IDEAS

Journal of Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Volume 11, Number 2, December 2023
pp. 1961 - 1978

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Issued by English study program of IAIN Palopo

Identifying Teaching Strategies in Reading Instruction at Vocation High School

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Received: 2023-12-20 Accepted: 2023-12-31
DOI: 10.24256/ideas. v11i2.12890

Abstract

Selecting appropriate teaching strategies for reading instruction is vital in vocational education, where students often struggle to comprehend foreign language texts. This study aims to identify the teaching strategies used by an English teacher in teaching reading to eleventh-grade Pharmacy students at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Palu. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered from one English teacher and 19 eleventh-grade Pharmacy students through an observation checklist, semi-structured teacher interview, student questionnaire, and classroom documentation. Findings indicate that the teacher deployed scanning, pre-reading examples, vocabulary explanations, classroom discussions, and guided exercises. However, implementation lacked consistency across sessions, strategy variation remained limited, and student independence was minimal, as all participants reported ongoing reading difficulties. The study concludes that while existing teacher strategies provide foundational learning support, enhanced strategic variety, differentiated instruction, and structured formative assessments are required to foster true learner autonomy.

Keywords: *Teaching strategies, reading instruction, vocational high school, reading comprehension, learner autonomy*

Introduction

English has become a major resource for accessing knowledge, technology, professional communication, and opportunities for further study and employment. In vocational education, the role of English is especially consequential because students are not learning the language only as a general academic subject. They are also expected to use English to interpret information that is connected, directly or indirectly, to their future occupations. Reading is therefore an important component of vocational English because students may encounter manuals, labels,

procedures, safety information, instructions, digital resources, and other workplace texts. Grabe and Stoller (2020) emphasize that reading in a second or foreign language requires readers to coordinate linguistic processing with higher-level comprehension processes. For vocational learners, this coordination becomes more demanding when texts contain specialized terminology, dense information, unfamiliar genres, and concepts that are not part of students' everyday experiences.

Reading comprehension should consequently be understood as an active meaning-making process rather than simple word recognition or translation. Readers need to identify information, connect ideas, infer meanings, recognize text organization, evaluate information, and monitor their own understanding. Research on EFL reading has repeatedly shown that students' strategy use is associated with the way they approach difficult texts. Freaha (2020), for example, found that EFL learners used cognitive procedures such as relating titles and illustrations to topics, scanning for specific information, recognizing words, discussing texts, and summarizing. Amini et al. (2020) likewise explain that reading instruction needs to make reader-oriented strategies visible because learners and teachers may otherwise concentrate mainly on the text itself rather than on the processes through which meaning is constructed.

The instructional role of the teacher is therefore central. Teachers select texts, determine the purposes of reading, model strategies, explain difficult language, ask questions, organize interaction, provide feedback, and decide when support should be withdrawn. Brown and Lee (2015) and Harmer (2015) both emphasize the importance of responsive pedagogy in which classroom techniques are connected to learners' needs, purposes, and participation. In reading instruction, this means that no single technique should be assumed to work equally well for every learner or every text. Scanning can be useful when students need to locate specific information, but it should be integrated with other processes when the learning objective is global comprehension, inference, evaluation, or independent interpretation.

The importance of strategic variety is supported by research conducted in Indonesian and international EFL contexts. Nurdianingsih (2021) reported that teachers may combine understanding-text activities, individual and group learning, and Question-Answer Relationships (QAR) to help students cope with reading difficulties. Adawiah and Manurung (2021), in an ELTS study, identified several strategies used in reading comprehension instruction, including QAR, scaffolding, discussion, questioning, dictionary use, brainstorming, and comprehension evaluation. Their review indicated that QAR was among the most frequently reported strategies. Similarly, Azis et al. (2022), also in e-Journal of ELTS, found that teachers at SMP Labschool Palu employed several reading strategies and selected them for classroom purposes.

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

These studies are particularly relevant to the present research because they demonstrate that reading strategy instruction has already been examined in the Palu context, but they do not specifically address the instructional practices of an eleventh-grade Pharmacy class in a vocational school.

Vocational learners face additional demands because general reading competence must be connected with occupational literacy. Research on vocational students indicates that limited vocabulary can become a substantial barrier to comprehension. Rullu and Bikas (2021) found a relationship between vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension among students at SMK Negeri 2 Luwuk. Manihuruk (2020) similarly examined the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension among Indonesian EFL learners. These findings help explain why teachers often prioritize vocabulary explanation.

However, vocabulary support should not become synonymous with translating every unfamiliar word. If students are consistently provided with meanings before they attempt to infer, analyze, or confirm meaning themselves, they may receive immediate assistance without developing the strategic independence needed for unfamiliar texts.

This issue is closely related to learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness. Effective readers do not simply apply strategies mechanically; they select strategies according to the purpose of reading, monitor whether a strategy is working, and change their approach when comprehension breaks down. Yulita (2019) found that less proficient EFL learners reported relatively high use of support and problem-solving strategies but comparatively weaker use of global strategies, suggesting a need for stronger instruction in global analysis. Maryam et al. (2019) also reported a significant relationship between metacognitive strategy awareness and reading comprehension among EFL university students. Teng (2020) demonstrated that explicit metacognitive reading-strategy awareness instruction could help young English learners become more conscious of reading processes. These findings suggest that classroom support should gradually move from teacher-controlled assistance toward strategic decision-making by students.

Another important consideration is the use of visual and interactive tools. Graphic organizers can help learners represent relationships among ideas instead of processing a passage as a sequence of isolated sentences. Qi and Jiang (2021) found that graphic organizers can support EFL learners' construction and display of text structure, while Andoko et al. (2020) demonstrated the potential of concept-map-based tools for supporting EFL reading. Such approaches are relevant to a classroom in which students have difficulty identifying main ideas and organizing information independently. Rather than immediately giving the main idea, teachers can guide students to record headings, key words, supporting details, and relationships among concepts.

Reciprocal and dialogic forms of reading instruction provide another route toward greater independence. Tolongtong and Adunyarittigun (2020) found positive effects of Reciprocal Teaching on Thai EFL high school students' responses

to different levels of reading questions. The procedure is particularly relevant because it distributes cognitive work among learners through processes such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing. In a vocational context, these processes can be adapted to technical texts so that students learn not only to find information but also to explain why information is important and how different pieces of information relate to one another.

Recent vocational research also points toward the importance of authentic and purpose-driven reading. Rohmawati et al. (2022) reported that vocational students' limited vocabulary affected reading comprehension and that teachers used pre-reading support such as contextual redefinition and word lists. Duong and Truong (2022) found that task-based language teaching can be used to support ESP reading comprehension in vocational education, including lexical understanding and identifying main and detailed ideas. Hadi and Ramadhani (2024) investigated Reading to Learn in a vocational high school and found that implementation quality matters: the existence of a named strategy alone does not guarantee effective classroom practice. These studies reinforce the need to examine what teachers actually do in real classrooms rather than assuming that a strategy is implemented simply because it appears in lesson plans.

Within the Indonesian vocational context, studies have also highlighted the role of reading habits, vocabulary, and classroom strategy use. Rahayuningsih (2020) reported significant effects of reading habit and vocabulary mastery on reading comprehension among Indonesian senior high school students. Kusumayanthi and Silalahi (2022) showed that KWL could be systematically implemented in a vocational high school, while also identifying students' limited background knowledge and vocabulary as implementation challenges. Apoko et al. (2023) examined EFL teachers' strategies in vocational schools and further supports the relevance of strategy selection to vocational reading instruction. Together, these studies show that reading difficulty is multidimensional: it involves linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, strategic awareness, motivation, task design, and the nature of classroom support.

Previous studies have demonstrated that effective reading instruction requires teachers to employ a combination of strategies rather than relying on a single instructional technique. Dwiningtiyas et al. (2020), for example, found that teachers employed several strategies in reading comprehension instruction, including asking students to identify specific information, reading aloud, using dictionaries, rereading texts to check comprehension, evaluating comprehension, and asking questions. Their findings suggest that the combination of appropriate strategies can provide learners with multiple ways to process and understand reading texts. This finding is relevant to the present study because the teacher at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Palu also employs more than one strategy, particularly scanning, vocabulary explanation, classroom discussion, and guided exercises.

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Despite this growing body of research, a gap remains. Much of the existing literature reports particular strategies or tests the effect of a specific intervention, while fewer studies examine the relationship among the strategies a teacher actually uses, the consistency of their implementation, and students' perceptions of their own independence within a specific vocational specialization. The Pharmacy class at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Palu provides a meaningful setting for such an investigation because students are expected eventually to engage with health-related terminology and information, yet their English reading instruction may still be dominated by general texts and teacher-mediated explanation. The present study therefore focuses on identifying the teacher's reading strategies, examining how those strategies are implemented, and interpreting the relationship between teacher support and student independence.

The originality of this study lies in its combination of classroom observation, teacher interview, student questionnaire, and documentary evidence within one vocational Pharmacy classroom. Rather than evaluating a single intervention, the study examines the existing instructional ecology: which strategies are visible, which are absent, how students perceive them, and what these patterns imply for learner autonomy. The study addresses the following questions: (1) What teaching strategies are used by the English teacher in reading instruction at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Palu? (2) How are the strategies implemented during classroom reading activities? (3) How do students perceive the strategies and their own reading ability? and (4) What instructional implications can be drawn for developing more independent reading among vocational learners?

The study is significant for three reasons. First, it provides a classroom-based description that can help teachers reflect on the balance between support and independence. Second, it contributes to the discussion of reading instruction in Indonesian vocational education, particularly in a Pharmacy specialization where occupational language may eventually become important. Third, it offers practical implications for teacher educators and future researchers who wish to move from general reading activities toward more strategic, differentiated, and authentic forms of vocational literacy instruction.

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. The design was selected because the research sought to describe instructional practices as they occurred in the natural classroom setting and to interpret participants' perspectives rather than to test an experimental treatment. Creswell and Poth (2018) note that qualitative inquiry is appropriate when researchers seek to understand processes, experiences, and meanings in context. In the present study, the focus was not on determining whether one strategy was statistically superior to another, but on identifying the strategies used by the teacher, examining their implementation, and understanding how students experienced the reading lessons.

The study was conducted at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Palu, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. The participants consisted of one English teacher and 19 students enrolled in the eleventh-grade Pharmacy class (XI Farmasi). The class was selected purposively because the students were in a vocational specialization in which English reading may eventually support access to health-related information, terminology, procedures, and workplace documentation. The teacher was the English instructor responsible for the class. Participation in the data collection was limited to the individuals and classroom activities relevant to the research purpose.

Four sources of data were used to strengthen the description of the instructional process: classroom observation, a semi-structured teacher interview, a student questionnaire, and documentation. The use of multiple sources was intended to reduce dependence on a single perspective. Observation captured what occurred in lessons; the interview provided the teacher's explanations and pedagogical reasoning; the questionnaire captured student perceptions; and documents provided contextual evidence about instructional materials and classroom tasks.

The observation checklist contained indicators related to reading strategy use, presentation methods, instructional aids, student engagement, strategy adjustment, classroom interaction, clarity of instructions, comprehension support, strategy variation, and assessment. The checklist allowed the researchers to record whether an instructional feature was observed and to add field notes describing the relevant classroom behavior. Particular attention was given to reading strategies such as scanning, skimming, predicting, vocabulary support, questioning, discussion, and guided comprehension activities.

A semi-structured interview was conducted with the English teacher to explore the rationale behind instructional choices, the perceived reading difficulties of the students, the teacher's approach to vocabulary and comprehension support, and the challenges of working with different levels of student ability. The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to maintain a common set of topics while giving the teacher opportunities to explain classroom practices in detail.

A questionnaire was administered to all 19 students. It contained closed- and open-ended items concerning learning objectives, explanations of reading materials, pre-reading examples, use of more than one reading strategy, vocabulary and technical-term support, classroom discussion, opportunities to ask questions, difficulty understanding English texts, and students' ability to understand texts without teacher assistance. The responses were summarized using percentage distributions. The percentage was calculated as $P = (n/N) \times 100$, where n represented the number of students selecting a response and N represented the total number of respondents, namely 19.

Documentary evidence consisted of available lesson plans or teaching modules, printed reading materials, student worksheets, and photographic evidence of classroom interactions. These documents were used to complement

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

the observation and interview data rather than to replace direct classroom evidence. The combination of data sources was intended to provide a fuller account of instructional practice.

Data analysis followed an interactive process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, consistent with the qualitative analytic approach described by Miles et al. (2019). First, observation notes, interview information, questionnaire patterns, and documents were organized according to the research questions. Second, recurring instructional patterns were displayed and compared across data sources. Third, conclusions were drawn by identifying convergence and divergence among the sources. The questionnaire percentages were used descriptively to support interpretation, not as inferential statistics.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across observation, interview, questionnaire, and documentation. A strategy was treated as more firmly established when it appeared across more than one source or when an observed behavior was supported by student responses. At the same time, discrepancies were retained as analytically meaningful. For example, students could report that a teacher often provided strategy support while observation could reveal that such support was not differentiated by proficiency level. Rather than treating this as an error, the difference was interpreted as evidence about the distinction between teacher support and strategic independence.

Result and Discussion

The findings are presented in relation to the four research questions. The first part identifies the strategies and instructional practices observed in the classroom. The second part examines students' perceptions. The third part discusses the central tension between strong teacher support and limited independent comprehension. The final part interprets the findings in relation to vocational English, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and learner autonomy.

Teaching Strategies Observed in the Classroom

The observation data indicate that the teacher used several practices that can be characterized as explicit reading support. Scanning was the most visible specific reading technique. Students were directed to identify key words or particular pieces of information in the text. The teacher also used pre-reading examples, explained unfamiliar vocabulary, encouraged discussion, asked comprehension questions, provided printed texts and learning materials, and gave clear task instructions. These practices suggest that the teacher was not relying on a single method throughout the lesson. However, the range of strategies was narrower than the range of processes required for deeper reading comprehension.

Table 1: Result of the Teaching Strategies Observations

No.	Focus area	Status	Observation
1	Specific reading strategy	Yes	Scanning; students were directed to locate key words or specific information.
2	Presentation method	Yes	Classroom discussion and teacher questioning were used to process text content.
3	Instructional aids	Yes	Printed reading texts and learning materials supported the lesson.
4	Student engagement	Yes	Most students participated by reading and answering questions.
5	Strategy adjustment	No	The same basic strategy was used for students with different ability levels.
6	Classroom interaction	Yes	The teacher asked questions and checked students' understanding.
7	Clear instructions	Yes	Reading tasks were explained before students began.
8	Comprehension support	Yes	The teacher explained unfamiliar vocabulary and guided main-idea identification.
9	Strategy variation	Yes	Scanning was combined with discussion and other guided activities.
10	Structured comprehension assessment	No	Follow-up checking was mainly oral and lacked systematic individual assessment.

The presence of scanning is not itself a weakness. Scanning can be highly appropriate when the purpose is to locate names, numbers, dates, definitions, or other specific information. Indeed, Nur et al. (2025) found positive effects when skimming and scanning were explicitly used to improve reading comprehension among Indonesian secondary students. Freaha (2020) also found scanning to be among the cognitive procedures used by EFL learners. The issue in the present classroom is therefore not the use of scanning but its relative prominence compared with strategies that require students to construct global meaning, infer relationships, evaluate information, and monitor comprehension.

The observation also showed that vocabulary explanation was an important component of teacher support. This finding is understandable in a Pharmacy class because students may encounter specialized words whose meanings are not easily inferred from everyday experience. Rullu and Bikas (2021) reported the relevance of vocabulary mastery to reading comprehension in a vocational high school, while Manihuruk (2020) examined vocabulary knowledge as a factor related to reading performance. Vocabulary support can therefore be viewed as a legitimate scaffold.

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Nevertheless, strategic vocabulary instruction should ideally include contextual inference, word-part analysis, and verification so that students gradually learn to solve lexical problems without waiting for teacher translation.

The absence of strategy adjustment is more concerning. Observation indicated that the teacher used essentially the same approach for students with different levels of ability. In a class where students report substantial reading difficulty, uniform strategy use may provide insufficient support for struggling readers while offering too little cognitive challenge to students who are ready for more independent work. The need for responsive strategy selection is consistent with the broader pedagogical principle that instructional techniques should be connected to learners' purposes, proficiency, and participation (Brown & Lee, 2015; Harmer, 2015).

The finding regarding the use of multiple instructional strategies is consistent with Dwiningtiyas et al. (2020), who reported that effective reading comprehension instruction involved a combination of strategies, including reading aloud, dictionary use, rereading, comprehension evaluation, and questioning. Similarly, the present study found that the teacher did not rely exclusively on one technique but combined scanning, vocabulary explanation, classroom discussion, and guided reading exercises. However, the present findings also indicate that the variation was not sufficiently differentiated according to students' proficiency levels.

Students Perceptions of the Reading Instruction

Table 2 presents the results of the student questionnaire, which was administered to 19 eleventh-grade Pharmacy students to explore their perceptions of the reading instruction.

Table 2: Result of the Students' Perceptions on the Reading Instruction

No.	Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Sometimes (%)
1	Learning objectives explained clearly	63.2	0.0	36.8
2	Reading material/passages explained clearly	47.4	0.0	52.6
3	Practical examples provided before reading	89.5	0.0	10.5
4	More than one reading strategy used	61.1	38.9	0.0
5	Difficult vocabulary/technical terms supported	84.2	0.0	15.8
6	Active discussion encouraged	73.7	0.0	26.3
7	Students given opportunities to ask questions	94.7	0.0	5.3
8	Students experience difficulty understanding English texts	100.0	0.0	0.0

No.	Indicator	Yes (%)	No (%)	Sometimes (%)
9	Students can understand texts independently	21.1	21.1	57.9

The questionnaire reveals a clear contrast between students' positive perception of teacher support and their continuing difficulty with independent reading. The strongest positive responses concern opportunities to ask questions (94.7%), practical examples before reading (89.5%), and assistance with difficult vocabulary or technical terms (84.2%). Active discussion was also positively reported by 73.7% of students. These responses suggest that students experience the teacher as accessible and supportive. Such a classroom climate is important because students who feel comfortable asking questions may be more willing to engage with difficult texts rather than avoid them.

However, the data also show that teacher support has not yet translated into consistent learner independence. All 19 students, or 100%, reported that they often experience difficulty understanding English reading texts. Only 21.1% reported that they could understand texts independently without teacher help, while 57.9% selected sometimes and 21.1% selected no. This pattern is central to interpreting the study. The teacher is providing support, but students still perceive themselves as needing substantial external assistance.

The result resembles the problem identified by Yulita (2019), who found that less proficient EFL learners could report frequent use of support and problem-solving strategies while still showing weaker global strategy use. It also relates to Maryam et al. (2019), who found a significant relationship between metacognitive strategy awareness and reading comprehension. Students may participate actively in a teacher-led lesson without necessarily knowing how to regulate their own reading when the teacher is absent. Consequently, participation should not be equated automatically with autonomy.

Teacher Support and Development of Learner Autonomy

One of the most important findings is the paradox between high teacher support and low independent comprehension. Scaffolding is valuable because learners often need temporary assistance when confronting a task that is beyond their current independent capacity. The instructional goal, however, should be a gradual transfer of responsibility. If the teacher consistently identifies the main idea, explains difficult words, asks the questions, and confirms the interpretation, students may learn the content of the lesson without learning how to reproduce the process themselves.

The present findings suggest that some forms of support may be functioning as permanent assistance rather than transitional scaffolding. When students encounter an unfamiliar word, they may wait for the teacher's explanation instead of first examining context, word form, nearby clues, or the purpose of the text. When asked for the main idea, they may wait for teacher confirmation instead of

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

generating and defending their own interpretation. This does not mean that teacher explanation should be removed. Instead, explanation should be redesigned so that students increasingly perform the cognitive work.

Reciprocal Teaching provides one practical model for this transition. Tolongtong and Adunyarittigun (2020) showed that Reciprocal Teaching can support EFL high school students' reading performance across different question types. In the present classroom, the teacher could initially model predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing, then assign these roles to pairs or small groups. Over time, students could take greater responsibility for deciding what is important, identifying comprehension problems, and explaining how they solved them.

QAR can provide another structured bridge between teacher support and student independence. Adawiah and Manurung (2021) identified QAR as a frequently reported strategy in reading instruction, while Abdul Baqi (2019) examined its use for improving reading comprehension. QAR encourages students to distinguish among questions whose answers are explicitly stated, questions requiring connections across the text, and questions requiring interpretation beyond direct textual information. For Pharmacy students, this distinction can be adapted to technical texts by asking students to locate a dosage instruction, connect several pieces of information, and then explain the practical implication of the information.

Metacognitive instruction is equally important. Teng (2020) found benefits from explicit instruction in reading-strategy awareness, while the broader evidence from metacognitive strategy research suggests that students need opportunities to plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading. In the present context, simple prompts can be integrated into each lesson: What is my purpose for reading? What do I already know? Which part of the text is difficult? What strategy can I try before asking for help? Did my strategy work? These prompts transform reading from a teacher-directed activity into a process of self-regulation.

Strategy Variety: From Scanning to Deeper Comprehension

The findings indicate that the teacher already combines scanning with discussion, vocabulary support, and questioning, but the strategic repertoire can be expanded. Amini et al. (2020) emphasize that reading instruction benefits from attention to reader-oriented strategies. Grabe and Stoller (2020) likewise present reading as a multidimensional process involving different purposes and levels of processing. Therefore, strategy selection should follow the reading purpose rather than the habit of using one familiar technique.

For example, a pre-reading stage can activate prior knowledge and establish a purpose. Students can predict content from a title, image, heading, or key terms. During reading, students can skim to identify the overall topic, scan for specific details, infer unfamiliar vocabulary from context, annotate key information, and ask questions. After reading, students can summarize, compare information,

complete a graphic organizer, explain the author's purpose, or apply the information to a practical situation. Such sequencing gives students a repertoire rather than a single technique.

Graphic organizers are particularly relevant because they make relationships visible. Qi and Jiang (2021) found that graphic organizers can support the construction and representation of text structure. Andoko et al. (2020) similarly demonstrated the usefulness of concept-map-based support for EFL reading. For the Pharmacy class, organizers could include a problem–solution map, process sequence, cause–effect chain, or table of medicine name, purpose, dosage, warning, and side effect. These formats would also begin connecting general reading skills to vocational literacy.

The use of authentic vocational materials should accompany strategy expansion. Hadi and Ramadhani (2024) demonstrate the importance of examining how reading-to-learn practices are actually implemented in vocational classrooms. Duong and Truong (2022) further show the potential of task-based approaches for ESP reading. Instead of limiting reading practice to general narratives, the teacher could introduce simplified medicine labels, patient-information leaflets, workplace notices, safety instructions, or short procedural texts. Students could then complete meaningful tasks such as identifying warnings, sequencing procedures, or extracting information required for a workplace decision.

The students' questionnaire responses indicate that practical examples are highly valued: 89.5% reported that the teacher gives examples before reading. This strength can be retained while changing the nature of the examples. Rather than giving students the answer or translating the passage, examples can model the process of strategic reading. The teacher might think aloud: "I do not know this word, but the sentence says it is taken after meals, so I will use the surrounding information to predict its meaning." Such modeling makes invisible cognitive processes visible.

Differentiated Instruction Strategy Variety: From Scanning to Deeper Comprehension.

The observation identified two connected weaknesses: the teacher did not consistently adjust strategies to student level, and comprehension checking was largely oral. These issues matter because a class may appear engaged while individual learners remain confused. Oral questioning can provide immediate feedback, but when only a few students answer, the teacher receives limited evidence about the comprehension of the entire class.

A stronger formative assessment system could be simple and low-cost. After reading, each student could write the main idea in one sentence, identify two supporting details, infer one unfamiliar word, and write one question about the text. The teacher could scan these responses quickly to identify patterns. Students who demonstrate strong comprehension could receive extension tasks involving inference or evaluation, while students who struggle could receive targeted

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

vocabulary or sentence-level support. This would create a direct connection between assessment evidence and differentiated instruction.

The questionnaire results support this need. Although 94.7% of students felt they had opportunities to ask questions, only 47.4% said that reading materials were clearly explained all the time; 52.6% selected sometimes. The pattern suggests that interaction is available, but the consistency of explanation may vary. Rather than interpreting this as a failure of the teacher, it indicates that structured checks could make the quality of understanding more visible and allow instructional adjustments to be based on evidence.

Differentiation does not necessarily require separate lesson plans for every student. The teacher can vary the level of support within the same text. For struggling readers, a short glossary, highlighted headings, or a partially completed organizer can reduce unnecessary difficulty. For more proficient students, the same passage can be accompanied by inference, evaluation, or synthesis questions. This approach preserves common classroom content while changing the amount and type of cognitive support.

Vocational and Pharmacy-Specific Implications

The Pharmacy specialization adds a particularly important dimension to the findings. Students are not simply preparing to pass an English reading exercise; they may eventually need to interpret information where accuracy has practical consequences. The ability to locate a word is insufficient if the student cannot understand how information is organized or distinguish a warning from a recommendation. Vocational reading therefore requires both linguistic competence and functional precision.

Rohmawati et al. (2022) observed that limited vocabulary can affect reading in vocational high school settings, while Duong and Truong (2022) emphasize ESP reading tasks that involve lexical meaning and identifying main and detailed ideas. These findings suggest that the present classroom can move gradually from general reading to more occupation-oriented literacy. For example, students could read a short medicine information text and complete tasks at increasing levels of difficulty: identify the medicine name, locate dosage information, identify warnings, infer the meaning of a technical word, summarize the instructions, and explain the consequences of ignoring a warning.

Such tasks also provide a natural context for integrating multiple strategies. Scanning can be used to locate a dosage; skimming can identify the overall purpose of a document; contextual inference can support vocabulary learning; a graphic organizer can classify information; discussion can test interpretations; and a short written response can provide formative assessment. In this way, strategy variety does not mean adding disconnected techniques. Instead, different strategies are combined because the text and task require them.

The vocational context also strengthens the argument for authenticity. Samudra (2023) emphasizes the relevance of educational strategies to Indonesian vocational contexts, while Apoko et al. (2023) highlight teachers' strategy use in vocational schools. Authenticity should nevertheless be introduced at an appropriate linguistic level. Highly technical texts may overwhelm students if introduced without support. A staged approach is preferable: simplified authentic texts first, followed by increasingly complex documents as students develop vocabulary, background knowledge, and strategy awareness.

Comparison With Previous Research and Contribution of the Study

The findings of this study both confirm and extend previous research. They confirm the importance of teacher strategy use identified by Adawiah and Manurung (2021) and Azis et al. (2022), particularly the value of questioning, discussion, vocabulary support, and multiple strategies. They also correspond with Nurdianingsih (2021), who found that teachers may combine text-understanding activities, individual or group learning, and QAR. The present study extends these findings by showing that the existence of multiple supportive practices does not automatically produce independent comprehension.

The findings also converge with research emphasizing metacognition. Yulita (2019) reported limited emphasis on global reading strategies among less proficient EFL learners, while Maryam et al. (2019) identified a relationship between metacognitive strategy awareness and reading comprehension. In the present study, students' limited independence suggests that strategy instruction should address not only what students do but why and when they should do it. The teacher can make strategy choice explicit and gradually ask students to justify their choices.

The study is also consistent with research on specific instructional approaches. Tolongtong and Adunyarittigun (2020) support Reciprocal Teaching; Qi and Jiang (2021) support graphic organizers; Kusumayanthi and Silalahi (2022) demonstrate the potential of KWL in vocational reading; and Duong and Truong (2022) show the relevance of task-based learning for ESP reading. The contribution of the present study is not to claim that one of these approaches should replace the teacher's current practice. Rather, it identifies a pathway for integrating them with practices that already work in the classroom.

An important contribution is the identification of the support–autonomy gap. The teacher's classroom is not characterized by an absence of instruction. On the contrary, students report substantial support and opportunities to interact. The challenge is that the support has not yet resulted in a corresponding level of independent comprehension. This distinction matters for teacher development: the solution is not simply to add more explanation. In some cases, adding more explanation may strengthen dependence. The more productive direction is to redesign support so that students gradually assume the cognitive responsibilities previously performed by the teacher.

ISSN 2338-4778 (Print)
ISSN 2548-4192 (Online)

Practical Model for Improving Reading Instruction

Based on the findings, a practical sequence for the classroom can be organized into five stages. The first stage is purpose setting and activation. The teacher introduces the topic, establishes why the text matters, and activates relevant knowledge. The second stage is strategic modeling. The teacher demonstrates one or two reading processes through a brief think-aloud. The third stage is guided practice, in which students work with partners or small groups using a graphic organizer, QAR prompts, or reciprocal roles. The fourth stage is independent practice, where students apply the strategy to a new portion of the text without immediate teacher explanation. The fifth stage is formative assessment and reflection, where students show what they understood and identify which strategy helped them.

This sequence maintains the strengths already visible in the classroom: practical examples, vocabulary support, discussion, and questioning. At the same time, it creates a clearer transfer of responsibility. The teacher begins by modeling and supporting, but students finish by applying and explaining the strategy independently. The approach is consistent with the principle that scaffolding should lead toward self-regulation rather than permanent dependence.

For Pharmacy students, the model can be paired with a progression of text types. Early lessons can use short general texts with familiar structures. Subsequent lessons can introduce health-related vocabulary and simplified workplace texts. Later lessons can involve authentic or adapted materials such as medicine labels, safety notices, procedural descriptions, and patient-information texts. Each stage can revisit the same core strategies while increasing the complexity and authenticity of the material.

The model should also include explicit reflection. At the end of a lesson, students can answer three brief questions: What did I understand? What was difficult? What did I do when I did not understand? These questions are simple enough for regular classroom use but can help students recognize reading as an active process. Over time, the teacher can use students' reflections to identify which strategies require additional modeling and which students are ready for greater independence.

Conclusion

This study examined teaching strategies used in reading instruction for 19 eleventh-grade Pharmacy students at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Palu. The teacher used scanning, pre-reading examples, vocabulary explanations, classroom discussion, printed learning materials, questioning, feedback, and guided exercises. These practices represent meaningful strengths. Students generally perceived the teacher as supportive, particularly in providing practical examples, explaining difficult vocabulary and technical terms, encouraging discussion, and allowing questions.

At the same time, the study identifies a substantial gap between teacher support and learner independence. All students reported difficulty understanding English reading texts, and only 21.1% reported that they could understand texts independently without teacher assistance. Observation also showed that strategy adjustment for different proficiency levels was absent and that comprehension assessment was primarily oral rather than systematically documented. The central problem is therefore not a lack of teacher effort but an instructional pattern in which support is stronger than opportunities for independent strategic performance.

The findings imply that reading instruction in this vocational context should move from strategy provision toward strategy ownership. Scanning and vocabulary explanation should be retained where appropriate, but they should be complemented by skimming, contextual inference, metacognitive monitoring, reciprocal teaching, QAR, graphic organizers, and structured formative assessment. Authentic vocational texts should be introduced progressively so that students can connect reading strategies with future occupational purposes.

For teachers, the immediate implication is to make the cognitive process of reading more explicit and to transfer responsibility gradually. For schools and teacher educators, professional development can focus on differentiated reading instruction, formative assessment, and vocational literacy. For future researchers, classroom action research or mixed-method studies could examine the effects of specific strategy combinations on independent reading, particularly when authentic Pharmacy or health-related texts are used.

Ultimately, effective reading instruction should not be measured only by whether students can answer questions while the teacher is present. A stronger indicator is whether students can approach an unfamiliar text, select an appropriate strategy, monitor their comprehension, solve problems, and explain what they have understood with decreasing reliance on teacher intervention. Developing that capacity is especially important in vocational education, where reading competence is expected to support students beyond the classroom and into future academic and professional environments.

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