

EXPLORING SEVENTH GRADE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF READING STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH READING

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ABSTRAK

Masalah rendahnya pemahaman membaca bahasa Inggris pada siswa EFL di tingkat sekolah menengah pertama menunjukkan pentingnya penggunaan strategi membaca yang efektif dalam pembelajaran. Penelitian ini berfokus pada persepsi siswa kelas VII terhadap strategi membaca dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di MTs Nurul Huda Grogol Masangan dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif yang melibatkan 35 siswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terbuka dan wawancara semi terstruktur, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif dan tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa lebih dominan menggunakan strategi membaca kognitif, seperti mengidentifikasi ide pokok, menebak makna kosakata berdasarkan konteks, membaca ulang bagian teks yang sulit, serta mengaitkan isi teks dengan pengetahuan sebelumnya, yang dipersepsikan membantu meningkatkan pemahaman membaca. Namun, penelitian ini juga mengungkap permasalahan utama berupa keterbatasan penguasaan kosakata, rendahnya kepercayaan diri dalam membaca, serta kesulitan siswa dalam menerapkan strategi membaca secara mandiri tanpa bimbingan guru. Selain itu, ditemukan adanya kesenjangan antara strategi membaca yang diajarkan oleh guru dan strategi yang secara konsisten dipraktikkan oleh siswa dalam kegiatan pembelajaran. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa pengajaran strategi membaca yang eksplisit dan terstruktur diperlukan untuk menjembatani kesenjangan tersebut serta meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran membaca bahasa Inggris pada konteks sekolah yang serupa.

Kata kunci: *Strategi Membaca, Persepsi Siswa, Siswa EFL*

ABSTRACT

The problem of low English reading comprehension among EFL students at the junior secondary school level highlights the importance of using effective reading strategies in learning. This study focuses on seventh-grade students' perceptions of reading strategies in English learning at MTs Nurul Huda Grogol Masangan and employed a qualitative descriptive design involving 35 students. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews and were analyzed descriptively and thematically to ensure depth and credibility of findings. The findings indicate that students predominantly used cognitive reading strategies, such as identifying main ideas, guessing word meanings from context, rereading difficult parts of the text, and relating the text to prior knowledge, which were perceived as helpful in improving reading comprehension. However, the study also revealed major challenges, including limited vocabulary mastery, low reading confidence, and students' difficulties in applying reading strategies independently without teacher guidance. In addition, a gap was identified between the reading strategies taught by teachers and those consistently practiced by students during classroom activities. Therefore, this study concludes that explicit

and structured instruction in reading strategies is necessary to bridge this gap and to improve the quality of English reading instruction in similar school contexts.

Keywords: *Reading Strategies, Student Perceptions, EFL Students*

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as it enables students to access academic content, expand vocabulary, and develop overall language proficiency. At all levels of education, reading serves as a foundation for understanding information and achieving academic success (Prihatiningtyas et al., 2022). Through reading, learners are exposed to various types of texts that support language development and academic literacy. Therefore, reading plays a central role in shaping students' ability to engage with English learning materials.

However, for many EFL learners, particularly junior high school students, reading English texts remains a significant challenge. Reading requires complex cognitive engagement, including understanding sentence structure, identifying main ideas, making inferences, and connecting textual information with prior knowledge. These processes demand both linguistic competence and cognitive control, which are still developing at this educational level. As a result, students often struggle to comprehend texts independently.

In the EFL context, processes of reading comprehension are often constrained by limited vocabulary mastery, insufficient exposure to English texts, and varied levels of language proficiency. These constraints have been identified as major obstacles in recent empirical studies (Fathurizki et al., 2025; Setiani et al., 2024; Ruswandi et al., 2024). Limited vocabulary makes it difficult for students to grasp key ideas, while minimal exposure to English texts restricts opportunities to practice reading skills. Consequently, students tend to depend heavily on teacher assistance during reading activities.

To address these challenges, learners need effective reading strategies. Reading strategies are deliberate cognitive and metacognitive actions that support learners in managing information and enhancing comprehension of texts. Such strategies help students plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading processes. Recent research has demonstrated that cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies significantly improve EFL students' reading comprehension and awareness of reading processes (Husna et al., 2025; Pahrizal et al., 2025; Nisrina, 2025).

Commonly used reading strategies include predicting text content, guessing word meanings from context, rereading difficult sections, and summarizing information. These strategies enable students to cope with unfamiliar vocabulary and complex text structures. By applying these strategies, learners can actively engage with texts rather than reading passively. As a result, reading comprehension becomes a more manageable and meaningful process for EFL students.

Although the role of reading strategies has been widely acknowledged, many previous studies have primarily focused on strategy instruction and reading outcomes. In contrast, students' perceptions of reading strategies have received comparatively less scholarly attention. Recent studies indicate that students' perceptions of reading strategies and reading practices significantly influence their engagement and strategic behavior during the learning process (Lindawati, 2021; Pratama, 2023; Safitri et al., 2025). Without considering learners' perspectives, reading instruction may not fully address students' actual needs and difficulties.

In the Indonesian EFL context, particularly at the junior high school level, students are in a transitional phase from primary to secondary education and begin to face higher academic demands. At MTs Nurul Huda Grogol Masangan, seventh-grade students are expected to

comprehend English texts despite limited instructional time and varying levels of language proficiency. Preliminary observations indicate that many students still struggle with reading comprehension and tend to apply reading strategies without a clear awareness of their purpose or effectiveness. Similar challenges have also been reported in other EFL junior high school contexts (Tahta & Pusparini, 2022), highlighting the need for context-specific research.

Several previous studies have examined students' perceptions of reading strategies at higher educational levels (Aljabri, 2024). However, research focusing specifically on junior high school students, particularly within Islamic secondary school contexts with similar socio-educational characteristics, remains limited. This lack of context-specific research highlights a gap in understanding how seventh-grade EFL students perceive and apply reading strategies in their reading activities. Therefore, this study aims to investigate seventh-grade students' perceptions of reading strategies at MTs Nurul Huda Grogol Masangan, focusing on the types of strategies used and the factors influencing their selection. The novelty of this study lies in its emphasis on students' perceptions within a madrasah context at the junior high school level, offering practical insights for developing more contextual and effective EFL reading instruction.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive approach and was conducted at MTs Nurul Huda Grogol Masangan, Gresik, Indonesia. The participants included 35 seventh-grade students who were selected based on accessibility. To obtain more detailed information, six students were purposively chosen for interviews, considering differences in classroom engagement, reading ability, and willingness to participate. All participants were informed about the study's purpose prior to data collection to ensure voluntary participation.

Data were collected using two instruments: a questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 20 closed-ended statements covering reading strategy use, learning environment, technology support, and peer interaction, with responses measured on a five-point Likert scale. It was administered after reading activities to ensure contextual relevance. Interviews were guided by ten structured questions that explored students' experiences, perceived usefulness of reading strategies, and difficulties encountered during reading.

Instrument validation was conducted through expert review by an English education lecturer and a practicing English teacher to ensure clarity and suitability for junior secondary learners. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis. Questionnaire data were summarized to identify dominant patterns of students' perceptions, while interview data were analyzed thematically. Triangulation across data sources was applied to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Questionnaire Results on Students' Perceptions of Reading Strategies

The questionnaire findings indicate that seventh-grade students generally had positive perceptions of reading strategies in English learning. Students mostly applied strategies that provided immediate comprehension support, particularly pre-reading and vocabulary-focused strategies, while more complex strategies were less frequently used. Vocabulary limitations were reported as the main challenge affecting reading performance. A summary of students' perceptions is presented in Table 1, illustrating these trends.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Reading Strategies

Reading Strategy Aspect	General Response Trend
Text comprehension	Strategies perceived as helpful
Pre-reading strategies	Frequently applied
Vocabulary strategies	Widely used
During-reading strategies	Moderately applied
Post-reading strategies	Infrequently applied
Reading difficulties	Vocabulary limitations

As shown in Table 1, students relied more on practical strategies that directly supported comprehension than on higher-level strategies requiring deeper cognitive processing. Pre-reading and vocabulary-related strategies were applied most frequently, while during-reading and post-reading strategies were used less consistently. Vocabulary limitations remained the main challenge affecting students' ability to understand texts. Overall, the results indicate that students prioritized strategies that helped them manage immediate comprehension difficulties during reading activities.

2. Interview Results on Students' Reading Strategy Use

Interview data provided further insight into how students applied reading strategies during reading activities. Participants reported frequently using pre-reading strategies, translating unfamiliar words, and rereading challenging sentences, while summarizing texts was rarely applied. Students also highlighted peers, teachers, and digital tools as supporting factors that facilitated comprehension. Table 2 summarizes the main interview findings and illustrates students' strategic behaviors.

Table 2. Summary of Interview Findings on Reading Strategy Use

Focus Area	Main Findings
Pre-reading strategies	Reading titles and pictures
Vocabulary handling	Using dictionaries or translation tools
During-reading strategies	Rereading difficult sentences
Post-reading strategies	Rarely summarizing texts
Supporting factors	Peers, teachers, and technology
Overall perception	Strategies viewed as helpful

As shown in Table 2, students primarily used strategies that provided direct support for comprehension, such as reading titles and pictures, translating unfamiliar words, and rereading

difficult sentences. Higher-level strategies, such as summarizing texts, were applied less frequently. Peers, teachers, and digital tools were identified as key factors that facilitated students' reading activities. Overall, the findings confirm that students focused on strategies that helped them overcome immediate vocabulary and comprehension challenges.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that seventh-grade students generally hold positive perceptions toward the use of reading strategies in English language learning. These perceptions suggest that students no longer view reading merely as a mechanical decoding process but as an activity that requires strategic effort. Such awareness reflects students' recognition of the role of reading strategies in supporting comprehension (Zahro et al., 2023). This condition indicates that students begin to position themselves as active readers who are consciously involved in the meaning-making process.

From a theoretical perspective, reading strategies function as cognitive and metacognitive tools that assist learners in constructing meaning and monitoring understanding. As proposed by Grabe and Stoller (2019), strategic reading enables learners to actively engage with texts rather than passively receiving information. Students' positive perceptions toward reading strategies can therefore be interpreted as an initial stage of metacognitive awareness. At this stage, learners start to recognize the purpose and importance of strategy use during reading activities.

This awareness indicates that learners begin to understand why certain strategies are necessary during reading activities. However, awareness alone does not guarantee effective strategy implementation. Students may acknowledge the usefulness of strategies without being able to apply them independently and consistently. This condition highlights the distinction between knowing about strategies and being able to use them strategically in varied reading contexts.

Despite their positive attitudes, students demonstrated variations in the depth and sustainability of strategy use. This variation suggests that their metacognitive development remains limited and uneven. Similar findings were reported by Kurniawan (2024), who found that EFL learners often show awareness of reading processes without fully developing reflective control over strategy selection and use. As a result, students' perceptions should be viewed as a foundational condition rather than an indicator of mature strategic competence.

The dominance of basic strategies, such as translating vocabulary and rereading sentences, further supports this interpretation. These strategies represent surface-level cognitive processes that provide immediate assistance during reading. Learners with limited language proficiency tend to prioritize such direct strategies because they are easier to apply and require less cognitive regulation. Previous studies have shown that lower-level EFL learners frequently rely on translation-based strategies to manage comprehension difficulties, especially when vocabulary knowledge is limited (Syukri & Karmini, 2023; Kurniawan, 2024).

This pattern indicates that students' strategy use remains procedural rather than reflective. From a theoretical standpoint, reliance on basic strategies reflects an early stage of learning strategy development. At this stage, learners focus on understanding text content rather than regulating their reading processes. Metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension, therefore require higher levels of awareness and sustained instructional support.

The findings also highlight the important role of technology and social interaction in supporting reading comprehension. The use of digital texts, multimedia materials, and

translation tools functions as instructional scaffolding for students facing linguistic challenges, particularly in online reading contexts (Rinantanti et al., 2024). This finding is reinforced by Agustina et al. (2025), who demonstrated that multimedia integration in language instruction supports learners' comprehension by combining visual, auditory, and textual inputs, thereby facilitating more meaningful engagement with learning materials. Additionally, peer interaction aligns with social constructivist principles, enabling learners to negotiate meaning collaboratively and build confidence during reading tasks (Utami & Rahmat, 2023). Despite generally positive perceptions and available support, students continued to experience difficulties related to vocabulary limitations, text complexity, and reading length, indicating the need for explicit, systematic, and sustained instruction to foster advanced strategic reading practices (Putra et al., 2025; Saputra et al., 2023; Zahro et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that seventh-grade students generally perceive reading strategies as beneficial, particularly basic cognitive strategies, while higher-order metacognitive strategies remain underutilized, indicating that strategic reading competence is still developing. The findings suggest that students' perceptions influence how strategies are selected and applied, but positive attitudes alone are insufficient to foster advanced strategic reading skills. Pedagogically, this underscores the need for explicit and systematic instruction that scaffolds students' progression from procedural to reflective strategy use. Incorporating modeling, guided practice, and reflective activities can enhance students' ability to monitor, evaluate, and regulate their reading processes.

Collaborative learning and selective use of instructional technology further support comprehension and engagement, providing both social and cognitive scaffolding. The study also points to future research opportunities, such as investigating the long-term effects of explicit strategy instruction and adapting interventions for different proficiency levels and learning contexts in EFL classrooms. These insights offer practical guidance for educators aiming to design strategic reading programs that develop both immediate comprehension and sustained metacognitive growth. Overall, the findings emphasize that fostering autonomous, reflective, and effective reading strategies requires integrated pedagogical approaches tailored to students' needs.

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