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Reading Comprehension and Test-Taking Strategies of Different Achievement Levels

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Abstract

The complexity of the reading process, which poses significant challenges for EFL and ESL learners, has encourages the search for effective strategies for reading comprehension. This qualitative phenomenological research aimed to explore students' strategies during reading activities and while taking reading comprehension tests. The study involved four fourth-semester students, differentiated by gender and achievement levels: a high-achieving female, a low-achieving female, a high-achieving male, and a low-achieving male. The research identified that students employed various strategies, with 11 metacognitive strategies being used out of a possible 23, including determining word meaning, making connections, inferring, and summarizing. Four of the five FIVES reading strategies were utilized, namely inference, vocabulary, summarization, and experience. High-achieving students employed more strategies, leading to better comprehension and higher test scores. Strategies such as careful time management, revisiting difficult questions, and employing process-of-elimination techniques were noted for test-taking. The effectiveness of reading and test-taking strategies and factors like topic familiarity and the ability to make inferences were crucial in determining reading success. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions that focus on teaching effective strategies, enhancing topic familiarity, and supporting students in developing robust test-taking strategies, particularly for low-achieving students.
Keywords: reading comprehension; reading strategy; test-taking strategy

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Introduction

Making meaning by interacting with the text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the views of readers related to the text is not an easy process to do in reading comprehension. Therefore, some believe that reading is the most challenging language skill compared to others. According to Abbas (2021), reading comprehension is a purposeful, dynamic, and interactive process that happens before, during, and after someone reads a text. He also added that the reading process is not fully accomplished without comprehension, as it is a key component of reading. Having to know this idea, reading can be seen as a complex process which becomes a major problem for both EFL and ESL learners.

Problems often encountered by students are disabilities in recognizing and appropriately applying background knowledge, poor decoding and word recognition skills, limited vocabulary knowledge, underdeveloped reading fluency, lack of strategic approach to comprehension, and limited understanding of common text structures. On the other hand, insufficient schemata is a serious problem in reading text for native, EFL, or ESL. A lack of sufficient schemata will make students unable to associate the language of the text with their experience and knowledge outside the text. Categories of reading strategies include metacognitive, cognitive, and supportive techniques (Muslimah, 2022).

There are two kinds of readers, i.e., good and poor. Good or effective readers are more aware of strategy use than less effective readers. Strategic readers actively construct meaning as they read and interact with the text. They set a purpose for reading, select methods to realize these purposes, monitor and repair their comprehension as they read, and evaluate the complete task. On the other hand, poor readers tend to initiate reading without thinking about the process of reading or the subject matter, omit or pay less attention to the meanings of unfamiliar but crucial words, and do not incorporate prior knowledge in attempting to understand the text they are reading.

As prospective teachers, the college students in the English Language Education (ELE) study program should have good reading skills to enable them to teach this skill to their students. Unfortunately, reading becomes a big problem for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. Zahra (2019) argued that many students of EFL/ESL have 'major

difficulties' with English reading comprehension even after years of learning the English language. Many EFL Arab learners, for example, can read a text but struggle to comprehend its content (Assiri & Alodhahi, 2018). Their study found that EFL learners encounter several challenges in the reading process, including ambiguous words, unfamiliar vocabulary, and limited time to process the text cognitively. Similarly, Kasim and Raisha (2017) identified unfamiliar vocabulary as the most significant reading comprehension problem, affecting 81% of the participants in their study. The difficulties were evidenced by the results of students' final tests, which showed that few students achieved maximum scores while most achieved low scores.

Despite the extensive research on reading difficulties, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the specific strategies students employ during reading activities and comprehension tests in the context of EFL learners. Existing studies often overlook the nuanced application of reading strategies and their impact on performance across different achievement levels. This research aims to fill this gap by examining the strategies used by students at varying achievement levels and exploring their effectiveness in improving reading comprehension and test-taking skills. By identifying these strategies, the study seeks to provide valuable insights for enhancing reading instruction and improving student outcomes in EFL contexts. Based on this, the study aims to answer two research questions: What are students' strategies during reading activities and their strategies in taking reading comprehension tests?

Literature Review

The Concept of Reading Comprehension

The point of reading is to understand, to get the information, and to be able to create meaning from a reading text. According to Maryansyah and Ramadhani (2021), reading comprehension is the ability to grasp and interpret the content of the texts we read. When reading a text, a reader has to understand the content, information, and explanation or facts intended to be delivered by the author. In other words, the reading process can be complex since readers may have to involve the quality of his/her thoughts to understand the text. Therefore, to be able to understand, to get the information, and to be able to create meaning from a text, the reader should choose a good strategy and know how to use it.

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To comprehend a reading text, the reader needs to apply a comprehension strategy appropriate to the text they read (Higgs et al., 2023). These strategies include paraphrasing, elaborating, confirming, and validating the results of the understanding. The use of these strategies has a significant effect on the reader's success in comprehending the content of the text (Coiro, 2021). Additionally, reading strategies are often metacognitive, meaning that selecting the right strategy can optimize comprehension while using an inappropriate strategy can hinder understanding.

Activities in Reading

Reading is a three-step pre-reading while reading and post-reading practice. Reading strategies are conscious and flexible plans that readers apply and adapt to various texts. Reading strategies indicate how readers understand a task, what textual clues they attend to, how they understand what is read, and what to do when they do not understand the reading texts.

In pre-reading, the readers need to apply specific strategies, including scanning and guessing, to survey the type of text they will read and recognize its difficulties. They then read the title, link it to their schemata, and predict the content. Lailiyah et al. (2019) found in their research that the difference in reading comprehension performance between the two groups suggested a strong likelihood that students who received pre-reading strategies before reading the text were more successful in comprehension than those who did not receive any pre-reading strategies.

Some examples of while-reading strategies are guessing word meanings by using context clues, word formation clues, or cognates, scanning and skimming for specific pieces of information, predicting text content, identifying topic sentences that contain the main idea of the paragraph, recognizing connecting ideas via connectors and making conclusions and drawing inferences On the other hand, post-reading strategies help students deepen their understanding of the content, build further connections, and expand their prior knowledge of the subject matter. Some examples of post-reading strategies include rereading, evaluating text purpose, confirming predictions, summarizing, reflecting, questioning, and connecting materials to one's life.

FIVES Reading Strategies

The FIVES Strategy for reading comprehension emphasizes five key components: facts, inferences, vocabulary, experiences, and summary (Shea & Roberts, 2016). First, "F" stands for facts, as readers must acquire and accurately recall facts to engage in deeper understanding. "I" stands for inferences, where readers combine text content with their background knowledge and experiences to read between the lines. "V" stands for vocabulary, highlighting the importance of understanding precise words and terminology within the text's context, as limited vocabularies hinder comprehension, particularly of informational texts. "E" stands for experiences, where readers make connections and elaborate based on their background knowledge and life experiences, negotiating meaning between the author and audience. Finally, "S" stands for summary, where readers demonstrate their comprehension by discerning main ideas and significant details, rephrasing information, constructing coherent summaries, and engaging in metacognitive behavior to self-monitor their understanding throughout the reading process.

Metacognitive Reading Strategies

Metacognitive strategies facilitate readers to construct meaning, monitor their understanding, and evaluate the text they read. According to Bouknify (2023), a metacognitive strategy oversees, controls, and guides a learner's learning process. Similarly, Afdaleni (2014) argued that metacognitive learning supports learners in regulating their learning by planning, self-regulation, and self-evaluation.

Given this understanding, it is fair to say that metacognitive strategies benefit reading comprehension. These strategies actively engage the reader in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their understanding of the text. For instance, before reading, a student might set goals and predict what the text will be about (planning). While reading, they might pause to summarize sections or ask themselves questions to ensure they understand (monitoring). After reading, they might reflect on the main ideas, clarify any confusion, and evaluate their understanding of the material (evaluating). A research by Muhid, et al. (2020), found that the more students applied metacognitive strategies, the greater their chances of enhancing their reading skills and improving their reading scores. This is because these strategies allowed them

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to effectively plan and select the most suitable reading techniques, perform self-assessments, and evaluate their progress, leading to optimal reading comprehension. As a result, students who utilized metacognitive strategies were able to read both efficiently and effectively.

Planning strategies are metacognitive strategies that the reader employs early in the reading process to enhance comprehension. These strategies include thinking about the text's topic, considering how text features can aid understanding, reading the title, author, and table of contents, studying illustrations, photos, and graphics with their labels and captions, skimming for bold-faced words, headings, subheadings, and summaries, and reflecting on prior knowledge, potential connections, and questions to be answered. Additionally, readers should consider how the text might be organized, recognizing structures such as cause and effect, compare and contrast, sequence of events, problem and solution, description, and combinations of these structures. Monitoring strategies, which occur during reading, help readers maintain meaning construction and address comprehension breakdowns by determining word meaning, questioning, reflecting, monitoring, summarizing, and identifying important information. According to Rafika and Bakar (2020), the self-monitoring approach to reading and thinking is founded on the concept that successful reading starts with the ability to identify what is clear and what is unclear in a given text.

Evaluating strategies come into play after reading, allowing students to reflect on their strategies and determine their effectiveness. According to Albazi and Shukri (2016), evaluating, as the final phase of metacognition in reading, involves assessing the overall effectiveness and quality of comprehension. These strategies involve thinking like the author, evaluating the text, anticipating the use of knowledge, monitoring for meaning, recognizing what is known and unknown, creating and using schema to make connections and build background knowledge, asking questions before, during, and after reading, determining importance, inferring by combining background knowledge with text information, using sensory and emotional images to deepen meaning, and synthesizing to create an evolved understanding by integrating knowledge from multiple sources.

Test-Taking Strategies

Test-taking strategies provide tips on correctly answering the test within the allotted time (Rafi & Fatikhul, 2017). It is important to distinguish between test-taking strategies and reading strategies, as these two categories of strategies show some overlap and can easily be confused in the context of reading assessment. First, test-taking strategies are not specific to any language skill, although it is true that each language skill has some specific test-taking strategies. Second, while-reading strategies are generally used when readers engage in a reading activity and thus are related to text comprehension. Test-taking strategies are often considered compensatory because test-takers typically use them to offset deficiencies, either in the language skills required to complete the test tasks, in the test-taking abilities themselves, or both (Assiri & Alodhahi, 2018).

Several test-taking strategies exist for the reading section of the TOEFL test (Nurhayati & Nehe, 2016). The first strategy involves looking ahead at the questions to determine what questions need to be answered, with each type requiring a different approach. The second strategy focuses on locating the passage's relevant section corresponding to each question. The type of question typically indicates where to look in the passage for the correct answers. For instance, to answer main idea questions, you should examine the first line of each paragraph. For detailed questions, whether directly or indirectly answered, identify a keyword in the question and skim the passage for that keyword or a related concept. The third strategy involves skimming the passage to grasp the main idea and overall organization. It is important to recognize that understanding every word and detail in the passage is unnecessary and can be time-consuming. For vocabulary questions, the word's location in the passage is usually specified in the question. For overall review questions, answers may be found anywhere within the passage. The fourth strategy is to carefully read the part of the passage that likely contains the answer, often found in the same sentence or immediately before or after the keyword or idea.

According to Salehi and Abbaszadeh (2017), strategies not only provide the students with chances to engage with a text, interact with different aspects of the text, and participate in activities at a higher level but also help the students process the text more rapidly. Here are the

previous studies about reading strategies during reading activities and strategies in taking reading comprehension tests.

Research by Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), found that reading strategies significantly enhance students' reading comprehension abilities. Successful readers employ various strategies to extract meaning from texts and actively monitor their comprehension throughout the reading process. This study underscores the importance of using multiple strategies to aid comprehension.

Similarly, research by Assiri and Alodhahi (2018), highlighted that test-taking strategies often precede the actual comprehension process during exams. Their findings suggest that test-takers frequently focus more on answering specific questions than understanding the text. This reliance on strategies indicates that comprehension often becomes secondary to test-taking mechanics, particularly in standardized tests. As a result, much of the comprehension test-takers achieve during standardized reading tests comes from their responses to specific test questions rather than a thorough understanding of the text itself.

Method

This research employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological research design. This research employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological research design. Qualitative research is a method used to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups assign to social or human issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It effectively delves into complex phenomena that cannot be easily quantified, offering rich, detailed insights into people's experiences, behaviors, and interactions. Phenomenological research, a specific type of qualitative research, seeks to understand and describe the essence of lived experiences regarding a particular phenomenon. According to Neubauer et al. (2019), this approach can enhance our comprehension of the intricate phenomena related to learning, behavior, and communication that are relevant to our field. The focus is on capturing the subjective experiences of individuals to gain a deeper understanding of how they perceive and make sense of their world. This study aimed to investigate students' strategies during reading activities and test-taking strategies in reading comprehension tests, as demonstrated in the

reading comprehension performance of fourth-semester English department students in a university in Mandalika, Indonesia.

Participants

The study subjects were four students, two from Class A and two from Class B. The students were categorized by gender (male and female) and achievement (high and low). The researcher selected the subjects using the following steps: among the four classes (A, B, C, and D), only Classes A and B were chosen because of their diverse score distribution. Four of 73 students in these classes were selected—two women and two men—based on their scores, listed from highest to lowest. Microsoft Excel was used to calculate the final test scores, and the chosen subjects were then categorized into high and low-achievement groups. Data of the study were interview notes and comments made by the researcher and transcription of two interview sessions. The data source was the selected students, as mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter.

Instrument

The instrument used in this research was the form of an interview sheet. Interviews used in this research were unstructured interviews with a model of open-ended questions. The unstructured interview was an open situation having greater flexibility and freedom (Cohen et al., 2018). Open-ended questions are flexible, allow the interviewer to probe so that the researcher may go into more depth or to clear up any misunderstandings, enable the interviewer to test the limits of the respondent's knowledge, encourage cooperation and help to establish rapport, and allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent believes.

The research utilized two interview sheets to confirm students' strategies during reading activities and explore their strategies for taking reading comprehension tests. The interview session aimed to answer the second research question concerning test-taking strategies in reading comprehension tests, requiring the interviewer to gather information on strategies for each test item. An unstructured interview with open-ended questions was employed to allow

questions to depend on each item in the question sheet and elicit various responses from the subjects.

The research utilized two interview sheets to confirm students' strategies during reading activities and explore their strategies for taking reading comprehension tests. This interview session aimed to answer the second research question regarding test-taking strategies in reading comprehension tests by gathering information on the strategies used for each test item. An unstructured interview with open-ended questions was employed to allow questions to be tailored to each item on the question sheet and to elicit various responses from the subjects.

Data Analysis

The research data was analyzed using the three steps proposed by Miles et al. (2014), such as data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming data from field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials to strengthen the data. The process in this study included transcribing data from interview sheets and voice recordings, selecting the most relevant data, focusing on information related to the two research questions, categorizing data by reading and test-taking strategies, further dividing it by achievement (high and low) and gender (male and female), labeling each category (e.g., F1 for a high-scoring female), and simplifying data by organizing it based on patterns identified in the literature.

The second step, data display, involves organizing and compressing information into an easily understandable format for conclusion drawing and action. The display can be in various forms, such as matrices, charts, and graphs. In this study, the researcher discussed the data in detail and displayed it in a matrix to facilitate a better understanding of the findings.

The final step, drawing and verifying conclusions, involves interpreting the data and explaining the findings. This step includes making conclusions based on the obtained data and briefly explaining how subjects engaged in reading activities and performed on reading comprehension tests, as derived from the interview results.

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Findings

The researcher obtained student reading strategies data through two online interview sessions with four research subjects. The interviews were conducted after each subject finished reading the texts provided by the researcher. All subjects answered ten questions across three categories: prior reading activity, while reading activity (vocabulary/word meaning, main idea, and sentence meaning), and after reading activity (background knowledge and conclusion).

In addressing the first research question related to reading strategies, the researcher identified and analyzed the strategies used by students, focusing on both FIVES metacognitive reading strategies. Eleven strategies were identified out of the 23 possible metacognitive reading strategies, including determining word meaning, making connections, inferring, combining background knowledge, looking for important information, monitoring for meaning, summarizing, determining importance, questioning, reflecting, and reading the title. Four out of the five strategies were used for the FIVES reading strategy: inference, vocabulary, summarization, and experience.

Students' Strategies during Reading Activities

FIVES Reading Strategy

This table presents the distribution of reading strategies among four subjects: F1, F2, M1, and M2. The strategies include Facts, Inferences, Vocabulary, Summary, and Experience, with a checkmark indicating the presence of each strategy for each subject. The total count of strategies used by each subject is also provided.

Table 1. FIVES Reading Strategy

Strategy	F1	F2	M1	M2
Fact	-	-	-	-
Inferences	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vocabulary	✓	-	✓	✓
Experience	✓	-	-	✓
Summary	✓	-	✓	-
Total	4	1	3	3

Among the five reading strategies in the FIVES, F1 used four strategies, i.e., inferences, vocabulary, experience, and summary. Indication of the inferences strategy was evident when F1 said, "I returned to the title and previous sentence to make a connection," in response to a question about handling difficult parts of the text. The vocabulary strategy was indicated when F1 stated, "I did not need to translate it if it was only a few as long as I could understand the next sentence," addressing how she dealt with unfamiliar words or phrases. For the experience strategy, F1 remarked, "If I had read about it in advance and what I was reading was similar, I would understand more since I assumed it would talk about the same topic," showing how she connected her background knowledge to the text. Lastly, the summary strategy was highlighted when F1 noted, "I only took the main point," describing how she concluded the text's main idea.

F2 applied only one strategy of the FIVES. The strategy that she preferred was inference. It was indicated in her responses to the question about how she understands difficult words or phrases in the text. She said, "I guess it is based on the context."

In the interview session, M1 declared that he applied three FIVES strategies: inferences, vocabulary, and experience. For inferences, he stated, "I made a connection based on the previous sentence," in response to handling difficult parts of the text. M1 said, "Especially in the paragraph, I know most of the vocabulary," indicating that he knew the meaning of most words or phrases in the text. For experiences, M1 remarked, "It is a kind of reflection," describing how he connected his background knowledge with the text he read.

The interview revealed that M2 employed three FIVES reading strategies: inferences, vocabulary, and summary. For inferences, M2 explained, "I tried to remember what the text was about by questioning myself and answering it myself," indicating his approach to understanding the main idea of each paragraph. Regarding vocabulary, M2 stated, "I usually skipped it," describing his strategy when encountering unfamiliar words or phrases. Finally, for summary, M2 mentioned, "I took it from the main idea," revealing his method of concluding the entire text based on its main idea.

Metacognitive Reading Strategy

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Table 2 illustrates the application of Metacognitive Reading Strategies among four students: F1, F2, M1, and M2. The strategies are categorized based on Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluating activities, with checkmarks indicating the presence of each strategy for each student. Additionally, the number of strategies employed in each activity is provided.

Table 2. Metacognitive Reading Strategy

Student	Metacognitive Reading Strategy					
	Planning Activity	Number of strategy	Monitoring Activity	Number of strategy	Evaluating Activity	Number of strategy
F1	✓	1 out of 7	✓	2 out of 6	✓	3 out of 10
F2	-	-	✓	1 out of 6	✓	1 out of 10
M1	✓	New Strategy	✓	1 out of 6	✓	2 out of 10
M2	✓	New Strategy	✓	1 out of 6	✓	1 out of 10

In the planning phase, F1 showed a selective approach, focusing solely on reading the title before delving into the text, highlighting the significance of this initial step in her reading process. Transitioning to monitoring strategies, she engaged more extensively, employing questioning and reflecting on deciphering main ideas and comprehending specific sentence structures within the text. Her active monitoring process involved self-directed questioning and revisiting previously read portions for contextual connections. In the evaluation phase, F1 demonstrated a broad engagement, utilizing strategies such as determining importance, monitoring for meaning, and combining background knowledge. Additionally, a novel strategy emerged where she emphasized understanding familiar words and phrases while conducting multiple readings to gain an overview of the text, enriching her metacognitive repertoire with a nuanced approach tailored to her comprehension needs.

In the planning phase, F2's responses revealed a lack of engagement with typical planning strategies, relying instead on familiar content by reading vocabulary or known parts of the text. Transitioning to monitoring strategies, F2 demonstrated limited engagement, utilizing

only the "summary" strategy to conclude the reading text by summarizing recurring themes across paragraphs. In the evaluation phase, F2 displayed minimal engagement, employing only the "monitoring for meaning" strategy by guessing unfamiliar words based on context and drawing conclusions from existing knowledge. Overall, F2's interview revealed a pattern of selective strategy use, with a preference for familiar content and an inclination towards intuitive approaches to text comprehension.

In the planning phase, M1 did not overtly engage in typical planning activities but mentioned new strategies such as preparing supporting tools like pen and paper and adopting a repetitive reading approach. Transitioning to monitoring strategies, M1 utilized the "looking for important information" strategy to seek the main idea of the first paragraph, emphasizing identifying the central theme. In the evaluation phase, M1 made connections and connected background knowledge. Additionally, the researcher noted an additional strategy employed by M1 during the after-reading activity, involving writing down unknown vocabulary for translation, enhancing comprehension, and language acquisition.

In the planning phase, M2 did not employ typical planning strategies but mentioned novel approaches such as starting reading by praying and seeking to understand the purpose of the text. Transitioning to monitoring strategies, M2 utilized the "determining word meaning" strategy to understand difficult words or phrases by focusing on familiar vocabulary and translating based on context. In the evaluation phase, M2 employed the "determining what matters most in the passage" strategy, recalling the text's content and self-questioning to arrive at conclusions independently. Overall, M2's approach to metacognitive reading strategies showcased a blend of traditional and innovative techniques tailored to his comprehension needs.

Students' Strategy during Taking Reading Comprehension Test

This table illustrates the strategies students F1, F2, M1, and M2 employ in responding to various questions during reading comprehension tasks. Each student's strategy is listed alongside the types of questions they addressed using that strategy.

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Table 3. Test-Taking Strategy

Student	Strategy	Types of question
F1	Guessing	Main idea question, Transition question, and implied detail question
	Translating	Vocabulary question
	Making correlation	Iplied detail question, Stated detail question, and transition question
F2	Similarity	Main idea question, Vocabulary question, Iplied detail question, Stated detail question, Transition question, Overall review question, Unstated detail question, and Implied detail question
M1	Reviewing the whole text and going ahead to the question	Main idea question
	Translating	Vocabulary question
	Finding connected word	Iplied detail question
	Determining whole ideas	Stated detail question
	Selecting what matters most	Transition question
	Making connection	Transition question
	Find similar word	Vocabulary question
	Guessing	Overall review question, Unstated detail question, Implied detail question
	Reviewing the whole text and going ahead to the question	Main idea question
M2	Finding correlation	Main idea question, Iplied detail question, & Stated detail question
	Translating	Vocabulary question
	Determining the main idea	Transition question
	Guessing	Transition question, Vocabulary question, Overall review question, Unstated detail question, and Implied detail question

In this section of the study, the researcher examines the strategies used by four participants in tackling a reading comprehension test. Across the board, the participants employed thirteen strategies, ranging from guessing to making connections and determining relevancy. The test consisted of multiple-choice questions based on two texts, each containing five questions. Consequently, each participant had to answer ten questions, prompting diverse strategic approaches.

F1, during the reading comprehension test, effectively utilized seven different strategies, resulting in eight correct answers out of ten questions. Strategies such as reducing, guessing,

and translating were used throughout the test. F1 employed reducing and guessing to discern the main idea while translating aided in decoding vocabulary. Determining the main ideas facilitated an overall review of the second passage, contributing to F1's success in comprehending and responding to the test questions.

In contrast, F2 employed only two strategies, resulting in a single correct answer out of ten questions. Despite this limited success, F2's strategies of finding word or sentence similarity and recognizing keywords were applied across various question types, ranging from main idea to unstated detail.

M1 employed eight distinct strategies during the test, yielding four correct answers. Strategies like reviewing the entire text and preemptively addressing questions were coupled with translating and identifying connected words. These approaches addressed inquiries about transitions and vocabulary, contributing to M1's partial success in navigating the comprehension questions.

Similarly, M2 employed five distinct strategies, achieving three correct answers. The strategies ranged from finding correlations to employing guesswork, enabling M2 to address inquiries related to main ideas and vocabulary. Despite facing challenges, M2's strategic approach contributed to their partial success in navigating the comprehension questions.

Discussions

The study reveals distinct reading and test-taking strategies among high and low-achieving students, with notable gender differences. High-achieving female students (F1) demonstrated a broad application of metacognitive and FIVES strategies, employing four out of five FIVES strategies and various metacognitive techniques such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating. In contrast, high-achieving male students (M1) used a more limited range of strategies but were still effective in their application. Low-achieving students exhibited a narrower range of strategies, with significant gender-based differences. Low-achieving females (F2) utilized fewer strategies and had lower test performance than their male counterparts (M2), who, despite using more strategies, still faced challenges with effectiveness.

These findings align with existing research on reading and test-taking strategies. Nurhayati and Nehe (2016), emphasized the importance of selecting strategies based on

question types and text skimming. This argument corresponds with our results, where high achievers applied effective strategies such as skimming and keyword identification. Salehi and Abbaszadeh (2017) and Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), highlight the role of diverse strategies in enhancing comprehension, reflected in the higher performance of students who used a variety of strategies. Conversely, Assiri and Alodhahi (2018), noted that test-taking strategies can sometimes overshadow deeper text understanding. This statement resonates with our findings that high-achieving students effectively used strategies, occasionally at the expense of deeper comprehension.

The results emphasize the importance of matching strategy use with specific question types to improve reading comprehension and test performance. High-achieving students demonstrated the ability to employ various strategies tailored to different question types, indicating a deeper engagement with the text and an adaptive approach to test-taking. The limited success of low-achieving students suggests that a broader application of strategies, particularly those focused on comprehension and test-taking, could enhance their performance.

Additionally, the study identified new reading strategies among participants, highlighting varied approaches during pre-reading, reading, and post-reading phases. Both high-achieving and low-achieving females used an inductive approach during pre-reading. In contrast, the high-achieving male employed tools like pen and paper, and the low-achieving male started with prayer. These findings underscore the individualized nature of reading strategies.

Further research is necessary to confirm these patterns and evaluate their effectiveness. For instance, while high-achieving and low-achieving females used similar pre-reading strategies, understanding the reasons behind this similarity warrants further exploration. Moreover, investigating the high-achieving male's emphasis on note-taking and vocabulary building could provide insights into its impact on comprehension and test performance. Gaining a deeper understanding of these strategies may lead to more effective reading instruction and targeted support for students of varying achievement levels.

The study's limitations include a small sample size and reliance on self-reported interview data, which may not fully capture students' strategies in diverse contexts. Future research should involve larger sample sizes and observational methods to understand strategy

use comprehensively. Additionally, exploring the impact of specific strategies on reading comprehension and test performance could provide deeper insights into their effectiveness, while investigating the reasons behind achievement gaps and individual differences in strategy use would be valuable for developing targeted instructional interventions.

Conclusion and Implications

This research analyzed students' strategies in reading activities and their performance in answering reading comprehension tests. The findings indicate that students generally employed a limited variety of reading strategies. Despite 23 Meta cognitive strategies available, only eleven were utilized by the subjects, suggesting a lack of exposure or understanding of these strategies. Similarly, among the five FIVES strategies, four were commonly used by all students, with the absence of the "fact" strategy indicating potential gaps in background knowledge. There was also a noticeable disparity between male and female students in strategy application, where female students employed more strategies than male students.

Additionally, the study identified several new strategies not included in the Metacognitive reading strategy list, such as inductive processing and starting reading with prayer. Students employed various strategies during the reading comprehension test, with uneven utilization observed among individuals. The researcher concludes that factors beyond the mere quantity or type of strategies employed, such as strategy relevance, predictive ability, and topic familiarity, influence students' achievement in reading comprehension tests.

Based on the conclusions drawn, recommendations are proposed for language educators, students, and future researchers. Language educators should ensure students are exposed to various reading strategies, including Metacognitive, FIVES, and others, through explicit instruction and opportunities for practice. Encouraging students to spend more time reading diverse resources can enrich their background knowledge and improve comprehension. Furthermore, educators should promote the development of individualized reading strategies tailored to each student's needs. Students should be trained in various test-taking strategies to enhance their performance in preparing for reading tests. Additionally, future research should explore the relevance of strategies, predictive ability, and topic familiarity further and

investigate gender differences in reading comprehension skills. Finally, researchers can explore newly identified strategies for their potential impact on reading comprehension.

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