses, there is limited qualitative research documenting how teachers in public junior high schools implement these strategies in real-life settings. Most existing studies use quantitative methods to test the effectiveness of specific strategies, but fewer delve into the lived experiences, beliefs, and constraints of the teachers themselves. This study seeks to address this gap by providing rich, contextualized data through classroom observations and teacher interviews.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative case study design, which allows the researcher to explore and understand the strategies used by English teachers in teaching reading comprehension in a real-life educational setting. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is appropriate when the objective is to gain deep insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and social interactions. A case study design is especially suitable because it provides an in-depth and contextual analysis of one or more cases within a bounded system—in this case, the classroom practices of one English teacher in a junior high school.
The study was conducted at a public three junior high school in Medan Tuntungan District, North Sumatera Indonesia. The selected school uses the national English curriculum and has regular English classes for all

students. The participant in this study is English teachers who teaches reading comprehension to 7th or 8th grade students. The teachers were chosen purposively based on their experience (minimum 3 years of teaching) and willingness to participate in the research. The study focuses on this teacher as a representative case to understand how reading strategies are implemented in typical EFL classrooms.

The researcher observed at least three reading comprehension lessons to identify what strategies are used, how they are applied, and how students respond. Observation notes focused on teacher instructions, student-teacher interactions, materials used, and instructional procedures. An observation checklist based on reading strategies (e.g., questioning, prediction, summarizing, graphic organizers) will guide the process.

After the observation, the researcher conducted an interview with the teacher to explore their perspectives on the strategies they use, reasons for choosing them, and any challenges they encounter. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility to explore emerging topics while maintaining focus on the research questions.

The researcher also analyzed relevant documents, such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and students' reading worksheets, to triangulate the findings and understand the alignment between planning and practice.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2019) six-phase model:

a. Familiarization with data – transcribing and reading through observation notes and interview transcripts.
b. Generating initial codes – identifying codes such as "strategy use," "student engagement," or "challenges."
c. Searching for themes – grouping codes into broader themes (e.g., teacher roles, instructional adaptations).
d. Reviewing themes – refining and validating themes across data sources.
e. Defining and naming themes – finalizing the interpretation of the data.
f. Writing the report – presenting findings in a narrative form supported by direct quotes and document excerpts.

To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, the researcher will apply the following strategies:

a. Triangulation: Combining data from observations, interviews, and document analysis.
b. Member Checking: Asking the participant to review interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations.
c. Thick Description: Providing detailed contextual descriptions of the setting and findings.
d. Audit Trail: Keeping records of the research process, including coding, analysis notes, and revisions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

From classroom observations and document analysis, the English teacher employed several key strategies during reading comprehension instruction. These included:

a. Pre-reading activities, such as activating background knowledge through questioning and introducing key vocabulary using visual aids and word maps.
b. While-reading strategies, like asking guiding questions, using the think-aloud technique to model comprehension, and encouraging students to annotate texts.
c. Post-reading tasks, which involved summarizing main ideas, completing graphic organizers (such as story maps and cause-effect charts), and conducting short discussions or reflections.

The teacher was also observed employing reciprocal teaching techniques, where students worked in small groups and took turns predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing parts of a text. These strategies were integrated in a scaffolded manner, often aligned with the students' reading levels and text complexity.

This finding is supported by Palincsar and Brown (2020), who emphasize the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching in improving students' engagement and reading comprehension. Likewise, Nation (2022) argues that vocabulary pre-teaching and reading scaffolds (e.g., prediction, clarification) are essential for second language readers, particularly when dealing with unfamiliar topics.

How Do These Strategies Help Students in Understanding Reading Texts

The observation and interview data revealed that the teacher's strategies contributed positively to students' engagement and understanding. Several outcomes were noted:

a. Improved comprehension accuracy: Students were able to answer comprehension questions more confidently when pre-reading strategies were used to familiarize them with key vocabulary and concepts.
b. Higher student interaction: During reciprocal teaching and group discussions, students were observed explaining and rephrasing information in their own words, indicating deeper processing of the texts.
c. Metacognitive awareness: The teacher's use of think-aloud protocols helped students become aware of the cognitive processes involved in reading, such as making inferences, identifying text structure, and summarizing.
d. For example, during the observation of a descriptive text lesson, the teacher paused frequently to model how to extract key information by thinking aloud: "Hmm, the first paragraph tells us about where the animal lives, so maybe that's the setting…". Students were later seen using similar language when discussing texts in groups.

These observations align with the findings of Wang and Chen (2020), who argue that teacher modeling enhances students' metacognitive development. Moreover, Astuti and Salmiah (2022) found that think-aloud strategies not only improved comprehension but also increased student

motivation and confidence.

What Challenges Do Teachers Face in Applying These Strategies in the Classroom

Despite the teacher's use of varied and effective strategies, several challenges emerged:

a. Time constraints: The teacher noted that implementing all three reading phases (pre-, while-, and post-reading) in a single lesson was often difficult due to limited time and syllabus demands. This occasionally led to rushed discussions or skipped post-reading tasks.

b. Diverse reading levels: The teacher expressed difficulty in addressing the varying proficiency levels of students. Some students required significant scaffolding, while others could handle the text independently, making it hard to balance instruction.

c. Classroom management during group work: While reciprocal teaching was beneficial, managing student behavior and ensuring productive group discussions proved challenging. The teacher reported that some students were passive or off-task during peer-led sessions.

d. Lack of authentic materials: The teacher relied heavily on textbooks due to a lack of printed or digital reading resources. Although efforts were made to modify and simplify texts, the teacher believed that authentic texts could provide more meaningful learning.

These challenges are not unique. Kurniawati et al. (2023) emphasize that large class sizes, limited instructional time, and insufficient resources are common barriers in Indonesian public schools. Similarly, Rahmawati and Hidayati (2022) highlight that without institutional support and teacher training, the implementation of reading strategies often remains surface-level.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reaffirm the significance of strategic instruction in developing reading comprehension among EFL learners at the junior high school level. The teacher in this case study demonstrated awareness of effective reading practices and made conscious efforts to integrate student-centered strategies into her lessons. Pre-reading preparation, while-reading engagement, and post-reading reflection were effectively used when time and conditions allowed.

Furthermore, the study provides evidence that students benefit cognitively and affectively from strategy-based instruction. They were more involved, demonstrated better comprehension, and showed increased awareness of their reading processes. These findings support the view of reading as a process-oriented activity rather than a product-oriented task, as emphasized in current reading pedagogy (Nation, 2022; Fitriani & Yuliana, 2021).

However, the challenges faced also suggest a gap between ideal practice and actual classroom implementation. These include practical limitations such as class size, student diversity, and resource availability, which align with existing literature (Kurniawati et al., 2023; Richards & Farrell, 2019). It implies that while teacher initiative is vital, systemic and institutional support is equally important for maximizing the effectiveness of reading instruction.

The findings of this study indicate that the teacher implemented a diverse range of strategic approaches in teaching reading comprehension, covering the three essential stages: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. Strategies such as think-aloud modeling, contextual vocabulary instruction, and reciprocal teaching proved effective in enhancing students' reading comprehension.

An important addition to these findings is that the strategies contributed not only to cognitive gains but also to affective aspects of learning. Students appeared more confident, enthusiastic, and actively engaged during reading sessions. This supports the strategic reading framework proposed by Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008), which emphasizes that successful comprehension is strongly influenced by students' awareness of strategies and their motivation to regulate their own cognitive processes.

Nevertheless, the challenges encountered by the teacher—such as time constraints, mixed reading proficiency levels, and lack of authentic materials—suggest that the teacher's role alone is insufficient to achieve optimal outcomes. Fullan (2007) argues that educational change cannot rest solely on individuals; instead, it requires policy support, ongoing professional development, and systemic collaboration among stakeholders.

Furthermore, the implementation of reciprocal teaching (Palincsar & Brown, 2020) enhanced students' metacognitive awareness, while think-aloud modeling positioned the teacher as a mediator of learning (as described in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, cited in Wang & Chen, 2020). These approaches collectively reinforced the teacher's function as a strategic facilitator rather than a mere transmitter of content.

Therefore, although the teacher effectively employed evidence-based reading strategies, there remains a gap between ideal instructional practice and classroom reality. Addressing this requires systemic support, including more accessible professional training (Richards & Farrell, 2019), contextualized teaching materials, and better student-teacher ratios to foster deeper learning engagement.
Lastly, the study contributes to the body of qualitative research by offering rich, contextual insights into one teacher's experience—something that is often underrepresented in Indonesian EFL research. It suggests that teacher training should not only introduce strategies but also emphasize adaptive pedagogy that allows teachers to adjust strategies according to

classroom realities.

The findings of this study affirm that strategic reading instruction plays a crucial role in enhancing reading comprehension among EFL students at the junior high school level. The teacher's consistent use of structured strategies—such as pre-teaching vocabulary, modeling with think-alouds, using reciprocal teaching, and encouraging post-reading reflection—demonstrates a high level of pedagogical awareness. These approaches supported both comprehension and student engagement.

This study reinforces the conceptual understanding that reading is a meaning-making process rather than a passive decoding activity. Reading comprehension involves multiple cognitive processes, including inference-making, monitoring understanding, identifying main ideas, and interpreting vocabulary in context (Al-Qatawneh & Al-Adwan, 2023). The think-aloud strategy, for example, helped students become aware of these processes, enabling them to mirror the teacher's metacognitive approach and apply it independently.

The use of reciprocal teaching, where students took turns in leading discussions, also promoted metacognitive growth. According to Palincsar and Brown (2020), this strategy fosters collaborative learning and empowers learners to take responsibility for meaning-making. In this study, reciprocal teaching encouraged student autonomy and created space for peer explanation, which is vital in developing critical thinking.

Moreover, the integration of graphic organizers and summarization activities in the post-reading phase aligns with the recommendations of Fitriani & Yuliana (2021), who emphasize that organizing textual information visually aids retention and higher-order thinking. These strategies pushed students beyond surface-level understanding and into deeper analytical engagement with texts.

The findings also echo Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests that students learn best when scaffolded by a more knowledgeable other—in this case, the teacher. Wang and Chen (2020) highlight that strategy modeling, guidance during group work, and scaffolded questioning are key to helping students internalize reading strategies. The teacher in this study played this role effectively, providing appropriate support while gradually encouraging independence.

Despite these effective practices, the study reveals significant implementation challenges. Time constraints hindered the full application of the three-phase reading model in every lesson. This situation is common in Indonesian EFL classrooms, where syllabus demands and limited contact hours force teachers to prioritize curriculum coverage over deep comprehension (Kurniawati et al., 2023). Furthermore, the diversity in student proficiency levels made it difficult to apply uniform strategies, which suggests the need for differentiated instruction approaches.

Another limitation was the lack of authentic materials. The teacher relied heavily on textbooks, which may not always reflect students' real-life experiences or interests. This limits the potential for connecting reading to learners' identities and motivations. Richards and Farrell (2019) argue that authentic materials and context-rich instruction enhance student engagement and provide more meaningful language exposure.

These challenges reveal a disconnect between curriculum expectations and classroom realities, a theme also highlighted by Rahmawati and Hidayati (2022). While curriculum documents emphasize communicative competence and higher-order skills, the lack of institutional support, limited access to resources, and absence of ongoing teacher training can hinder meaningful implementation.

Finally, this study underscores the importance of teacher agency and reflective practice. The teacher's ability to adapt strategies, manage challenges, and respond to student needs indicates a high level of professional judgment. This aligns with Richards and Farrell's (2019) view that effective teaching requires more than knowledge of methods—it demands continuous reflection and the capacity to adapt to complex classroom dynamics.

In conclusion, the discussion highlights that strategic reading instruction, when thoughtfully and flexibly applied, can significantly improve students' reading comprehension and engagement. However, maximizing its impact requires systemic support, access to resources, and targeted professional development to address the contextual constraints of real-world EFL classrooms.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the strategies used by an English teacher in teaching reading comprehension at a junior high school, the impact of these strategies on students' understanding, and the challenges faced during implementation. The findings revealed that the teacher employed a variety of effective reading strategies, including pre-reading vocabulary introduction, think-aloud modeling, questioning techniques, and reciprocal teaching. These strategies not only enhanced students' comprehension abilities but also fostered their active engagement, critical thinking, and metacognitive awareness. The study also uncovered significant challenges, such as limited instructional time, varying student proficiency levels, classroom management issues during group work, and a lack of authentic reading materials. Despite these constraints, the teacher demonstrated commitment and adaptability in delivering meaningful reading instruction. The findings underscore the vital role of teachers in shaping students' reading development and highlight the need for ongoing support, training, and access to resources to optimize reading instruction in EFL classrooms. Ultimately, this research contributes

valuable insights into real-world classroom practices and reinforces the importance of strategic, student-centered reading instruction in fostering literacy and language proficiency among junior high school learners.

SUGGESTION

Based on the findings and discussion, the following suggestions are proposed:

1. English Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to continuously enhance their strategy-based teaching skills through training and reflective practice. Techniques such as think-alouds, reciprocal teaching, and graphic organizers should be tailored to student needs and reading material complexity.

2. Schools and Educational Institutions

Institutional support is vital. This includes allocating sufficient instructional time for strategy-based reading lessons, providing continuous professional development on communicative and metacognitive approaches, and supplying authentic reading materials relevant to students' lives.

3. Curriculum Developers

Effective strategies identified in this study should be explicitly integrated into the national curriculum, including instructional guidelines and assessment frameworks that promote strategic reading instruction.

4. Future Researchers

Future studies should consider involving multiple schools or teachers to gain broader insights into instructional practices and challenges. Action research can also be used to directly test and refine strategies in classroom settings.

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