

# Metacognitive Reading Strategies Employed by Grade Nine Male and Female Students: A Study in Addis Ababa Secondary Schools

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received January 18 2024

Revised April 15 2024

Accepted April 23 2024

### Keywords

Keyword\_1 Reading

Comprehension

Keyword\_2 Reading Strategies

Keyword\_3 Metacognitive

Strategies

## ABSTRACT

This study examined the level and preference of metacognitive reading strategies used by Grade 9 students at Ula-dula General Secondary School in Ethiopia. 130 students (59 males and 71 females) participated in the study and filled out the questionnaire. Six of them took part in the interviews. The data was collected using the Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategy Inventory (MARS) and a semi-structured interview. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Version 24) was used to analyze the quantitative data, while thematic analysis was employed for the qualitative data. The results indicated that students used the metacognitive reading strategies moderately, with an average mean score of 2.8. However, individual students' use of the strategies showed that 40% of the students used the strategies at a low level, 26.2% at a high level, and 33.8% at a medium level. The problem-solving strategies were used most frequently, followed by global and support strategies in second and third place, respectively. Problem-solving and global strategies were utilized moderately, while support strategies were employed at a lower level. The results of an independent sample t-test revealed no significant correlation between the gender of the students and their usage of the strategies. In summary, while the average result showed that students, as a whole, used the strategies moderately, the majority of individual students were found to use them at a low level. The qualitative data provided further evidence to support the quantitative findings. The result suggests that the students' low level of reading proficiency might have been due to a lack of awareness and inappropriate utilization of reading strategies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ethiopia is a multilingual country with more than 80 ethnic groups, each with its native language, and Amharic is the national language widely utilized throughout the country (Abebaw, 2013). Despite this, as a foreign language, English has had paramount significance in academic and non-academic areas. English is taught as a subject starting from grade one and used as the medium of instruction in secondary schools and higher education (MOE, 1994). Proficiency in reading is essential for Ethiopian students who are learning English as a foreign language, as they predominantly acquire knowledge through reading in the English language. Despite the fact that Ethiopian students have been taught reading skills since the first grade, they continued to fail to meet the minimum competency

level of knowledge in the curriculum. In this regard, EGRA (early grade reading assessment) (2018) reported that only 32 percent of primary school students in Ethiopia were able to answer the question of reading comprehension correctly. It suggests that the majority of primary school students struggle with answering reading comprehension questions that are designed for their grade level. If students do not acquire fundamental reading skills during primary school, they may struggle to understand advanced reading materials at the secondary and tertiary levels, which require critical reading abilities. Local studies claimed that Ethiopian secondary school students' level of proficiency in reading is very low (Abiy, 2005; Amlaku, 2010; Chanyalew, 2019; Yenus, 2018).

Literature has provided evidence regarding the disparity in the reading performance of EFL students. Peregoy and Boyle (2004), as cited in Linse (2005), identified factors that impact foreign language learners' reading performance. These are the learner's background knowledge, linguistic knowledge, text difficulty, topic or topic knowledge, task, and the readers' strategies (p.69). The literature highlighted that reading strategies are essential for solving students' reading comprehension problems (Eskey, 2005; Grabe, 2009). This conception leads to the conclusion that reading strategies may significantly affect students' reading performance. Metacognitive reading strategies have been extensively discussed in various studies. Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) described metacognitive reading strategies as "deliberate conscious procedures used by readers to enhance text comprehension" (p. 3). Concerning the relationship between metacognition and reading comprehension, literature affirmed that good readers can use reading strategies more effectively than poor readers (Block, 1986; Oxford, 2002; Sheorey & Mokhtari, 2001; Zhang, 2018). Similarly, Mokhtari et al. (2018) showed that there was a positive correlation between the use of ESL/EFL reading strategies and their reading performance. In summary, proficient readers use metacognitive reading strategies more frequently and appropriately than less proficient readers.

Previous studies on students' metacognitive reading strategy use found that Ethiopian university learners are classified as medium strategy users (Asalefew, 2018; Belilew, 2015). On the contrary, Teshome and Arficho (2022) highlighted that Ethiopian university students are classified as high-strategy users. Concerning students' preference for metacognitive reading strategies, numerous studies identified that problem-solving strategies are the most preferred strategies, followed mainly by global strategies and sometimes by support strategies (Annury et al., 2019; Harimurti1 et al., 2023; Levchyk et al., 2022; Manh & Le, 2021). On the other hand, Al-khresheh and Ben (2023) indicated that the global reading strategies are the most frequently employed strategies, followed by support and problem-solving strategies. The previous studies focused on university-level students and employed quantitative methods. However, they overlooked the use of metacognitive reading strategies and the potential variations between male and female secondary school students.

The present study aimed to investigate the level and preference of secondary school students' use of metacognitive reading strategies when reading academic materials. More precisely, this study aimed to 1) investigate the level at which students employ the metacognitive reading strategies, 2) explore frequently and less frequently preferred

metacognitive reading strategies, and 3) identify the possible differences between grade nine male and female students' use of the metacognitive reading strategy via a mixed-method approach.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Reading Skills**

Reading ability is compulsory for EFL students as they study most of their education through reading in English. Regarding this, Grabe (2009), Nunan (1995), and Richards and Renandya (2002) highlighted that reading is the most fundamental skill in many second or foreign-language teaching contexts as the student's academic success or failure is mainly determined by their reading ability. The authors explicitly stated that the student's reading needs were specifically identified for information, pleasure, professional, and educational purposes. According to Grabe (2002), the primary goal of reading for EFL students is comprehension, and to obtain comprehension, students need to identify the main idea from specific details, recognize text organization, etcetera. Reading comprehension is influenced by several factors, such as the strategies employed by the reader.

### **2.2 Reading Strategies**

The main focus of the current study was on students' use of reading strategies, which are considered to be one of the most important factors determining their reading proficiency. As cited in Afflerbach & Cho (2009), Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris define reading strategies as "the reader's deliberate and goal-oriented attempts to control and modify their efforts to decode text, understand words, and construct meanings of text" (p. 69). In this study, the particular emphasis was on metacognitive reading strategies, which are more comprehensive and consciously employed strategies.

### **2.3 Metacognitive Reading Strategies**

Metacognitive reading strategies are one of the many reading strategies that are used to enhance learners' reading comprehension. Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) defined metacognitive awareness as "the deliberate, conscious procedures used by readers to improve text comprehension" (p. 3). Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) also explained metacognition as "awareness and monitoring of comprehension processes are critically important aspects of skilled reading, which can be thought of as knowledge of the readers' cognition about reading and the self-control mechanisms they exercise when monitoring and regulating text comprehension" (p. 249). This explanation of metacognition refers to the concept of how individuals monitor and assess their reading performance by employing metacognitive reading strategies throughout the reading process. In their 2002 study, Mokhtari and Sheorey classified metacognitive reading strategies into three categories: global reading strategies (consisting of 13 items), problem-solving strategies (consisting of 8 items), and support reading strategies (consisting of 9 items). Global reading strategies involve general techniques such as setting a purpose and making predictions about the text. Problem-solving strategies, like rereading and reading aloud, are employed to address comprehension challenges. Support reading strategies, such as referencing and note-taking, are used to assist in understanding difficulties (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002, p. 252).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study utilized a mixed-method approach to examine the usage and preference of metacognitive reading strategies among ninth-grade students. Grade nine was selected because it marks the commencement of secondary school, where students are anticipated to engage with broader and more intricate reading materials. The objective of this research was to examine reading strategies, taking into account the hypothesis that reading strategies could potentially influence students' reading proficiency. The study used convenience sampling, simple random sampling, and stratified sampling methods to choose the setting and participants. The convenience sampling method was used to select Ula-Dula General Secondary School in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, due to its close proximity to the researchers. A simple random sampling method was then used to select three sections and 130 participants. 71 female and 59 male students aged between 15 and 21 participated in the study; among them, six were selected using a stratified sampling method for the semi-structured interviews.

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data. For this study, the researchers employed MARSİ (Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategy Inventory), a tool that was created and validated by Mokhtari and Sheorey in 2002. At first, the authors created 100 strategies, but after being reviewed by three expert judges, field-tested, and checked for reliability, the strategies were reduced to 30 items (pp. 251-252). The authors conducted Cronbach's alpha testing on the three subscales of strategies. It resulted in Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .92, .79, and .87 for global strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support strategies, respectively (p. 253). The MARSİ questionnaire comprises 30 items and uses a five-point Likert scale, with options ranging from 1 (I never do this) to 5 (I always do this). The students were given the questionnaire and asked to rate the frequency of their use of each strategy after reading them carefully. Based on the questionnaire results, two students from each level (high, moderate, and low strategy users) were interviewed to examine their use and preference of metacognitive reading strategies thoroughly and to provide additional support for the quantitative data. The semi-structured interview questions consisted of six general questions along with specific details.

Following the collection of data, quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science version 24) to determine the level and frequency of metacognitive reading strategies utilized by students. It involved examining frequencies, means, and standard deviations. The researchers determined the level of metacognitive reading strategies used by students by using Makhtari and Sheorey's (2002) classification. This classification categorizes the mean values as high ( $>3.5$ ), medium (2.5-3.4), or low (2.4). Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis, which involved grouping discrete concepts into categories and then combining them into broader categories such as global, problem-solving, and support strategies.

### 4. FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Data Presentation

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics of subscales of strategies

No.	Types of Strategies	N	M	SD	Level
1.	Global	130	2.7686	.94248	Moderate

2.	Problem-Solving	130	3.2683	.91659	Moderate
3.	Support	130	2.3915	1.03524	Low
	Average	130	2.8		Moderate

Note. N = Sample size, M = Mean, SD = Standard deviation

As shown in Table 4.1, the mean value for the problem-solving strategies was 3.3, for the global strategies, it was 2.8, and for the support strategies, it was 2.4. According to the standard cut-off points, the use of problem-solving and global reading strategies fell within moderate levels, whereas support reading strategies were used at low levels. The mean score of the overall metacognitive reading strategies employed by the students was 2.8, indicating that grade nine students, as a whole, employed the metacognitive reading strategies moderately when reading academic materials.

Table 4.2 Descriptive statistics on the levels of strategies

	Levels of Strategies			Total
	Low	Moderate	High	
Count	52	44	34	130
%	40.0%	33.8%	26.2%	100%

Out of 130 students, 52/40% employed metacognitive reading strategies at a low level, 44/33.8% at a moderate level, and 34/26.2% at a high level. It indicated that the majority of students employed metacognitive reading strategies occasionally when reading academic materials.

Table 4.3 Descriptive statistics for global reading strategies

No	Global Strategies	N	M	SD	Level
1.	I have a purpose in mind when I read.	130	2.77	1.198	Moderate
2.	I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it.	130	2.75	1.196	Moderate
3.	I think about what I know to help me understand what I'm reading.	130	2.66	1.118	Moderate
4.	I check whether the content of the text fits my purpose.	130	2.78	1.161	Moderate
5.	I skim the text first by noting characteristics like length and organization.	130	2.68	1.245	Moderate
6.	I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	130	2.92	1.132	Moderate
7.	I use tables, figures, and pictures in a text to increase my understanding.	130	2.74	1.285	Moderate
8.	I use context clues to help me better understand what I'm reading.	130	2.75	1.081	Moderate
9.	I use typographical aids like boldface type and italics to identify key information.	130	2.65	1.275	Moderate
10.	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	130	2.78	1.127	Moderate
11.	I check my understanding when I come across conflicting information.	130	2.82	1.091	Moderate
12.	I try to guess what the text is about when reading.	130	2.88	1.142	Moderate



13.	I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	130	2.81	1.205	Moderate
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The global reading strategies had mean values ranging from 2.65 to 2.92, with standard deviations ranging from 1.091 to 1.245. All items of the global reading strategies were used at a moderate level. Among them, the most frequently used were 'I decide what to read closely and what to ignore' with a mean value of 2.92. While 'I use typographical aids such as boldface type and italics to identify key information and 'I think about what I know to help me understand what I'm reading' were the least frequently used global reading strategies with mean values of 2.65 and 2.66, respectively.

Table 4.4 Descriptive statistics for problem-solving strategies

No.	Problem-Solving Strategies	N	M	SD	Level
1.	I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I'm reading.	130	3.34	1.165	Moderate
2.	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	130	3.32	1.114	Moderate
3.	I adjust my reading speed according to what I'm reading.	130	3.28	1.155	Moderate
4.	When text becomes difficult, I begin to pay closer attention to what I'm reading.	130	3.32	1.100	Moderate
5.	I stop from time to time to think about what I'm reading.	130	3.09	1.124	Moderate
6.	When text becomes difficult, I reread it to increase my understanding.	130	3.30	1.179	Moderate
7.	I try to picture or visualize information to help me remember what I'm reading.	130	3.16	1.193	Moderate
8.	I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	130	3.35	1.292	Moderate

The problem-solving reading strategies had mean values ranging from 3.09 to 3.34, with standard deviations ranging from 1.1 to 1.292. All items of problem-solving strategies were used at a moderate level. Among them, 'I try to guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases' and 'I read slowly but carefully to be sure I understand what I am reading' were the most frequently used problem-solving strategies with mean values of 3.35 and 3.34 successively. Item 'I stop from time to time to think about what I am reading' was the least frequently used strategy with a mean value of 3.09.

Table 4.5 Descriptive statistics for support strategies

No.	Support Strategies	N	M	SD	Level
1.	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I'm reading.	130	2.52	1.253	Moderate
2.	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I'm reading.	130	2.41	1.322	Low
3.	I summarize to reflect on key ideas in the text.	130	2.40	1.292	Low

4.	I discuss my reading with others to check my understanding.	130	2.35	1.225	Low
5.	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	130	2.35	1.257	Low
6.	I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I'm reading.	130	2.45	1.246	Low
7.	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I'm reading.	130	2.32	1.195	Low
8.	I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas.	130	2.38	1.151	Low
9.	I ask myself questions I would like to have answered in the text.	130	2.35	1.286	Low

Support reading strategies had mean values between 2.32 and 2.52, with standard deviations ranging from 1.151 to 1.322. Relatively, items 'I take notes while reading to help me understand what I am reading' and 'I use reference materials such as dictionaries to help me understand what I am reading' were the most frequently supported strategies with mean scores of 2.52 and 2.45, respectively. These two items were used at a moderate level, whereas the remaining 7 items were classified under a low level between mean values of 2.32 and 2.40.

Table 4.6 T-Test strategy preference between male and female students

Strategies	Gender	N	M	SD	Level
Problem-solving	Male	59	3.1208	.85253	Moderate
	Female	71	3.3908	.95523	Moderate
Global	Male	59	2.6910	.92413	Moderate
	Female	71	2.8332	.95918	Moderate
Support	Male	59	2.4275	.98667	Low
	Female	71	2.3615	1.08000	Low
All Strategies (total)	Male	59	2.7266	.82462	Moderate
	Female	71	2.8404	.94585	Moderate

Table 4.6 demonstrates that problem-solving strategies were the most frequently used strategies by both male and female students as a group, with mean values of 3.1208 and 3.3908 and standard deviations of 0.85253 and 0.95523, respectively. The global reading strategies were the second most frequently preferred strategies by male and female students, with mean values of 2.6910 and 2.8332 and standard deviations of 0.92413 and 0.95918 sequentially. The support reading strategies were the least frequently used strategies by both male and female students, with mean values of 2.4275 and 2.3615 and standard deviations of 0.98667 and 1.08. The total average result indicated that the mean value of the strategies used by males was 2.7266, and by females was 2.8404.

Table 4.7 Independent samples test

Strategies	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
				Lower	Upper
Problem- Solving	.095	-.27008	.16033	-.58733	.04716
	.091	-.27008	.15865	-.58402	.04385
Global	.394	-.14215	.16620	-.47101	.18671
	.392	-.14215	.16563	-.46994	.18565
Support	.719	.06599	.18299	-.29608	.42807
	.717	.06599	.18146	-.29309	.42508

Table 4.7 demonstrates the average p-values for the three subscales of strategies. The global strategies (.394), the problem-solving strategies (.095), and the support strategies (.719). All values were found to be higher than the standard P-value of 0.05, indicating that there was no significant relationship between the student's gender and their use of metacognitive reading strategies. Additionally, the Mann-Whitney U test was utilized to assess if there was a significant relationship between each strategy item and gender. Except for the item "I see the text before I read it," which is a global strategy with a P-value of .008, the remaining 29 items had a P-value greater than 0.05, confirming the above finding.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Based on the findings above, it was determined that grade nine students utilized metacognitive reading strategies to a moderate level, with an average value of 2.8. This finding aligns with previous research (Asalefew, 2018; Belilew, 2015) that indicated Ethiopian EFL learners are classified as medium strategy users.

In the pie chart below, the classification of students as high, moderate, and low strategy users is shown.

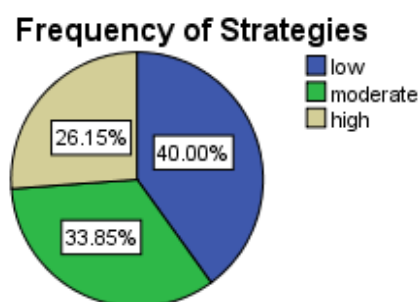


Chart 1. Level of metacognitive reading strategies employed by the students

As depicted in Chart 1, out of 130 participants, 40% used the metacognitive reading strategies at a low level, 33.85% at a moderate level, and 26.15% at a high level. While the average score for overall metacognitive reading strategy usage indicated a moderate level among all students, individual mean scores showed that most students used them at a low



level, a quarter of the students used them at a high level, and one-third of the students used them at a moderate level when reading academic materials.

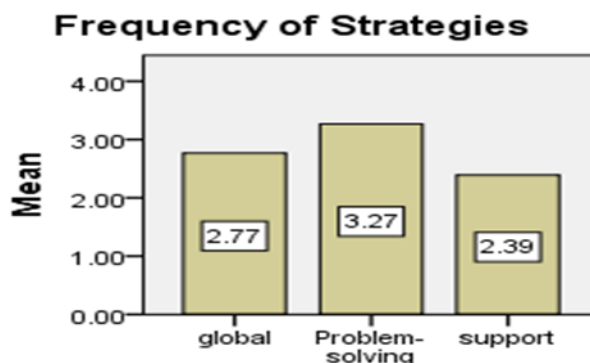


Chart 2. Frequency of strategies employed by the students

Among the three subscales of the metacognitive reading strategies, the data showed that the problem-solving strategies were the most frequently used strategies, with a mean score of 3.27, followed by the global strategies, with a mean score of 2.77, and the support strategies with a mean score of 2.39. Concerning the levels of the subscales of strategies, global and problem-solving strategies were used at a moderate level, whereas support strategies were used at a low level. Previous studies (Harimurti et al., 2023; Li, 2010) have also supported the concept that problem-solving strategies are the most commonly used strategies, followed by global and support strategies.

Some of the most frequently employed global reading strategies by students include deciding what to read closely and what to ignore, as well as trying to guess what the text is about when reading. On the other hand, some of the least frequently used global strategies involve using typographical aids like boldface type and italics to identify key information and utilizing prior knowledge to aid comprehension. The problem-solving strategies that were used most frequently by students were attempting to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases and reading slowly but attentively to ensure comprehension. Conversely, the problem-solving strategies that were used least frequently were trying to picture or visualize information to aid in memory retention and pausing periodically to reflect on the content being read. The support strategies that were used most frequently were 'taking notes while reading to aid in understanding the material' and 'utilizing reference materials like dictionaries to assist in comprehension'. While these two support strategies were used at a moderate level, the remaining seven items were used at a low level.

The students' interviews revealed that problem-solving reading strategies were the most frequently mentioned strategies by the students. Specifically, guessing the meanings of unknown words, rereading when the text becomes difficult, and reading slowly were the commonly mentioned problem-solving strategies. In connection with this, S1 stated, "If I do not comprehend the material, I read it again". S3 also said, "I guess the meaning of new words". The second most frequently mentioned strategies by the students were global reading strategies, specifically guessing what the text is about when reading and having a purpose in mind when reading, which were commonly stated global strategies. For instance, student 2 said, "When I finish one paragraph, I wonder what the next paragraph

will be about." Student 4 also said, 'Based on my purpose and the type of activity, I concentrate'. Finally, the strategies that were mentioned the least frequently were those related to support strategies. Relatively, taking notes, underlining, and circling information were the most commonly mentioned support strategies. This finding aligns with the quantitative data, which showed the reading strategies that the students most and least preferred.

There were differences observed in the frequency of the overall as well as the subscales of strategies used by male and female students. Females scored more than males in overall problem-solving and global strategies, whereas males scored more than females in support strategy. However, the independent sample t-test proved that there was no statistically significant difference between male and female students in the frequency of overall and subscales of strategies used. Among the subscales of strategies, problem-solving strategies were the most preferred, followed by global and support strategies for both male and female students. Further, through the Mann-Whitney U test, it was discovered that there was no significant difference between male and female students' strategy employment except for the statement 'I preview the text to see what it's about before reading it,' which has a P value of .008 which is less than 0.05.

In summary, the study found no statistically significant correlation between gender and the use of strategies or preferences in strategy among ninth-grade students. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted by Zhang (2022), Asgarabadi et al. (2015), Bashir (2021), and Deliany and Cahyono (2020), which also indicated that there is no significant correlation between the frequency of the overall metacognitive reading strategies employed. Additionally, the study found no significant gender differences in the use of global, problem-solving, and support strategies.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the metacognitive reading strategies used by grade nine male and female students in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and their preferences for these strategies. The findings showed that the students as a whole were classified as moderate strategy users, but when it came to individual students, the majority of them used the strategies at a low or moderate level, and a small percentage of them used the strategies at a high level. Additionally, the findings showed that problem-solving strategies were utilized most frequently, followed by global and support strategies. Problem-solving and global reading strategies were used moderately, while support strategies were used at a low level.

Metacognitive reading strategies have been developed and emphasized based on the premise that through them, the students can deliberately monitor and assess their level of comprehension in order to overcome their reading problems. However, the findings of this study showed that most students who participated did not use adequate and balanced metacognitive reading strategies. More precisely, the study indicated that the majority of the students employed a metacognitive reading strategy at a low level.

This implies that there is a lack of awareness of metacognitive reading strategies among students. Therefore, English teachers should equip themselves with sufficient

reading strategies so they can model and apply the strategies in reading instruction. Teachers should provide sufficient reading strategies and encourage their students to apply a variety of them in appropriate contexts while the students deal with reading activities. Material developers and textbook writers should also incorporate topics or notes about reading strategies in the students' textbooks. Subsequently, the students have the opportunity to study, refer, and practice a variety of reading strategies.

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