

TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES IN SMP NEGERI 35 MEDAN

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of an experienced English teacher on reading comprehension strategies at SMP Negeri 35 Medan. A descriptive qualitative design was employed to collect data through a semi-structured interview with a Year 9 English teacher with over fifteen years' experience. The findings revealed that the teacher employed student-centred strategies that emphasised higher-order thinking skills. These strategies included symbol and image-based learning, open-ended questioning, multimedia integration and flexible instructional adaptation. The selection of strategies was guided by students' learning styles, persistence, and readiness rather than by ability grouping. The study also identified key challenges in reading instruction, such as students' overreliance on digital tools without achieving genuine comprehension, and the limited availability of technological resources. Assessment practices focused on linguistic accuracy, particularly tense usage, and structural completeness, evaluated through various products, such as written texts, videos, and performances. The results showed that effective reading comprehension instruction in Indonesian English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts needs to balance cognitive demands with practical constraints, prioritising analytical and critical thinking over memorisation. This study sheds light on how experienced teachers navigate the complexities of reading instruction and provides practical implications for teacher development and instructional improvement in junior high school settings.

Keywords: reading comprehension, teaching reading comprehension, teaching strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English language learning and serves as a crucial gateway to academic success across all subject areas. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Indonesia, reading comprehension presents unique challenges as students must simultaneously develop their language proficiency while learning to comprehend increasingly complex texts (Grabe, 2009). At the junior high school level, where texts become more demanding and higher-order thinking skills are required, the role of effective teaching strategies becomes even more critical (Pourkalhor & Kohan, 2013).

Reading is more than simply decoding written symbols; it is an active process of constructing meaning where readers interact with text and context to build understanding (Weaver, 2009). According to Grabe (2009), reading is a process in which readers learn from what they read and apply it to an academic context as part of their education. This complex activity requires readers to use their brain, emotions, and beliefs

to interpret what writers intend in their writing. Effective reading comprehension involves the reader's ability to retrieve, process, and interpret information from text through the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008).

In Indonesian junior high schools, students often struggle with reading comprehension due to several factors including low vocabulary mastery, lack of background knowledge, weak interest in reading, and insufficient instruction in effective reading strategies (Nurlaila, 2019; Saragih, 2021). These challenges underscore the critical importance of understanding how teachers approach reading instruction and what strategies they employ to help students overcome these barriers.

Teachers play a pivotal role in facilitating students' achievement of reading comprehension skills. Their beliefs, understanding, and perceptions significantly influence their teaching methods and classroom practices (Borg, 2003). Research on teacher cognition shows that teachers with a positive understanding of reading comprehension strategies tend to use them more effectively in the classroom. However, teachers also face various practical challenges such as time constraints, large class sizes, differences in student abilities, and lack of learning resources, all of which can impact the implementation of effective strategies (Rahmawati & Siregar, 2022).

Most previous research has focused on the effectiveness of specific reading strategies on student learning outcomes, while studies examining teachers' perspectives—particularly at the junior high school level in specific Indonesian contexts—remain limited. Understanding teacher perspectives is crucial for developing effective teaching practices, informing teacher training programs, and shaping learning policies in schools. Teachers' beliefs and decision-making processes provide valuable insights into how reading instruction can be improved to better meet students' needs.

At SMP Negeri 35 Medan, teachers work with students who have varying abilities, backgrounds, and reading motivations. This diversity requires teachers to adapt their strategies to meet individual student needs while navigating institutional constraints. Therefore, exploring how teachers understand reading comprehension strategies, how they select and implement them, and what factors influence their teaching decisions becomes essential for improving reading instruction quality.

This study aims to address the existing research gap by examining an experienced English teacher's perspective on using reading comprehension strategies at SMP Negeri 35 Medan. The research focuses on two main questions: (1) What are teachers' perceptions of the strategies used to teach reading comprehension? and (2) Why do teachers choose certain strategies when teaching reading comprehension? By answering these questions, this study seeks to provide practical insights that can support improvements in reading instruction at the junior high school level and serve as a reference for English language learning development in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading and Reading Comprehension

Reading is an activity that provides insight and knowledge, defined as the observation of written symbols and the subsequent understanding derived from them (Hidayah, 2012). According to Grabe (2009), reading is a process in which readers learn from what they read and apply it to an academic context. Reading comprehension is defined as the ability to read and understand text, involving a complex interaction between the reader and the text (Cline, 2006). Westwood (2008) reveals that reading comprehension is an active thinking process through which readers intentionally construct meaning to develop deeper understanding of concepts and information presented in a text.

Reading comprehension involves more than literal understanding of words and sentences. It encompasses multiple levels of understanding, from basic recognition of vocabulary and sentence structure to higher-order skills such as making inferences, drawing conclusions, evaluating arguments, and synthesizing information (Moorman & Ram, 1994). According to Alyousef (2006), reading comprehension is an interactive process between reader and text that leads to automaticity or reading fluency, during which readers dynamically interact with the text using linguistic knowledge through bottom-up processing and schematic knowledge through top-down processing.

The importance of reading comprehension in academic contexts cannot be overstated. It is a skill that every student must possess to acquire knowledge (Dewi et al., 2019). According to Frasandy, Juita, and Sukma (2024), understanding a text enables students to extract accurate information, analyze content, and draw valid conclusions. Various factors influence reading comprehension, including readers' prior knowledge, experiences, background, and vocabulary knowledge (Orasanu, 1986; Yildirim et al., 2011).

Teaching Reading Comprehension

Teaching reading is a complex, multifaceted process that goes beyond decoding written symbols. It involves equipping learners with skills and strategies necessary to comprehend, interpret, and critically engage with text. In EFL contexts, this process is especially challenging because of linguistic obstacles students encounter (Supriadi, Utami, & Melati, 2020).

Nunan (2003) proposes eight key principles for effective reading instruction: exploiting readers' background knowledge, building a strong vocabulary base, teaching for comprehension, working on increasing reading rate, teaching reading strategies, encouraging students to transform strategies into skills, building assessment into teaching, and striving for continuous improvement as a reading teacher. Brown (2007) emphasizes that reading instruction should balance bottom-up processes (decoding words, syntax, and grammar) and top-down processes (using background knowledge and context to interpret meaning).

Effective reading instruction typically involves three-phase procedures: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Pre-reading activities activate background knowledge through brainstorming, previewing, and

vocabulary introduction (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Whilereading strategies involve questioning, note-taking, and finding main ideas (Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995). Post-reading activities emphasize summarizing, discussion, and comprehension questions (Nation, 2009).

Teaching Strategies in Reading

Teaching strategies are specific plans, methods, and techniques that educators use to facilitate learning and help students achieve particular goals (Harmer, 2001). In reading instruction, these strategies include Question-Answer Relationship (QARs), which helps students identify the source of answers by categorizing questions (Raphael & Au, 2005); scaffolding, which provides temporary support structures for learning (Vygotsky, 1978); skimming and scanning techniques for efficient text navigation (Tuhumury & Nikijuluw, 2020); vocabulary development strategies (Mahmud, 2008); reading aloud and think-aloud strategies (Razinski & Padak, 2000); and reciprocal teaching involving predicting, questioning, summarizing, and clarifying (Vacca & Vacca, 1999).

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. Research in Indonesian contexts has highlighted various approaches teachers use to address low literacy and motivation, including memorizing vocabulary, group discussions, educational games, and multimedia integration (Ariyana & Nanda, 2017; Syahputra et al., 2022).

Relevant Studies

Several studies have examined teachers' strategies in teaching reading comprehension. Sarjan and Mardiana (2017) found that teachers at SMP 1 Wonomulyo used QARs and scaffolding strategies effectively to improve students' reading comprehension. Gaol and Anzelina (2019) discovered that reciprocal teaching and QAR strategies made students more focused and helped them easily understand text meanings. Tuhumury and Nikijuluw (2020) identified cultivating vocabulary, reading aloud, skimming, scanning, and summarization as the most frequently used and effective strategies in junior high schools in Ambon.

Putri (2023) found that teachers in Palu City mostly used QARs alongside scaffolding, role-playing, skimming, scanning, group work, translation, and media use, with varying levels of effectiveness. Rahmawati, Supriyono, and Primasari (2025) showed that interactive strategies including Think-PairShare, Jigsaw, Roundtable, and Read-Aloud effectively improved vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, text comprehension, and student confidence.

However, most existing studies focus on general EFL classrooms or specific regions, with limited attention to understanding individual teachers' perspectives and decision-making processes in selecting and adapting strategies to their specific contexts. This gap underscores the need for qualitative research examining how experienced teachers understand, select, and implement reading comprehension strategies in their unique classroom environments.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore an English teacher's perspective on strategies used in teaching reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 35 Medan. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to understand social phenomena in their natural context and explore meaning through detailed data collection (Creswell, 2014). This approach was chosen to obtain an in-depth understanding of the teacher's instructional practices, the rationale behind strategy selection, and the dynamics occurring within the reading comprehension classroom.

Data and Data Sources

The data consisted of qualitative interview responses regarding the teacher's perceptions of reading comprehension learning strategies, reasons for choosing certain strategies, media used, challenges faced, and expectations for students' reading development. The data source was an experienced ninth-grade English teacher at SMP Negeri 35 Medan, selected using purposive sampling technique to ensure the informant had extensive knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002).

Data Collection Technique

Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection technique, allowing the researcher to explore information in depth while following question guidelines (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). The interview was conducted in person, recorded with the participant's consent, and lasted approximately 53 minutes. The interview protocol included 20 questions covering the teacher's professional background, perceptions of students' reading abilities, strategies used, media integration, challenges encountered, assessment practices, and reflections on effectiveness.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) qualitative data analysis model, consisting of three stages: (1) Data Reduction transcribing interview recordings, then selecting, simplifying, and focusing data relevant to research objectives; (2) Data Display presenting reduced data in narrative descriptions and thematic categories to facilitate understanding of patterns and relationships; and (3) Conclusion Drawing and Verification drawing conclusions from research findings and verifying them by comparing analysis results with original data to ensure validity.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis of the interview data revealed six main themes regarding the experienced English teacher's perspective on reading comprehension instruction at SMP Negeri 35 Medan. These themes address the two primary research questions of this study: (1) what the teacher's perceptions are concerning the strategies used to teach reading comprehension, and (2) why the teacher chooses certain strategies when teaching reading comprehension. The findings are presented sequentially below.

A. Teacher's Perception of Strategies Used to Teach Reading Comprehension

1. Teacher's Professional Background

The participant is an experienced English teacher who has been teaching at SMP Negeri 35 Medan for more than fifteen years as a contract teacher. The teacher holds a Master's degree in Educational Technology from Universitas Negeri Medan (UNIMED), providing a strong foundation in both English teaching and instructional design principles. This combination of extensive teaching experience and advanced education forms the basis of the teacher's confidence in designing learning activities and integrating various types of media into the classroom.

2. Strategies Used in Teaching Reading Comprehension

The findings indicate that the teacher prefers student-centered strategies that encourage higher-order thinking rather than simple recall of information. Symbols and pictures with minimal text are frequently used as starting points for reading activities. Students are asked to observe images, interpret context, and then produce sentences or texts based on their own understanding. This approach stimulates imagination, analysis, and the ability to infer meaning from limited written input. The teacher explained:

"Saya lebih suka kepada hal-hal yang sifatnya simbol... itu teks sangat sedikit sekali saya kasihkan" [I prefer things that are symbolic... I give very little text].

Questioning serves as a key strategy, but the teacher avoids one-answer definitional questions. Instead, the teacher prefers open problem-like questions that require students to think, investigate, and discuss possible answers rather than simply repeating information from the text. Strategy selection is not based on labeling students as "smart" or "weak." The teacher emphasizes focusing on students' persistence, willingness to read, and learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) instead of ability grouping.

The teacher also reported that strategies are often modified from one meeting to another. If a particular approach seems less effective, it will be changed or adjusted in the next lesson. This shows that reading instruction is seen as a flexible and dynamic process, where methods are continuously refined to match students' development and classroom conditions.

3. Use of Media and Technology

Media and technology play an important role in the teacher's reading instruction. The teacher uses a combination of text, images, and movement-based media to accommodate different learning styles. Pictures, written texts, and videos are used together so that visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners can all engage meaningfully with the material. The teacher stated: *"Yang tulisannya ada, gambarnya ada, yang ada gerak-gerakannya pun ada... pakai IT-mu"* [There are writings, pictures, and movements... use your IT].

PowerPoint remains one of the main tools used, with slides that include objectives, texts, images, and clear learning steps. However, the teacher also observed that students now feel more familiar and interested in newer platforms such as Canva, especially when they are asked to create products or presentations. The teacher allows students to choose digital tools they are comfortable with, which often results in more enthusiastic and creative work related to reading tasks.

4. Assessment Practices and Perceived Impact

The teacher's assessment of students' reading comprehension focuses on both language form and text structure. When evaluating narrative texts, two main aspects are considered: the accuracy of tense use and the completeness of generic structure, including orientation, characters, setting, conflict, and resolution. The teacher stated: "*Kekuatan pola saya itu kepada dua. Cara dia menuliskan menurut tenses-nya dan generic structure-nya pas atau tidak*" [My pattern strength is on two things. The way they write according to tenses and whether the generic structure is correct or not].

Assessment is carried out through various products, such as written texts, videos, and drama performances, aligned with curriculum expectations that emphasize students' ability to present learning results. The teacher expressed the view that the strategies used have been effective in increasing students' creativity, reasoning, and confidence. Students who were previously passive are now more willing to ask questions, share ideas, and propose alternative ways of doing tasks.

Regarding suitable strategies for current junior high school students, the teacher believes that approaches developing students' thinking patterns, analysis, and creativity are more relevant than strategies merely focusing on memorizing rules. The teacher advised other educators to keep enriching their own knowledge so they can foster critical thinking in students, and expressed hope that students' reading ability will continue improving toward deeper and more analytical understanding.

B. Teacher's Rationale for Strategy Selection (RQ2)

5. Perceptions of Students' Reading Ability

The teacher perceives that the general reading ability of ninth-grade students is still relatively low. Students are described as "instant" learners who tend to focus only on what is explicitly stated in the text and struggle to understand implied meanings. According to the teacher, many students have difficulty analyzing information, thinking critically about what they read, and moving beyond basic levels of comprehension. The teacher stated: "*Cenderung hanya mampu menangkap yang tersurat saja, hal-hal yang tersirat mereka sulit... kemampuan analisis dan critical thinking mereka masih lemah*" [They tend to only be able to capture what is explicit; they find implicit things difficult... their analytical and critical thinking abilities are still weak].

The teacher believes reading comprehension is highly important for junior high school students in the current era, where information is abundant and easily accessible. Students do not need to memorize too many details, but they must be able to analyze, interpret, and understand concepts from the texts they read. Reading comprehension is viewed as a key skill that supports academic success and prepares students to handle the demands of modern learning, particularly in relation to critical thinking and problem-solving.

6. Challenges and Ways of Overcoming Them

The teacher identifies two broad categories of challenges: those related to students and those related to school facilities. On the student side, the main difficulty is not a lack of tools or information, but a lack of seriousness, accuracy, and deep understanding. Many students rely on tools such as Google Translate or AI, but still produce incorrect answers because they input wrong data or ignore context. This shows *they have not yet developed*

strong skills in interpreting and checking meaning. The teacher emphasized: "Bukan, kamu masukkan datanya salah. Itulah pemahaman" [No, you entered the wrong data. That is understanding].

To address these problems, the teacher guides students to use technology more critically. Students are asked to work from pictures, create sentences based on context, adjust verb forms according to time expressions, and interpret implied meanings carefully. The teacher often uses problem-solving tasks and contextual exercises to train students to be more accurate and reflective in their reading.

On the facility side, the teacher faces limited technological support. There is no Wi-Fi for students, projectors are few and must be shared, and the computer laboratory cannot accommodate the large number of students. Because of these constraints, the teacher sometimes returns to more traditional methods such as writing on the whiteboard and organizing group work, while still allowing limited use of mobile phones for information searching when appropriate.

Discussion

The findings definitively show that the teacher has a comprehensive view of reading comprehension. They consider it to be an active and interpretive process, rather than simply decoding printed words. Students often identify explicit information, but struggle to understand implied meanings, integrate prior knowledge and form coherent interpretations. The instructional choices observed, such as starting with visuals, encouraging observation and prompting students to generate their own interpretations, demonstrate a deliberate attempt to develop students' reasoning skills and encourage deeper engagement with the text. It is clear that the teacher's practices show they are committed to supporting students' comprehension, confidence and initiative in independently processing information.

The findings definitively align with well-established theories of reading comprehension. These theories stress the vital interaction between linguistic knowledge, background experience and cognitive strategies. The teacher's focus on higher-order thinking skills, such as analysing, predicting, comparing and drawing conclusions, is consistent with research that identifies these skills as essential for genuine comprehension. Integrating multimedia tools and student-centred activities reflects pedagogical principles that view learning as constructive, adaptive and differentiated. The teacher's reflective adjustments to their instructional approach demonstrate an understanding of how comprehension improves through continual evaluation and adaptation (Grabe, 2009; Westwood, 2008; Snow, 2002; Brown, 2007; Nunan, 2003).

The findings are clear, reading instruction must include explicit guidance on how students can use technology responsibly and critically. The misuse of tools such as Google Translate and AI often leads to misunderstandings. Teachers must design flexible teaching methods that remain effective when technical resources are limited. These methods must ensure that students' meaning-making processes can be supported through traditional or low-tech approaches. The clear increases in student participation, willingness to ask questions and readiness to generate ideas show that student-centred, project-based approaches are

the way to strengthen critical literacy, autonomy and more durable comprehension skills. This makes them invaluable for long-term instructional planning.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the experienced English teacher at SMP Negeri 35 Medan holds a clear and consistent perspective on teaching reading comprehension as an active thinking process requiring students to build meaning, notice implications, and connect text with their reasoning. The teacher's approach emphasizes student-centered strategies that develop higher-order thinking rather than surfacelevel recall, including symbol and image-based learning, open-ended questioning, multimedia integration, and flexible strategy adaptation.

Strategy selection is guided by attention to students' learning styles, persistence, and readiness rather than fixed ability labels, with continuous modification based on classroom realities and student responses. The teacher deliberately pushes students beyond literal comprehension toward analytical, inferential, and critical engagement with texts. Media and technology are integrated purposefully to accommodate diverse learning preferences, though the teacher remains mindful that digital tools must support rather than replace genuine cognitive effort.

Challenges include students' overreliance on technology without deep understanding and limited school facilities, yet the teacher adapts by emphasizing critical use of available resources and maintaining flexibility in instructional approaches. Assessment practices focusing on both linguistic accuracy and structural completeness, evaluated through diverse products, reflect efforts to connect form, meaning, and coherent text organization. The findings demonstrate that effective reading comprehension instruction in Indonesian EFL contexts requires not only appropriate strategy selection but also deep understanding of how strategies fit students' needs and available resources. The teacher's perspective provides valuable insights into how experienced educators navigate the complex landscape of reading instruction, balancing theoretical principles with practical constraints while maintaining focus on developing students' analytical abilities, confidence, and independence as readers.

SUGGESTIONS

For Teachers

English teachers are encouraged to adopt strategies that help students think beyond literal text comprehension. Activities starting from pictures, symbols, or short prompts that lead students to observe, interpret, and write can effectively train deeper understanding. Open-ended questioning, project-based tasks, and opportunities for students to discuss their interpretations can make reading lessons more meaningful. It is crucial for teachers to guide students in using technology critically so digital tools support rather than replace their comprehension efforts.

For Schools

Schools should provide stronger support for reading instruction by improving learning facilities, especially those related to technology. Access to stable internet, sufficient

projectors, and functional computer laboratories can help teachers implement planned strategies and media effectively. Schools may also consider organizing workshops or discussion forums where teachers can share and develop ideas about teaching reading comprehension, particularly strategies fostering higher-order thinking and student-centered learning.

For Future Researchers

Future researchers may extend this study by involving more participants, including multiple teachers from different schools or students themselves, to obtain a broader picture of reading comprehension practices. Further studies could combine interviews with classroom observations or analysis of students' written products to see more clearly how strategies are applied and how students respond in real learning situations. Research comparing different grade levels or school types may also provide valuable insights into how reading comprehension strategies can be adapted to diverse contexts. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of specific strategies on students' reading development would contribute significantly to the field.

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