

EXPLORING STUDENTS' READING STRATEGIES IN COMPREHENDING NARRATIVE TEXT: A CASE STUDY AT SMPN 4 BARANTI

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is a crucial aspect of English learning, yet many students still experience difficulties in understanding narrative texts due to unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentences, and limited use of appropriate reading strategies. This study aimed to explore the reading strategies used by Grade VIII students in comprehending narrative texts at SMPN 4 Baranti and to describe how those strategies were applied during the reading process. The study employed a qualitative case study approach involving 10 Grade VIII students as research informants. Data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews, and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that students employed cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies included reading the title, predicting story content, identifying the main idea, guessing meaning from context, rereading difficult parts, and summarizing the text. Metacognitive strategies were reflected in students' preparation before reading and awareness of comprehension difficulties. Social strategies were demonstrated through asking teachers and discussing texts with peers. Overall, the use of various reading strategies helped students overcome reading difficulties and supported their comprehension of narrative texts.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Globally, reading is considered a crucial component of academic success because it enables learners to access knowledge, develop critical thinking, and improve language proficiency. According to Nunan (2003), reading is an active process in which readers combine textual information with their background knowledge to construct meaning. In other words, reading is not a passive activity of decoding printed symbols; rather, it is a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text.

In the Indonesian educational context, reading is one of the major skills emphasized in the English curriculum at the junior high school level. Students are required to comprehend various genres of texts, including descriptive, recount, exposition, and narrative texts. Among these genres, narrative text plays an important role because it introduces students to story structures, moral values, and cultural elements.

According to Anderson and Anderson (1997), narrative text aims to entertain the reader and usually consists of orientation, complication, and resolution. To comprehend narrative texts successfully, students must understand not only vocabulary but also the structure and implicit meanings within the story.

Reading comprehension does not occur automatically; it requires the use of appropriate strategies. Grabe and Stoller (2002) state that reading comprehension involves strategic processing, linguistic knowledge, and background knowledge. This means that students must apply certain strategies to make meaning from the text. Without strategies, students may become stuck when they encounter unfamiliar words or complex sentences, and their overall understanding of the story may remain incomplete.

Reading strategies are deliberate and conscious actions used by readers to enhance understanding. Oxford (1990) classifies learning strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective strategies. In reading activities, cognitive strategies may include translating, summarizing, predicting, and guessing meaning from context. Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension. Social strategies may include discussing the text with peers or asking the teacher for clarification. These categories provide a useful framework for examining how students approach reading tasks.

Based on preliminary observation at SMPN 4 Baranti, students demonstrated different approaches in reading narrative texts. Some students tended to translate the text word by word, while others attempted to identify key information or guess meanings from context. However, not all students were aware of the strategies they used, and some still struggled to fully understand the content of narrative texts. This situation indicates that there is a need to explore what strategies students actually use and how they apply those strategies in comprehending narrative texts.

Considering the importance of reading strategies and the challenges faced by students in understanding narrative texts, it is necessary to conduct a study that explores students' reading strategies in comprehending narrative texts at SMPN 4 Baranti. This research aims to identify the types of strategies used by Grade VIII students and describe how these strategies are applied during the reading process. By doing so, the findings are expected to contribute to improving reading instruction and students' comprehension skills. The study is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the literature on reading strategies in EFL contexts and practical insights for teachers who wish to emphasize strategy instruction in their classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process that involves constructing meaning from written text through the interaction of linguistic knowledge, cognitive skills, and background knowledge (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). In the EFL context, reading comprehension is particularly challenging because students must process texts in a language that is not their mother tongue. Successful comprehension requires readers to decode words, understand sentence structures, make inferences, and integrate new information with prior knowledge.

Narrative texts present unique demands on readers. Students need to follow the sequence of events, identify characters and settings, understand the conflict and resolution, and often grasp the moral or message of the story. Without appropriate strategies, students may focus only on surface-level decoding and fail to construct coherent meaning from the text. Therefore, the development of reading strategies is essential for helping EFL learners become more independent and effective readers.

Several factors influence reading comprehension, including vocabulary knowledge, syntactic awareness, background knowledge, motivation, and strategic competence. Among these factors, strategic competence is particularly important because it enables students to compensate for gaps in linguistic knowledge. When students encounter difficult vocabulary or complex structures, the ability to use strategies such as contextual guessing, rereading, or seeking clarification can prevent comprehension breakdown.

Reading Strategies

Oxford (1990) classifies language learning strategies into three major categories that are widely applied in reading research: cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective strategies. Cognitive strategies involve direct interaction with the text, such as predicting content, identifying main ideas, guessing meaning from context, rereading, and summarizing. These strategies help readers process and transform textual information so that it becomes more meaningful and memorable.

Metacognitive strategies refer to higher-level processes that involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's own comprehension. Readers who use metacognitive strategies prepare before reading (for example, by examining the title or predicting content), monitor their understanding during reading, and evaluate whether they have adequately comprehended the text after reading. Metacognitive awareness enables students to recognize when comprehension has broken down and to take corrective action.

Social/affective strategies involve interaction with others and the management of emotional factors during learning. Social strategies include asking teachers or peers for clarification and discussing texts with classmates. Affective strategies relate to managing anxiety, maintaining motivation, and building confidence. In classroom reading activities, social strategies often appear when students seek help from the teacher or collaborate with peers to solve comprehension problems.

O'Malley and Chamot (1990) similarly classify learning strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, and social/affective categories and emphasize that strategy use contributes to more effective second language learning. In the context of reading, the combination of these strategies allows students to process the text, regulate their own understanding, and obtain support when individual effort is insufficient.

Previous Related Studies

Previous studies have shown that strategic readers tend to achieve better comprehension than those who read passively. Hermansyah et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of predicting and summarizing in supporting students' reading comprehension. Their study indicated that strategic activities encourage students to engage actively with texts and understand information more deeply. Other research has also highlighted the role of metacognitive awareness in helping students monitor and regulate their reading processes.

Studies conducted in Indonesian EFL classrooms have frequently reported that many students still rely heavily on word-by-word translation and are less familiar with higher-order strategies such as prediction, inference, and summarization. This condition underscores the need for classroom research that documents the strategies students actually use and identifies areas that require instructional support. The present study contributes to this body of research by focusing on Grade VIII students at SMPN 4 Baranti and examining their use of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies in comprehending narrative texts.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research method using a case study approach. A qualitative case study was selected because the research sought to explore in depth the reading strategies used by students and to describe how those strategies were applied in a natural classroom context. The case study design allowed the researcher to focus on a specific group of learners at SMPN 4 Baranti and obtain detailed descriptions of their reading behaviors without applying experimental treatment.

According to Sugiyono (2022), qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher aims to understand phenomena in their natural setting and to interpret the meanings that participants attach to their experiences. In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the use of reading strategies in comprehending narrative texts, and the natural setting was the English classroom at SMPN 4 Baranti.

Research Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at SMPN 4 Baranti, Sidenreng Rappang Regency. The participants consisted of 10 Grade VIII students selected as research informants. Participant selection considered students' involvement in English reading activities so that their reading strategies could be observed and explored through interviews. The object of the study was students' reading strategies in comprehending narrative texts.

The selection of ten informants was considered sufficient for a qualitative case study because the aim was not to generalize findings to a larger population but to obtain rich and detailed descriptions of strategy use. The participants represented a range of reading abilities within the class, which allowed the researcher to capture variation in strategy application.

Research Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. The observation sheet was used to record students' reading behaviors during narrative text lessons, including strategies such as reading the title, predicting content, identifying main ideas, guessing meaning from context, rereading, summarizing, and seeking help from teachers or peers. Observation provided direct evidence of the strategies that students displayed while reading.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted after reading activities to explore students' experiences, the strategies they consciously used, the difficulties they encountered, and the ways they overcame those difficulties. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that allowed students to describe their reading processes in their own words. Documentation was used to complement the data through notes and relevant instructional materials.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Observation and interview data were grouped according to the categories of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. During data reduction, irrelevant information was filtered out, and significant statements related to strategy use were

coded and categorized. Data display involved organizing the categorized findings into descriptive accounts and a summary table. Conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns across participants and verifying them against the original data.

Data credibility was maintained through source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing information obtained from observation and interviews. Consistency between observed behaviors and students' self-reports strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The findings of this study were derived from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with ten Grade VIII students at SMPN 4 Baranti. The analysis identified three major categories of reading strategies employed by the students while comprehending narrative texts: cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. Among these categories, cognitive strategies were the most frequently used. A summary of the strategies identified is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Result of Reading Strategies Used by Students

Reading Strategy	Evidence from Students	Category
Reading the title before reading	10 students	Metacognitive
Predicting story content	9 students	Cognitive
Identifying the main idea	10 students	Cognitive
Guessing meaning from context	10 students	Cognitive
Rereading difficult parts	10 students	Metacognitive
Summarizing the text	10 students	Cognitive
Asking teacher or friends	9 students	Social/Affective

Cognitive Strategies

Cognitive strategies were the most frequently employed reading strategies by the participants when comprehending narrative texts. These strategies involved students' direct interaction with the text in order to understand its content, identify important information, and solve comprehension problems. Based on the interview data from the ten participants, most students demonstrated the use of several cognitive strategies.

Predicting the content of the story was reported by nine students. Before reading the full text, students used the title and sometimes illustrations to anticipate what the story would be about. This prediction helped them activate background knowledge and establish expectations that guided their subsequent

reading. For example, when the title suggested a familiar theme such as friendship or honesty, students predicted possible characters and events before reading the body of the text.

Identifying the main idea was reported by all ten students. Students attempted to determine the central events or the most important information in each paragraph or in the overall narrative. This strategy enabled them to focus on essential content rather than becoming lost in details. Several students explained that they looked for repeated information or key actions performed by the main character in order to identify the main idea.

Guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from context was also used by all ten students. When encountering difficult vocabulary, students did not always stop to look up a dictionary. Instead, they used surrounding sentences, the storyline, and known words to infer possible meanings. This strategy was particularly important because narrative texts often contain vocabulary that is not part of students' everyday repertoire. By relying on context, students were able to maintain the flow of reading and continue constructing meaning.

Rereading difficult parts and summarizing the narrative text after reading were likewise reported by all participants. By rereading, students clarified confusing information and verified their interpretation. By summarizing, they reconstructed the main events in their own words, which strengthened their overall comprehension. Summarizing also helped students check whether they had understood the orientation, complication, and resolution of the story.

These findings are consistent with Oxford's (1990) classification of cognitive strategies as actions that involve direct manipulation of the language material. The results also align with Grabe and Stoller (2002), who emphasize that strategic processing is essential for successful reading comprehension. Through prediction, contextual guessing, identifying main ideas, rereading, and summarizing, students actively processed information rather than reading passively. The findings are also in line with Hermansyah et al. (2022), who emphasized the importance of predicting and summarizing in supporting students' reading comprehension.

Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies involve students' awareness and control of their own reading processes. In this study, evidence of metacognitive strategies was mainly reflected in students' preparation before reading, their awareness of comprehension difficulties during reading, and their decision to reread parts of the text that they did not understand.

Reading the title before starting the narrative text was one indication of students' preparation. All ten students reported that they read the title before reading the entire text. Reading the title helped students establish an initial purpose and activate expectations about the content of the story. This behavior demonstrates that students did not always begin reading without preparation; instead, they used information available before the main text to support their comprehension.

Students' use of prediction can also be related to metacognitive awareness because they attempted to anticipate the content of the story before reading it completely and later compared their predictions with the actual text. By predicting, students established expectations that could later be confirmed or revised. This process demonstrates an element of planning and monitoring during reading.

Monitoring comprehension during the reading process was another prominent metacognitive behavior. When students encountered confusing information or difficult sentences, they did not immediately continue reading. Instead, they paused to think about the meaning, reread the problematic sections, and attempted to connect the information with previous paragraphs. All ten students reported rereading when they were uncertain about the meaning or the sequence of events. This demonstrates that the participants actively monitored their understanding rather than reading the text passively.

Some students also evaluated their comprehension after completing the reading activity by recalling main events, identifying the moral value, or summarizing the narrative. If they realized that they still had difficulty understanding the text, they reread certain parts or sought clarification from the teacher. Overall, the findings provided stronger evidence of planning and monitoring than of explicit post-reading evaluation. Nevertheless, the presence of these metacognitive behaviors indicates that students possessed a basic level of awareness of their own comprehension processes.

Social Strategies

Social strategies were also evident from the interview data. The findings showed that students did not rely only on their individual efforts when they experienced difficulties in comprehending narrative texts. Instead, they also sought assistance from other people, particularly teachers and classmates.

Asking the teacher was the most common form of social strategy. Nine students reported asking the teacher or requesting an explanation when they encountered difficulties with vocabulary or story content. Students considered the teacher an important source of support for solving comprehension problems. When individual strategies such as contextual guessing or rereading were insufficient, teacher explanation helped students continue the reading process.

Peer interaction was also evident. Some students asked their seatmates or classmates for assistance with difficult words. Student responses indicated that peer discussion provided an alternative source of clarification and allowed students to share interpretations of the text. These responses demonstrate that students were willing to use teachers and peers as additional sources of information during the reading process.

These findings are consistent with Oxford's (1990) classification of social strategies, which involve interaction with other people such as asking teachers or peers for clarification and discussing texts with classmates. The use of social strategies played an important role in supporting students' comprehension. When students could not understand a word or part of the story independently, interaction with teachers and peers provided additional explanations and allowed them to continue the reading process instead of remaining stuck on a particular difficulty.

It should be noted that the findings provide stronger evidence of social strategies than of affective strategies. The interview questions mainly focused on students' reading behaviors, difficulties, and sources of assistance. Therefore, the data clearly demonstrate asking teachers and peers for clarification, but they do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that students consciously used specific affective strategies to manage anxiety, frustration, or motivation.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Grade VIII students at SMPN 4 Baranti combined different reading strategies according to the difficulties they experienced while reading narrative texts. Cognitive strategies helped students process and understand textual information; metacognitive strategies helped them prepare for and monitor their reading; and social strategies provided additional support through interaction with teachers and peers.

The dominance of cognitive strategies suggests that students were already engaging in active processing of the text. Strategies such as predicting, identifying main ideas, guessing from context, rereading, and summarizing are practical tools that can be further strengthened through explicit strategy instruction. Teachers can model these strategies, provide guided practice, and encourage students to reflect on which strategies work best for them. For example, teachers can demonstrate how to use context clues, how to identify the main idea of a paragraph, and how to produce a brief summary of a narrative.

The presence of metacognitive strategies, although mainly limited to preparation and monitoring, is encouraging because metacognitive awareness is a key characteristic of skilled readers. Teachers can

support the development of evaluation skills by asking students to summarize, discuss moral values, or check whether their initial predictions matched the story. Activities that require students to reflect on their reading process can gradually strengthen metacognitive control.

Social strategies highlight the value of collaborative reading activities. Pair discussion, group work, and teacher scaffolding can help students who struggle with vocabulary or complex sentences. At the same time, teachers should gradually encourage students to develop independent problem-solving strategies so that social support complements rather than replaces individual effort. A balanced approach that combines individual strategy use with collaborative support is likely to produce more durable comprehension skills.

Overall, the findings support the view that reading comprehension is enhanced when students use a repertoire of strategies rather than relying on a single approach. Instruction that raises students' awareness of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies can contribute to more effective comprehension of narrative texts in EFL classrooms. The present study also confirms that even at the junior high school level, students are capable of applying multiple strategies when given opportunities to read and discuss narrative texts.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Grade VIII students at SMPN 4 Baranti used various reading strategies in comprehending narrative texts, including cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies. Cognitive strategies were the most frequently applied and included predicting story content, identifying the main idea, guessing meaning from context, rereading difficult parts, and summarizing the text. These strategies enabled students to process textual information actively and to construct an understanding of the story.

Metacognitive strategies were reflected in students' preparation before reading, such as reading the title and predicting content, and in their monitoring of comprehension through rereading when difficulties occurred. Although explicit post-reading evaluation was less strongly evidenced, the presence of planning and monitoring indicates that students possessed a basic level of metacognitive awareness. Social strategies were demonstrated through students' willingness to ask teachers and discuss the text with peers when they encountered comprehension problems.

The use of these strategies helped students overcome reading difficulties and supported their comprehension of narrative texts. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to integrate explicit

strategy instruction into reading lessons, model effective strategies, and create opportunities for both independent and collaborative reading practice. Future researchers may expand this study by involving a larger number of participants, examining strategy use across different text genres, or investigating the relationship between strategy use and reading achievement. Such research would further enrich the understanding of how reading strategies contribute to EFL learners' comprehension development.

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