

ENGLISH TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION AT SMA SWASTA AL MAKSUM

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the teacher strategies and the implementation of those strategies in teaching reading comprehension at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum Deli Serdang Sumatera Utara. The research conducted uses descriptive qualitative research to collect data from semi-structured interviews and classroom observation techniques involving one English teacher teaching eleventh-grade students. The result of this study shows that several strategies such as Note-taking (highlighting critical vocabulary, guiding students to write difficult words with meanings and examples), Peer tutoring (helping less able readers, pairing stronger and weaker students, small-group discussion to interpret texts collaboratively), Game learning (motivating reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension games, point and reward system to promote active participation), YouTube video materials (providing visual reinforcement, selecting topic-related videos, pre-teaching vocabulary, post-video tasks linking visual content to reading texts). These strategies contribute to addressing problems such as limited literacy skills, low student motivation, and varied levels of comprehension. Consequently, this study provides insight into learning strategies to be adopted to improve learning processes in EFL language learning despite adverse learning conditions such as minimal language literacy skills in learning institutions.

Keywords: teaching strategies, reading comprehension, english learning.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is an essential skill in the English language, and is foundational in achieving language mastery and succeeding academically. It is not enough to just decode words. One must build meaning from the text and draw from pre-existing knowledge and skills. It is an interactive, evaluative, and multi-faceted approach to processing information (Snow, 2002; Grabe and Stoller, 2011). EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Indonesia has its particular challenges since English is not used as a communicative medium. It is purely taught as a subject. Students have limited exposure to English, have low motivation, and a lack of vocabulary which contributes to difficulty in text comprehension (Kirkpatrick 2007; Fauziati 2010). As a result, the onus has been on the teachers and the initiatives being taken to help improve the reading skills of students, particularly in senior high school (SMA) where the texts are more complex and more higher-order thinking is required (Pourkalhor Kohan 2013).

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding teaching strategies in reading comprehension is the approach outlined by Grabe and Stoller (2011), which emphasizes pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities to scaffold learners' comprehension processes. These strategies include brainstorming, predicting, questioning, note-taking, summarizing, and discussion, which help students activate prior knowledge,

monitor understanding, and reflect on content. Studies in EFL classrooms have shown that teachers often employ interactive and adaptive strategies such as semantic mapping, reciprocal teaching, and question-answer relationships (QAR) to improve comprehension, with positive outcomes in vocabulary enrichment and text interpretation (Sibagariang, 2022; Ariyana & Nanda, 2017). Research in Indonesian contexts has similarly highlighted teacher-centered approaches, where strategies like memorizing vocabulary, group discussions, and educational games are used to address low literacy and motivation (Ariyana & Nanda, 2017; Syahputra et al., 2022).

However, most existing studies focus on general EFL classrooms or specific regions, with limited attention to the unique characteristics of private schools like SMA Swasta Al-Maksum, where factors such as flexible policies, diverse student backgrounds, and resource availability may influence strategy implementation. There is a notable gap in in-depth qualitative research examining how teachers at this institution adapt strategies to contextual needs, including challenges like uneven student proficiency and limited exposure to English. This gap underscores the need for targeted studies to provide practical insights into effective reading teaching practices tailored to such settings.

To address this gap, this study focuses on identifying and describing the strategies used by English teachers in teaching reading comprehension at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum, as well as how these strategies are implemented in the classroom. Therefore, the research problems are formulated as follows: 1. What strategies are used by English teachers in teaching reading comprehension at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum? 2. How is the implementation of these strategies carried out by teachers at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum?

LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Teaching (ELT)

English Language Teaching (ELT) is a multidisciplinary field that emphasizes the theory and practice of teaching English to non-native or second-language speakers. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), ELT involves both the methodological frameworks and pedagogical principles that guide teachers in facilitating the acquisition of English for communicative, academic, or professional purposes.

In the Indonesian context, ELT plays a crucial role because English is taught as a foreign language (EFL), not a second language. Kirkpatrick (2007) emphasized that EFL students face limited exposure to authentic language, so learning needs to be interactive and contextual. The Independent Curriculum (Kemendikbud, 2022) promotes a competency-based approach and flexible learning, but its implementation remains constrained by resources and teacher capabilities.

Teaching Strategies

A teaching strategy is a systematic plan or approach used by teachers to achieve learning objectives. Brown (2001) defines it as a planned action to encourage student engagement in the process of constructing knowledge. Richards & Lockhart (2007) add that effective strategies emphasize learner-centeredness, interaction, and collaborative learning. The choice of strategy is influenced by student characteristics, learning objectives, classroom context, and teacher competency (Harmer, 2015). In Indonesia, factors such as large student

numbers, limited media, and low motivation require teachers to be adaptive in choosing creative and context-appropriate strategies.

Considering the case of EFL Indonesia, educators tend to mix the classic and communicative approach to achieve both accuracy and fluency at the same time. The best EFL classrooms include the use of visuals, integration of scaffolding discussions, and cooperative technological learning to enhance motivation and participation. Teaching reflection also assists educators to evaluate the impact of their strategies and modify it to suit the changing requirements of the students.

Reading Skill

Reading is a complex cognitive process involving interaction between the reader and the text. Grabe & Stoller (2011) explain that reading encompasses word recognition, syntactic comprehension, inferring meaning, and evaluating content. Krashen (2004) emphasizes that extensive reading can enrich vocabulary and naturally improve language proficiency. In EFL learning, reading serves as a primary receptive skill that strengthens other productive skills. Types of reading include skimming, scanning, intensive reading, and extensive reading (Nuttall, 2005), each of which serves a different purpose, from understanding the main idea to in-depth analysis of text structure.

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the ability to interpret and construct meaning from written text. Snow (2002) states that this process is active, involving the integration of linguistic knowledge, prior experience, and cognitive strategies. There are three main process models of reading comprehension: bottom-up (processing symbols into meaning), top-down (utilizing context and prior knowledge), and interactive (a combination of both) (Rumelhart, 1980). Furthermore, Barrett (1976) divides comprehension into three levels: literal, inferential, and critical. These levels describe students' abilities, ranging from simply recognizing explicit information to assessing and evaluating texts in depth.

Teachers' Strategies in Teaching Reading Comprehension

Teaching strategies in reading comprehension refer to the planned techniques and instructional approaches employed by teachers to facilitate students' understanding of written texts. In the context of reading, these strategies encompass pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities that guide learners through different stages of comprehension. Grabe and Stoller (2011) emphasize that successful reading instruction involves scaffolding the process helping learners activate prior knowledge, process information, and reflect on what they have learned.

The first strategies is pre-reading, in this activity, the teacher activates background knowledge through brainstorming, previewing, and vocabulary introduction (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Second strategies, the while reading strategy refers to techniques used during the reading process to enhance comprehension and critical engagement with the text. This activity involves strategies such as questioning, note-taking, and finding the main idea (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). The last strategies, post-reading emphasizes summarizing, discussion, and comprehension questions (Nation, 2009). Techniques such as guided reading, group work, and scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978) help students gradually understand the text while encouraging independent learning. The teacher acts as a facilitator and model

for active reading (Harmer, 2015), ensuring engagement and connecting the text to real-world contexts.

METHODOLOGY

The present study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore English teachers' strategies in teaching reading comprehension at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum. This approach was chosen because qualitative inquiry enables the researcher to understand social phenomena in their natural context, as noted by Creswell (2010), who emphasizes that qualitative research aims to explore meaning through detailed data collection such as interviews and observations. By using this design, the researcher was able to obtain an in-depth understanding of teachers' instructional practices, the rationale behind their strategies, and the dynamics that occur within the reading comprehension classroom.

Data for this study were collected from English teachers who teach reading comprehension, using observations and semi-structured interviews as the primary instruments. The observations were conducted during classroom activities to identify how teachers implemented various reading comprehension strategies from the beginning to the end of the lesson. These observations were supported with detailed field notes to capture instructional behaviors relevant to the research focus. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted after the teaching sessions to obtain deeper verbal responses regarding the teachers' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in applying reading strategies. This format allowed the researcher to follow a set of guiding questions while still providing space for unanticipated but important information to emerge.

The data collected were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's qualitative data analysis model, which consists of data condensation, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and categorizing raw information into meaningful units through coding and abstraction. The condensed data were then organized into displays such as matrices or charts to help identify emerging patterns and relationships. Conclusion drawing was conducted by interpreting these patterns and developing explanations grounded in the data, while verification ensured the credibility and consistency of the findings through procedures such as triangulation. Through this systematic analysis, the researcher ensured that the results accurately reflected the teachers' actual practices and experiences in teaching reading comprehension.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

This section presents findings related to the two research questions: **(1)** what strategies English teachers use in teaching reading comprehension at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum, and **(2)** how these strategies are implemented. These findings are based on the interview transcripts previously presented.

1. The strategies are used by English teachers in teaching reading comprehension at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum

Based on the interview results, English teachers at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum use four key strategies in teaching reading comprehension: sticky notes, peer tutoring, games and

practical activities, and YouTube videos. These strategies were chosen to address student challenges such as low motivation, moderate to low literacy, and stronger interest in practical subjects like sports compared to English. These findings align with Harmer (2015) and Grabe & Stoller (2013), who emphasize that effective reading strategies should be interactive and activity-based to support students' comprehension.

- **Sticky Note**

The teacher uses sticky notes as a simple visual tool to help students focus on identifying keywords. Students read the text, mark important words with sticky notes, and then discuss "typical words" together. As stated in the interview: *"I make it like using sticky notes first. I ask them to read first, ready to explain, then later I make a cardboard on the board. Whoever has what typical word comes to the front, and after the child is correct, I give a reward."* This strategy increases student motivation through competition and rewards but is time-consuming. The teacher also mentioned using timed activities (so many minutes for this one), which reflects Brown's (2001) idea of interactive teaching requiring efficient time management. Sticky notes are particularly useful for students with low literacy but require careful timing to avoid fatigue.

- **Peer Tutoring**

The second strategy is peer tutoring, where gifted students help classmates who struggle. If peer tutors are not sufficient, the teacher provides additional support during office hours. As noted by the respondent: *"First, I create peer tutors. The gifted ones are taught by me to help those who can't. If they still can't, I have office hours, so during those hours I create special classes for them. Because sometimes children are awkward with their teachers, but with their friends, they're normal."* This strategy aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, as students often learn more comfortably from peers. It builds confidence and reduces anxiety, but requires accurate identification of gifted students and consistent teacher supervision to avoid misinformation.

- **Games and Practical Activities**

Games are integrated after reading to make lessons more engaging and avoid monotonous lectures. The respondent explained: *"Basically, if there are games, not just lectures, they'll be more interested... Just a few. Because, as I said earlier, this is currently on the decline."* Games help increase interest among students who prefer hands-on activities and support concepts from gamification theory (Prensky, 2001). However, their effectiveness varies depending on student responsiveness, so teachers need a variety of game types and follow-up evaluation to ensure comprehension.

- **YouTube Videos**

Teachers also use YouTube videos to demonstrate proper reading techniques, especially during extended class periods. However, limited facilities affect implementation. The respondent stated: *"For reading comprehension, I usually show videos during extended periods. They can find out how to read well on YouTube. However, we use infocus here, but we only have two, so we have to schedule them."* Videos support multimedia learning principles (Mayer, 2009), offering visual and auditory models that help students who struggle with text-heavy tasks. Yet, limited access to projectors restricts consistency, making it necessary for teachers to plan schedules or prepare offline videos.

2. Implementation of reading comprehension teaching strategies by teachers at SMA Swasta Al-Maksum

The implementation of these strategies is gradual and adaptive, shaped by student responses, time constraints, and school resources. This approach aligns with Miles & Huberman's (1994) qualitative data analysis framework.

• Implementation of Sticky Notes

Teachers prepare materials, guide students through reading, explain keywords, and provide rewards. As noted by the respondent: *"If it's a plus, the students are more enthusiastic and happy. But if it's a minus, it takes time, so we have to use the time wisely."* This strategy promotes active participation, but requires strict time management (Marzano, 2007). Using a timer or limiting keywords can help maintain student engagement without extending the activity too long.

• Implementation of Peer Tutoring

Teachers select peer tutors based on observation, supervise their collaboration, and provide special classes when needed. The respondent clarified: *"The good ones are taught by me, while the weak ones are taught by their peers."* This implementation strengthens collaboration (Bandura, 1977), but requires follow-up evaluations to ensure accuracy. Teachers must monitor sessions to avoid misconceptions and provide brief tutor training for effectiveness.

• Implementation of Games

Games are used after reading as a reinforcement tool. According to the respondent: *"Yes, we use games. If we use sticky notes and games, they enjoy them. However, these children don't just want theory; they also want practice."* This implementation creates an energetic learning environment and suits students who prefer practical tasks. However, it aligns with differentiated instruction principles (Tomlinson, 2014), meaning teachers must adjust game difficulty based on student levels and ensure a balance between fun and comprehension.

• Implementation of YouTube Videos

Teachers schedule video sessions during extended hours, choose relevant content, and use infocus projectors when available. The respondent stated: *"But we only have two infocusses here, so we have to schedule it."* This approach supports visual learning (Fleming, 2001) but is limited by equipment availability. Teachers can download videos beforehand or prepare alternative visual aids for classes without projector access.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study show that the English teacher at SMA Swasta Al Maksum employs adaptive strategies including sticky notes, peer tutoring, games, and video-based instruction to address students' low motivation and limited literacy skills while fostering a more interactive reading environment. These strategies align with established theories of reading instruction; for example, the sticky note technique supports students in identifying key vocabulary before deeper comprehension, consistent with Grabe and Stoller's (2011) emphasis on directing learners' attention to essential information, while peer tutoring reflects Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, where learning is enhanced through collaboration with more capable peers. The integration of games and multimedia further demonstrates the teacher's effort to increase engagement, aligning with Prensky's (2001)

argument that game-based learning enhances motivation and Mayer's (2009) Multimedia Learning Theory, which highlights the benefit of presenting information through both visual and auditory channels. However, limitations such as insufficient projectors and uneven student motivation indicate that the effectiveness of these strategies is shaped by contextual constraints within the school environment. Overall, the strategies not only align with theoretical perspectives but also represent the teacher's adaptive response to classroom realities, suggesting that successful reading instruction depends on both appropriate strategy selection and the degree to which these strategies fit students' needs and available resources.

CONCLUSION

From these results, it can be concluded that several adaptive and interactive approaches have been conducted by English teachers of SMA Swasta Al-Maksum to improve their reading comprehension skills. The approaches conducted by these teachers have been aimed at creating strategies to overcome issues such as low student motivation to read texts in English, lack of mastery of their vocabulary skills needed to read texts effectively, and differences in their mastery of reading skills. In particular, strategies such as sticky note methods, peer tutoring activities, game learning approaches, and video learning approaches have been implemented not only to improve their learning by making it interactive but also to encourage learning among their peers and improve their understanding and interpretation of texts to be read. Nevertheless, despite all these challenges, several approaches conducted by these teachers have helped improve student participation and their gradual understanding of texts to be read.

SUGGESTION

From this study's findings, recommendations are made to ensure better teaching and learning processes in reading comprehension. Firstly, for teachers, it would be advisable to continue implementing interactive approaches such as sticky note methods, peer tutoring techniques, games, and video learning approaches together and provide firm guidance to ensure low-achieving scholars receive sufficient tutoring. Teachers would be encouraged to make greater use of these available sources by planning effectively to make use of multimedia tools, for example, by creating material to be completed offline if multimedia tools were restricted to their environment. The second recommendation would be to encourage scholars to take part actively in classroom sessions and make use of peer tutoring methods to improve their reading capabilities by developing their reading routines out of classroom sessions to improve their understanding and vocabulary. Finally, it would be advisable for scholars who pursue research in this area to investigate further ways these methods would have lasting effects and other ways such as digital literacy approaches.

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