

Reading Strategies in Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language: A Mixed-Method Study

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ABSTRACT

Reading strategies are essential for teachers and students, especially in an EFL classroom. However, reading comprehension strategies and effective adoption of the strategies have been challenging for both teachers and students in Malaysia. This study aimed to identify the reading strategies used and not used by students and teachers when answering and teaching reading comprehension questions and explore the discord between the responses using an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. The participants were 91 students and five teachers from a private university in Malaysia recruited using census sampling methods. A questionnaire consisting of literal, reorganization, and inferential reading comprehension questions was administered to the students, whereas interviews and observation were used to examine the strategies targeted by teachers based on Barrett's reading taxonomy (1972). The findings revealed that EFL teachers used a vast

repertoire of strategies in teaching reading, whereas students only used a small number of strategies when answering reading comprehension questions. This study underscores the importance of the accord between the strategies taught and those utilized by L2 readers. Students' awareness plays a key role in filling in this gap.

Keywords: Inferential, literal, reading, reorganization, strategies

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INTRODUCTION

Critical skills (such as connecting between sources of information and detailed meanings and applying reading understanding to reflect the social context) are vital requisites for reading comprehension. Reading comprehension as part of EFL follows an active mode of learning (Othman & Zare, 2013). Reading comprehension skills are acquired through various comprehension strategies (Amini & Amini, 2017; Amini et al., 2016), modes of operation for achieving an end, or plans for regulating information (Brown, 2007). Readers develop the skill to read and identify the intention of the text as their comprehension skill gradually advances (Amini & Amini, 2012; Yovanoff et al., 2005).

The procedure of selecting reading strategies can be generally summarized as (a) ascertaining the reading objective; (b) activating and applying one's knowledge based on the content of the text; (c) depicting the relationship between words, sentences, and paragraphs comprising the envisioning of information and creation of representations; (d) exploring the nature and form of different genres of texts; (e) discovering the theme and main ideas of a text; (f) questioning and answering one's uncertainty; (g) planning, monitoring and rectifying one's reading behavior; (h) assessing a text for its worth; (i) reflecting on the reading processes that have been carried out and their outcomes (Pressley, 2000).

Higher education institutions perceived reading as the most fundamental academic skill (Noor, 2011; Sattar & Salehi, 2014). It is

essential when reading in a second language (Yapp et al., 2021) or as a foreign language (Kazemi, 2021). However, language learners often struggle to master reading (Trudell, 2019). By recruiting suitable strategies for answering comprehension questions, students become autonomous readers (Cadena, 2006; James et al., 2018). Reading strategies are significant in assisting students in planning and monitoring their reading comprehension. Language learners could use reading strategies to develop more strategic and flexible reading comprehension skills (Scheid, 1993).

English language is a second language in Malaysia (Omar, 2011) and is a compulsory subject at all levels of education, including higher education in the country (Pillai & Ong, 2018). Consequently, international students from non-English speaking countries who come to study in Malaysia are mostly required to take up an English proficiency program at the tertiary level. Moreover, English is the teaching medium for several subjects from primary school through university (Thirusanku & Melor, 2012).

However, there are many differences amongst university students entering their first year of studying in the four macro-skills of reading, speaking, writing, and listening (Humphreys et al., 2012). This scenario aggravates L2 students who are less exposed to reading academic materials in English prior to entering tertiary education (Hermida, 2009; Yapp et al., 2021). Consequently, educators may face a critical situation when many foreign language learners struggle to read. Furthermore, teachers

and students may not have an adequate acquaintance with reading strategies (Cadena, 2006). Thus, if this issue is not addressed adequately, the learners' academic performance can be affected negatively. Previous studies, such as Humphreys et al. (2012), found that reading ability is strongly interrelated to academic success. In addition, there is a gap in the literature about the international students' understanding and application of EFL reading comprehension strategies in Malaysia. Reading is often taught directly and systematically using strategies. Reading strategies for young learners could enhance learners' familiarity with the aim, lexicon, comprehension skills, and textual structures (Ng et al., 2020). Likewise, explicit instruction seems necessary in teaching reading strategies to expand phonemic and phonic knowledge, spelling, and comprehension skills. Such explicit teaching could improve learners' fluency, automaticity, and understanding (Javed et al., 2016). Since reading strategies are flexible tools designed to facilitate text comprehension (Javed et al., 2016), comparing the strategies used by instructors and learners could provide an in-depth understanding enhancing reading comprehension skills. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated based on the objectives of the study:

- How do students and teachers use different strategies in answering and teaching reading comprehension questions?
- This study investigates reading strategies in teaching and learning English as a foreign language in the Malaysian EFL context. The following section summarizes studies conducted on reading strategies in EFL and Malaysian contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading comprehension strategies are intentional plans and procedures that proficient readers apply to comprehend the text (Maine, 2013). Readers should equip themselves with multiple reading strategies to comprehend a text effectively (Sohail, 2016). The complexity of the reading process is often associated with grasping the intended meaning of the text (Yapp et al., 2021). In addition, the process often involves "internal thinking" (Paris & Flukes, 2005). Reading strategies are thus employed by the readers who deliberately attempt to monitor and alter their initiatives in decoding the text, comprehending words, and understanding the meaning of the text (Afflerbach et al., 2008). These strategies enable readers to identify the text's main point from the explicit and implicit information and synthesize the content effectively (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Readers who read critically can draw conclusions, find solutions, form justifications, compare concepts, hypothesize, and evaluate different ideas and circumstances (Tran, 2015). It demonstrates how skilled readers are generally more

aware of employing reading strategies effectively (L. Zhang, 2017).

Although reading is an important skill for students (Trudell, 2019), it is especially challenging for non-native English learners, given their distinctive linguistic, educational, sociocultural, and institutional backgrounds (L. Zhang, 2017). The reading strategies are not merely about personal preferences but also conventional norms (Alghail & Mahfoodh, 2016). Learners need to compromise between the dimensions of the depth and breadth of information by reading the text (Wallace & Wray, 2021).

The common reading strategies include skimming (searching for key information), scanning (glance for an overview), and intensive reading (a thorough read-through of the text; Wallace & Wray, 2021).

Examining the effectiveness of teaching collaborative reading strategies, Amjadi and Talebi (2021) found that students adopted various reading strategies, such as previewing, scanning, skimming, guessing, grasping the central idea, and looking for a synonym for unfamiliar words while reading.

Reading is largely facilitated by the interplay of cognitive and metacognitive strategies used by the readers (Thongwichit & Buripakdi, 2021). According to L. Zhang (2017), metacognitive strategies consist of planning, assessment, and monitoring. On the other hand, cognitive strategies entail the strategies of progression, identification of the main point, integration of ideas, and making inferences. Previous studies have supported the effectiveness of employing cognitive strategies (N. J. Anderson &

Cheng, 2004) and metacognitive strategies (Thongwichit & Buripakdi, 2021; M. Zhang, 2013) in enhancing students' academic reading performance. In addition, several studies (e.g., Phakiti, 2003; Sun, 2011; L. Zhang, 2017) found that students adopted both strategies simultaneously in reading comprehension.

Shah et al. (2007) investigated reading strategies by Malaysian ESL students and suggested that teachers should employ more reading strategies in teaching English. Similarly, Nordin et al. (2013) reported using different reading strategies by undergraduate ESL learners in Malaysia and suggested effective use of reading strategies to improve the reading proficiency level of low-proficient ESL learners. In another study, Mahmud (2008) examined the role of reading strategies used by ESL teachers in facilitating teaching and learning of reading and found that the dominant strategies were activating students' background knowledge and scanning for specific details. Finally, using a quasi-experimental design, Choo et al. (2011) examined the efficacy of the reciprocal teaching strategies in teaching reading comprehension among low achievers form-sixth Malaysian students. The study reported that employing the strategies of predicting, questioning, summarizing, and positively clarifying affected the learners' comprehension.

It can be concluded that the previous studies have mostly emphasized that reading comprehension strategies are deliberate plans and procedures that competent readers employ to decipher meaning. Moreover, examining how teachers apply

strategies can help students answer reading comprehension questions. Students who are taught comprehension strategies become more vigilant and engaged readers who oversee their reading comprehension.

The present study adapted Barrett's (1972) Taxonomy. This taxonomy deals particularly with reading comprehension. Barrett classified reading comprehension strategies into five levels of comprehension: 1) literal, 2) reorganization, 3) inference, 4) evaluation, and 5) appreciation. The levels of comprehension related to language learning skills are literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension. Evaluation and appreciation levels are mostly used in teaching literature. The first three levels are further divided into sub-categories, i.e., reading comprehension strategies (Barrett, 1972). The present study adapted the three main types from Barrett's taxonomy, i.e., literal, inferential, and organizational, to identify the reading comprehension strategies and how the EFL students and teachers used them. In the present study, EFL refers to the English language taught to international (non-Malaysian) students in Malaysia who intend to enter a degree program.

The following section summarizes the design, participants, and the details of the data collection and analysis procedure in the present study.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The current study enjoyed an explanatory sequential mixed-method design (Creswell,

2015) in collecting quantitative and qualitative data.

Participants

The study was conducted at UCSI University Malaysia, Centre for Languages. At UCSI University, international students must complete ten levels of English for Tertiary Education with at least a band score of 5.5 in IELTS to enroll in the degree program. Therefore, the first group of participants in the study was students at the Centre for Languages, UCSI University, Malaysia. Census sampling was used in this study to recruit the maximum number of available EFL teachers and students at the center. Ninety-one out of 123 questionnaires were returned to the researchers (dropout rate = 26%).

Table 1 shows the demographic information of students. The participants were 35 female and 56 male students. The age groups of students were divided into four categories: Below 18, 18 to 21, 22 to 25, and above 25 years old. Most of the students were from the second age group, i.e., 18 to 21 years old (% 63.7). Students' English proficiency levels were categorized into: 1 to 3, 5 to 8, and 9 to 10. More than half of the students were from levels 5 to 8 (% 53.8). Students mainly were from Arab-speaking countries, China and Indonesia.

The students had completed a reading lesson prior to answering the questionnaire. The student's responses to the reading strategies were tallied with the teachers' interviews and the classroom observations.

As for the student's proficiency level, the higher number represents the higher level

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of students

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Gender			
Female	35	38.5	38.5
Male	56	61.5	100.0
Total	91	100.0	
Age			
< 18	4	4.4	4.4
18–21	58	63.7	68.1
22–25	18	19.8	87.9
> 25	11	12.1	100.0
Total	91	100.0	
English proficiency level			
1–4	5	5.5	5.5
5–8	49	53.8	59.3
9–10	37	40.7	100.0
Total	91	100.0	

of proficiency recorded in the placement test. Students are given a placement test to identify their level at the language center. Therefore, not all students start their English course at level 1. It means that they were given different reading materials appropriate for their level of proficiency. For example, students from level 10 can read more complex texts than students from level 3. Therefore, only the former students were taught reading strategies in this example. Because of students' different levels of English language proficiency, teachers might adopt or teach different reading comprehension strategies to suit the students' proficiency levels. Hence, this might explain why the teachers do not use certain strategies.

The second group of participants in the study was teachers at the Centre for Languages at UCSI University, Malaysia.

Five teachers were purposively selected as respondents for the interview and their classroom observation. All teachers were female. They were aged 25 and above. Two teachers had less than seven years of experience, and three teachers had between 8-15 years of teaching experience.

Instruments

A questionnaire consisting of 32 questions with a five-point Likert scale indicating 'Never,' 'Rarely,' 'Sometimes,' 'Regularly,' and 'Often' and three open-ended questions were constructed based on Barrett's (1972) taxonomy of reading comprehension. The 32 multiple-choice and the three open-ended questions were categorized according to the three main types of reading comprehension questions, i.e., literal comprehension, reorganization comprehension and inferential comprehension questions. Three items were categorized under demographics, nine items were categorized under literal comprehension, and ten items each under reorganization comprehension, and inferential comprehension questions. For the internal consistency reliability coefficient, Cronbach's alpha was measured ($\alpha = .71$), indicating an acceptable level of reliability (M. Alavi et al., 2020; Pallant, 2007). The procedure of validating the questionnaire started with the face validation by having the test items validated by three content experts in the field. First, the irrelevant or confusing statements were eliminated (Ahadzadeh et al., 2018). Then a pilot study was conducted on 13 students, and the irrelevant questions were dropped based on the feedback from

the respondents and the three experts. The development of a valid content instrument is usually achieved by a rational analysis of the instrument by raters (experts) familiar with the construct of interest or experts on the research subject (M. Alavi et al., 2018; Sangoseni et al., 2013). Moreover, the convergent validity yielded similar results for the same concept measured (Smith, 2005), i.e., via the open-ended questionnaires, expert feedback, and pilot test in the present study.

Observations were conducted using an observation checklist adapted from Javed et al. (2016), originally designed based on Barrett's Taxonomy. The checklist had 46 items with three main categories: literal comprehension strategies, reorganization comprehension strategies, and inferential comprehension strategies. There were 11 strategies under literal comprehension, 19 strategies under reorganization comprehension, and 16 strategies under inferential comprehension.

Finally, interview questions were used to explore the teachers' experiences and their elaborations and interpretations of the experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The questions were then validated for their content by three experts in reading and assessment.

There were several limitations and constraints in validating the instruments. The main challenge was finding qualified content experts willing to validate the instruments. It was tackled by obtaining a list of 10 experts and approaching them via email and academic platforms. Eventually, three experts agreed to contribute to

the validation of instruments. Another constraint was conducting the pilot study on a sufficient number of students in a short time. Moreover, since the population, i.e., the total number of students at the Center for Languages, UCSI University was not large enough for a questionnaire-based survey study, we decided to go for the maximum number of participants from that population for the survey and opted for a mixed methods research design to use the qualitative findings after collecting and analyzing the quantitative data. This merging and comparison of quantitative and qualitative data provided more valid results (Creswell, 2015).

Procedure

All participants were briefed on the purpose of the study. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before data collection. The students were from different levels, which means they had been exposed to different reading materials and reading strategies during their study. It could affect the consistency and trustworthiness of the quantitative results. To address this issue, we tried to give some additional reading materials to the students from different levels. We briefed them for about 30 minutes about reading strategies before distributing questionnaires.

As for the qualitative phase of the study, structured interviews and 'unobtrusive observations' were conducted to explore the use of strategies by the teachers. Unfortunately, single classroom observation was insufficient, considering the long

checklist with 46 items. Therefore, the same teachers and classes were observed twice for about 90 minutes. Nevertheless, we attempted to obtain an accurate view of the use of strategies by the five teachers with these considerations.

The observation allowed us to analyze the participants' negligence or the reasons which contributed to this neglect (Kawulich, 2012). Furthermore, observations facilitated further documenting what was important to the respondents, discovering the time spent on a certain task, observing non-verbal cues, and ascertaining their social circle (Schmuck, 1997). Observations also helped us verify unmentioned information in the interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Two observations were carried out for each teacher right after the survey was administered, and the reading strategies that teachers applied during the lesson were taken down.

After the observations were conducted, face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with each teacher. Follow-up questions (probing) were used after the initial questions were asked to extract further information on their responses. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. The interviews were then converted into transcripts which were verbatim records of the respondents to the questions asked by the interviewer.

Data Analysis

The IBM SPSS software (v. 25) was used to process the quantitative data. First, the frequencies and percentages were

analyzed using descriptive statistics (M. Alavi et al., 2017). Then, the data were tabulated according to the three main types of literal, reorganization, and inferential comprehension questions.

Answers to the open-ended questions on the questionnaire from the students were coded and thematically analyzed. As similar codes were grouped to form the main idea, themes were analyzed (Vaismoradi et al., 2015; Yap & Amini, 2020). As for the qualitative data from the teachers, the emerging themes were categorized based on the strategies adopted by teachers in teaching reading comprehension. Member checking and rereading were processed with the teachers to check if the explanations were accurate and representative of the qualitative data. The reasons why particular themes were more significant in the data and the selection process were reported. Finally, possible reasons for the connection between the qualitative and quantitative data were explained. The results of the data analysis were then summarized and presented. The following section provides the findings of the present study in terms of the strategies used and not used by students and teachers, as well as how the strategies were utilized differently by the instructors and students.

RESULTS

Strategies Used and Not Used by Students and Teachers

The findings indicated differences between the strategies used by the students and teachers in answering and teaching reading comprehension questions. The strategies that both students and teachers used to answer

and teach literal comprehension questions were “read the questions first before reading the passage,” “identify the keywords from the questions,” “find the topic sentence,” and “identify the keywords from the passage,” “scan the text for a specific piece of information,” “locate supporting details from the keywords,” “distinguish between important and unimportant supporting details” and “go through the text (skim) to find out the main ideas/ concepts.”

Moreover, students applied “read the signpost questions” and “locate answers to the signpost questions through obvious information from the text.” Finally, based on the interviews, the teachers applied “guess,” “understand the format of the questions,” as well as “getting feedback from students.”

On the other hand, the new strategy by students was “preview the text.” The strategies applied by the teachers were counted as “used” when the teacher applied them during teaching reading. Therefore, all strategies were employed by the teachers during reading comprehension class.

Students’ Use of Comprehension Strategies When Answering Reading Comprehension Questions

Use of Literal Comprehension Strategies.

The results show that students practiced different strategies when answering the three types of literal comprehension questions, reorganization comprehension questions, and inferential comprehension questions (see Figure 1 and Table 2).

The students “read the questions first before reading the passage” when answering literal comprehension questions. Based on the scale and open-ended questions, the most frequent strategy used by students “often” was reading the questions first before reading the passage. This finding is consistent with Oxford (1990) and Z. Zhang (1992), who concluded that reading with a purpose would remarkably enhance test results and efficiency. The results indicated that the students would prefer to “identify the keywords from the questions” when answering literal and inferential comprehension questions. This strategy

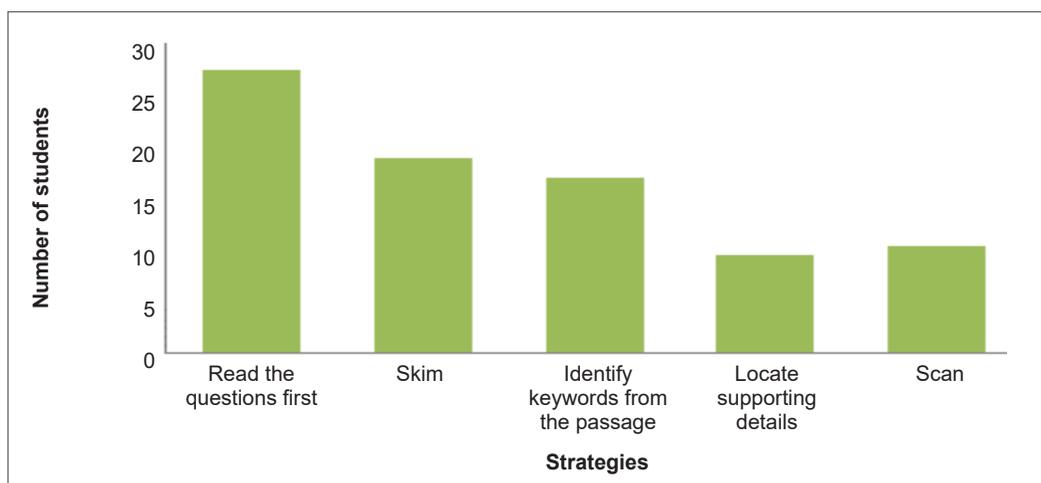


Figure 1. Strategies used by students to answer questions clearly stated in the text

Table 2
Literal comprehension strategies used by students

No.	Item	Never n*	Rarely n*	Sometimes n*	Regularly n*	Often n*	Mean	SD
1	I read the questions first before reading the passage.	10 (11)	2 (2.2)	27 (29.7)	16 (17.6)	36 (39.6)	3.73	1.31
2	I can identify the keywords from the questions.	3 (3.3)	6 (6.6)	49 (53.8)	17 (18.7)	16 (17.6)	3.41	0.97
3	I look for the topic sentence when reading a text.	2 (2.2)	5 (5.5)	37 (40.7)	22 (24.2)	25 (27.5)	3.69	1.01
4	I can identify the keywords from the passage.	5 (5.5)	16 (17.6)	39 (42.9)	20 (22)	11 (12.1)	3.18	1.04
5	I can locate the supporting details from the keywords.	4 (4.4)	10 (11)	45 (49.5)	18 (19.8)	14 (15.4)	3.31	1.01
6	I can differentiate between important and unimportant supporting details.	8 (8.8)	17 (18.7)	39 (42.9)	12 (13.2)	15 (15.4)	3.10	1.16
7	I go through the text in detail to find out the main ideas/ concepts.	2 (2.2)	20 (22)	39 (42.9)	19 (20.9)	11 (12.1)	3.19	0.99
8	I read the signpost questions (questions indicated beside the text).	38 (41.8)	26 (28.6)	17 (18.7)	6 (6.6)	4 (4.4)	2.03	1.13
9	I can locate answers to the signpost questions through obvious information from the text.	32 (35.2)	35 (38.5)	14 (15.4)	6 (6.6)	4 (4.4)	2.07	1.08
10	Average Mean and SD						3.08	1.08

*Number of respondents. Values in parentheses indicate percentage.

was found in both scale and open-ended question responses, with a high percentage of students using it when answering literal comprehension questions.

“Locate supporting details from the keywords” was another strategy employed by the students to answer literal and reorganization comprehension questions. This finding was also supported by Lestari et al. (2015), where students were “fairly” able to locate supporting details in a text. “Go through the text thoroughly (skim) to find out the main ideas/concepts” was also one of the strategies applied by the students. This finding aligns with Amjadi and Talebi’s

(2021) study, which reported that students apply to skim during the reading test to grasp the central idea due to time limitations. This strategy also improved students’ results, especially reading comprehension (Amjadi & Talebi, 2021).

The students did not “preview the text” when answering literal comprehension questions. Although this strategy was explicitly taught to students, the reason for not “previewing” could be due to the time factor and trying to answer the questions straight away. However, Amjadi and Talebi (2021) reported that students employed the preview strategy in answering the reading

test. This difference could be due to the purpose, research designs, and methods used in the present study. While the study was merely eliciting the types of strategies used by the students, Amjadi and Talebi (2021) administered a reading test that required multiple strategies to deal with the reading test effectively.

Use of Reorganization Comprehension Strategies. The results indicated that the students “go through the text thoroughly to find out the cause and effect” when answering reorganization comprehension questions (see Figure 2 and Table 3). A small number of students applied this strategy. It is in line with Torgesen (2002), i.e., identifying main ideas is one of the difficulties students face when reading comprehension.

Next, students “combine information clearly stated from more than a single source” when answering reorganization comprehension questions. The students used this strategy “often” based on data from the scale analysis. The same result

can be seen in the study conducted by Sani et al. (2011) on reading motivation and reading strategies used by undergraduates in Universiti Teknologi MARA. They found that skimming the text to find out the cause and effect is useful in strengthening students’ reading ability.

Students did not “read the signpost questions (questions indicated beside the text)” when answering reorganization comprehension questions. The findings also revealed that the students did not “analyze the information to find the answers.” It could be because the textbook that they were using did not provide signpost questions, or signpost questions were not part of their IELTS exam that they were supposed to take at the end of the proficiency course. Thus, they possibly found it irrelevant to their studies. This finding is in line with the study by Javed et al. (2016), which concluded that some reading strategies, such as reading the signpost questions, locating answers to the signpost questions, and analyzing the information to find the answers were not

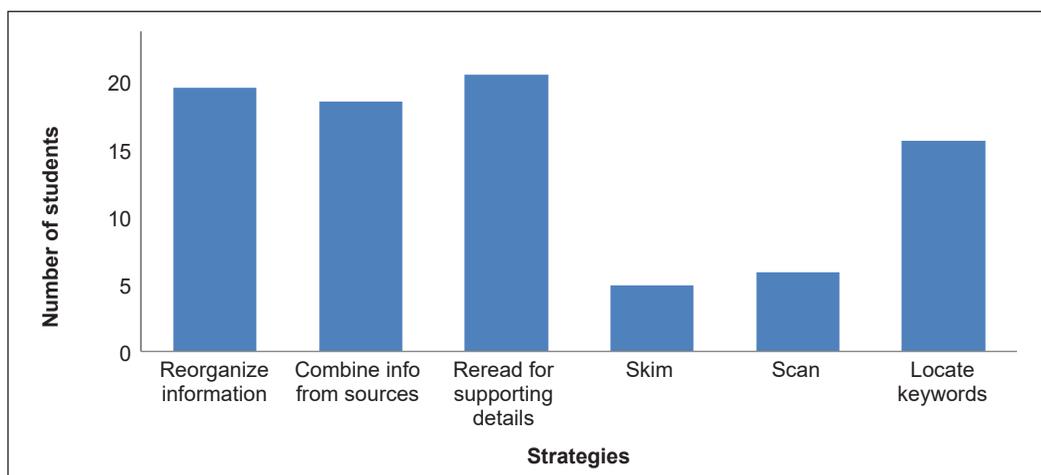


Figure 2. Strategies used by students to answer questions related to keywords and chronological events

Table 3
Reorganization comprehension strategies used by students

No.	Item	Never n*	Rarely n*	Sometimes n*	Regularly n*	Often n*	Mean	SD
1.	I read the questions first before reading the passage.	2 (2.2)	8 (8.8)	21 (23.1)	26 (28.6)	28 (30.8)	3.77	1.06
2.	I can identify the key concept from the questions.	7 (7.7)	11 (12.1)	22 (24.2)	37 (40.7)	14 (15.4)	3.44	1.13
3.	I summarise the text to identify supporting details.	6 (6.6)	20 (22)	38 (41.8)	17 (18.7)	10 (11)	3.05	1.06
4.	I go through the text thoroughly to find out the cause and effect.	4 (4.4)	18 (19.8)	38 (41.8)	19 (20.9)	12 (13.2)	3.19	1.04
5.	I can connect the previous knowledge with learned knowledge.	5 (5.5)	11 (12.1)	36 (39.6)	27 (29.7)	12 (13.2)	3.33	1.03
6.	I can locate supporting details from the keywords.	6 (6.6)	22 (24.2)	13 (14.3)	38 (41.8)	12 (13.2)	3.31	1.17
7.	I can understand the information that is not clearly stated in the text.	12 (13.2)	17 (18.7)	43 (47.3)	12 (13.2)	7 (7.7)	2.84	1.07
8.	I can combine information clearly stated from more than a single source.	1 (1.1)	16 (17.6)	16 (17.6)	18 (19.8)	40 (44)	3.88	1.19
9.	I can combine information clearly stated in the text to support the main points.	5 (5.5)	12 (13.2)	36 (39.6)	25 (27.5)	13 (14.3)	3.32	1.05
10.	I can formulate the correct answer to the questions.	6 (6.6)	24 (26.4)	33 (36.3)	20 (22)	8 (8.8)	3.00	1.05
Average Mean and SD							3.31	1.09

*Number of respondents. Values in parentheses indicate percentage.

employed ideally by the teachers. Thus, it is no surprise that the students are unaware of these strategies.

Students did not “identify difficult/new words to figure out their meanings with the contextual clues.” They did not “identify the key concepts from the passage” when answering reorganization comprehension questions. This result was also found by S. S. Alavi et al. (2015), Susanto (2017), and Yang (2002). It can be said that most college students are still facing difficulties in reading English textbooks due to insufficient vocabulary knowledge. Moreover, the

students did not “distinguish between important and unimportant supporting details” when answering reorganization comprehension questions. Shah et al. (2007) reported that students never recognize their deprivation of concentration, split sentences into parts, and paraphrase a sentence. He concluded that the students are probably ignorant about those strategies or are unsure of their application method.

Use of Inferential Comprehension Strategies. Figure 3 and Table 4 provide an overview of the strategies used by students

to answer questions that are not stated in the text. Students “make assumptions about the meaning of unfamiliar words” when answering inferential comprehension questions. Students used this strategy “often” based on the analysis of the scale and open-ended questions. This finding aligns with Amjadi and Talebi’s (2021) finding. They reported that students make predictions about the meaning of a word and the text’s content. One possible explanation for this might be that students are required to accomplish and submit their reading tasks within a short time. Grasping the meaning of the text within a “limited” time could be a major challenge for them, considering their overall language proficiency.

Students “reread the text to draw conclusion” when answering inferential comprehension questions. The analysis revealed that most of the students employed this strategy. This finding is in line with the findings of Shah et al. (2007). They concluded that students often reread the text to find relations among ideas.

Another identified strategy was “relate the text to personal experience.” They applied this strategy when answering inferential comprehension questions. However, this finding is inconsistent with Shah et al. (2007). They reported that students never related the sentences to personal experience. A possible justification could be that the students were probably aware or sure of how to use the strategy.

The students did not “identify the contextual clues from the text” when answering inferential comprehension questions. Furthermore, they neither “try to understand the writer’s intention” nor “reformulate the assumptions” when answering inferential comprehension questions. Comprehension is the link between prior knowledge and new information. Thus, the readers who did not employ such strategies as using contextual clues, revising predictions, and understanding the purpose of the text are considered as reading but not comprehending a text (R. C. Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Pearson & Johnson, 1978).

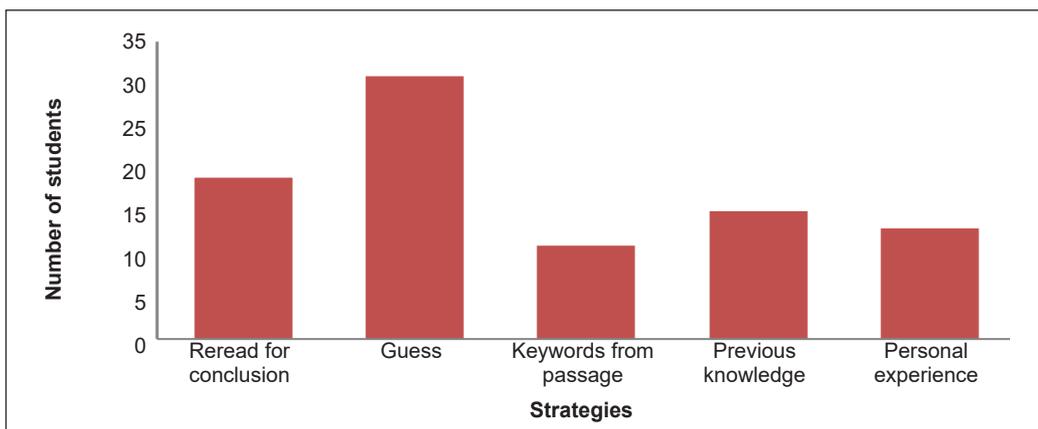


Figure 3. Strategies used by students to answer questions that are not stated in the text

Table 4
Inferential comprehension strategies used by students

No.	Item	Never n*	Rarely n*	Sometimes n*	Regularly n*	Often n*	Mean	SD
1.	I apply my previous knowledge about the current topic when reading a text.	4 (4.4)	14 (15.4)	40 (44)	19 (20.9)	14 (15.4)	3.27	1.04
2.	I read the questions first before reading the passage.	7 (7.7)	4 (4.4)	10 (11)	23 (25.3)	47 (51.6)	4.09	1.23
3.	I can identify the clue words from the questions.	4 (4.4)	15 (16.5)	24 (26.4)	34 (37.4)	14 (15.4)	3.43	1.08
4.	I reread the text to conclude.	2 (2.2)	7 (7.7)	34 (37.4)	37 (40.7)	11 (12.1)	3.53	0.89
5.	I make assumptions about the meaning of unfamiliar words.	3 (3.3)	7 (7.7)	10 (11)	34 (37.4)	37 (40.7)	4.04	1.06
6.	I can justify the acceptance or rejection.	4 (4.4)	16 (17.6)	38 (41.8)	16 (17.6)	17 (18.7)	3.29	1.10
7.	I can relate the text to personal experiences.	11 (12.1)	13 (14.3)	22 (24.2)	31 (34.1)	14 (15.4)	3.26	1.24
8.	I can make multiple interpretations of the conclusion.	5 (5.5)	22 (24.2)	38 (41.8)	15 (16.5)	11 (12.1)	3.05	1.06
9.	I can recollect information from memory.	1 (1.1)	15 (16.5)	35 (38.5)	23 (25.3)	17 (18.7)	3.44	1.01
10.	I can conclude the text.	4 (4.4)	12 (13.2)	40 (44)	21 (23.1)	14 (15.4)	3.32	1.03
Average Mean and SD							3.47	1.07

*Number of respondents. Values in parentheses indicate percentage.

Teachers' Use of Strategies When Teaching Reading Comprehension

Use of Literal Comprehension Strategies.

The results indicated that the teachers applied multiple strategies when teaching literal comprehension questions, i.e., the pedagogical strategies used by teachers in teaching reading comprehension (see Figure 4). Based on the analysis of the observations, all the teachers "read the questions first before reading the passage" when teaching literal and reorganization comprehension questions during their lesson. According to Palinscar and Brown (1984), teachers who read the questions first would allow

the students to anticipate what may be the answer and predict logically.

The analysis revealed that teachers "identify the keywords from the questions" when teaching literal comprehension questions. This strategy was applied by all the teachers when they were observed. The teachers believed that many keywords could be identified from the questions, which would later help the students locate answers. Furthermore, the teachers used "identify keywords from the passage" to teach literal comprehension questions. One of the teachers mentioned she would ask the students questions to make them look at

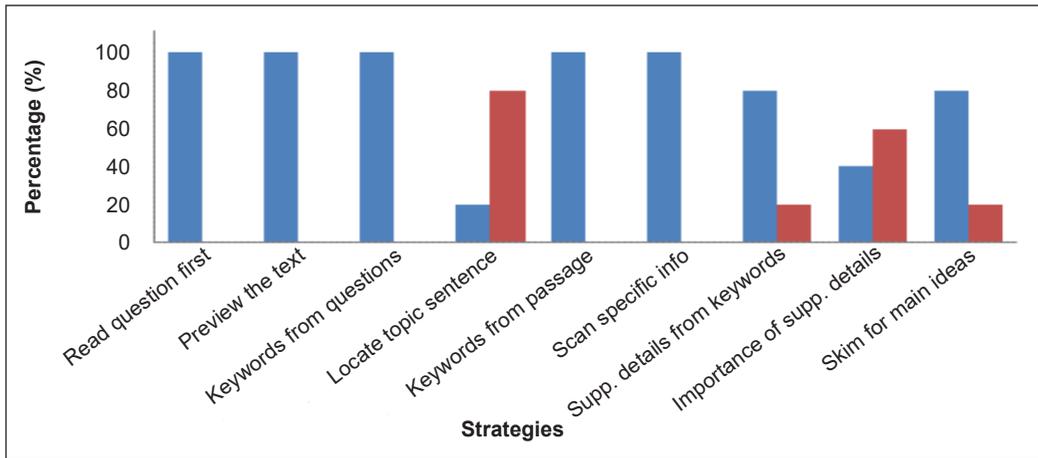


Figure 4. Strategies used and not used by teachers to teach literal comprehension questions
 Note. Blue=Used; Red=Not used

certain words in the passage. Besides that, the teachers preferred to “locate supporting details from the keywords” when teaching literal and reorganization comprehension questions. The teachers applied this strategy when teaching literal comprehension questions based on the interview. Javed et al. (2016) stated that teachers employ various reading strategies, particularly identifying keywords from the questions, identifying keywords from the passage, and locating supporting details from the keywords. The present study’s findings also showed that teachers “scan the text for a specific piece of information” and “skim to find out the main ideas or concepts” when teaching literal comprehension questions. One teacher encouraged students to scan “because it saved their time.” Skimming and scanning are common effective strategies that teachers can utilize to enhance students’ reading comprehension (Wallace & Wray, 2021).

When teaching literal comprehension questions, the teachers did not use “read

the signpost questions” and “locate answers to the signpost questions through obvious information from the text.” Again, it could be due to the lack of signpost questions in the textbook. When teaching reorganization comprehension questions, the teachers did not use “read the signpost questions (questions indicated beside the text)” either.

Use of Reorganization Comprehension Strategies. The findings revealed that the teachers used the strategy of “identify the key concepts from the questions” when teaching reorganization comprehension and “summarize the text to identify supporting details” (see Figure 5). For example, one teacher mentioned that she would give the students a brief idea of what the text is about answering the questions. It could imply that teachers should be encouraged to identify the main ideas and support details to help students become proficient readers. Another strategy was using “skim to find out the cause and effect” when teaching

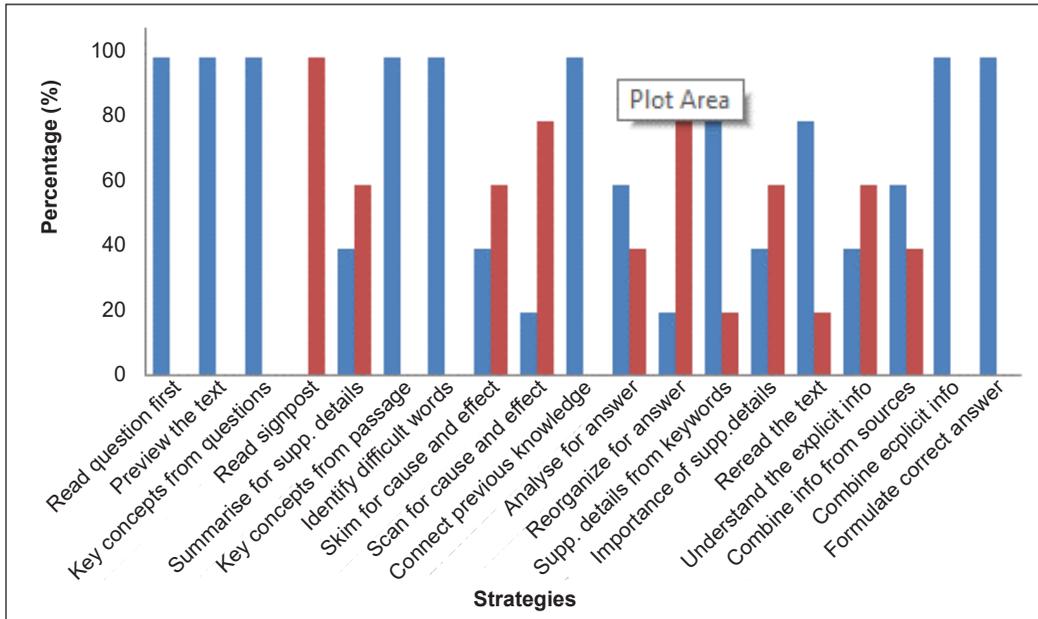


Figure 5. Strategies used and not used by teachers to teach reorganization comprehension questions
 Note. Blue=Used; Red=Not used

reorganization comprehension questions. This finding is consistent with Sani et al.’s (2011) findings as they concluded that skimming the text to find out the cause-and-effect relation should be employed by teachers as a practical strategy.

The data analysis indicated that teachers “connect previous knowledge with the learned information.” For example, one of the teachers mentioned that she would expose students to similar examples first before giving them questions so that they can connect what they have learned to the new information. This finding is identical to Johnson (1983) and Pardo (2004). They found that teachers activate students’ prior knowledge when teaching reorganization comprehension questions. It should be noted that reading comprehension ability can be enhanced when the reader has relevant prior

knowledge, and relevant words are pre-taught (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).

The teachers applied the strategy of “understanding the information not clearly stated in the text.” When the teachers were observed, they tried to ask students questions about the text’s implicit information. Javed et al. (2016) emphasized that teachers frequently employ this strategy when teaching reorganization comprehension questions.

Use of Inferential Comprehension Strategies. The teachers used “identify the contextual clues from the text” when teaching inferential comprehension questions (see Figure 6). Observation results also showed that the teachers applied this strategy. Ahmad et al. (2018) reported

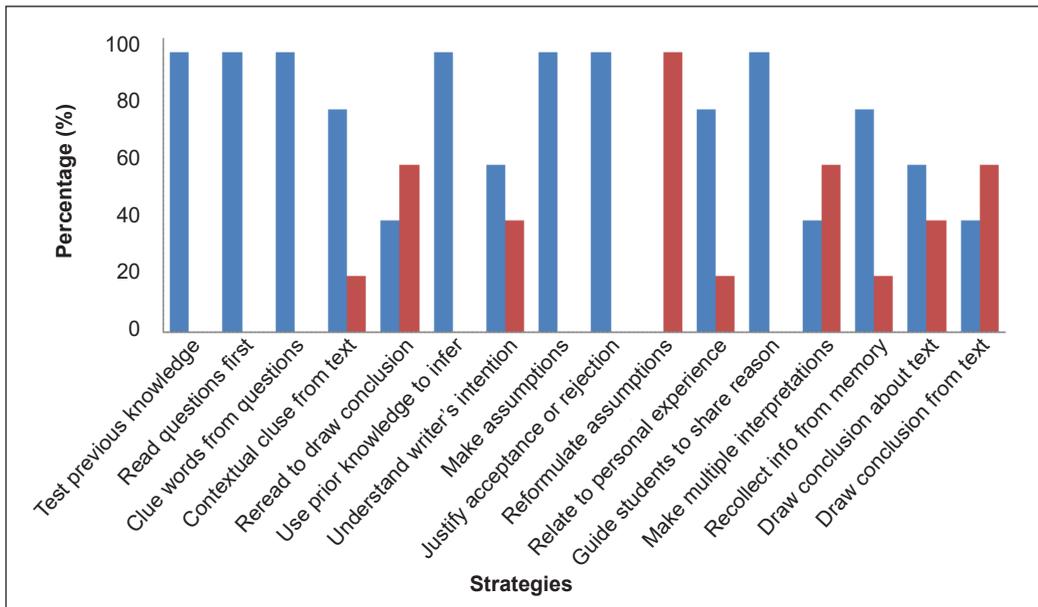


Figure 6. Strategies used and not used by the teachers to teach inferential comprehension questions
 Note. Blue=Used; Red=Not used

that identifying contextual clues from the text by teachers could help students obtain the correct answer. Teachers should adopt the strategies according to the student's proficiency level.

Furthermore, it was found that teachers "make assumptions" about the meaning in the text when they teach inferential comprehension questions. One of the teachers mentioned that she uses "a lot of guessing when it comes to teaching inferential comprehension questions." Celce-Murcia (2001) and Bakhtiarvand (2006) confirmed that guessing by referring to the contextual clues and paraphrasing is an effective strategy to teach reading comprehension.

Teachers' use of "relating the text to personal experience," whereby the text would be linked to the students' personal life by teachers, was another identified

strategy. Teachers also "asked students to conclude the text" when teaching inferential comprehension questions. For example, one teacher stated that she would ask the students to share their personal experiences regarding a certain topic before she started the lesson.

Analysis of the interviews indicated that teachers "guide the students to share the reasoning regarding predictions." The teachers asked the students to share their opinions regarding certain questions using this strategy. This finding is supported by Choo et al. (2011), which suggested that teaching questioning and predicting strategies drew positive outcomes for students. Effective questioning is a constructive strategy for teaching reading comprehension (Primas, 2010).

The teachers did not use the "reformulate the assumptions" strategy when teaching

inferential comprehension questions. On the contrary, Gersten et al. (2001) emphasized that developing teachers' assumptions helps improve students' understanding of a text when teachers have relevant prior knowledge.

It can be concluded that teachers frequently relate the text to personal experience and make inferences about a passage, as supported by Javed et al. (2016). The following section discusses the findings and relates them to previous studies on reading strategies. The discussion section summarizes the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

DISCUSSION

The results indicated that students and teachers used slightly different strategies. This finding could imply that ongoing (formative) assessments should accompany comprehension strategies. In addition, teachers should observe the application of reading comprehension strategies among students and their ability to comprehend a text.

The students used "read the signpost questions" and "locate answers to the signpost questions through explicit information from the text. However, none of the teachers used these two strategies.

The teachers applied six strategies that students did not consider: "previewing the text," "providing examples," "guessing," "understanding the format of the questions," "continuous assessment," and "getting feedback from students."

Students and teachers applied a few strategies when answering and teaching literal comprehension questions. It could mean that students and teachers should be introduced to more reading strategies. Teachers applied more strategies when teaching than the number of strategies used by students to answer literal comprehension questions. Such difference could imply that the students were unsure of the application method of the strategies taught by the teachers.

The strategies that the teachers can only use are "identify the contextual clues from the text," "try to understand the writer's intention," "guide the students to share the reasoning regarding predictions," and "ask the students to conclude the text," and "use of synonyms."

When answering and teaching reorganization comprehension questions, the students and teachers employed reading comprehension strategies more frequently. Most students and teachers found reorganization comprehension questions more feasible than literal and inferential questions.

For answering reorganization comprehension questions, the teachers applied almost twice as many as the number of strategies applied by the students. It could generally mean the strategies used by teachers were not considered as important, effective, or feasible by the students. Possibly the teachers did not notice the students' negligence of the strategies. Therefore, teachers should consider students' weaknesses and adapt appropriate

teaching methods according to the student's assessment of their level of understanding, needs, and expectations. Assisting students in utilizing various reading strategies and catering to them with a repertoire of reading materials could be useful for students and teachers.

About half of the strategies used by teachers to teach inferential comprehension questions were employed by students for answering inferential comprehension questions. Teachers are recommended to take the initiative to identify students' favorable strategies and apply effective strategies selectively when teaching inferential comprehension questions. The awareness about the neglected strategies could be raised, and the changes in students' reading comprehension skills could be recorded.

None of the students applied "preview the text," "identify the key concepts from the questions," "identify difficult/new words to figure out their meanings with the contextual clues," "analyse the information to find the answers," or "distinguish between important and unimportant supporting details," "relate the text to personal experience," "read other materials to gain background knowledge," "use visual aids," and "share knowledge among students."

Moreover, some strategies were overlooked by students and teachers when answering and teaching reading comprehension questions. It suggests that the strategies were probably unknown to the students and teachers, for example, when they were too new for the students and teachers.

This study offers insights for students and teachers to strengthen their knowledge and practice a repertoire of strategies, especially those overlooked by students and teachers. In addition, students are recommended to evaluate their preferences for using strategies throughout the reading comprehension course.

CONCLUSION

Reading comprehension strategies play an important role in an EFL classroom for teachers and students. This study was conducted to identify the use of strategies by students and teachers based on three types of reading comprehension questions. The analysis revealed that students occasionally employ a limited number of strategies to answer different reading comprehension questions. On the other hand, teachers apply more diverse strategies when teaching different reading comprehension strategies. For example, using illustrations, guessing, and synonyms for unknown words could strengthen students' reading comprehension (Amjadi & Talebi, 2021).

Furthermore, the analysis showed that identifying the main idea and making inferences could improve students' reading performance. This finding was also supported by N. J. Anderson and Cheng (2004).

Another possible factor within the reading strategies was the role of lexical knowledge. Vocabulary was identified as a challenge for EFL students. This finding was supported by Amini et al. (2018) and Thongwichit and Buripakdi (2021).

Ineffective use of reading comprehension strategies by teachers (Torgesen, 2002), the students' deficiency of linguistic knowledge, or motivational issues to comprehend English, in general, were other factors confirmed by the present study's findings.

Although previewing and pre-learning were not identified in the present study, other studies found that they produce mental representations before reading a text (Burns et al., 2004). Previewing also contributes to enhanced comprehension (Cates et al., 2006) as they activate prior knowledge. It could be because students tend to employ fewer cognitive strategies in reading comprehension (Cates et al., 2006).

Implications

Practically, curriculum developers and syllabus designers can utilize the findings of this study in developing more effective programs and course content for EFL learners. The neglected useful strategies need to be practiced more often by the students. The difference in the use of reorganization and inferential comprehension strategies by students and teachers could indicate their different perceptions about the advantages of the strategies or simply negligence. Additional materials to use reorganization and inferential comprehension strategies and monitoring the use of strategies by both students and teachers could enhance students' reading proficiency. The administrators are recommended to organize more training for teachers and students to improve their knowledge of reading comprehension skills and strategies.

Limitations and Recommendations

The present study has a few limitations that should be highlighted. One limitation was the small number of the participants (teachers and students) from only one institution, making the findings less generalizable despite the efforts to obtain a maximum possible size. Furthermore, future studies may consider exploring gender differences in teaching and learning reading strategies among ESL learners to understand the practicality of exploring this dimension of the efficacy of reading strategies. Also, as this study only investigated teaching and learning of reading strategies employing a mixed-method design, future researchers are encouraged to conduct an experimental design to gauge a more holistic overview of the effectiveness of teaching or learning multiple reading strategies in the ESL/EFL contexts. It will also explore the differences in reading strategies used in various contexts. Besides, this study de-emphasized the types of the reading materials. Therefore, the study did not draw any conclusion in determining the actual reading strategies employed by the teachers and students in other reading contexts. In terms of sampling the materials, other researchers could also focus on specific types of reading materials only, such as research articles and reference books for informative texts, to construct a more congruent outlook concerning reading strategies.

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