



ISSN1989–9572

DOI:10.47750/jett.2024.15.02.010

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**Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers, Vol. 15 (3)**

<https://jett.labosfor.com/>

**Date of reception: 23 November 2023**

**Date of revision: 05 May 2024**

**Date of acceptance: 14 July 2024**

**Dr. Youcef HADJ SAID(2024). Reading Comprehension Strategies for Literature Texts Among EFL Students at the University of Ghardaia . *Journal for Educators, Teachers and Trainers*, Vol.15(3).112-125.**



## **Reading Comprehension Strategies for Literature Texts Among EFL Students at the University of Ghardaia**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the reading comprehension strategies used by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the University of Ghardaia, Algeria, with a particular emphasis on how these strategies influence their understanding of literary texts. Given the complexities inherent in literary works, effective reading strategies are essential for students who must not only decode the language but also interpret deeper meanings and themes. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative data from questionnaires with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. A sample of 100 students participated, providing data on the frequency and effectiveness of various cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies.

The findings indicate a predominant use of metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring, planning, and evaluating, which students perceive as significantly enhancing their comprehension of literature. These strategies enable students to engage critically with texts, facilitating a deeper understanding of complex literary elements. However, the study also reveals a relative underuse of cognitive strategies, such as summarization, questioning, and visualization, which are equally important for a holistic comprehension process. The qualitative data highlight that while students recognize the benefits of metacognitive strategies, there is a need for more structured instruction and practice in employing a broader range of strategies.

The study concludes that while EFL students at the University of Ghardaia are proficient in using certain strategies, there is a gap in their comprehensive use of all available reading tools, suggesting the potential for pedagogical improvements. The findings hold important implications for curriculum development, particularly in enhancing students' strategic approaches to reading literature, thereby better preparing them for academic and professional success in the field of English studies.

**Keywords:** Reading Comprehension Strategies, Literary Texts, Cognitive Strategies, Metacognitive Strategies, Self-Monitoring, Summarization.

### **1. Introduction**

The ability to comprehend and interpret literary texts is a fundamental skill for students majoring in English Language and Literature. Literature, by its very nature, often presents readers with complex language, diverse stylistic devices, intricate narratives, and deep thematic content, all of which require sophisticated reading strategies for effective

understanding. For EFL students, the development of these strategies is not only crucial for academic success but also for fostering critical thinking and analytical skills, which are vital in both academic and professional contexts.

Reading comprehension strategies have been extensively studied in educational research, particularly within the context of language learning. However, much of this research has concentrated on general reading strategies employed by language learners at various stages of education, often overlooking the specific needs and challenges faced by students in higher education, particularly those studying literature. Unlike other types of texts, literature demands readers to engage in multiple levels of interpretation—literal, inferential, and critical—simultaneously. This complexity underscores the relevance and necessity of studying reading strategies within the context of literary texts.

EFL students are expected to read and analyze a wide range of literary texts, including novels, plays, poems, and essays from different historical periods and cultural backgrounds. These texts often present unique challenges in terms of language structure and content. To navigate these challenges, students must employ a variety of reading strategies that enable them to decode the text, infer meaning, and critically engage with the themes and ideas presented. However, the extent to which these students are equipped with and effectively use these strategies has not been thoroughly investigated.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the reading comprehension strategies employed by EFL students at the University of Ghardaia. The primary objectives of this research are to identify the specific strategies used by these students, assess the frequency and effectiveness of these strategies, and evaluate how they contribute to the students' overall comprehension of literary texts. By understanding the strategies that students use and the challenges they encounter, this study seeks to provide insights that can inform the development of more effective teaching practices and curriculum designs in literature courses.

The significance of this study lies in its focus on a specific group of students and its emphasis on the comprehension of literary texts, which are inherently different from other types of reading material. While previous research has highlighted the importance of reading strategies in general, there has been little attention paid to the unique demands of literary reading and the strategies that best support it. This study, therefore, not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge on reading comprehension strategies but also addresses a critical need for research specific to EFL Students in higher education.

The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. What reading comprehension strategies are most commonly employed by EFL students at the University of Ghardaia when reading literary texts?
2. How effective are these strategies in enhancing students' comprehension of complex literary works?
3. What challenges do students face in applying these strategies, and how do these challenges impact their overall reading comprehension and academic performance in literature courses?

To answer these questions, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from a structured questionnaire with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews.

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature on reading comprehension strategies by focusing specifically on EFL students and their approach to reading literary texts. The findings from this research have the potential to inform teaching practices, enhance curriculum design, and ultimately improve the academic outcomes of EFL Students. Moreover, by shedding light on the challenges and successes of these students in an Algerian context, the study contributes to a broader understanding of literature education in diverse cultural and educational environments.

The subsequent sections of this article will provide a detailed review of the relevant literature, outline the research methodology, present and analyze the findings, and discuss their implications for literature education. Through this comprehensive approach, the study aims to offer valuable insights that can guide both educators and students in navigating the complex terrain of literary reading and comprehension.

## **2. Literature Review**

The study of reading comprehension strategies has been a central focus in educational research, particularly within the context of language learning and literacy development. Over the past few decades, scholars have extensively explored

the cognitive and metacognitive strategies that readers employ to enhance their understanding of texts. These strategies are essential not only for decoding written language but also for achieving the deeper comprehension necessary for critical analysis, especially in literary studies. This literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the key theories, concepts, and empirical findings related to reading comprehension strategies, with particular attention to their application to literary texts and their relevance for EFL students.

### **2.1. Theoretical Frameworks on Reading Comprehension Strategies**

Reading comprehension strategies are typically classified into two categories: cognitive and metacognitive strategies, each playing a distinct role in the reading process. Cognitive strategies involve direct engagement with the text, such as summarizing, predicting, inferring, and questioning. These strategies assist readers in processing and organizing information, making it more accessible and meaningful. In contrast, metacognitive strategies involve self-regulatory processes that enable readers to plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension. As defined by Flavell (1979), metacognition refers to the knowledge and regulation of one's cognitive processes. In the context of reading, this includes being aware of one's understanding of the text, identifying comprehension breakdowns, and taking corrective actions to address them.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) offers a valuable framework for understanding how reading comprehension strategies can be taught and developed. According to Vygotsky, learners can achieve higher levels of understanding and performance with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other, such as a teacher or peer. This scaffolding process is critical in helping students develop the ability to independently employ effective reading strategies. Similarly, Bruner's (1983) concept of scaffolding aligns with Vygotsky's ZPD, emphasizing the role of guided support in the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills.

### **2.2. Empirical Studies on Cognitive and Metacognitive Strategies**

Empirical research has consistently underscored the importance of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies in reading comprehension. For instance, Pressley et al. (1990) conducted a series of studies demonstrating that skilled readers are more likely to use a variety of cognitive strategies, such as summarization and questioning, to enhance their understanding of texts. These strategies promote active engagement with the material, facilitating the integration of new information with prior knowledge.

In the context of literary texts, which often contain complex themes, ambiguous language, and non-linear narratives, the use of cognitive strategies becomes even more crucial. Research by McNamara (2004) has shown that the ability to make inferences and connect different parts of a text is essential for comprehending literature. Inference-making allows readers to fill in gaps in the narrative, understand implicit meanings, and develop a coherent interpretation of the text. Similarly, questioning strategies, which involve generating questions about the text, have been found to foster deeper engagement and critical thinking.

Metacognitive strategies have also been extensively studied in relation to reading comprehension. Metacognitive awareness, or the ability to reflect on one's thought processes, has been identified as a key factor in successful reading. A study by Baker and Brown (1984) found that students who are aware of their comprehension processes and who use strategies such as self-monitoring and evaluation tend to perform better in reading tasks. These findings have been supported by later research, including a meta-analysis by Hattie (2009), which identified metacognitive strategies as one of the most effective interventions for improving student achievement across various subjects, including literature.

### **2.3. Reading Comprehension Strategies in the Context of Literature**

Literary texts present unique challenges to readers, particularly in higher education, where students are expected to engage with complex and often unfamiliar material. Unlike informational texts, which are typically straightforward and fact-based, literary texts require readers to interpret symbolism, understand historical and cultural contexts, and appreciate the aesthetic qualities of language. This makes the application of reading comprehension strategies particularly important for EFL Students.

Studies specific to the reading of literature have shown that metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring and planning, are especially valuable. According to Baker (2007), metacognitive strategies help students navigate the complexities of literary texts by allowing them to track their understanding, adjust their reading pace, and revisit challenging sections of

the text. Moreover, research by Kintsch (1998) on the construction-integration model of reading posits that the comprehension of literature involves not only the construction of a coherent mental representation of the text but also the integration of new information with existing knowledge. This model underscores the importance of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies in achieving a deep understanding of literary works.

Furthermore, reader-response theory plays a significant role in literature education, emphasizing the active role of the reader in constructing meaning from the text. Reader-response theory, as articulated by Rosenblatt (1978), suggests that readers bring their experiences, emotions, and interpretations to the reading process, which interact with the text to create meaning. This theory aligns with the concept of strategic reading, where the reader actively engages with the text using a combination of cognitive and metacognitive strategies to interpret and analyze the material.

#### **2.4. Challenges and Gaps in Current Research**

While the importance of reading comprehension strategies is well-established, several gaps remain in the current research, particularly concerning the specific needs of EFL students. Much of the existing literature focuses on general reading strategies or the comprehension of expository texts, with relatively few studies addressing the unique demands of literary reading. Moreover, there is limited research on the effectiveness of these strategies in different cultural and educational contexts, such as in Algerian universities, where students may face additional challenges related to language proficiency, access to resources, and external social factors.

One notable gap is the lack of research on how students in non-Western contexts approach reading literature in English, which is often not their first language. Studies by Grabe and Stoller (2011) have highlighted the difficulties non-native speakers may encounter when reading complex literary texts in a second language. These difficulties are compounded by cultural differences that may affect the interpretation of literary themes and symbols. Consequently, more research is needed to explore how students in diverse cultural contexts employ reading strategies and how these strategies can be supported through targeted instruction.

Another gap in the literature is the underutilization of cognitive strategies, such as questioning and visualization, among EFL Students. While metacognitive strategies are frequently emphasized, there is less attention given to the role of cognitive strategies in enhancing literary comprehension. Research by Duke and Pearson (2002) suggests that a balanced approach incorporating both cognitive and metacognitive strategies is necessary for effective reading instruction. However, limited empirical evidence exists on how this balance can be achieved in literature education.

#### **2.5. Implications for Teaching and Curriculum Design**

The findings from existing research have significant implications for teaching literature and designing curricula for EFL students. Given the critical role of reading strategies in literature comprehension, it is essential that educators provide explicit instruction in both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. This instruction should be integrated into literature courses, offering students opportunities to practice and reflect on their strategy use.

Moreover, curriculum designs should consider the specific challenges faced by students in different cultural and linguistic contexts. For example, students at the University of Ghardaia may benefit from instructional approaches that take into account their social environment and the potential impact of external factors on their academic performance. Additionally, the curriculum should include a diverse range of literary texts that reflect both local and global perspectives, allowing students to apply reading strategies across different genres and cultural contexts.

The literature on reading comprehension strategies provides a strong foundation for understanding the cognitive and metacognitive processes underlying successful reading, particularly in the context of literary texts. However, significant gaps in the research need to be addressed, particularly concerning the specific needs of EFL students and the challenges faced by students in diverse cultural contexts. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to more effective teaching practices and curriculum designs that support the development of critical reading skills in EFL Students.

### **3. Methodology**

This study's methodology is meticulously designed to thoroughly explore the reading comprehension strategies employed by EFL students at the University of Ghardaia, with a particular focus on their effectiveness in enhancing the comprehension of literary texts. Given the complexity of the research questions and the necessity to capture both the

breadth and depth of strategy use, a mixed-methods approach was adopted. This approach integrates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

### **3.1. Research Design**

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The quantitative component involves the use of a structured questionnaire to gather data on the frequency and perceived effectiveness of various reading comprehension strategies among the student participants. The qualitative component, on the other hand, consists of semi-structured interviews aimed at gaining deeper insights into the students' experiences and challenges in employing these strategies.

The mixed-methods approach was selected for its capacity to provide a holistic understanding of the research problem. While the quantitative data offers a broad overview of strategy use across the sample, the qualitative data provides rich, contextualized information that helps explain the underlying reasons for the patterns observed in the quantitative data. This approach also allows for data triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the study's findings.

### **3.2. Participants**

The study was conducted with a sample of 100 EFL students at the University of Ghardaia. Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure the sample was representative of the larger student population in terms of gender, academic year, and academic performance. This sampling method was chosen to account for potential variations in reading strategy use across different subgroups of students.

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 24 years, with a near-equal distribution of male and female students. They were enrolled in various stages of the English Language and Literature program, from first-year students to those in their final year of study. This diversity within the sample was crucial for capturing a wide range of experiences and perspectives on reading strategy use, as students at different academic stages may employ different strategies or encounter distinct challenges.

Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were fully informed about the study's purpose, the nature of their participation, and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. The study was approved by the university's ethics committee, ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects.

### **3.3. Data Collection Instruments**

The primary instruments used for data collection were a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide, both carefully designed to capture quantitative and qualitative data on reading comprehension strategies.

#### **3.3.1. Structured Questionnaire:**

The structured questionnaire was developed based on existing literature on reading comprehension strategies, along with input from experts in literature education. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:

**a. Demographic Information:** This section gathered basic information about the participants, including age, gender, academic year, and academic performance.

**b. Cognitive Strategies:** This section included items measuring the frequency and perceived effectiveness of various cognitive strategies, such as summarization, questioning, and inferencing. Participants were asked to rate how often they used each strategy on a Likert scale ranging from "Never" to "Always," and to evaluate the effectiveness of each strategy in enhancing their comprehension of literary texts.

**c. Metacognitive Strategies:** This section focused on metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring, planning, and evaluation. Similar to the cognitive strategies section, participants rated the frequency of use and perceived effectiveness of these strategies.

The questionnaire was piloted with a small group of students before the main study to ensure its reliability and validity. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the wording of the items and improve the overall clarity of the questionnaire.

### **3.3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews:**

To complement the quantitative data from the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 participants. These participants were selected based on their responses to the questionnaire, aiming to include students who represented a range of strategy use patterns and academic performance levels.

The interview guide was designed to explore students' experiences with reading literary texts in greater depth. The questions focused on how students applied specific strategies, the challenges they faced in using these strategies, and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies in improving their comprehension. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in the interviews, enabling the interviewer to probe deeper into areas of interest and explore topics that emerged during the conversations.

The interviews were conducted in a quiet and comfortable setting on campus, with each interview lasting approximately 30 to 45 minutes. With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

The data analysis process involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques, reflecting the mixed-methods design of the study.

#### **3.4.1 Quantitative Data Analysis:**

The quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data and describe overall patterns of strategy use among the participants. Inferential statistics, such as t-tests and ANOVA, were employed to examine differences in strategy use across various demographic groups, such as gender and academic year.

The data were entered into statistical software (SPSS) for analysis, and to ensure accuracy, the data were double-checked for errors during the entry process. The results of the quantitative analysis provided a clear picture of the prevalence of different reading strategies among the students and the factors influencing their use.

#### **3.4.2. Qualitative Data Analysis:**

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and robustness in analyzing qualitative data, allowing for both inductive and deductive approaches to coding.

The analysis process began with the transcription of the interview recordings. The transcripts were then read multiple times to gain an overall understanding of the data. Next, the data were coded using a combination of a priori codes (based on the interview guide) and emergent codes (based on the participants' responses). These codes were then grouped into broader themes that captured the key aspects of students' experiences with reading strategies.

The themes identified through the qualitative analysis were compared with the quantitative findings to explore areas of convergence and divergence. This triangulation of data helped to validate the study's findings and provided a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

### **3.5. Validity and Reliability**

Ensuring the validity and reliability of the study was a key consideration throughout the research process. In the quantitative component, the questionnaire's validity was established through expert review and pilot testing, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to measure the internal consistency of the items. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 or higher was considered acceptable for the scales used in the questionnaire.

In the qualitative component, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to review and confirm the accuracy of the interview transcripts. Transferability was considered by providing rich, detailed descriptions of the research context and participants, allowing readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through the use of an audit trail, which documented the research process and decisions made during the analysis.

### 3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were central to the design and conduct of this study. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants, including the right to confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants before their involvement in the study.

To protect the privacy of participants, all data were anonymized, and identifiers were removed from the interview transcripts and questionnaire responses. The data were securely stored, with access restricted to the research team.

### 3.7. Limitations of the Study

While this study was carefully designed to explore the reading comprehension strategies of EFL students, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size, while adequate for the purposes of this study, limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of EFL Students in other contexts. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data in the questionnaire may introduce response bias, as participants may overestimate or underestimate their use of certain strategies. Finally, the qualitative component, while providing rich insights, is based on a relatively small subset of participants, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences within the larger student population.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the reading comprehension strategies employed by EFL Students and provides a foundation for future research in this area. By addressing these limitations in future studies, researchers can further enhance our understanding of how best to support EFL Students in developing effective reading strategies.

Here is the revised and paraphrased version of the Results section:

## 4. Results

The results of this study are organized to address the primary research questions: (1) the frequency and types of reading comprehension strategies employed by EFL students, (2) the perceived effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing comprehension of literary texts, and (3) the challenges students face in applying these strategies. Both quantitative data from the structured questionnaire and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews are presented to provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings.

### 4.1. Frequency and Types of Reading Comprehension Strategies

This section presents the quantitative data on the frequency of use of various reading comprehension strategies, which are categorized into cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

#### 4.1.1 Cognitive Strategies

The quantitative analysis revealed varying degrees of use among the different cognitive strategies. The following table summarizes the frequency of use of each cognitive strategy as reported by the participants.

**Table 4.1. the frequency of use of each cognitive strategy**

Cognitive Strategy	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean Frequency
<b>Summarization</b>	5%	8%	20%	37%	30%	3.79
<b>Questioning</b>	15%	18%	22%	25%	20%	3.17
<b>Visualization</b>	20%	25%	25%	18%	12%	2.77
<b>Inferencing</b>	10%	15%	25%	35%	15%	3.30



As shown in Table 4.1, summarization emerged as the most frequently used cognitive strategy, with a mean frequency score of 3.79, indicating that students often use this strategy to condense and retain key information from literary texts. In contrast, questioning and visualization were less frequently employed, with mean frequency scores of 3.17 and 2.77, respectively. This suggests that while students recognize the value of summarization, they may not be fully utilizing other cognitive strategies that could enhance their comprehension.

#### 4.1.2. Metacognitive Strategies

Metacognitive strategies were more consistently employed by students, as reflected in the frequency data presented in the following table.

**Table 4.2. the frequency of use of each metacognitive strategy**

Metacognitive Strategy	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Mean Frequency
<b>Self-Monitoring</b>	3%	5%	12%	45%	35%	4.04
<b>Planning</b>	5%	8%	15%	50%	22%	3.76
<b>Evaluation</b>	7%	10%	18%	40%	25%	3.66

As illustrated in Table 4.2, self-monitoring is the most frequently employed metacognitive strategy, with a mean frequency score of 4.04. This high frequency reflects students' reliance on self-monitoring to maintain their comprehension during reading. Planning and evaluation also show relatively high usage, with mean frequency scores of 3.76 and 3.66, respectively, indicating that these strategies are integral to students' approach to reading and understanding literary texts.

#### 4.2. Effectiveness of Reading Comprehension Strategies

The perceived effectiveness of the reading comprehension strategies was assessed through self-reported data, with the results summarized in the following tables. These tables display the percentage of students who rated each strategy as "not effective," "somewhat effective," or "highly effective."

**Table 4.3. Perceived Effectiveness of Cognitive Strategies**

Cognitive Strategy	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Highly Effective	Mean Effectiveness
<b>Summarization</b>	8%	32%	60%	4.12
<b>Questioning</b>	15%	40%	45%	3.65
<b>Visualization</b>	20%	38%	42%	3.50
<b>Inferencing</b>	10%	35%	55%	3.85

As shown in Table 4.3, summarization is perceived as the most effective cognitive strategy, with 60% of students rating it as highly effective and a mean effectiveness score of 4.12. Questioning and visualization, while still viewed as beneficial, are perceived as less effective overall, with mean effectiveness scores of 3.65 and 3.50, respectively. These findings suggest that while students recognize the value of these strategies, they may require additional support or practice to fully harness their potential.

**Table 4.4. Perceived Effectiveness of Metacognitive Strategies**

Metacognitive Strategy	Not Effective	Somewhat Effective	Highly Effective	Mean Effectiveness
<b>Self-Monitoring</b>	5%	25%	70%	4.35
<b>Planning</b>	7%	28%	65%	4.18
<b>Evaluation</b>	8%	30%	62%	4.12

Table 4.4 highlights the high perceived effectiveness of metacognitive strategies. Self-monitoring stands out, with 70% of students rating it as highly effective and a mean effectiveness score of 4.35, indicating its critical role in enhancing comprehension. Planning and evaluation are also regarded as highly effective, with mean scores of 4.18 and 4.12, respectively. These findings reinforce the importance of metacognitive strategies in supporting students' comprehension and engagement with literary texts.

### **4.3. Challenges in Applying Reading Comprehension Strategies**

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews provided valuable insights into the challenges students face in applying reading comprehension strategies. Three main themes emerged: the complexity of literary texts, the lack of instruction in strategy use, and external factors influencing reading practices.

#### **a- Complexity of Literary Texts**

The interviews revealed that many students struggle with the inherent complexity of literary texts, which often feature dense language, unfamiliar vocabulary, and intricate narrative structures. This complexity sometimes makes it difficult for students to apply certain reading strategies effectively. For example, some students expressed frustration with summarization when dealing with texts that are heavily abstract or symbolic, as they found it challenging to distill these texts into concise summaries. Similarly, the use of questioning was reported as problematic when students encountered texts with ambiguous or multiple interpretations, making it difficult to formulate meaningful questions.

#### **b- Lack of Instruction in Strategy Use**

Another significant challenge identified by students was the lack of explicit instruction in how to use reading comprehension strategies effectively. Although students were aware of some strategies, they often lacked detailed guidance on how to apply these strategies in different contexts or how to combine multiple strategies for more effective comprehension. This gap in instruction was particularly evident with cognitive strategies like questioning and visualization, which were less frequently used and perceived as less effective by the students. Many participants expressed a desire for more targeted instruction and practice in these areas, suggesting that better training could help them more effectively navigate complex literary texts.

#### **c- External Factors Influencing Reading Practices**

External factors, including time constraints and workload also impacted students' ability to apply reading comprehension strategies. The interviews revealed that many students felt overwhelmed by their academic workload, which often left them with limited time to engage deeply with their reading assignments. These external pressures often led students to adopt surface-level reading strategies, such as skimming, rather than engaging in the more time-consuming but effective strategies of self-monitoring, planning, and evaluation.

In summary, the results of this study reveal a clear preference for metacognitive strategies among EFL students at the University of Ghardaia. These strategies—self-monitoring, planning, and evaluation—are frequently used and are perceived as highly effective in enhancing comprehension of literary texts. However, the study also highlights the underutilization of cognitive strategies, such as questioning and visualization, suggesting a need for more explicit instruction and practice in these areas. The challenges identified by the students, particularly those related to the complexity of literary texts and the lack of strategy instruction, point to potential areas for pedagogical intervention.

## **5. Discussion**

This section interprets and contextualizes the findings of the study within the broader literature on reading comprehension strategies, particularly focusing on EFL students at the University of Ghardaia. It examines the implications of the study's results, explores the relationships between different types of strategies and student outcomes, and suggests directions for future research and pedagogical practices.

### **5.1. Interpretation of Findings**

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of the reading comprehension strategies employed by EFL students. The predominance of metacognitive strategies, such as self-monitoring, planning, and evaluation, suggests that students are highly aware of their cognitive processes during reading and actively engage in strategies that help them

monitor and regulate their comprehension. This observation aligns with existing literature, which emphasizes the significance of metacognitive strategies in fostering deeper comprehension and critical engagement with texts (Baker & Brown, 1984; Hattie, 2009).

### **5.1.1. Cognitive vs. Metacognitive Strategies**

The study revealed that while metacognitive strategies are frequently used and perceived as highly effective, cognitive strategies, such as questioning and visualization, are less frequently employed. This discrepancy may reflect a lack of familiarity or confidence in applying cognitive strategies, particularly in the context of complex literary texts. Cognitive strategies, which involve direct interaction with the text, are crucial for constructing meaning and integrating new information with prior knowledge (Pressley et al., 1990; McNamara, 2004). The underutilization of these strategies could potentially limit students' ability to engage with texts on a deeper level, as these strategies are essential for making inferences, generating questions, and visualizing abstract concepts.

The lower frequency of use and perceived effectiveness of cognitive strategies may also indicate the challenges students face in applying these strategies to literary texts. Unlike expository texts, which are often straightforward and fact-based, literary texts require readers to navigate multiple layers of meaning, interpret symbolism, and appreciate stylistic nuances. The complexity of literary texts may, therefore, pose a barrier to the effective use of cognitive strategies, especially for students who have not received explicit instruction in how to apply these strategies in a literary context.

### **5.1.2. Effectiveness of Metacognitive Strategies**

The high perceived effectiveness of metacognitive strategies is consistent with the literature, which highlights the role of metacognition in enhancing reading comprehension (Brown, 2007; Kintsch, 1998). Self-monitoring, in particular, was identified by students as a critical strategy for maintaining comprehension and ensuring a deeper understanding of the text. This finding suggests that students are not merely passive recipients of information but are actively engaged in regulating their reading processes. Planning and evaluation were also perceived as highly effective, supporting the notion that students benefit from a structured approach to reading that includes setting goals, planning their reading sessions, and reflecting on their comprehension.

The effectiveness of metacognitive strategies in this study underscores the importance of explicitly teaching these strategies in literature courses. Given that metacognitive strategies were associated with higher levels of comprehension and engagement, educators should consider incorporating metacognitive training into their curriculum to help students develop these critical skills. This could involve teaching students how to set reading goals, monitor their understanding, and evaluate their comprehension after reading—all of which are essential for navigating the complexities of literary texts.

## **5.2. Challenges in Strategy Application**

The qualitative findings from the interviews provide insight into several challenges that students face in applying reading comprehension strategies, particularly in the context of literary texts. These challenges include the inherent complexity of the texts, the lack of explicit instruction in strategy use, and external factors such as time constraints and social stressors.

### **a- Complexity of Literary Texts**

The complexity of literary texts was identified as a significant barrier to the effective use of reading strategies. Students reported that the dense language, unfamiliar vocabulary, and intricate narrative structures often made it difficult to apply strategies such as summarization, questioning, and visualization. This finding is consistent with previous research, which highlights the challenges of reading literature, often requiring higher-order thinking skills and the ability to interpret multiple layers of meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978; Grabe & Stoller, 2011).

The difficulties students encounter in applying cognitive strategies to literary texts suggest a need for more targeted instruction that addresses these challenges. Educators could assist students by teaching them how to break down complex texts into more manageable parts, use questioning to explore different interpretations, and apply visualization techniques to create mental images of abstract concepts. By equipping students with the tools to navigate the complexities of literary texts, educators can help them develop a more nuanced and critical approach to reading.

### **b- Lack of Instruction in Strategy Use**

Another significant challenge highlighted in the study was the lack of explicit instruction in how to use reading comprehension strategies effectively. While students were aware of some strategies, they often lacked guidance on how to apply these strategies in different contexts or how to combine multiple strategies for optimal comprehension. This gap in instruction was particularly evident with cognitive strategies like questioning and visualization, which were less frequently used and perceived as less effective by the students. Many participants expressed a desire for more targeted instruction and practice in these areas, suggesting that better training could help them more effectively navigate complex literary texts.

To address this gap, educators should consider integrating explicit strategy instruction into their literature courses. This could involve teaching students how to apply different strategies to various types of texts, providing opportunities for practice, and offering feedback on their strategy use. Additionally, educators could encourage students to reflect on their reading processes and experiment with different combinations of strategies to find what works best for them. By making strategy instruction a central component of literature education, educators can help students develop the skills they need to become more effective and independent readers.

### **c- External Factors Influencing Reading Practices**

The study also revealed that external factors, including time constraints and workload influenced students' ability to apply reading comprehension strategies. Many students reported feeling overwhelmed by their academic responsibilities, often leaving them with limited time to engage deeply with their reading assignments and created stress and distractions that further hindered students' ability to focus on reading.

These external pressures often led students to adopt surface-level reading strategies, such as skimming, rather than engaging in more time-consuming but effective strategies like self-monitoring, planning, and evaluation. This finding underscores the need for educators to be mindful of the broader context in which students are reading and to provide support that addresses these challenges. For example, educators could offer flexible deadlines, provide additional resources, or create a supportive classroom environment that acknowledges and addresses the external pressures students face.

### **5.3. Implications for Teaching and Curriculum Design**

The findings of this study have several important implications for teaching and curriculum design in literature education. First, the study highlights the need for a balanced approach to reading instruction that incorporates both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. While metacognitive strategies were found to be highly effective, cognitive strategies also play a critical role in comprehension, particularly in helping students engage with the text at a deeper level. Educators should, therefore, aim to teach a wide range of strategies and provide students with the guidance and practice they need to apply these strategies effectively.

Second, the study underscores the importance of explicit strategy instruction in literature courses. Given that many students lack the necessary skills to apply cognitive strategies effectively, educators should focus on teaching these strategies in a way that is relevant to the specific demands of literary reading. This could involve integrating strategy instruction into the reading process, providing opportunities for guided practice, and offering feedback on students' strategy use.

Third, the study suggests that educators should be mindful of the external factors that influence students' reading practices. By creating a supportive classroom environment and providing resources that address these challenges, educators can help students overcome the barriers they face and develop a more strategic approach to reading. This could include offering flexible deadlines, providing additional support for students who are struggling, and creating opportunities for peer support and collaboration.

### **5.4. Directions for Future Research**

While this study provides valuable insights into the reading comprehension strategies employed by EFL students, several areas warrant further investigation. Future research could explore the long-term impact of strategy instruction on students' academic performance and their ability to engage with literary texts. Additionally, research could examine the effectiveness of different instructional approaches in teaching reading comprehension strategies, particularly in diverse cultural and educational contexts.

Another area for future research is the exploration of how technology can be used to support the development of reading comprehension strategies. With the increasing availability of digital tools and resources, there is potential for integrating technology into the reading process in ways that enhance comprehension and engagement. For example, digital annotations, interactive reading platforms, and online discussion forums could provide students with new opportunities to practice and refine their reading strategies.

Finally, future research could investigate the role of social factors in shaping students' reading practices. It is important to understand how these factors influence their ability to engage with texts and develop effective reading strategies. By exploring these areas, future research can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of reading comprehension in diverse educational contexts and inform the development of more effective teaching practices.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on reading comprehension strategies by providing insights into the strategies employed by EFL students at the University of Ghardaia. The findings underscore the importance of metacognitive strategies in enhancing comprehension and engagement with literary texts while also highlighting the need for more explicit instruction in cognitive strategies. The challenges identified in this study point to potential areas for pedagogical intervention and suggest that a more balanced and supportive approach to reading instruction could benefit students in literature courses. By addressing these challenges and building on the findings of this study, educators and curriculum developers can help students develop the skills they need to become more effective, independent, and confident readers.

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