EXPLORING METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION IN ISLAMIC BOARDING JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

Reading is one of the important lessons for students, especially when they are learning English. English learners usually can read the text well, but many of them cannot understand the content of the text. Several previous studies found strategies that can help students in reading comprehension, namely metacognitive strategies. However, there has been no research involving English students in Islamic boarding schools, while it is known that there are many boarding schools, especially in Indonesia. Therefore, this article attempts to describe a study that further explores metacognitive strategies for understanding English reading by students in Islamic boarding schools where in several aspects this school is different from public schools. Using a qualitative descriptive design, this study describes the results through reading comprehension tests, MARSI questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The results showed that students had good awareness in the use of metacognitive reading strategies. However, there is no significant relationship when it comes to reading comprehension results. This is because several other factors such as interest, background knowledge of students and the role of the teacher also have a major influence on students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: Metacognitive Strategy, English Reading Comprehension, Islamic Boarding School

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a process carried out to obtain knowledge or information from a written text. In this case, the reader must have reading comprehension skills such as interpreting code or graphics into words or understanding the meaning of the written text. The process of making meaning that involves language, word knowledge, word reading and fluency is called reading comprehension (Cain, Oakhill & Bryant, 2004; Paris, 2005; Ahmadi, 2017). Reading comprehension in a foreign language is a measure of a student's success in learning a foreign language. Aisah, Surtiana & Nurjamin (2021) in their research argued that there will be bad impacts both in learning, motivation, attitude and learning performance if students are not able to develop their reading comprehension effectively. Furthermore, several studies on English as a foreign language state that reading comprehension is the main factor that will determine student achievement in class (Jamshidian & Farahani, 2010; Dehghani, Jafarisani, Pakmehr, & Malekzadeh, 2011; Seifoori, 2015). However, we know that in English reading comprehension, differences in vocabulary, language structure and culture are challenges that cannot be avoided. It also should be noted that reading ability is a complex skill that involve a lot of components and variables, such as the use of different reading strategies and different background knowledge of readers (Rianto, 2021). In addition, when readers try to read the English text, they must have good language competencies such as mastery of vocabulary and sentence structures that are different from their native language. The complex nature of reading comprehension makes most EFL students especially Indonesian students still find difficult to understand what they read.

A study conducted by Snow (2002) & Eskey (2005) found that in a certain level, many foreign language learners still find difficult to understand what they read even though they have adequate language competence. Two things that make it difficult for students to develop their reading comprehension are; they do not know what strategies or effective methods that can they use when reading, and they also do not understand how to improve their reading skills (Wahyuni, Ratmanida & Marlina, 2018). Furthermore, when students have difficulty in reading, it can be interpreted that they are not applying their comprehension, memory monitoring, and cognitive tasks (Flavell, 1979; Aflah, 2017). Therefore, it is very important for students to apply strategies and approaches that can support them in reading comprehension. Metacognitive reading strategy can be one solution to this problem. The term of metacognition was coined by Flavell in 1979. He argued that metacognition is cognition about cognitive phenomena or also known as thinking about thinking. Many researchers have developed metacognitive definition, one of them is Ozsoy (2008) as cited in Babayigit (2019), he stated that the metacognitive process occurs when readers are aware of their own thought process and can control that process. Metacognition is also defined as a process of thinking, understanding, and controlling one's own learning (Schraw & Dennison, 1994; Babayigit, 2019). Hence, it can be seen that metacognition is a thought process that is carried out by a person consciously to understand, monitor, and control of their cognitive processes. Baker (2002) argues that the purpose of metacognitive strategies is to teach students or readers how to set goals and make them effective in independent reading. Here, an evidence conducted by Phakiti (2008) as cited in Zhang and Seepho (2013) they found that in the academic reading test, there was a significant difference both in quality and quantity between students who get high scores and students who get low scores. Students with the highest score in reading tests tend to use more metacognitive strategies than their friends who get low scores. This is in line with the research conducted by Kolic-Vehovec & Bajsanski (2006), they used several instruments in their research such as error correction and text sensitivity task to find out the correlation between metacognitive strategies and reading comprehension. The result showed that there was a significant relationship between awareness of using metacognitive reading strategies and reading comprehension where advanced readers consciously used more metacognitive strategies than non-advanced readers. Metacognitive strategy also able to support students in planning, monitoring or controlling and evaluating the results of their reading. In that way, students who use metacognitive strategies will have a better understanding, especially in reading foreign languages or second languages. Thus, it can be said that metacognitive strategies have a positive impact on students' reading comprehension.

Although many researchers have acknowledged that metacognitive strategies can improve students' reading comprehension, there are no studies that have implemented this strategy in Islamic boarding schools, especially in Indonesia. Even though it is known that there are a lot of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Differences in environmental, subject and responsibility when it is compared to public schools can be factors that affect students' English skills. Therefore, the researcher tried to explore further about the use of metacognitive reading strategies in learning English in one of the Islamic Boarding Junior High Schools in Karawang, precisely in Klari. This novelty will later be useful for teachers who teach reading English to consider the use of metacognitive strategies, especially when they teach students in boarding schools. Unlike previous studies where most of the research on metacognitive strategies was conducted by academic reading on students, this study uses several types of simple texts such as narrative, procedure, recount text. This is based on the consideration of participants who are at the junior high school level. To export more about metacognitive strategies, this study will

answer the following research question: How far do EFL students in Islamic boarding school utilize metacognitive strategies in their reading comprehension.

METHOD

The main objective of this study was to explore the use of metacognitive reading strategies in depth, so that the appropriate research design for this research was descriptive research using qualitative approach. This research was used to identify the nature, occurrence, or distribution of variables where it involved the thing being studied and not manipulating the variables (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). Therefore, it can be said that the use of descriptive qualitative research will describe the research situation as it is. The participants in this study were eight of 9th grade students who studied English at one of Islamic Boarding Junior High School in Karawang that were selected through purposive sampling. Participants in this study were selected for three reasons: 1) they were from the same school, 2) they always present in learning English at their school, and 3) they were at the same level. In this study, to keep the data collected valid and reliable, the researcher used the triangulation method. According to Patton (1999), triangulation is a method used to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena by using several data sources. The researcher admitted that each data collection method used has its own advantages and disadvantages, therefore the researcher combined the three methods to cover the weaknesses and make the research result more reliable. There were three data collection methods that were used in this study; English reading comprehension test that was taken from school final exams made by the education commissariat per region; questionnaire using the MARSI (Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory) instrument that was developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002). This questionnaire will be measured using Likert scale with a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 means "never at all" and 5 means "always"; and semi-structured interview. These data collection methods will answer research question of this study in next chapter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section describes the results of descriptive calculations of students' metacognitive strategies obtained through the English reading test and the MARSI (Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory) questionnaire developed by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) using a Likert scale. Here's the explanation:

Table 1. Students' English Reading Comprehension Test Score

Participant	Reading Test Score	Predicate	Description
Participant 1	70	C	Enough
Participant 2	65	C	Enough
Participant 3	65	C	Enough
Participant 4	80	B	Good
Participant 5	95	A	Very Good
Participant 6	80	B	Good
Participant 7	65	C	Enough
Participant 8	85	B	Good

Mean Score = 75.62	
Range: 54 or lower = E; 55 – 59 = D; 60 – 74 = C; 75 – 90 = B; 91 – 100 = A	

Table 1 shows the students' reading comprehension scores obtained through the English reading comprehension test where students are given 30 minutes to work on 20 multiple choice questions. This reading comprehension test is done by combining metacognitive strategies that students know. The results show the average score that students get is 77.25. The highest score that students get is 94 with a predicate 'very good'. Then the lowest score obtained is 70 with a predicate 'enough'. This indicates that although the researcher did not apply special treatment, students in Islamic boarding junior high schools are able to understand English reading texts well. After doing the English reading comprehension test, participants were asked to fill out the MARSI questionnaire which is divided into three subscales, those are global reading strategies, problem solving strategies and supporting strategies. Table 2 shows 13 strategies that reflect global reading strategies. Table 2 also shows that the highest strategy use is in 'I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it' with an average of 4.62 followed by 10 other strategies which are also identified with a high rating and 2 strategies with a medium rating. The lowest strategy use is 'I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization' with a medium rating (x = 2.62). Then, students at Islamic boarding schools showed positive results towards the use of metacognitive reading strategies as indicated by the overall average use of metacognitive reading strategies (x = 3.84) which could be described with a high rating.

Table 2. Students' Global Reading Strategies Rating

Statements	Mean	Rating
I have a purpose in my mind when I read.	3.62	High
I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	4.25	High
I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it.	4.62	High
I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	3.87	High
I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.	2.62	Medium
I decide what to read closely and what I'm reading.	3.75	High
I use table, figures, and pictures in the text to increase my understanding.	4.37	High
I use context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading.	3.75	High
I use typographical aids like bold face and italic to identify key information.	3.87	High
I critically analyze and evaluate information presented in the text.	3.25	Medium
I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	3.87	High
I try to guess what the material is about when I read.	3.87	High

I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	4.25	High
Overall Mean Score = 3.84		

Range: 2.4 or lower = low; 2.5 – 3.4 = medium; 3.4 or higher = high

Next, table 3 shows 8 item problem-solving strategies where the items in this strategy are strategies that students can use when they have difficulty understanding the text they are reading. Ranging from 4 to 4.75, students in Islamic boarding junior high school showed a high use of problem-solving strategies. Rereading to improve understanding when students have difficulty understanding a text has the highest rating (x = 4.75). This implies that students consciously know their weaknesses in reading well so that they will think and reread sentences they do not understand to solve the problem. The lowest item used by students in problem solving strategies is 'I try to guess the meaning of unknow words or phrase' (x = 4). However, even though that the item has the lowest rating in problem-solving strategies, the rating on the item is still on a high scale which indicates that students are still using the strategy actively even though the quantity is not as large as the other items. Then, the overall average score of using problem-solving strategies for students in Islamic boarding junior high school is at a high rating (x = 4.35) which means it is higher than global reading strategies.

Table 3. Students' Problem-solving Strategies Rating

Statements	Mean	Rating
I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I'm reading.	4.5	High
I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	4.12	High
I adjust my reading speed according to what I'm reading.	4.5	High
When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I'm reading.	4.12	High
I stop from time to time and think about what I'm reading.	4.37	High
I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	4.5	High
When text becomes difficult, I reread to increase my understanding.	4.75	High
I try to guess the meaning of unknow words or phrases.	4	High
Overall Mean Score = 4.35		

Range: 2.4 or lower = low; 2.5 – 3.4 = medium; 3.4 or higher = high

Last, the nine items in the support reading strategies shown in the table 4 show the overall average use of support reading strategies, which is 3.49 with a high rating. Although the overall average use is high, the use of support reading strategies by students in Islamic boarding junior high school is the lowest when compared to global reading strategies and problem-solving strategies. It stated that students in Islamic boarding school have a decrease from the previous sub-strategy and indicated they should increase their use of support reading strategies. However, it can be seen in table 3 that the highest use of the items occurred when students read

back and forth to find the relationship of each idea in the paragraph (x = 4.12). This shows that students often have difficulty understanding the main ideas and topics in the English texts they read. In addition, the lowest strategy use can be seen in the item that has an average of 2.87, 'When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read'.

Table 4. Students' Support Reading Strategies Rating

Statements	Mean	Rating
I take notes while reading to help me understand what I'm reading.	3.12	Medium
When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	2.87	Medium
I summarize what I read to reflect on important information in the text.	3.12	Medium
I discuss what I read with others to check my understanding.	3.5	High
I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	3.37	Medium
I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I read.	3.87	High
I paraphrase (restate my ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	3.87	High
I go back and forth in the text to find relationship among ideas in it.	4.12	High
I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	3.62	High
Overall Mean Score = 3.49		

Range: 2.4 or lower = low; 2.5 – 3.4 = medium; 3.4 or higher = high

Furthermore, if it is associated between students' reading comprehension scores and the use of metacognitive reading strategies where the results of the MARSI questionnaire for each participant are calculated on average, there is no strong relationship between the results of using metacognitive reading strategies on students' English reading comprehension tests. This can be seen in table 5 where Participant 7 with the highest frequency of use of the overall strategy items contained in the metacognitive strategy (x = 4.36) got a low score compared to other students who had a lower frequency than Participant 7. Then, on the other hand, Participant 8 had the lowest frequency in the use of all metacognitive strategies, but it did not mean that she got low score in her English reading comprehension test when compared to other participants with a higher frequency of use.

Table 5. Frequency of Overall Metacognitif Strategies Use

Participants	Mean	Rating
Partisipant 1	3.56	High
Partisipant 2	3.6	High
Partisipant 3	3.96	High
Partisipant 4	4	High

Partisipant 5	4.3	High
Partisipant 6	3.9	High
Partisipant 7	4.36	High
Partisipant 8	3.33	Medium

Range: 2.4 or lower = low; 2.5 – 3.4 = medium; 3.4 or higher = high

In this finding, students who got high scores and students who got low scores were stated to use almost the same type of strategy and frequency, so it is customary to say that there is no strong relationship between the use of metacognitive strategies on students' reading comprehension results. However, it is known that students who get high scores have good background knowledge of English and are able to answer questions posed by their teacher in English.

> "Before reading, I usually look at the text first, if there is an image, I will pay attention to the image or I will try to understand the title so that later I can increase my reading comprehension. Then, when I find a difficulty in understanding a text, I usually ask to my English teacher, my friends or I can look at dictionary or search in the google translate." (Participant 5).

> "Honestly, I don't really like English lessons. But when I read an English text, I try to understand the text by looking at the picture or table or try to figure it out from the title of the text. I also use a dictionary but not always because it makes me feel tired when I try to find a meaning of a word, so I often discuss and ask the word or text that I can't understand to my friends." (Participant 7).

From the results of the interview with the seventh participant who got lower score than others in English comprehension test, it is known that student interest can be a determining factor in the learning process. It can be seen from the statement of the third participant who does not have much interest in learning English so that he gets a lower score than other friends. Besides that, the role of peers plays an important role in the teaching and learning process, especially for students who have low abilities. Students are more comfortable discussing their thoughts with their friends rather than having to ask their teacher or trying to understand the text on their own.

> "I prefer to ask my friends rather than having to ask my English teacher because when I ask to my English teacher I feel uncomfortable." (Participant 7).

Based on the findings above, it can be seen that EFL students in Islamic boarding junior high school already have good awareness in using metacognitive strategies as indicated by the overall mean score which range high. The highest average frequency of using metacognitive strategies by EFL students in Islamic boarding school is on the problem-solving strategies, followed by global reading strategies and support strategies. However, it is known that metacognitive reading strategies do not have much effect on students' reading comprehension at Islamic boarding schools, but there are several other aspects that can influence students' reading comprehension such as student interests, background knowledge of students about English and the role of teachers and classmates.

Discussion

This study investigates the use of metacognitive strategies for reading comprehension of 9th grade Indonesian Junior High School students in Islamic boarding school. Data that was collected through English reading comprehension test, MARSI questionnaire, interview and analyzed using descriptive qualitative method found that students actively use metacognitive reading strategies in 3 main categories, those are global reading strategies, problem solving strategies and support strategies in their reading comprehension. It is found that the most frequently used by students in Islamic boarding school is problem-solving strategies with high rating. It was also followed by global reading strategies and support reading strategies. This finding is in line with research conducted by Fitrisia, Tan & Yusuf (2015), Wahyuni et al. (2018), Gaith & El-Sanyoura (2019) and Nguyen (2022) where in their research it was found that the Problem Solving Strategy was at the highest level compared to the Global Reading Strategy and the Support Reading Strategy. The use of this strategy subscale is in the highest rating which is closely related to the proficiency of EFL students in understanding foreign language texts. This is in line with the research conducted by Fitrisia, Tan & Yusuf (2015) where she stated that the use of problem-solving strategies is related to students' proficiency where it is characterized by the use of various reading strategies that lead students to get back on track when they lose concentration or find complex sentences that difficult to understand. It is possible if students often find difficult in the process of understanding reading English, they will actively seek and use various strategies that are able to overcome their problems where these strategies are found on the problem-solving strategies subscale.

Furthermore, global reading strategies is ranked second from the highest frequency in the use of metacognitive strategies by EFL students in Islamic boarding school. This indicates that EFL students in Islamic boarding school often analyze the text as a whole by looking at the text before reading, paying attention to pictures, typography, and paying attention to context clues than analyzing word for word or sentence. The high use of Global Reading Strategy also indicates that students actively use their background knowledge to predict and interpret the content of the texts that they read by relating the new information they get in the text with their previous knowledge (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). Although it appears that EFL students in Islamic boarding school have an interest in the use of global reading strategies that are shown by the high average use, they still need to develop and continue to practice the use of these strategies (Nobles & Cruz, 2020). Last, Support Reading Strategy is a metacognitive strategy with the lowest frequency which in its implementation will involve external references such as dictionaries or books that can support students' reading comprehension. Of course, it is known that in its application it will take a long time because students have to do a search, record what they find, understand and apply what they find into the reading text. This is what makes EFL students tend to be reluctant to use Support Reading Strategies so that the frequency of their use is lower than other subscales. This is also in line with research conducted by Mokhtari & Reichard (2002) and Monos (2004) as cited in Manalu & Wirza (2020) where they also found that Support Reading Strategies were the least used strategy by students compared to the other two categories.

Different from the research conducted by Kolic-Vehovec & Bajsanski (2006) and Zhang & Seepho (2013), they found a significant relationship between the use of metacognitive strategies and students' reading comprehension which can be seen from the results of reading comprehension where students who get high scores tend to use more metacognitive strategies than students who scored low, this study actually found no significant relationship. This can be seen when Participant 7 uses metacognitive strategies with the most frequency, it does not necessarily make her get a better score than her friends with lower frequency, and vice versa. It

also proves, the problem that occurs in students' weak reading comprehension is not due to a lack of student awareness in the use of metacognitive strategies but students need further training on the use of these strategies in order to be able to use them effectively in academic learning (Nobles & Cruz, 2020). Furthermore, Fitrisia, Tan & Yusuf (2015) in their research also suggests that EFL students may already have awareness and knowledge of metacognitive reading strategies, but they do not understand the benefits and rules for using these metacognitive strategies. She also argues that students should be able to apply and monitor the metacognitive strategies they use in order to achieve better results.

Although it is known that the use of metacognitive strategies does not have much effect on students' reading comprehension, there are several other factors that show an influence on students' English reading comprehension at Islamic boarding schools such as student interest, background knowledge of students and the role of teachers or classmates. It is in line with research conducted by Nobles & Cruz (2020), they found that students' interest in learning would have a significant impact. Hamiddin & Saukah (2020) also have documented previously in their research, there are some important aspects that can affect students' reading comprehension, those are motivation, self-efficacy, intra-individual characteristics, and interest of students. This interest will emerge from what texts they read. If the text is related to their daily situation and they have background knowledge of its topic, students will be more interested and feel easy to understand the content of the text because they will consciously activate their background knowledge easily. Reading material must also be in accordance with the context of student learning at school, otherwise students will find it difficult. One of the things that can overcome problems that happen in reading comprehension is to involve the teacher in every existing learning process. Teachers must understand the difficulties that students face. Teachers should also try harder to make the classroom atmosphere pleasant, provide references that can support students' background knowledge, and present relevant texts for students. Fitrisia, Tan & Yusuf (2015) also stated that the information contained in MARSI can be a reference material for teachers to teach, investigate and assess the strategies used by students in their reading comprehension of English texts. Furthermore, the teacher's teaching method is also an important factor influencing students' reading comprehension. The involvement of teachers in providing brief background knowledge about the content of English texts or providing opportunities for students to exchange ideas with other students will greatly support their reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the extent to which EFL students in Islamic boarding school use metacognitive reading strategies into their reading comprehension. It is known that the average use of metacognitive reading strategies by students at Islamic boarding schools is relatively high, but this only shows that students' awareness of the use of these strategies is good while the high usage does not have a significant relationship with students' English reading comprehension. It can be concluded that in this study, the teacher plays an important role in the teaching and learning process. Making the teaching and learning process interesting for students, providing background knowledge for students, and also further training on metacognitive strategies are some of the ways that teachers can do to improve students' reading comprehension in English. So, it is hoped that every teacher is able to become a professional teacher who can find out student problems and provide every solution properly in order to the teaching and learning process becomes more effective, especially in learning English reading comprehension.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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