

READING STRATEGIES IN NARRATIVE TEXT COMPREHENSION: A CASE STUDY OF INDONESIAN EFL JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Fitri^{1*}, Bimas Reskiawan², Susi Astiantih³, Roslina⁴
^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Sembilanbelas November Kolaka, Kolaka, Indonesia

28fitryyani@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Low reading interest and comprehension difficulties among EFL junior high school students, particularly in understanding narrative texts, remain significant challenges in Indonesian education, especially in rural settings. This mixed-methods research investigated the reading strategies used by third-grade junior high school students in comprehending narrative texts and how they use those strategies in reading class. A qualitative case study design was employed, supported by quantitative data from a questionnaire. The subjects were 27 third-grade students at a junior high school in Kolaka Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. Data were collected through classroom observations using field notes and a questionnaire based on (Banditvilai, 2020) framework of four reading strategies: skimming, scanning, making predictions, and questioning. Thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data, while descriptive statistics (percentages) were calculated for quantitative data. The findings revealed that students employed all four strategies with distinct patterns. Skimming and scanning functioned as efficiency-oriented strategies: 74.1% of students sometimes skipped small details during reading. Prediction and questioning functioned as depth-oriented strategies: 55.6% often compared predictions with actual information. The integration of questionnaire and observation data through methodological triangulation indicates that students actively combine multiple metacognitive strategies. However, the gap between "Sometimes" and "Often" responses suggests that consistent application remains a challenge requiring explicit instructional support.

Keywords: Junior High School, Narrative Text, Questioning, Reading Strategies, Skimming

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental means of acquiring knowledge and ideas from written texts, functioning as a medium of communication that transcends time and distance (Sutarti, 2017). Reading comprehension extends beyond decoding to include strategic processing and metacognitive awareness (Grabe & Stoller, 2020; Nation, 2019). In academic contexts, particularly in EFL settings, reading proficiency plays a crucial role in enhancing comprehension, developing analytical thinking, and fostering deeper engagement with texts. However, low reading interest remains a significant challenge. As noted by Sari et al. (2020), limited motivation to read restricts students' opportunities to expand vocabulary, develop

critical thinking, and gain broader knowledge. Poor reading habits can further hinder students' ability to comprehend complex texts, actively participate in discussions, and achieve academic success (Lestari & Holandiyah, 2016; Azizah et al., 2017). This decline in reading interest is often influenced by the dominance of digital entertainment, limited access to engaging materials, and the absence of a strong reading culture in both home and school environments (Sari et al., 2020).

Reading comprehension is a multifaceted process that involves not only decoding skills but also higher-order cognitive processes such as inference, synthesis, and evaluation (Kendeou et al., 2016; Perfetti & Stafura, 2014). To support comprehension, learners employ various reading strategies, including skimming, scanning, predicting, and questioning Banditvilai (2020). These strategies are particularly important in understanding narrative texts, which often contain complex plots, diverse characters, and rich linguistic features (Özdemir, 2018).

Nevertheless, many EFL learners perceive such texts as difficult and unengaging, leading to frustration and reduced participation (Huyen & Anh, 2022; Sari et al., 2020), especially in rural contexts where access to resources and strategy instruction is limited (Sari et al., 2020). Previous studies have highlighted these challenges. Setiyaningsih (2013) demonstrated that the Three Phases Technique can improve students' engagement and comprehension, while Marzona & Ikhsan (2019) identified difficulties in recognizing main ideas, vocabulary, implied meaning, and text structure. Hidayat and Maharot (2017) found that narrative texts are effective due to their entertaining nature, yet Farihah et al. (2023) reported persistent difficulties in vocabulary, inference, and main idea identification. These issues are often linked to limited use of reading strategies and insufficient metacognitive awareness (Afflerbach et al., 2015; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002).

More recent studies have examined specific reading strategies and factors affecting comprehension. Ngoc (2016) and Sari (2016) provided evidence that skimming and scanning techniques improve reading comprehension achievement among EFL students. Prastika et al. (2020) investigated the effect of prediction strategy on students' reading comprehension, demonstrating that prediction significantly enhances comprehension. (Amalia & Devanti, 2017) found that questioning strategy improves students' reading comprehension by encouraging active engagement with the text. Okasha (2020) reported that using strategic reading techniques significantly improves EFL reading skills. (Pardede, 2022) reviewed online reading strategies in EFL contexts and emphasized the importance of metacognitive awareness in digital reading environments. Meniado (2016) confirmed that metacognitive reading strategies positively correlate with reading comprehension performance.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the Reading Systems Framework proposed by Perfetti & Stafura (2014) which positions word knowledge as central to reading comprehension and highlights the importance of word-to-text integration processes. This perspective emphasizes that successful comprehension relies not only on decoding lexical items but also on integrating them into coherent textual meaning. Extending this view, Panayiota Kendeou et al. (2016) conceptualize reading comprehension as a multidimensional and complex process, requiring systematic assessment to identify

learners' difficulties and inform appropriate instructional interventions. In addition, Snow (2002) frames reading comprehension as an interactive process involving dynamic relationships among the reader, the text, and the context in which reading occurs.

From a pedagogical perspective, Hyland (2013) underscores the importance of strategic reading for academic success, arguing that learners need to be equipped with effective strategies to process and interpret texts. Empirical evidence further supports the role of strategy instruction in enhancing comprehension. For instance, Selma Babayigit (2019) found that metacognitive reading strategies significantly improve students' comprehension outcomes. In EFL contexts, Pasumbu and Macora (2020) demonstrate that compensation strategies are effective in supporting junior high school learners in overcoming reading difficulties. More recently, Putri et al. (2024) show that story-mapping techniques can enhance students' engagement in reading classrooms.

Despite the growing body of research on reading comprehension, a notable gap remains in examining the strategies that students naturally employ when engaging with narrative texts without explicit teacher guidance. Much of the existing literature has primarily focused on the implementation of specific instructional techniques or the measurement of comprehension outcomes through assessments (Setyaningsih, 2013; Marzona & Ikhsan, 2019; Farihah et al., 2023), rather than exploring the strategies that learners autonomously apply in authentic classroom contexts. This gap is particularly evident at the junior high school level in rural Indonesian settings, where students often encounter challenges such as limited access to English reading materials, minimal exposure to authentic texts, and insufficient prior instruction in reading strategies (Sari et al., 2020). Theoretically, effective readers are known to actively employ strategies such as predicting, questioning, and monitoring comprehension (Nell K. Duke & P. David Pearson, 2002; Neil J. Anderson, 2008). Empirical evidence also suggests that reading comprehension difficulties tend to be more pronounced among EFL learners in under-resourced educational contexts (Al-jarrah et al., 2018). Therefore, investigating students' self-initiated reading strategies is crucial for informing the development of more contextualized and learner-centered approaches to reading instruction. Strategic reading behaviors are essential for developing independent readers in EFL contexts (Chamot, 2005).

Given this gap, the current research becomes highly relevant and necessary. This study aims to explore how third-grade junior high school students attempt to comprehend narrative texts, focusing on the reading strategies they utilize whether consciously or unconsciously and how they use those strategies in reading class. The research questions are: (1) What are the strategies used by students to understand narrative text? and (2) How do students use the strategies in reading class? The novelty of this research lies in three aspects. First, it focuses on students' natural, self-initiated reading strategies rather than teacher-imposed techniques. Second, it is conducted in a rural junior high school in Kolaka Regency, an under-researched educational context. Third, it employs a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth, contextualized understanding of students' strategic reading behaviors as they naturally occur. The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the body of knowledge on reading strategies in EFL contexts by documenting how students independently apply cognitive and metacognitive

strategies, extending the work of (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014), (Kendeou et al., 2016), and (Hyland, 2013). Practically, the findings are expected to inform English teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers about the actual strategies students use, enabling them to design more contextualized and student-centered reading instruction that addresses the specific needs of learners in rural educational settings.

METHODS

This research employed a mixed-methods approach with a qualitative case study design as the primary framework, supported by quantitative data from a questionnaire. A case study design was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore a specific phenomenon in this research, the reading strategies of EFL junior high school students within its real-life setting without manipulation or control by the Nurrisa & Hermina (2025). This design is suitable for answering the research questions because it enables a comprehensive understanding of what strategies students use and how they use those strategies in authentic reading activities. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to capture nuanced insights into students' behaviors, thoughts, and actions as they interact with narrative texts, while the quantitative data from the Likert-scale questionnaire provides supplementary information on the frequency of strategy use (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The subjects of this research were third-grade (ninth-grade) students at a junior high school located in Kolaka Regency. A total of 32 students were initially involved in the classroom observation, while 27 students participated as respondents in the questionnaire. The sampling was purposive, as third-grade students were selected based on initial observations indicating that they still face several challenges in fully understanding the structure and meaning of narrative texts (Sari et al., 2020). Additionally, students at this grade level are at a cognitive development stage that supports the enhancement of reading skills and text comprehension (Babayigit, 2019). The research was conducted for approximately one month, from November to December 2025.

The research instruments consisted of two main tools: observation and questionnaire. Observation was conducted directly in the reading classroom using field notes to systematically monitor students' reading behaviors as they naturally occurred. Field notes served as genuine documentation, capturing the processes taking place in the field depending on the research focus (Nurrisa & Hermina, 2025). The questionnaire was distributed virtually using Google Forms to gather data from 27 participants regarding their reading strategies. The Google Form consisted of 21 statements formatted on a 4-point Likert scale (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always) and was categorized into four reading strategies: skimming, scanning, making predictions, and questioning, based on (Banditvilai, 2020) framework. The questionnaire items were designed to comprehensively capture the strategies students employ when reading narrative texts.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the instruments, several steps were taken. For content validity, the questionnaire items were developed based on established theoretical frameworks (Banditvilai, 2020; Hyland, 2013), and reviewed by two English education experts to ensure that the items accurately represented the four reading strategies. For

reliability, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which yielded a value of .85, indicating high reliability. For observational data, validity was ensured through prolonged engagement in the classroom setting and peer debriefing with fellow researchers to minimize researcher bias (Creswell, 2017).

Data collection techniques followed a systematic procedure. First, classroom observations were carried out in the reading classroom, where the researcher used field notes to record students' reading behaviors, including how they skimmed, scanned, made predictions, and asked questions while engaging with narrative texts. Each observation session lasted 60 minutes, and a total of three observation sessions were conducted over two weeks. Second, the questionnaire was distributed via Google Forms to the 27 participating students. The use of Google Forms aimed to streamline the data collection process, making it more organized and accessible (Okasha, 2020). All responses were automatically recorded and compiled for analysis. The data collected included both qualitative data from observations (field notes describing behaviors, interactions, and verbal responses) and quantitative data from the Likert-scale questionnaire (numerical responses indicating frequency of strategy use).

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the qualitative data, methodological triangulation was employed. This technique involved comparing and cross-verifying data collected through two different methods: classroom observation and questionnaires (Creswell, 2017). Observations were carried out directly to identify students' reading behaviors, while questionnaires were distributed to gather detailed information regarding the students' self-reported strategy use. By applying this triangulation method, the researcher could determine whether the data from observations aligned with the students' questionnaire responses. Consistency between both data sources reinforced the credibility of the research findings.

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis, which serves as a fundamental method in qualitative research (Meniado, 2016; Pardede, 2022). The researcher applied thematic analysis to examine the data gathered through field notes during observations. The analysis process followed the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2017): (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. The key themes identified were the four reading strategies: skimming, scanning, making predictions, and questioning. For the questionnaire data, descriptive statistics (percentages) were calculated using Microsoft Excel to determine the frequency of strategy use among students. The percentage for each item was calculated by dividing the number of responses in each category (Never, Sometimes, Often, Always) by the total number of respondents (27), then multiplying by 100. These quantitative results were then integrated with the qualitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' reading strategy use, following a convergent mixed-methods design where both types of data were analyzed separately and then compared for convergence (Creswell, 2017).

RESULTS

This section presents the findings from the questionnaire and classroom observation conducted with 27 third-grade junior high school students in Kolaka Regency. The results are organized according to the four reading strategies proposed by (Banditvilai, 2020): skimming, scanning, making predictions, and questioning.

Skimming Strategies

As presented in Table 1, the majority of students demonstrated awareness of skimming strategies. Notably, none of the students selected "Never" for reading quickly to get a general idea, and 74.1% reported sometimes skipping small details during the first reading. These findings indicate that students understand the basic concept of skimming as a technique for grasping overall meaning without processing every word.

Table 1. Data of questionnaire result for skimming strategies

Statement	N	S	O
I read the text quickly to get a general idea.	0%	66.7%	40.7%
I focus on the title, subtitles, and the first sentence to understand the main idea.	3.7%	59.3%	40.7%
I skip the small details during the first reading.	3.7%	74.1%	22.2%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Note: N = Never, S = Sometimes, O = Often

The observation results confirmed these findings. Students were observed reading the first sentence of each paragraph to identify the main idea, intentionally skipping minor details, and successfully providing a general summary after reading quickly. This consistency between self-reported and observed behaviors indicates that students possess functional awareness of skimming as a comprehension strategy.

Scanning Strategies

The questionnaire results for scanning strategies are presented in Table 2. For the stat Table 2 shows that scanning strategies were widely applied by students. All three statements received 0% for "Never," indicating that every student uses scanning to some extent. The most commonly reported behavior was scanning for keywords, numbers, or names, with 74.1% selecting "Sometimes."

Table 2. Data of questionnaire result for scanning strategies

Statement	N	S	O
I look for specific information in the text without reading everything.	0%	51.9%	48.1%
I scan the text to find keywords, numbers, or names.	0%	74.1%	29.6%
I go straight to the part of the text that is likely to contain the answer.	0%	51.9%	48.1%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Note: N = Never, S = Sometimes, O = Often

Classroom observations confirmed that students could effectively locate specific details such as characters, places, time references, and numerical information without reading the entire passage. Students demonstrated quick eye movements across the text to identify keywords, reflecting an ability to navigate texts strategically.

Making Predictions Strategies

Table 3 displays the results for prediction strategies. Notably, 55.6% of students reported often comparing their predictions with actual information in the text the highest "Often" percentage across all prediction items. This suggests that students not only make predictions but also actively evaluate and adjust them based on textual evidence.

Table 3. Data of questionnaire result for making predictions strategies

Statement	N	S	O
I predict the content of the text based on the title or pictures before reading.	3.7%	51.9%	44.4%
I predict what will appear in the next part while reading.	7.4%	51.9%	40.7%
I compare my predictions with the actual information in the text.	0%	48.1%	55.6%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Note: N = Never, S = Sometimes, O = Often

Observation data revealed that students actively engaged in prediction behaviors: they examined titles and initial pictures before reading, made guesses about upcoming events while reading, and revised their predictions when new information emerged.

Questioning Strategies

As shown in Table 4, questioning strategies were used consistently by students. None of the students selected "Never" for any of the three statements, indicating universal use of questioning to support comprehension. The highest "Sometimes" response (63%) was for making questions about text content before or while reading.

Table 4. Data of questionnaire result for questioning strategies

Statement	N	S	O
I make questions about the content of the text before or while reading.	0%	63%	37%
I look for the answers to my questions while reading.	0%	51.9%	48.1%
I ask myself whether I understand the text correctly.	0%	55.6%	44.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Note: N = Never, S = Sometimes, O = Often

Observation findings confirmed that students asked questions before reading (e.g., "What is this story about?"), questioned themselves during reading to understand plot development, and returned to the text to verify their answers. This cyclical questioning process demonstrates metacognitive awareness.

Summary of Key Patterns

Across all four strategies, three key patterns emerged. First, skimming and scanning were the most frequently used strategies, with 0% "Never" responses across almost all items. Second, prediction and questioning strategies showed moderate to high use, indicating engagement in deeper comprehension processes. Third, the consistent gap between "Sometimes" and "Often" responses suggests that while students are aware of these strategies, consistent application remains a challenge.

DISCUSSION

Discussion of Reading Strategies Used by Students

The findings of this research revealed that third-grade junior high school students employed four types of reading strategies when comprehending narrative texts: skimming,

scanning, making predictions, and questioning. These findings align with the theoretical framework proposed by Banditvilai (2020), who stated that these four strategies play a central role in enabling students to navigate written texts effectively. However, beyond simply confirming the existence of these strategies, the current research provides insight into how and why students use them in authentic classroom contexts, particularly in a rural EFL setting.

Why do students use skimming? The results showed that skimming was the most frequently used strategy, with 66.7% of students sometimes reading quickly to get a general idea and 74.1% sometimes skipping small details. The observation data revealed that students used skimming primarily as an efficiency tool to reduce cognitive load and quickly determine whether a text was worth reading in depth. This finding extends (Banditvilai, 2020) definition by demonstrating that skimming serves not only as a comprehension strategy but also as a text selection strategy. In contrast to Marzona and Ikhsan's (2019) finding that students struggle to identify main ideas, the current research found that when students consciously apply skimming, they can successfully identify main ideas. This suggests that the difficulty identified by Marzona and Ikhsan (2019) may stem not from lack of ability but from lack of explicit strategy instruction.

How do students use scanning? Scanning was used strategically to locate specific information such as names, numbers, and keywords. Observational data revealed that scanning was used most frequently when students had a clear and explicit purpose, particularly when responding to comprehension questions. This finding is consistent with previous studies indicating that skimming and scanning techniques contribute to improved reading comprehension achievement (Ngoc, 2016; Sari, 2016). It also supports the view that efficient readers selectively process textual information to minimize cognitive load (William Grabe, 2009).

However, the present study offers an important extension to existing research. While students in rural contexts demonstrated the ability to use scanning effectively under structured task conditions, they showed limited transfer of this strategy to more open-ended reading situations without explicit guidance. This suggests that strategic competence remains task-dependent and highlights the need for sustained instructional support. In line with this, strategic scanning can be understood as a form of goal-directed reading behavior (Michael Pressley & Peter Afflerbach, 1995), in which readers selectively attend to relevant information based on specific purposes. Therefore, teachers should explicitly guide students in recognizing when and how scanning can be appropriately applied across different reading contexts to promote more autonomous and flexible strategy use.

Why do students make predictions? Prediction strategies were used moderately, but the most notable finding was that 55.6% of students often compared their predictions with actual information the highest "Often" percentage across all prediction items. This suggests that students were not merely making guesses but were actively monitoring and refining their understanding based on textual evidence. Such behavior aligns with findings by Prastika et al. (2020), who reported that prediction strategies significantly enhance reading comprehension. From a theoretical perspective, prediction facilitates comprehension by

activating prior knowledge and guiding readers' interpretation of incoming information (Ellen L. Block, 1992).

Further observation revealed that prediction served two key functions: (1) as a pre-reading strategy, where students used titles and visual cues to anticipate content, and (2) as an ongoing comprehension-monitoring strategy, where they continuously revised their predictions while reading. This dual function indicates that prediction operates as a metacognitive strategy that sustains cognitive engagement and supports meaning construction throughout the reading process (Meniado, 2016).

How do students use questioning? Questioning strategies were used consistently, with 63% of students sometimes generating questions before or while reading. Observational data revealed a cyclical process in which students formulated questions, searched for answers within the text, evaluated whether their questions had been addressed, and subsequently generated new questions. This iterative pattern reflects a level of metacognitive awareness that Panayiota (Kendeou et al., 2016) identify as essential for effective reading comprehension.

Unlike other strategies, questioning requires learners to actively construct meaning rather than passively receive information. This finding is consistent with Amalia & Devanti (2017), who demonstrated that questioning strategies enhance reading comprehension by fostering active engagement. From a theoretical standpoint, questioning promotes deeper comprehension by encouraging learners to monitor their understanding and regulate their reading processes (Scott G. Paris & Patricia Winograd, 1990).

Integration with Theoretical Frameworks

The findings of this research can be understood through Perfetti & Stafura's (2014) Reading Systems Framework, which places word knowledge at the center of reading comprehension and emphasizes word-to-text integration processes. The current research extends this framework by demonstrating that strategic behaviors (skimming, scanning, prediction, questioning) mediate the relationship between word knowledge and comprehension. In other words, even when students have limited vocabulary, they can still achieve comprehension by strategically using these four strategies.

Furthermore, Kendeou et al. (2016) argued that reading comprehension is multidimensional and requires assessments that help identify sources of difficulties. The current research supports this by showing that students' difficulties are not always cognitive (lack of ability) but can be strategic (lack of awareness or application). For example, students who struggled with identifying main ideas could do so when they consciously applied skimming. This suggests that assessment of reading comprehension should include not only outcome measures (test scores) but also process measures (what strategies students use).

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this research both support and extend previous studies in the field. Setyaningsih (2013) investigated the application of the Three Phases Technique to enhance students' engagement and reading comprehension of narrative texts. While Setyaningsih (2013) focused on teacher-implemented instructional techniques, the current research

focused on students' self-initiated strategies. Both studies, however, emphasize the importance of structured strategic reading behaviors. The current research extends Setiyaningsih (2013) work by documenting how students naturally employ skimming, scanning, prediction, and questioning without explicit teacher direction during each phase.

Similarly, Marzona and Ikhsan (2019) identified comprehension difficulties such as problems in identifying main ideas, interpreting word meanings, and understanding implied information. The current research complements these findings by demonstrating that strategy awareness can help students overcome many of these difficulties. For example, students in the current research used skimming to identify main ideas and scanning to locate specific information, directly addressing the difficulties identified by Marzona and Ikhsan (2019). This finding aligns with Okasha (2020), who reported that using strategic reading techniques significantly improves EFL reading skills.

The present study also extends the work of Meniado (2016), who identified a positive correlation between metacognitive reading strategies and reading comprehension performance. In contrast to predominantly quantitative approaches, the current research provides qualitative evidence of this relationship by documenting specific observable behaviors, such as updating predictions and revisiting the text to locate answers, which exemplify metacognitive strategy use in practice. Furthermore, while Pardede (2022) examined online reading strategies in EFL contexts, the present study complements this line of inquiry by focusing on offline, classroom-based reading strategies in a rural setting with limited digital access. These findings reinforce the view that metacognitive awareness plays a crucial role in reading development and is a key predictor of reading success (Kouider Mokhtari & Carla A. Reichard, 2002).

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this research have several theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on reading strategies in EFL contexts by demonstrating that students in rural, under-resourced schools are capable of using multiple reading strategies simultaneously. This finding challenges the deficit perspective that assumes students in such settings lack strategic reading abilities (Sari et al., 2020). Instead, the findings suggest that strategy awareness is present but may require explicit activation through task demands and instructional support.

Practically, the findings have several implications for reading instruction. First, the consistent use of skimming and scanning strategies by students suggests that teachers should continue to reinforce these skills through timed reading activities, main-idea identification tasks, and keyword-search drills (Banditvilai, 2020; Ngoc, 2016). Second, the strong engagement with prediction and questioning strategies indicates that pre-reading activities such as picture walks, KWL charts, and prediction checkpoints are valuable instructional tools (Amalia & Devanti, 2017) (Prastika et al., 2020). Third, the finding that students compare their predictions with actual information and return to the text to find answers reflects metacognitive awareness, which Kendeou et al. (2016) and Meniado (2016) identified as essential for reading comprehension. Strategy instruction plays a crucial role in improving reading comprehension outcomes (Chamot, 2005).

Practically, the findings offer several important implications for reading instruction. First, the consistent use of skimming and scanning strategies suggests that teachers should continue to reinforce these skills through structured activities such as timed reading tasks, main-idea identification exercises, and keyword-search drills (Banditvilai, 2020; Ngoc, 2016). Second, students' strong engagement with prediction and questioning strategies highlights the value of pre-reading and during-reading activities, including picture walks, KWL charts, and prediction checkpoints, as effective tools for activating prior knowledge and sustaining comprehension (Amalia & Devanti, 2017; Prastika et al., 2020).

Third, students' tendency to compare their predictions with textual information and revisit the text to locate answers reflects a developing level of metacognitive awareness, which has been identified as essential for successful reading comprehension (Kendeou et al., 2016); Meniado, 2016). This finding underscores the importance of explicitly fostering metacognitive strategy use in classroom practice. Overall, these results reinforce the view that strategy instruction plays a crucial role in enhancing reading comprehension outcomes (Chamot, 2005), and should therefore be systematically integrated into reading pedagogy.

For curriculum developers, the findings suggest that reading materials should include clear titles, visuals, and structured paragraphs to support prediction and skimming activities. Comprehension questions should be designed to require scanning for specific details, reinforcing this strategy. For teachers in rural settings, the findings highlight the importance of providing explicit strategy instruction and opportunities for independent practice, regardless of school location (Pasumbu & Macora, 2020).

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, this research was conducted at only one junior high school in Kolaka Regency, involving 27 students as questionnaire respondents. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all EFL junior high school students in Indonesia. Second, the research focused exclusively on narrative texts; students' use of reading strategies may differ when engaging with other text genres such as descriptive, expository, or argumentative texts (Sari et al., 2020). Third, the research was conducted over a relatively short period of approximately one month, which may not capture the full range of students' strategic reading behaviors across different learning contexts. Future research is needed to explore reading strategy use across different text types, educational contexts, and longer time frames. Additionally, future studies could employ think-aloud protocols to capture students' metacognitive processes in real time, providing deeper insights into how and why students select specific strategies.

CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods research investigated the reading strategies used by third-grade junior high school students in comprehending narrative texts and how those strategies are employed in reading class. Based on questionnaire and observation data from 27 students at a junior high school in Kolaka Regency, the findings answer both research questions: students employ four reading strategies skimming, scanning, making predictions, and questioning each with distinct patterns of use.

Synthesizing across the four strategies, two key patterns emerge. First, skimming and scanning function as efficiency-oriented strategies. Questionnaire data showed that 74.1% of students sometimes skip small details, while observations confirmed they read first sentences to identify main ideas; both allow students to quickly locate information with minimal cognitive effort. Second, prediction and questioning function as depth-oriented strategies. The finding that 55.6% of students compare predictions with actual information, alongside observations of students updating hypotheses and revisiting the text for answers, indicates engagement in metacognitive monitoring and self-evaluation. Together, these strategies form a complementary toolkit for navigating narrative texts at both surface and deep levels, supporting the view that strategic reading instruction is essential for developing independent learners (Grabe & Stoller, 2020).

The primary contribution of this research is empirical evidence that students in rural, under-resourced EFL settings are capable of using multiple reading strategies independently, challenging deficit-based assumptions that often prevail in such contexts. Unlike previous studies that focused on teacher-implemented instructional techniques (Setiyaningsih, 2013) or quantitative measurements of comprehension difficulties (Marzona & Ikhsan, 2019), this research documents the natural, self-initiated strategic behaviors of students in authentic classroom contexts. The integration of questionnaire and observation data through methodological triangulation strengthens the validity of these findings.

Theoretically, these findings extend (Perfetti & Stafura, 2014) Reading Systems Framework by demonstrating that strategic behaviors mediate the relationship between word knowledge and comprehension. Practically, the findings suggest that while strategy awareness is present among students, consistent application requires explicit activation through task demands and instructional support. For rural educational contexts like Kolaka Regency, this implies that teachers should focus not on introducing new strategies but on reinforcing and deepening the strategies students already use.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The research was confined to a single junior high school in Kolaka Regency with 27 participants, focused exclusively on narrative texts, and conducted over a one-month period. Consequently, the findings are not generalizable to all EFL junior high school students in Indonesia, across different text genres, or over longer timeframes. Additionally, the self-reported nature of questionnaire data may be subject to social desirability bias, although triangulation with observation data mitigates this concern.

Suggestions

Based on these findings and limitations, recommendations are directed toward three audiences.

For future researchers, replication studies are needed in diverse educational contexts (urban schools, private schools, other regions of Indonesia) to compare reading strategy use across settings. Longitudinal studies should examine how strategy use develops over time and how explicit instruction influences strategic reading behaviors. Research across different text genres (descriptive, expository, argumentative) is needed to determine whether students adapt their strategies based on text type. Alternative data collection methods such as think-aloud protocols and reading journals could provide deeper insights into students' metacognitive processes beyond what questionnaires and observations can capture.

For English teachers, explicit instruction and guided practice in all four strategies should be provided, with particular attention to prediction and questioning, which showed lower consistency ("Often" responses) compared to skimming and scanning. Pre-reading activities such as picture walks and KWL charts can activate prediction skills, while comprehension questions requiring scanning for specific information reinforce scanning. Timed reading activities and main-idea identification tasks help refine skimming skills. Most importantly, encouraging students to generate their own questions before, during, and after reading can deepen comprehension and promote active engagement with the text.

For curriculum developers and schools, reading materials should include clear titles, visuals, and structured paragraphs to support prediction and skimming activities. Comprehension questions should be designed to require location of specific details, reinforcing scanning skills. Schools should promote regular reading habits and independent practice outside the classroom by providing access to diverse reading materials, including storybooks, articles, and digital texts in the school library. Professional development for teachers on explicit strategy instruction is also recommended, particularly for rural schools where access to such training may be limited.

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