



The Reading Strategies and Challenges Used to Develop Eighth-Grade Students' Reading Skills at Junior High School

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Abstract

The current study aims to find the reading strategies and challenges faced by eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Tampaksiring. The strategies were obtained based on three reading categories: cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. There were 30 eighth-grade students involved in this study who were selected by using cluster sampling. Meanwhile, only 3 students were selected by using purposive sampling as the informants for the interview section. The data were collected through observation and semi-structured interviews. The research instruments were an observation sheet and an interview guide. The data were analyzed by using the Qualitative Data Analysis method consisted of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data triangulation and method triangulation were conducted to ensure data trustworthiness of the current study. The results showed that 1) three kinds of learning strategies are employed by students at SMPN 2 Tampaksiring to enhance English reading skills, covering cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies; and 2) five challenges are encountered in using reading strategies, covering limited vocabulary, low comprehension, strategy application, lack of motivation, and anxiety. The present study relates to education, where the strategies are beneficial for engaging students in reading activities. It highlights the importance of integrating explicit strategy instruction into the English curriculum.

Keywords: *Challenge, Reading, Strategies*

Introduction

Reading is one of the fundamental skills that crucially impact students' academic success in mastering a foreign language. It allows students to acquire knowledge from different perspectives as well as foster their critical thinking skills (Habók et al., 2024). It is also added that students are able to develop their

vocabulary by comprehending numerous information from reading activities (Nurdianingsih, 2021). A student with high reading skills often engages in high-order thinking activities to construct knowledge supporting academic achievement across various subjects (Cahyani et al., 2022). It is highlighted that reading not only helps students to comprehend an English text but also improves students' vocabulary and grammar (Kizkapan & Bektas, 2017; O, 2022). As a foundation in learning a language, reading needs to be emphasized in the English classroom to optimize students' English development, as well as other learning objectives.

Having better reading skills leads students to achieve better learning outcomes in the English learning process (Anwar, 2020). It enables students to be capable of completing assignments and interpreting English texts (Saori, 2020). Reading skills are consciously and strategically applied by the students when they confront challenging texts to find the meaning of a certain text (Mulatu & Regassa, 2022). However, an issue appears due to the reading skills of Indonesian students, in which it is found that they tend to have low reading skills. This issue emerges as a serious problem, considering it obstructs students from improving their English literacy (Dwipayana, 2021). It is relevant to the preliminary observation, which shows that the students at SMPN 2 Tampaksiring are struggling to comprehend concepts, supporting information, text structure, and specific vocabulary. It reflects that the students have low reading skills. This condition is also perceived as an obstacle impacting students' English learning outcomes.

Considering that reading is a complex process involving many variables, teachers are required to apply various reading strategies to improve students' ability to comprehend, interpret, and criticize information within texts. It is added that implementing reading strategies and individual strategies strongly correlates with students' ability to comprehend English texts (Khasawneh, 2021). A successful English learning demands students to extensively read the text, which also requires certain effective reading strategies (Par, 2020). The earliest theory states that improving students' reading skills can be done by using three reading strategies, such as cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective (O'Malley et al., 1990). Cognitive strategies referred to the activities as summarizing, recognizing key ideas, and deducing the meaning of new words from context, involve direct engagement with the text.

These strategies help students to process and remember information more efficiently. Metacognitive strategies involve advanced mental skills that enable readers to plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading activities effectively, ensuring that they stay focused on their goals and make adjustments when necessary. Socio-affective strategies focus on the social and emotional aspects of reading, including seeking clarification from teachers or peers, discussing ideas collaboratively, and managing emotions such as motivation and anxiety. Together, these strategies create an active and supportive reading process that promotes deeper comprehension and long-term learning. These strategies help both teachers and students to achieve

successful English learning.

Numerous studies have investigated the reading strategies used by English teachers. A study reveals that implementing skimming and scanning as reading strategies brings a significant impact on students' reading process, in which they are capable of comprehending the texts and formulating questions related to them (Banditvilai, 2020). It is added that implementing problem-solving strategies affects students' reading achievement, which shows that there is a significant correlation between both variables (Par, 2020). A meta-analysis reveals that a combination of four instructional strategies brings many benefits for EFL students, one of which is a better English reading comprehension (Li et al., 2024).

In addition, there is a positive correlation found between cognitive reading strategies and students' English proficiency. All the studies indicate that reading strategies are essential for students' reading development as well as their English proficiency. However, further study needs to be conducted to investigate faced by the students at SMPN 2 Tampaksiring and fill the gap related to the three strategies proposed by O'Malley et al. (1990): cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. Therefore, the current study aims to analyze reading strategies used by students at SMPN 2 Tampaksiring, which are obtained from the strategies proposed by O'Malley et al. (1990). The challenges faced by students are also examined in the current study.

Method

A qualitative approach was applied in this study by using a case study as the research design. The study was conducted at SMPN 2 Tampaksiring by involving eighth-grade students as research subjects. They were selected by using cluster sampling. There were 30 eighth-grade students observed during the English learning process; only 3 students were selected by using purposive sampling to be interviewed. The three students were selected by considering their reading proficiency (low, average, and high). The data were collected through observation and semi-structured interviews. The research instruments used were an observation sheet and an interview guide.

The data analysis was conducted by adapting the Qualitative Data Analysis proposed by Miles et al., (2014) consisting of four stages: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analyzed data were also triangulated to guarantee data trustworthiness. Data triangulation and method triangulation were implied in this study.

Results

The Learning Strategies Employed by Students at SMP N 2 Tampaksiring to Enhance English Reading Skills

The present study reveals ten strategies across the three categories of learning strategies employed by students at SMP N 2 Tampaksiring to enhance their English reading skills, namely cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies. The detailed information is presented in the following Tables 1 to 3.

Table 1. Cognitive Strategies Employed by Students

Specific Strategy	Interview Evidence	Observation Notes
Skimming	<i>Helps me understand topics more quickly.</i>	Students looked over the topic sentences and headings.
Scanning	<i>Makes me answer questions more quickly.</i>	Students looked up keywords before reading the full text.
Guessing meaning	<i>I try to solve problems before asking for help from my teacher or a dictionary.</i>	Students used context to infer meaning.
Summarizing	<i>This allows me to retain the lesson's material.</i>	After finishing their reading, students provided a summary of the key points.

Table 1 presents various reading strategies used by students during reading activities. Firstly, students employed skimming by quickly looking over topic sentences to obtain the main ideas. It was reported by one of the students, *It helps me understand topics more quickly*. It emphasized the strategy to gain a general understanding of the material in a short time. In addition, students used a scanning strategy to look for specific information in the full text. It was reflected in a student's statement, *makes me answer questions more quickly*. Moreover, students used a guess meaning strategy to get unfamiliar words or information.

It was remarked by a student, *"I try to solve problems before asking for help from my teacher or a dictionary,"* indicating an effort to increase problem-solving. Lastly, in the summarizing strategy, students summarized the key points to strengthen their understanding and memory of the material, as stated by a student, *this allows me to retain the lesson's material*, showing that summarization supports long-term learning. Overall, it can be seen that all the strategies can help students to get the content of their reading.

Table 2. Metacognitive Strategies Employed by Students

Strategy Component	Interview Evidence	Observation Notes
Planning	<i>I consider questions before reading to know what I need to concentrate on.</i>	Before reading, some students examined the assignments or questions.
Monitoring	<i>Sometimes I take a moment to see if I comprehend the text, though I don't always do this.</i>	Few students stopped to review difficult passages or assess their understanding.
Evaluating	<i>After reading, I don't generally double-check my responses. I simply await the teacher's correction.</i>	Students' self-evaluation and post-reading reflection were hardly ever apparent.

Table 2 shows three key components of metacognitive reading strategies. To begin with, planning involves preparation by identifying what to focus on. As mentioned by a student, *I consider questions before reading to know what I need to concentrate on*. In addition, the monitoring strategy deals with checking one's understanding during the reading process, as supported by a student who said *Sometimes, I take a moment to see if I comprehend the text, though I don't always do this*. The last strategy was evaluating. It was done by conducting a reflection of one's performance after reading, as said by a student who said *After reading, I don't generally double-check my responses. I simply await the teacher's correction*. In short, the metacognitive strategies help students become more aware, active, and independent in their reading process.

Table 3. Socio-Affective Strategies Employed by Students

Strategy Component	Interview Evidence	Observation Notes
Anxiety Management	<i>I try to manage things on my own since I become nervous when I have to express myself in English.</i>	Instead of seeking assistance, students tended to work alone.
Peer Support	<i>I sometimes ask a friend for guidance, but only after class.</i>	The majority of peer support occurred outside of scheduled class activities.
Group Learning	<i>I like group activities since they help me relax, but opportunities are limited.</i>	Although it increased participation, group reading was not used very often.

Table 3 shows that there were three strategies employed by students in reading activities as follows. First of all, anxiety management involves handling stress or nervousness. It was stated by a student; *I try to manage things on my own since I become nervous when I have to express myself in English*. Next, peer support strategy refers to a collaboration in the learning process, as stated by a student, *I sometimes*

ask a friend for guidance, but only after class. Finally, group learning strategy involves participating to join group learning, which is shared by a student: *I like group activities since they help me relax, but opportunities are limited.* In conclusion, the socio-affective strategy helps students organize their social interaction, emotions, and motivation during the reading process.

Challenges Faced by Students in Using Their English Reading Learning Strategies

The present study also reveals some challenges faced by students in using their reading strategies, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Challenges Faced by Students in Using Reading Strategies

Challenges	Interview Evidence	Observation Notes	Effect on Reading
Limited Vocabulary	<i>I frequently come across words I don't understand, so I just skip them.</i>	Students misunderstood or skipped challenging words.	Missing context and significance.
Low Comprehension	<i>Sometimes I read, but I don't understand what it means.</i>	Unable to recognize key concepts or make deductions.	Incomplete Comprehension.
Strategy Application	<i>I know I should look for keywords; however, I forget while reading.</i>	Weak or inconsistent application of strategies.	Limited improvement in comprehension.
Lack of Motivation	<i>Reading is difficult for me, so I don't enjoy it.</i>	There is little student involvement, and they are unwilling to assume responsibility.	Limited opportunities for reading practice.
Anxiety	<i>I feel nervous when the teacher asks me to read aloud.</i>	Students avoided joining participating to calm themselves.	Lower confidence and missed learning opportunities.

Table 4 shows five challenges in employing the reading strategies. Firstly, the challenge was limited vocabulary. It was revealed that many students struggled with unfamiliar words, as stated by a student, *I frequently come across words I don't understand, so I just skip them.* In addition, the next challenge concerned low comprehension. Some students found it difficult to catch the meaning of what they read. A student reported, *Sometimes I read, but I don't understand what it means.* Moreover, strategy application becomes a challenge. Students knew the reading strategy, but they failed to apply the strategy, as stated by a student, *I know I should look for keywords; however, I forget during reading.* Furthermore, the challenge

concerned a lack of motivation. Reading activities were difficult to complete. As one mentioned, *Reading is difficult for me, so I don't enjoy it*. It indicated low engagement. Finally, the challenges also concerned anxiety. Some students felt nervous in reading aloud, as expressed by a student, *I feel nervous when the teacher asks me to read aloud*. It showed that students often avoided participation, which missed their opportunities.

Discussion

The present study reveals that students use three kinds of strategies, namely covering cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies. These strategies are beneficial for students since they can help students in the reading activities. As stated by O'Malley & Chamot (1990), good instruction should consist of these strategies. Cognitive strategies that support learners in effectively understanding and processing material include techniques such as skimming, scanning, making predictions based on context, and using visual aids like graphic organizers. For example, learners make use of cognitive strategies to actively engage with the language by altering, adjusting, or reorganizing it in ways that help them better understand and internalize its structure and meaning.

These strategies allow students to process language input more effectively by reshaping it into forms that are easier to comprehend or remember. Through this process, they are not just passively receiving information but are taking an active role in constructing their own understanding of the language (Dewi & Endarto, 2022; Zeithofer et al., 2023). Some studies have revealed that cognitive strategies can significantly influence students' reading comprehension (Farid et al., 2020; Hasani & Pahamzah, 2022; Juliantina & Rani, 2023; Marzuki et al., 2018; Nabilah, 2021). In essence, cognitive strategies in reading play an important part in helping readers derive meaning from texts and complete specific reading tasks effectively.

These strategies involve a range of mental processes, such as translating unfamiliar words or phrases, anticipating what might come next in the text, summarizing key points, and connecting new information with existing knowledge or past experiences. Additionally, students may apply their understanding of grammar rules or infer the meanings of unknown words based on contextual clues. These activities support deeper comprehension and more active engagement with the reading material.

In addition, metacognitive strategies play a crucial role in helping students manage and monitor their reading process. These involve activities such as planning before reading, checking comprehension during reading, and evaluating understanding afterward (Sunggingwati & Ungau, 2023; Zeithofer et al., 2023). Besides, metacognitive reading strategies are described as mental processes that enable readers to exercise self-regulation and self-management during reading. Through these strategies, readers are able to make conscious decisions about which reading approaches to use, depending on the context, the type of text, and their specific reading goals (Dewi & Endarto, 2022).

It allows learners to modify and manage their learning behaviors in a deliberate manner to better align with their academic goals. By actively monitoring their own progress and making necessary adjustments, students can adopt more effective approaches that support the achievement of specific learning outcomes. This adaptability is essential for successful, goal-oriented learning, especially when facing different tasks or challenges throughout the learning process. Many studies have reported the effectiveness of metacognitive strategy in which it develops problem solving, high order thinking, self-efficacy, making decision or understanding a situation or text, and reading ability (Afdal et al., 2023; Babashamasi et al., 2021; Farid et al., 2020; Febriani, 2022; Hasani & Pahamzah, 2022; Husna et al., 2025; Jugas, 2024; Kan et al., 2024; M et al., 2025; Pebriyanti et al., 2024; Riki, 2021; Sunggingwati & Ungau, 2023; Xie et al., 2023; W. Zhang & Lian, 2024).

The activities in this strategy help students be ready. Planning means deciding on goals and how to read before starting, so students can read with a clear purpose. Monitoring is checking their understanding while reading, so they can notice if they get confused and change their strategy. Evaluating happens after reading, where students think about how well they understood the text and whether their strategies worked. In this study, metacognitive reading strategies help reduce unnecessary mental effort by giving students clear ways to deal with a text.

Furthermore, socio-affective strategies contribute to enhancing students' motivation, reducing anxiety, and fostering a positive and collaborative learning environment. This can be achieved through group discussions, peer questioning, and working together to solve problems. It is also supported by some studies that the socio-affective strategies are beneficial to make class interactive and goal-oriented, based on a collaborative and cooperative approach (Farid et al., 2020). Besides, it also helps to reduce the students' anxiety (Robiansyah & Rochmahwati, 2020). Students are encouraged to speak and can control their emotions. Moreover, the strategy can develop students' motivation and confidence (Sumang et al., 2022). The strategy can direct students to be motivated in the learning process and not be afraid to perform in class.

Another result of the present study is also reported that five challenges are encountered in using reading strategies covering limited vocabulary, low comprehension, strategy application, lack of motivation, and anxiety. It is also reported by Babashamasi et al. (2021) that students have problems with vocabulary. These challenges appear due to the complexity of reading, which involves collecting information to be comprehended, finding the interpretation, and requiring mastery of vocabulary (Husna et al., 2025; Pebriyanti et al., 2024; Shuqin & Kamarudin, 2023). Students need to have experience in reading activities so they can easily analyze the text. As mentioned above by the previous studies, these reading activities significantly influence students' reading ability. The learning strategy training can cope with these challenges, as done by Zhang & Guo (2020) it can help students become more aware of the strategies they use. When they understand the

importance of a strategy, they will choose to use it on their own without needing help from the teacher. This helps them learn how to monitor and manage their own learning. Therefore, they need to have such training to maximize the use of the strategies.

Conclusion

The present study concludes two main points, namely 1) three kinds of learning strategies are employed by students at SMP N 2 Tampaksiring to enhance English reading skills, covering cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies; and 2) five challenges are encountered in using reading strategies covering limited vocabulary, low comprehension, strategy application, lack of motivation, and anxiety. The present study practically implicates education. Firstly, the reading strategies, such as cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies, employed by students are beneficial for engaging them in reading activities. It highlights the importance of integrating explicit strategy instruction into the English curriculum.

Teachers not only teach reading skills but also direct students to implement the reading strategies during the reading task. The development of these strategies can promote greater learner autonomy and long-term reading success. Secondly, the challenges in using reading strategies in the present study can be used as a consideration when teachers want to conduct reading activities. Teachers should foster a positive reading culture that motivates students to engage in reading activities. Besides, teachers are also expected to create a safe and supportive classroom environment to reduce anxiety when students conduct reading activities, especially reading aloud. The present study is limited to a qualitative study that describes the reading strategies. An experimental study is suggested to be conducted to further study to examine the effect of reading strategies.

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