

READING STRATEGIES USED BY ISLAMIC STUDIES STUDENTS IN ENGLISH TEXTS

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Abstract: Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in second language acquisition, particularly for learners studying English as a foreign language (EFL). Islamic students, who often encounter English texts alongside religious and cultural learning contexts, employ distinctive reading strategies shaped by linguistic background, educational traditions, and cognitive approaches. This study investigates the types of reading strategies used by Islamic students when engaging with English academic texts. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through questionnaires, reading tasks, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that Islamic students predominantly utilize cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as inferencing, summarizing, monitoring comprehension, and activating prior religious and cultural knowledge. The study highlights the significant role of metacognitive awareness in successful reading comprehension and suggests pedagogical implications for English instruction in Islamic educational settings.

Keywords: Islamic pupils, reading techniques, Metacognition, reading comprehension, and learning English as a second language

Introduction

It is often acknowledged that reading comprehension is essential to both language growth and academic success, especially when learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Learners can access academic knowledge, exercise critical thinking, and take part in international scholarly debate when they are able to derive meaning from written materials. Globalization, the growth of worldwide academic networks, and the rising availability of English-medium materials in science, technology, and the humanities have all contributed to the importance of English reading proficiency for students in Islamic educational institutions.

Despite its significance, reading in a foreign language can be quite difficult. Lack of exposure to real literature, restricted vocabulary, and unfamiliar grammatical structures are common problems for EFL learners. These difficulties are made worse in Islamic educational settings, where English is often taught alongside Arabic or other regional languages, each of which has its own unique linguistic systems and reading customs. As a result, when interacting with English literature, students must manage a variety of linguistic and cognitive demands.

Islamic pupils contribute distinctive learning opportunities to the reading process. Textual engagement, interpretation, memory, and reflection are highly valued in traditional Islamic education, especially while studying the Qur'an and other major religious writings. These exercises foster self-control, focus on textual details, and interpretive abilities, all of which may have an impact on how students approach English reading assignments. However, students' awareness and application of proper reading techniques play a major role in the transfer of these skills to EFL reading.

The intentional activities readers take to create meaning, control comprehension, and get past obstacles in texts are known as reading strategies. According to research on second language acquisition, students who actively employ a variety of reading techniques typically attain greater levels of autonomy and comprehension. In order to create instructional techniques that are both culturally sensitive and cognitively effective, it is crucial to comprehend the particular tactics employed by Islamic pupils when reading English texts.

Few studies have specifically addressed students in Islamic educational contexts, despite the fact that many have looked at reading strategies among EFL learners. Teachers' capacity to create instructional strategies that meet the requirements and learning styles of Islamic pupils is hampered by the dearth of focused research. In order to close this gap, the current study explores the kinds of reading techniques Islamic students use when interacting with English literature and looks at how these techniques affect their understanding processes.

Literature Review

Theoretical Perspectives on Reading in a Second Language

The cognitive process of reading in a second or foreign language is intricate and requires background knowledge, linguistic expertise, and strategic competence. From a cognitive standpoint, reading is seen as an interactive process where readers actively create meaning by fusing information from the text with what they already know. This interaction occurs through both bottom-up processes, such as decoding words and recognizing grammatical structures, and top-down processes, such as predicting meaning and drawing inferences based on context.

The harmony between top-down and bottom-up processing becomes especially crucial in EFL environments. Bottom-up decoding is frequently used extensively by learners with low language ability, which can impede comprehension and lower overall understanding. On the other hand, learners who successfully use top-down techniques are better equipped to make up for linguistic deficiencies by using contextual clues and prior knowledge. By acting as a link between these processes, reading methods help students maximize comprehension and manage cognitive demands.

Socio-cognitive theories also highlight how learning history, society, and context influence reading habits. According to this viewpoint, reading is impacted by social customs, educational traditions, and cultural norms in addition to being an individual cognitive activity. Given that Islamic students' educational experiences are firmly anchored in distinct textual traditions, this theoretical lens is especially pertinent for comprehending reading techniques among them.

Classification of Reading Strategies

In second language research, reading strategies have been categorized in a number of ways; nevertheless, the most popular and practical framework divides them into three categories: cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies. This categorization takes into account both the type of methods used and the level of conscious control students use while reading. Analyzing how Islamic students interpret English texts and how their educational background affects strategic behavior requires an understanding of these areas.

Cognitive Reading Strategies

Numerous classification frameworks have been developed as a result of reading strategy research. A popular paradigm divides techniques into three categories: support, cognitive, and metacognitive. This categorization offers a thorough framework for examining how students approach texts and control their comprehension.

Identifying key concepts, summarizing, drawing conclusions, translating, and inferring word meanings from context are examples of cognitive techniques that entail direct engagement with the text. EFL students of all skill levels regularly use these techniques, which are crucial for creating meaning.

Learners' awareness and control over their reading processes are referred to as metacognitive methods. Planning before reading, keeping an eye on comprehension while reading, and assessing comprehension after reading are some of these techniques. Because they help students identify comprehension problems and take corrective action, metacognitive methods are frequently linked to good reading.

Auxiliary methods that indirectly aid comprehension include utilizing dictionaries, taking notes, underlining important details, and discussing books with peers. Support techniques can be useful, but relying too much on them—especially translation—can impair reading fluency.

Empirical Studies on Reading Strategies in EFL Contexts

Numerous studies have looked at EFL students' reading methods in a variety of educational settings. These studies regularly show that compared to less successful readers, effective readers use a wider range of tactics and do so with greater flexibility. Cognitive and metacognitive techniques are often combined by high-achieving EFL readers, who modify their strategy based on the text's difficulty and reading goal.

Metacognitive strategies are highly predictive of reading comprehension skills, according to quantitative research utilizing reading strategy surveys. Higher reading scores are typically attained by students who report regularly assessing their understanding and making strategic plans. Qualitative research, such as think-aloud protocols and interviews, also shows that adept readers are better able to articulate their reading processes and are more conscious of the strategies they employ.

But studies also show that many EFL students employ ineffective tactics. For instance, students may rely too much on dictionary use or word-by-word translation, which impedes reading flow and raises cognitive load. These results imply that strategic awareness and suitable strategy selection are necessary for good reading, rather than strategy use alone.

Cultural and Educational Influences on Reading Strategy Use

Learners' reading techniques are greatly influenced by their culture and educational background. While students exposed to learner-centered environments may develop better metacognitive awareness, individuals educated in systems that prioritize rote learning and teacher-centered instruction may exhibit limited strategic flexibility.

However, there are difficulties when switching from religious writings to academic English texts. English writings frequently call for critical analysis, concept synthesis, and interaction with foreign rhetorical devices. Islamic students may first approach reading in English using methods appropriate for religious materials, like memorizing and repeated reading, which may not necessarily be compatible with the requirements of academic English reading.

Reading Strategies among Islamic and Muslim EFL Learners

Studies that concentrate on Islamic or Muslim EFL learners are scarce, although they offer insightful information. According to these studies, Islamic students often use cognitive techniques including contextual guessing, inferencing, and rereading. Despite their existence, metacognitive techniques are frequently applied unconsciously.

The utilization of past religious and cultural knowledge as a comprehension help is one recurrent finding. Islamic students frequently use analogies with Islamic teachings to interpret

English books that deal with moral, social, or philosophical topics. This approach promotes deeper comprehension and increases engagement, although it might not work as well with extremely technical or culturally distant literature.

The impact of Arabic or other regional languages on English reading is another noteworthy discovery. Learners may have to rely on translation or the use of dictionaries due to additional difficulties caused by linguistic differences in syntax, morphology, and script. Although these techniques offer temporary assistance, over use of them may hinder the growth of reading fluency.

Metacognitive Awareness and Strategy Instruction

Effective reading has been found to depend heavily on metacognitive awareness. Students are better able to handle reading difficulties if they are conscious of the tactics they employ and know when and how to utilize them. Explicit training in reading methods can greatly enhance learners' metacognitive awareness and reading performance, according to research.

Modeling tactics, guided practice, and reflective exercises that prompt students to consider their reading processes are all common components of strategy-based education. Such training may be especially helpful in Islamic educational situations since it might assist students in applying their preexisting analytical skills to English reading assignments.

Although approach education has demonstrated efficacy, it is not consistently applied in EFL classrooms in Islamic institutions. Educators may concentrate predominantly on vocabulary and grammar, rendering strategy development implicit. This gap underscores the necessity for pedagogical methods that explicitly incorporate reading strategy instruction.

Research Gaps and Rationale for the Present Study

Although previous research has contributed significantly to understanding reading strategies in EFL contexts, several gaps remain. First, there is a lack of in-depth, mixed-methods studies focusing specifically on Islamic students' reading strategies. Second, few studies examine how religious and cultural backgrounds interact with cognitive and metacognitive processes in English reading.

Even if earlier studies have made a substantial contribution to our understanding of reading techniques in EFL environments, there are still a number of gaps. First, there aren't many comprehensive mixed-methods studies that concentrate on the reading strategies of Islamic students. Second, not much research has been done on the relationship between religious and cultural backgrounds and the cognitive and metacognitive processes involved in English reading.

Additionally, a large portion of the current literature only uses self-reported data, which might not accurately reflect the utilization of strategies. A more comprehensive insight of students' reading habits can be obtained by combining questionnaires with reading assignments and interviews.

The current study uses both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the reading methods employed by Islamic students while interacting with English texts in order to close these gaps. The project intends to provide a more inclusive and context-sensitive understanding of EFL reading by investigating strategy utilization in a culturally relevant setting.

Methods

Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to capture both the frequency of reading strategy use and the underlying cognitive processes associated with these strategies. By

combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Islamic students approach English reading tasks.

Participants

The participants were 60 undergraduate students enrolled in an Islamic higher education institution. All participants were studying English as a compulsory subject and had achieved an intermediate level of English proficiency based on institutional placement tests. The participants shared similar educational backgrounds, having received formal Islamic education prior to university enrollment.

Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect data:

Reading Strategy Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire adapted from established EFL reading strategy inventories was administered to measure students' self-reported use of cognitive, metacognitive, and support strategies.

Reading Comprehension Tasks

Participants completed English reading tasks consisting of academic texts followed by comprehension questions. These tasks were designed to assess reading performance and strategy application.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 selected participants to explore their reading experiences, perceived challenges, and strategic behaviors in greater detail.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify patterns and frequencies of strategy use. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically, allowing for the identification of recurring themes related to reading strategies and comprehension processes.

Results and Discussion

Overall Strategy Use

The findings show that when interacting with English literature, Islamic students use a variety of reading techniques. The most commonly cited cognitive methods included rereading challenging passages, finding key concepts, and inferring word meanings from context. Though with differing degrees of awareness, metacognitive techniques like organizing reading activities and keeping an eye on understanding were also frequently employed.

Use of Prior Knowledge

The frequent activation of preexisting information, including religious and cultural understanding, was one noteworthy observation. Students claimed that they were able to create meaning and stay engaged by interpreting unfamiliar English texts using concepts and values

they were familiar with. This tactic illustrates how Islamic teaching methods affect pupils' reading habits.

Challenges and Strategy Limitations

Students continued to struggle with language constraints and intricate sentence patterns despite their strategic understanding. Some participants relied too much on translation, which slowed down reading and occasionally caused misunderstandings. These results imply that although students have strategic capacity, they can profit from clear education in adaptable and effective strategy deployment.

Discussion

The results corroborate previous studies that highlight the significance of cognitive and metacognitive techniques in EFL reading comprehension. Strategic reading seems to be facilitated by Islamic students' experience in textual analysis, especially when it comes to perseverance and meaningfulness. The findings, however, also emphasize the necessity of educational initiatives that foster metacognitive awareness and lessen an excessive dependence on translation.

Conclusion

The reading techniques employed by Islamic students when reading English texts were investigated in this study, along with the ways in which these techniques aid understanding. The results show that students use both cognitive and metacognitive techniques, with a focus on inferencing, rereading, and understanding monitoring. Understanding is also greatly aided by prior religious and cultural knowledge.

This study examined the reading strategies used by Islamic students when reading English literature, as well as the manner in which these strategies facilitate comprehension. The findings demonstrate that students employ both cognitive and metacognitive strategies, emphasizing comprehending monitoring, rereading, and inferencing. Prior religious and cultural knowledge also has a significant role in understanding.

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