

An Examination on the Impact of Reading Strategies Employed by Secondary School Students on Their Reading Performance and the Role of Gender on the Use of These Strategies

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Abstract

Metacognitive reading strategies are essential for improving students' reading skills. Various studies have emphasized their importance, particularly in the Ethiopian context. However, relatively few of these investigations have looked into how gender impacts the application of these strategies. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between students' strategy use and their reading performance, particularly highlighting any notable differences between male and female students. To this end, one hundred and thirty (71 female and 59 male) grade nine students participated in the study. Data were collected using the TOEFL reading comprehension test and the Metacognitive Reading Strategy Inventory (MARSI). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 24 was utilized for data analysis. Detail analysis removed The result showed a significant relationship between the utilization of strategies and reading performance. The t-test indicated no notable differences in overall strategy usage between male and female students collectively. When examining the achievement levels of male and female students, significant differences in strategy usage were found for both low and high achievers. However, there were no significant differences identified among male and female students performing at a medium level. The study suggests that ninth-grade students would benefit from enhanced opportunities to employ effective reading strategies. Future research could build on these findings by expanding the scope of the investigation.

Keywords: Reading; reading strategies; metacognitive reading strategies; gender

Introduction

Ethiopia is notable for its vast linguistic diversity, boasting over 80 languages (Samuel & Tamiru, 2020). In this vibrant multilingual context, students

are expected to learn multiple languages, including their native tongue, a national language, and a regional language. Additionally, English instruction begins as early as first grade, eventually becoming the primary language of instruction in the ninth grade (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2018, 1994). Given that English is taught in a non-native environment, students often face challenges in finding opportunities to practice the language beyond the classroom. However, its importance in various fields is clear, as English has a longstanding and significant presence in the educational system.

Reading skills are introduced in first grade, where students concentrate on essential components like word recognition and the identification of letters and sounds (MOE, 1994). As they move into secondary education, learners are expected to engage with a range of subjects in English in addition to their English coursework. At this stage, students face more diverse and challenging reading materials that demand advanced critical reading abilities. Moreover, to excel academically from primary school through higher education, students must cultivate strong reading competencies. Eskey (2005) highlighted the crucial role reading plays for foreign language learners, noting that it not only facilitates language learning through comprehensible input but is also a fundamental skill many dedicated students need to refine. Eskey pointed out that for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), reading is particularly vital compared to other language skills. This is because they often do not have ample opportunities to practice speaking the language daily, yet reading is essential to accessing the vast knowledge that exists only in English.

Likewise, for Ethiopian learners, reading abilities are vital not only for academic achievement but also for their long-term personal development. Unfortunately, Ethiopian students demonstrate markedly low levels of reading proficiency. Research reports have shown that students across various grades struggle with their English reading abilities, failing to achieve the Minimum Learning Competencies set by the Ministry of Education in terms of literacy (Abiy, 2005; Belilew, 2015; Tekeste, 2006). The previous researchers have also reported that many primary, secondary, and preparatory school students find it challenging to understand texts deemed appropriate for their proficiency levels. Furthermore, Amlaku (2013) indicated a decline in the reading abilities of

secondary school students over time. Additionally, both Abiy (2005) and Amlaku (2013) highlighted that the reading proficiency level of the students and the academic expectations of the students in the curriculum do not match.

The differences in outcomes for learners of a second language or foreign language can be significantly influenced by the reading strategies they apply (Grabe, 2009; Eskey, 2005). As Block (1986) highlighted, effective readers are aware of the strategies they use and that they use strategies flexibly and efficiently. Block noted that proficient readers employ a range of reading strategies to address comprehension challenges more effectively than their less successful counterparts. Reading in a second/foreign language is essentially a subfield of foreign language education and applied linguistics, so reading strategy is also part of language learning strategy. According to Oxford (2002), language learning strategies refer to specific actions or cognitive processes that learners utilize to improve their L2 acquisition.

This research also investigated the impact of gender on the reading strategies adopted by students, operating on the premise that gender significantly influences their strategic approaches. Existing literature highlights gender as a crucial factor in shaping students' strategy utilization (Chamot, 2004; Nyikos & Oxford, 1993; Oxford, 2002). Regarding reading strategies, Grabe (2009) observed that gender plays a role in the comprehension strategies learners use. Some studies suggest that females may apply a broader range of strategies, while others imply that males might use more strategies overall; there are also findings that point to negligible differences in strategy use related to gender. For example, Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) discovered that females were more inclined to engage with metacognitive strategies than their male counterparts (additional details are available in the discussion section). As a result, this study recognized the importance of examining potential differences in the use of metacognitive reading strategies between male and female students.

Given that reading strategies can influence students' reading abilities, it is important to explore the link between these two variables. Therefore, this study aimed to delve into the relationship between the strategies employed by students and their reading performance.

Numerous studies, both experimental and descriptive, have investigated how the use of reading strategies by students affects their reading performance and the role of strategy training in enhancing reading comprehension. For example, a study by Asalifew et al. (2024), titled ‘The effects of reading strategy training on students’ reading strategy use and critical reading ability in EFL reading classes,’ involved 83 participants from Wachamo and Wolkite Universities in Ethiopia. The findings revealed that students who received instruction in reading strategies showed significant advancements in both their use of these strategies and their critical reading abilities. Additionally, Yenus (2018) conducted a study titled ‘Conceptualizing Reading to Learn: Strategy Instruction and EFL Students’ Reading Comprehension’ involving 128 students from Bahir Dar University in Ethiopia. The results suggested that those students who engaged in reading strategy instruction experienced a more pronounced enhancement in their reading comprehension abilities compared to peers who were taught using traditional skill-based methods. Yenus characterizes skill-based instruction as the conventional method of teaching reading, highlighting its differences from the more strategic approaches utilized in reading education.

Additionally, several descriptive studies have explored this area. One such study by Berhe (2019), titled ‘Relationship among reading strategy use, reading anxiety, and performance in reading,’ involved 130 participants from universities in Ethiopia. The findings revealed a statistically significant, moderately positive correlation between the overall use of reading strategies and students' reading comprehension performance. In another investigation, Musema & Geremew (2023) explored ‘The Relationship between Reading Strategy Use and Reading Performance Among Students,’ focusing on first-year students at Wollo University, specifically within the College of Social Science for the 2022 academic year. Their research indicated that high-achieving students utilized a broader array of reading strategies more often than their lower-achieving peers, with this difference being statistically significant. Similarly, Oranpattanachai (2023) examined the ‘Relationship between the Reading Strategy, Reading Self-Efficacy, and Reading Comprehension of Thai EFL Students’. This study centered on 31 Thai engineering students enrolled in a TOEIC course at a public university in Thailand and found a significant relationship between their reading strategies

and reading skills. Importantly, a considerable correlation was also identified between comprehension abilities and top-down strategies; however, no significant relationship was established between reading skills and bottom-up strategies. According to Eskey (2005), Grabe and Stoller (2011) bottom-up reading strategies are processes where readers start by recognizing individual letters, sounds, and words, gradually working their way toward understanding the entire text. In this method, the text acts as the primary source of meaning and is commonly used in the early stages of literacy education. Conversely, top-down reading strategies rely heavily on the reader's prior knowledge, informed by their varied life experiences and educational history. Here, the reader takes an essential role in shaping meaning, moving beyond a strict dependency on the text itself. This approach is typically applied at more advanced levels of reading.

While numerous studies have shown that implementing reading strategies improves students' reading comprehension skills, some research has yielded contrary findings. For instance, Abebe and Simegn (2024) conducted a study entitled 'Effects of Explicit Reading Strategy Instruction on Students' Reading Comprehension and Motivation,' which involved 76 eleventh grade students from Taytu General Secondary School in Debretabor, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. Unlike the previous research findings, this study revealed no significant differences in reading comprehension performance between the control and experimental groups following the intervention.

Previous studies have largely concentrated on university students, leaving a gap regarding secondary school learners. Moreover, these studies have not addressed the potential influence of gender on the preferences and use of reading strategies in relation to reading performance. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by investigating the relationship between reading strategies, reading performance, and gender among ninth-grade students at Ula-Dula General Secondary School in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The main objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the relationship between the reading strategies employed by ninth-grade students and their reading performance.
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2. To examine if there are gender-related differences in the strategies used and the reading skills of students classified as less proficient, moderately proficient, and highly proficient readers.

METHOD

This section presents a comprehensive overview of the research methodology, encompassing the research design, the study's location, and the participants involved. It outlines the sampling techniques utilized throughout the study and elaborates on the different instruments used for data collection.

Research design

This study aimed to examine the influence of metacognitive reading strategies on students' reading performance, as well as to explore potential differences in this strategy usage between male and female students and its correlation with their reading outcomes. A descriptive-correlational research design was employed for this purpose.

Participants

Participants in this study were drawn from a government secondary school named Ula-Dula General Secondary School in Addis Ababa. Grade 9 female and male students were participants of the study. Participants were selected from three classes in the selected school. Ninth-grade students were selected for this study as they are transitioning into secondary education, a stage where reading expectations rise beyond those of primary schooling. This phase of education serves as a vital link to higher education, where reading proficiency significantly influences overall academic achievement. By cultivating strong reading skills at this level, students are more likely to succeed in their subsequent educational endeavors and in their future lives.

In this study, convenience sampling and simple random sampling methods were utilized to select both the setting and the participants. Addis Ababa was selected using the convenience sampling approach, given its close geographical location to the researchers. Subsequently, the same sampling technique was utilized to select Ula-Dula General Secondary School as the study site. To determine three classes and individual students within these classes, simple random sampling was applied. A total

of one hundred thirty participants were chosen, comprising fifty-nine male and seventy-one female students, all aged between 15 and 21.

Data collection instruments

In order to answer the research questions, a standardized reading comprehension test and the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) were employed for data collection. According to Saville-Troike (2006), the strategies used by adults are usually not visible; self-reporting is a common means for collecting information on what strategies learners select, usually with questionnaires about what they have done or usually do (retrospective reports).

In this research, the reading comprehension assessment was carried out to measure students' reading proficiency, while the questionnaire sought to identify the strategies that students claim to utilize.

To evaluate the reading abilities of the students, a reading assessment was administered. Specifically, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), a widely recognized standardized test created and managed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) for assessing the language proficiency of ESL and EFL learners, was utilized.

A questionnaire is mainly used to find out what people think, covering attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests, and values of a population by studying a sample of that population (Dornyei, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Moreover, a questionnaire is an appropriate tool to get data from a large sample. Thus, in the current study, the purpose of the questionnaire was to elicit information about the frequency and type of students' reading strategy use and its impact on their achievements. Chamot (2004) and Oxford's (2002) studies also claimed that the strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) has been used in studies that correlate strategy use with variables such as learning styles, gender, proficiency level, and culture. The purpose of using a closed-end questionnaire was to identify the students' preferred strategy and its association with their reading performance.

The Survey of Metacognitive Reading Strategies (MARSI), which was designed by Mokhtari & Reichard (2002) to measure the adolescent and adult ESL

students' metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies while reading academic materials, was adopted for the current study. Mokhtari and Reichard categorized metacognitive reading strategies into three main groups: global strategies, problem-solving strategies, and supportive strategies, totaling thirty distinct items. Global strategies refer to the deliberate and planned approaches readers employ to monitor and control their reading activities. This group includes thirteen specific strategies such as setting a reading purpose, predicting the text's content, and understanding its organization. Problem-solving strategies consist of strategies that students apply when they encounter difficulties comprehending academic materials. This category comprises eight methods, including re-reading, modifying reading pace, and reading aloud. Finally, supportive strategies, which encompass nine elements, provide essential assistance that improves students' understanding during their academic readings. This group includes strategies like note-taking, consulting reference sources, and highlighting key information.

Each of the items has a 5-point Likert scale option to go from 1 'I never do' to 5 'I always do'. Thus, the data gathered from the questionnaire was analyzed using the SPSS data analysis tool to see whether there is a relationship between students' strategy use, reading score, and gender.

Procedure

To analyze the data, the following procedures and statistical techniques were employed. First, TOEFL reading comprehension tests, which were prepared for intermediate students, were administered for the current research. The test has 100 questions to measure different language aspects and contains 20 reading comprehension questions. In order to determine students' reading comprehension level, the reading comprehension part of the test, which contains twenty reading comprehension multiple-choice items, was administered for this study.

In advance of preparing the reading test, the researcher read the reading passages in the students' textbooks to check their difficulty levels and prepare the reading test accordingly. Although TOEFL is a standardized test particularly designed to measure the proficiency level of second and foreign language speakers, it was essential to evaluate them to check their appropriateness for grade

9 students. With this regard, the test was evaluated by grade 9 English language teachers who teach in the targeted school. The test was evaluated by two teachers to see whether the test fits the students reading proficiency level or to make sure that the test was not too easy or too difficult.

The questions vary from simple scanning questions to detail understanding of beyond line questions. Concerning vocabulary questions the tests contain items from plain reference questions (e.g. “What does the pronoun ‘they’ in line 4 refers to?”); and guessing the meanings of unfamiliar words (e.g. “According to the passage the word... in line...has closer meaning to...”).

After the test was marked, the average result was changed to 100%. Then, the students were grouped into three levels: high, medium, and low achievers accordingly. To classify students into three distinct levels, the Angoff cut-off method, as outlined by Fulcher and Davidson (2007), was utilized. This approach involved language teachers advising on the determination of the passing score by categorizing assessment items into easy, moderate, and difficult ranges. A minimum threshold of 50% was established to signify basic proficiency in the language. Consequently, students scoring below 50, primarily on easier questions, were classified as low achievers. Those who answered questions of medium difficulty, securing scores between 50 and 84, fell into the medium achievers category. In contrast, students who performed exceptionally on the more challenging questions, earning scores of 85 to 100, were acknowledged as high achievers.

Finally, a closed-ended questionnaire was administered to gather information about the students’ reading strategy use. Before the questionnaire was distributed to the students, the researcher communicated its purpose to the students. Furthermore, the researcher ensured that the students clearly understood the instructions for completing the questionnaire. They were invited to ask for clarification on any part of the metacognitive questionnaire, including any statements, phrases, or words that were challenging to comprehend. Each statement contains five options categorized under a five-point Likert scale. The responses were categorized on a scale from 1 to 5, where ‘1’ denoted ‘never or almost never true for me,’ ‘2’ indicated ‘occasionally true for me,’ ‘3’ represented ‘sometimes true for me,’ ‘4’ signified ‘usually true for me,’ and ‘5’ meant ‘always

or almost always true for me.' Thus, the participants responded to each statement once.

Data analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 24) was used to analyze the result of the study. The five-point Likert scales 1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=frequently 5=always was used to determine the level of strategy use. After the questionnaire was filled out by the students, an analysis was made to correlate the strategy use, reading score, and gender of the students. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to analyze the relationship between students' strategy use and their reading performance. Pearson correlation indicate whether there is a relationship, if the relationship is positively correlated (+sign), how strong the relationship is (between -1 and +1), and if the relationship is statistically significant (< 0.05) (Muijs, 2004).

Moreover, to investigate the relationship between gender and strategy use, an independent sample t-test was used. The independent sample t-test was used to measure whether there is a relationship between being male or female and strategy use. Like Pearson's correlation, the independent sample t-test specifically tells the details of the relationship, like the significance level of the t-test has a standard cut-off point of 0.05 sig, and the strength (effect size) of the relationship was measured by Cohen's d levels from <0.02 weak effect to >1 very strong effect (Muijs, 2004).

Finally, the interpretation of results will be discussed based on the results gained from the analysis. Numeric findings will be interpreted in words. Based on the findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations will be given.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The first research question aimed to explore how students' utilization of metacognitive reading strategies correlates with their reading achievements.

Table 1.The Reading Scores across the Three Levels

Level	Score	Male	Female	Frequency
Low	<50	17	28	45
Medium	50-84	23	26	49
High	>85	19	17	36
Total	-	59	71	130

Table 1 illustrates a summary of students' reading performance categorized by gender. Students are classified into three achievement levels: low achievers, medium achievers, and high achievers. Low achievers are defined as those scoring below 50%, medium achievers score between 50% and 84%, while high achievers score above 85%. Examining the data by gender, there are 45 low achievers (comprising 17 males and 28 females), 49 medium achievers (with 23 males and 26 females), and 36 high achievers (including 19 males and 17 females).

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	M	SD.	N
Reading Score	66.3	18.924	129
Overall Strategies	2.79	.89131	130
Global	2.77	.94248	130
Problem-Solving	3.27	.91659	130
Support	2.39	1.0352	130

Note: N for total number, M for mean, SD for standard deviation,

Table 2 presents a summary of the mean scores related to students' reading performance, along with their usage of various strategies. The mean reading score was 66.3. When examining strategy implementation, students received an average score of 2.79 for overall strategies, with global strategies at 2.77, problem-solving strategies averaging 3.26, and support strategies scoring 2.39.

Table 3. The Relationship between Students' Strategies and Their Reading Score

		Reading	OS	G	PS	S
Reading	Pearson Correlation	1	.858**	.801**	.788**	.784**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000

	N	129	129	129	129	129
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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Note: OS stands for overall strategies, G for global, PS problem-solving, and S for support strategies

Table 3 illustrates the correlation between students' use of strategies and their reading performance. The analysis revealed a P-value of 0.000 for the association between reading scores and the overall use of strategies, a finding that holds for all individual subscales, which also recorded a P-value of 0.000. These values are below the established threshold of 0.005, indicating a significant positive correlation between the strategies employed by students and their reading outcomes. These results suggest a strong relationship among the variables, demonstrating that the values are all close to '1', indicating a robust correlation. The Pearson correlation coefficients for the various strategies were found to be quite high: .858 for overall strategies, .801 for global strategies, .788 for problem-solving strategies, and .784 for support strategies. These findings indicate a strong interconnection between the variables, as the values approach '1', which signifies a substantial correlation.

The second research question aims to explore if there are notable differences in the strategies utilized by male and female students across the three levels of achievement.

Table 4. Independent Samples T-Test

	Gender	N	M	Sig. (2 tailed)	SD.	MD	SED
Reading score	Male	59	69	0.14	18.004	4.99	3.33
	Female	70	64	-	19.501	-	-

Note: MD stands for mean difference and SED for standard error difference

An assessment of reading scores among male and female students was conducted in order to uncover any disparities in their reading abilities. As shown in

Table 4, the average reading score for male students was 69, while female students averaged 64, with standard deviations of 18 and 19.5, respectively. The p-value for significance is 0.14. According to Muijs (2004), a p-value exceeding 0.05 suggests that there is no significant relationship between the two examined variables. Thus, it can be inferred that no significant difference existed in the reading performance of ninth-grade male and female students. Once this is clarified, the focus shifted to examining the relationship between gender and the reading strategies employed by both male and female learners.

Table 5. Group Statistics of Gender Basis Overall and Subscales of Metacognitive Strategies

Strategy	G	N	M	SD	SEM.
OS	M	59	2.7266	.82462	.10736
	F	71	2.8404	.94585	.11225
G	M	59	2.6910	.92413	.12031
	F	71	2.8332	.95918	.11383
PS	M	59	3.1208	.85253	.11099
	F	71	3.3908	.95523	.11337
S	M	59	2.4275	.98667	.12845
	F	71	2.3615	1.0800	.12817

Note: G on the column stands for gender and SEM standard error mean

Table 5 presents the group statistics categorized by gender, focusing on both the overall results and the distinct subscales of metacognitive strategies. In terms of overall strategies, males had an average score of 2.7, whereas females achieved an average of 2.8, with standard deviations of .8 and .95, respectively. For global strategies, males achieved a mean score of 2.7, while females scored 2.8, with standard deviations of .9 and .96 respectively. When it comes to problem-solving strategies, males received an average of 3.1, while females scored higher at 3.4, with standard deviations of .85 and .96. Lastly, both genders scored an average of 2.4 in support strategies, with a standard deviation of 1 for each group. The results indicate that female students excelled compared to male students in overall metacognitive reading strategies, as well as in global and

problem-solving approaches. On the other hand, male students demonstrated slightly better score than female students in applying support strategies. It remains crucial to investigate this difference further to determine if it holds statistical significance.

The table below illustrates the relationship between the metacognitive reading strategy usage of female and male students.

Table 6. Independent Samples Test

Strategy	F	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	SED
OS	1.81	-0.72	128	0.471	-0.11	0.157
G	0.08	-0.86	128	0.394	-0.14	0.166
PS	0.76	-1.69	128	0.095	-0.27	0.160
S	0.45	0.36	128	0.719	0.066	0.183

Table 6 indicates that the p-value for the overall strategies is 0.47, which exceeds the cut-off point 0.05, suggesting no significant relationship between the two groups. Looking at the specific strategies, the global strategy has a p-value of 0.394, the problem-solving strategy shows a p-value of 0.095, and the support strategy has a p-value of 0.719. The findings suggest that gender does not significantly influence the use of reading strategies. It is worth noting that previous research has shown varying results, with some studies indicating that female students utilize more strategies than their male counterparts, and others suggesting the opposite (see the discussion section).

The following table presents gender basis metacognitive reading strategy use among the three achievement levels.

Table 7. Group Statistics

Strategy	G	Low			Medium			High		
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
OS	M	17	1.7	.12	23	2.7	.31	19	3.7	.36
	F	28	2.0	.25	26	2.9	.38	17	4.3	.16
G	M	17	1.7	.16	23	2.6	.70	19	3.6	.54
	F	28	1.9	.34	26	2.9	.46	17	4.2	.14
PS	M	17	2.1	.31	23	3.2	.47	19	4.0	.44

	F	28	2.5	.39	26	3.6	.43	17	4.7	.28
S	M	17	1.4	.15	23	2.3	.63	19	3.5	.62
	F	28	1.6	.35	26	2.2	.65	17	4.0	.45

As presented in Table 7, male low achievers exhibited a mean score of 1.7 for overall metacognitive reading strategies, 1.7 for global strategies, 2.09 for problem-solving strategies, and 1.37 for support strategies. Low-achieving female students achieved a mean score of 1.96 for overall strategies, 1.93 for global strategies, 2.45 for problem-solving strategies, and 1.56 for support strategies. In conclusion, female students who are low-achievers outperformed their low-achieving male counterparts both in overall scores and in various subscale strategy uses.

Regarding medium achievers, male students scored of 2.69 for overall strategy, 2.63 for global strategy, 3.18 for problem-solving, and 2.34 for support strategy. Their female counterparts achieved scores of 2.86 for overall strategy, 2.9 for global strategy, 3.57 for problem-solving, and 2.16 for support strategy. Among high achievers, male students had an average score of 3.68 for overall strategy, 3.63 for global strategy, 3.97 for problem-solving strategy, and 3.48 for support strategy. On the other hand, female students scored, with 4.27 for overall strategies, 4.22 for global strategies, 4.68 for problem-solving strategies, and 3.99 for support strategies.

To summarize, female students excelled in comparison to male students across all performance levels in both overall metacognitive reading strategies and their specific subscales. However, the data does not indicate whether this difference is statistically significant. The table below illustrates the extent of this difference.

Table 8. Independent Sample T-Test

Strategy	Low		Medium		High	
	t	Sig.	t	Sig.	t	Sig.
OS	-3.7	0.001	-1.624	0.111	-6.327	0.000
G	-2.4	0.021	-1.572	0.123	-4.359	0.000
PS	-3.3	0.002	-2.997	0.004	-5.602	0.000

S	-2.1	0.042	0.982	0.331	-2.816	0.008
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Table 8 reveals that among low-achieving students, the p-values demonstrate notable differences that benefit female students. Specifically, the values are .001 for overall strategies, .021 for global strategies, .002 for problem-solving strategies, and .042 for support strategies. For medium achievers, the p-values indicate that there are no significant differences in strategy usage between male and female students, with overall strategies at .111, global strategies at .123, and support strategies at .331. The exception is found in problem-solving strategies, which show a significant difference, denoted by a p-value of .004. Conversely, high-achieving female students exhibited a notable difference compared to their male counterparts, with p-values of .000 across both overall and specific strategy subscales, consistently favouring female students.

Discussion

The first research question focused on whether a significant relationship exists between students' use of strategies and their reading performance. This was assessed by examining both the overall metacognitive reading strategies and their specific subscales. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between students' utilization of metacognitive reading strategies and their performance in reading. In other words, students who actively employ these strategies tend to achieve higher scores on reading assessments, and the reverse is also true. This aligns with earlier findings by Musema and Geremew (2023), who demonstrated that high achievers tend to use a broader range of reading strategies more frequently than their lower-achieving peers. Similarly, Manurung et al. (2023) found that students who apply a diverse set of reading strategies—including problem-solving, supportive, and global strategies—perform better in reading comprehension tasks. Moreover, Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) reported that proficient readers tend to use strategies more often than those who are less skilled. Par (2020) also identified a significant correlation between overall reading strategy usage and students' reading achievements. Wang (2016) also noted that effective readers tend to utilize variety of strategies more adeptly and purposefully. During their reading, they actively assess their understanding of the text, recognize any

challenges, and implement corrective actions to address breakdowns in comprehension. On the other hand, struggling readers tend to use strategies less effectively and often miss recognizing inconsistencies in their understanding, failing to apply suitable strategies to manage these issues. Thus, unlike unskilled readers, skilled readers not only use strategies frequently but they use variety of strategies based on the context they need.

The secondary research question focused on the potential correlation between the reading strategies employed by male and female students and their respective reading performance. To explore this, students were divided by gender into categories of high, medium, and low achievers. The results indicated no significant correlation between the strategy use of male and female students overall. In agreement with these findings, Bashir (2016) noted that the results from an independent-samples t-test did not show significant differences in the reading strategies used by male and female students, despite females scoring higher in the overall use of reading strategies.

Conversely, an analysis of the achievement levels among male and female students indicated a significant correlation between gender and strategy usage for both low and high achievers, while those in the medium achievement group showed no significant differences. In a similar vein, Rianto (2021) discovered notable gender disparities in the use of overall, problem-solving, and support strategies, with female students outperforming their male counterparts on average, despite the small effect sizes. In a similar study, significant gender differences in overall and support strategies were found among less skilled readers, whereas no significant differences were observed among skilled readers. Additionally, Mokhtari et al. (2018) reported that there is a small effect size for the gender difference in favour of females on each of the three latent factors, with the relatively largest effect size being on problem-solving strategies, followed by the effect size for support reading strategies and global reading strategies.

Conclusion

The findings indicated that students who actively applied reading strategies tended to achieve higher results in reading assessments, whereas those with minimal strategy application scored lower. A significant number of students displayed both a lack of strategy use and performance on reading tests. Regarding the correlation

between gender and strategy usage, the study generally indicated no major differences between male and female students. However, notable distinctions were identified in favor of high-achieving female students when comparing their strategy use to that of high-achieving male counterparts. The study indicates that lack of utilizing diverse and effective reading strategies may be a key factor contributing to the poor reading performance observed among ninth-grade students.

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are forwarded to various concerned bodies. It is important to ensure that students have access to a variety of effective reading strategies to use when engaging with reading materials. To address this need, language teachers should first develop a strong understanding of different reading strategies before teaching them to their students. This knowledge allows teachers to create opportunities and guide students in selecting and applying specific strategies to effectively tackle reading comprehension issues. The study indicated that there is a strategy use difference even between high-achieving male and female students. Thus, teachers should create opportunities for students to share better experiences in using reading strategies to solve comprehension problems. Moreover, educational content creators should carefully integrate ample input and detailed explanations of these strategies into textbooks, providing a useful resource for students to refer to. Moreover, task designers should include reading tasks in the students' material that are deliberately designed to promote the use of a variety of reading strategies.

This study focused exclusively on the variables of reading strategies, reading performance, and the gender of the participants. It did not account for other factors that could influence their reading outcomes. Furthermore, it relied exclusively on a quantitative methodology, overlooking the qualitative aspects that could lead to a deeper exploration of the subject matter. Therefore, upcoming studies should aim to expand this investigation by incorporating additional variables, especially those that might influence the execution of reading strategies and their correlation with reading comprehension. Future researchers might also benefit from utilizing a mixed-methods approach to enrich the analysis and provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

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