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Exploring Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Among English Department Students at Hamzanwadi University

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Abstract

Comprehending complex English academic texts remains a primary challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students due to linguistic limitations and immature metacognitive control. Therefore, this study aims to deeply explore how metacognitive awareness and reading strategies are utilized by 34 novice EFL students when facing text comprehension difficulties. The research employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design involving 34 second-semester students at Hamzanwadi University. Quantitative data were collected using the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) questionnaire, followed by purposive semi-structured interviews with 11 participants to explore their cognitive rationalizations. The results revealed that students predominantly relied on Problem-Solving Strategies (M=3.90) and Support Strategies (M=3.68), whereas Global Strategies (M=3.61) were the least utilized. Qualitatively, the findings uncovered that students' metacognitive monitoring was highly reactive; the selection of tools like digital translators was pragmatically driven by the need for efficiency and cognitive load management to avoid mental fatigue and vocabulary memory failure. Practically, these findings contribute to reading comprehension instruction by highlighting the need for educators to integrate explicit strategy-based training, particularly in promoting Global Strategies for higher-order critical reading. In conclusion, while novice learners effectively use instant support tools to overcome immediate linguistic barriers, this heavy reliance on digital convenience tends to supersede a more holistic and critical reading evaluation process.

Keywords: *Metacognitive Awareness, Reading Strategies, EFL Students, MARSI, Cognitive Load.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of modern higher education, reading skills for English academic texts have become an essential competency for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to critically evaluate and construct knowledge (Souheylaa et al., 2022). Academic reading is no longer merely a process of decoding literal meaning, but rather a complex cognitive activity that demands strong metacognitive control to navigate texts effectively (Wijaya, 2022). Metacognitive awareness functions as an internal mechanism that enables readers to plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension processes to align with their reading goals and the text's difficulty level (Kusumawardana & Akhiriyah, 2022). Therefore, the mastery of reading strategies underpinned by metacognitive awareness is crucial in helping students

manage the complexity of literature and significantly contributes to their overall academic success (Özensoy, 2021).

Although metacognitive reading strategies have been proven to enhance reading comprehension and self-regulated learning (Pahrizal et al., 2024; Suharni et al., 2024), many EFL students in reality still face linguistic barriers and fail to apply these strategies appropriately (Souheylaa et al., 2022). Often, students apply strategies mechanically and reactively—such as merely translating or guessing meanings spontaneously—without profound reflection on when and why a particular strategy should be used (Kusumawardana & Akhiriyah, 2022). Furthermore, a review of the literature indicates a significant research gap; most previous studies have been dominated by quantitative approaches focusing on the frequency of strategy use or merely measuring Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) scores (Deliany & Cahyono, 2020; Souheylaa & Bouli, 2022). These studies have not qualitatively explored the personal reasons, cognitive load management, and psychological decision-making processes behind the selection of these specific strategies in authentic academic situations.

Exploring the rationales behind the selection of reading strategies holds crucial urgency, both scientifically and practically, especially for students who are in a transitional phase toward advanced literacy demands. Second-semester students in the English Language Education Program at Hamzanwadi University, for instance, are expected to begin interacting with academic texts independently, yet they are frequently hindered by linguistic limitations and their immature metacognitive control. Understanding in depth how novice learners navigate text difficulties and experiment with various support tools amidst their comprehension limitations is essential for designing precise educational interventions. Without a profound identification of this urgency, students run the risk of continuing to rely on superficial mechanical strategies that ultimately hinder the holistic development of critical reading skills.

Based on the background and literature gaps mentioned above, this study aims to deeply explore how students demonstrate their metacognitive awareness in using reading strategies when facing complex English academic texts. More specifically, this study, which adopts an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, is directed to identify the dominant strategy use—encompassing Global Strategies, Problem-Solving Strategies, and Support Strategies based on the MARSI framework—while also dissecting the fundamental reasons and motivations underlying the students' selection of these strategies. Through the integration of descriptive statistical data and qualitative narratives, this research seeks to answer research questions that not only focus on "what" strategies are utilized, but further delve into the mechanics of "how" and "why" these strategies are executed.

The results of this article are expected to provide theoretical contributions by enriching the global literature on the metacognitive awareness of EFL learners, particularly by offering a novel perspective regarding cognitive load management that is rarely touched upon by traditional quantitative studies. Practically, the empirical findings of this study are designed to provide applicable insights for lecturers in integrating meaningful reading strategy training into the language learning curriculum. Furthermore, this article is expected to empower students to proactively control their comprehension, while also serving as a methodological

foundation for future researchers interested in examining the effectiveness of strategic interventions across different levels of language proficiency.

METHOD

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to systematically gather and analyze the data (Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at the English Language Education Program of Hamzanwadi University, with the implementation period taking place from June 18 to September 18, 2026. The population of this study comprised second-semester EFL students. From this population, a sample of 34 students was selected using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique for the initial quantitative phase to ensure balanced representation. Subsequently, for the qualitative phase, a sub-sample of 11 students was purposively selected based on their diverse strategic preference scores from the questionnaire, ensuring a comprehensive and rich qualitative exploration.

The MARSI questionnaire used in this study has been validated in previous research (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002; Mokhtari & Dimitrov, 2018), ensuring its reliability and appropriateness for measuring metacognitive awareness of reading strategies among EFL students. The research procedure was executed in two consecutive data collection stages. Initially, quantitative data were obtained by distributing a closed-ended questionnaire adapted from the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory/MARSI (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002) via Google Forms to measure the frequency of students' strategy use. Following the quantitative data collection, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews to deeply explore the "how" and "why" behind the students' strategic choices. These interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online (via Zoom/WhatsApp), lasted approximately 20 to 40 minutes per participant, and were audio-recorded for transcription accuracy.

The data analysis technique was carried out in three integrative stages. First, the quantitative data from the MARSI questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to calculate the central tendency (Mean Score) for each strategy category, which determined the dominant reading strategies employed by the cohort. Second, the qualitative interview transcripts were analyzed using the Interactive Model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). This qualitative analysis encompassed data condensation for thematic coding, data display for pattern identification, and conclusion drawing/verification. Finally, the numerical results and qualitative narratives were integrated during the interpretation phase to construct a cohesive and robust explanation regarding the students' metacognitive awareness in reading academic texts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative phase of this study maps the general patterns of students' reading strategy usage based on the MARSI framework. Data gathered from the 34 respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the dominant strategies employed. The mean scores for the three primary categories—Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB), Support Reading Strategies (SUP), and Global Reading Strategies (GLOB)—are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean Scores of Students' Reading Strategies Categories

MARSI Category	Item Numbers	Mean Score	Interpretation
Problem-Solving Strategies (PROB)	7 – 13	3.90	High Usage
Support Reading Strategies (SUP)	14 – 20	3.68	High Usage
Global Reading Strategies (GLOB)	1 – 6	3.61	High Usage

Table 1 demonstrates that second-semester EFL students predominantly rely on Problem-Solving Reading Strategies (M = 3.90). This statistical dominance indicates a highly reactive cognitive approach; students primarily execute reading strategies only when they face immediate linguistic breakdowns during the reading process. The specific item analysis confirms this behavioral pattern, showing that the most frequent actions taken are rereading difficult texts (M = 4.15) and intentionally slowing down reading speed (M = 4.12). Conversely, the least utilized strategies included activating prior knowledge before reading (M = 3.15) and summarizing information (M = 3.44), indicating a neglect of preparatory and integrative cognitive processes.

Furthermore, the data shows that Support Reading Strategies (M = 3.68) are frequently utilized as a secondary tool, while Global Reading Strategies (M = 3.61) remain the least utilized. This scoring hierarchy reveals that students prioritize mechanical, micro-level decoding tools to bridge vocabulary gaps rather than engaging in proactive, macro-level text evaluation. Proactive strategies such as summarizing information (M = 3.44) or activating prior knowledge before reading (M = 3.15) are largely neglected in favor of immediate problem-solving.

Table 2. Profile of Selected Participants Based on MARSI Questionnaire Scores

Participant Code	GLOB Mean	PROB Mean	SUP Mean	Dominant Strategy Preference (Selection Rationale)
R1	3.00	3.29	4.29	Support Strategies (High dependency on translation & asking for help)
R2	3.83	4.43	3.86	Problem-Solving (Active note-taking & immediate translation)
R3	3.83	3.86	3.29	Problem-Solving / Global (Reliance on immediate digital tools)
R4	3.83	4.00	4.29	Support / Problem-Solving (High use of physical markers & dictionaries)
R5	3.83	3.29	3.43	Global Strategies (Strong previewing & planning from subtitles/outlines)
R6	3.17	4.00	3.29	Problem-Solving (Focus on decoding difficult parts & using dictionaries)
R7	4.00	5.00	3.86	Problem-Solving / Global (Extremely high problem-solving engagement)
R8	3.17	4.71	3.00	Problem-Solving (Heavy focus on line-by-line reading & monitoring)
R9	3.67	4.14	3.57	Problem-Solving (High cognitive load management through note-taking)
R10	4.00	4.29	3.29	Problem-Solving / Global (Highly strategic reader profile)
R11	3.33	4.00	4.00	Problem-Solving / Support (Balanced active tool user)

Table 2 outlines the diverse strategic profiles of the 11 purposively selected participants, serving as the qualitative foundation to explain the quantitative trends. The interview results derived from these specific profiles explicitly expose the

psychological rationales behind their strategic choices. Students deliberately select digital translators, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and physical highlighters based on two primary motives: efficiency and cognitive load management.

The qualitative thematic analysis indicates that the students' metacognitive monitoring is heavily tied to line-by-line literal translation rather than grasping holistic academic contexts. Participants consistently justified their reliance on instant digital tools because these methods offer the path of least resistance. For instance, one participant (R4) stated, "When I see too many unknown words, I immediately open Google Translate because if I try to guess one by one, I will get tired and forget the beginning of the paragraph." Similarly, R2 explained, "I use a highlighter to mark important points and then translate them into Indonesian. It helps me focus, but sometimes I miss the big picture of the text." These excerpts reveal that students prioritize immediate comprehension at the word level, often at the expense of global text understanding. By utilizing these specific Support and Problem-Solving strategies, students effectively mitigate vocabulary memory failure and actively minimize the severe mental and physical fatigue associated with reading complex English texts.

The triangulated findings of this study reveal that novice EFL students exhibit a functional yet highly reactive state of metacognition. When evaluated against the theoretical framework of self-regulated learning and previous studies by Habók and Magyar (2018), it is evident that these students utilize metacognitive awareness primarily as a reactive defense mechanism against immediate linguistic breakdowns. Instead of deploying metacognition as a proactive tool for critical evaluation and holistic text comprehension, their awareness is triggered almost exclusively when encountering vocabulary blockages, prompting an immediate halt in reading to seek external clarification.

Furthermore, the strong statistical preference for Problem-Solving and Support Strategies over Global Strategies corroborates the findings of Souheylaa et al. (2022) and Abdalla and Abker (2020). The sheer volume of unfamiliar vocabulary in complex academic texts consumes the students' cognitive capacity, forcing them into a state of continuous translation. Consequently, students abandon higher-order global strategies—such as critically evaluating the author's purpose or summarizing core arguments—in favor of micro-level problem-solving and mechanical decoding.

This study significantly advances the broader empirical literature by revealing a novel psychological perspective within the real-world EFL context. Unlike purely quantitative studies that rely solely on MARSI scores (Deliany & Cahyono, 2020), this mixed-methods exploration uncovers the pragmatic survival instincts that dictate strategy execution. While proficient readers adaptively use strategies to improve profound comprehension (Huang & Zhang, 2022), this study reveals that for novice EFL learners, strategic flexibility is pragmatically driven by a profound desire to manage cognitive load and minimize physical and mental fatigue. Students actively favor the immediate speed and convenience of modern digital tools (such as digital dictionaries and AI) over the traditional cognitive struggles required for deep linguistic processing. This localized reliance indicates that digital convenience often supersedes holistic, critical reading evaluation.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature by mapping the specific cognitive load management strategies and psychological rationales of novice EFL

readers navigating digital tools. Practically, these findings underscore an urgent need for educators to integrate explicit strategy-based instruction into reading courses. Because students already possess localized problem-solving skills, instruction must deliberately push students beyond mechanical decoding by explicitly training them to apply Global Strategies for higher-order conceptual thinking.

Despite these contributions, this study acknowledges certain limitations. Reading comprehension was positioned strictly as a contextual background to explore cognitive processes, rather than being objectively measured as a performance outcome. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct experimental or correlational studies to objectively measure whether this heavy reliance on digital support strategies actually results in higher or lower academic reading test scores. Additionally, exploring the metacognitive awareness of more advanced EFL students is recommended to observe if strategic maturity and the utilization of global strategies naturally evolve as linguistic proficiency improves.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the metacognitive awareness of early-stage EFL students is functional yet highly reactive. When dealing with complex academic texts, students' metacognitive control is primarily triggered as a defense mechanism against immediate linguistic bottlenecks, rather than as a proactive instrument for holistic text evaluation. This results in a high reliance on Problem-Solving Strategies (M=3.90) and Support Strategies (M=3.68), such as line-by-line literal translation and the use of digital tools, while Global Strategies (M=3.61) remain underutilized. This strategic preference is fundamentally driven by a pragmatic psychological need for efficiency and cognitive load management; students opt for digital translators and physical markers to prevent vocabulary forgetting and minimize mental and physical fatigue.

Theoretically, this research makes a scientific contribution by expanding the literature on EFL reading strategies through the revelation of psychological rationalizations and cognitive load management tactics among novice learners. These findings demonstrate that students' strategic flexibility is often dictated by a pragmatic instinct to seek the path of least resistance amidst linguistic limitations. Practically, the implications of this study highlight the urgency for language education institutions to explicitly integrate strategy-based reading instruction into their curricula.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Berdasarkan temuan penelitian, direkomendasikan agar dosen mengintegrasikan pengajaran strategi membaca yang eksplisit ke dalam kurikulum dengan melatih mahasiswa menerapkan Global Strategies—seperti pemetaan tujuan teks dan summarisasi kritis—serta menumbuhkan kebiasaan refleksi diri untuk menggeser pola pikir mahasiswa dari sekadar decoding mekanis reaktif menuju kontrol metakognitif yang proaktif. Secara bersamaan, mahasiswa disarankan untuk mengurangi ketergantungan berlebihan pada alat penerjemah digital instan dengan secara bertahap membangun kosakata dan menggunakan petunjuk kontekstual, sehingga mampu mengembangkan kebiasaan membaca yang lebih mandiri dan kritis. Adapun bagi peneliti selanjutnya, sangat penting untuk melakukan studi

eksperimental atau korelasional guna mengukur secara objektif dampak ketergantungan pada alat digital terhadap skor pemahaman bacaan, meneliti perkembangan metakognitif mahasiswa semester lanjut guna mengamati kematangan strategis, serta mengevaluasi secara ketat efektivitas program intervensi Global Strategies yang terarah di berbagai tingkat kemahiran berbahasa.

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