

Students' Metacognitive Strategies in Learning English Reading Comprehension in Junior High School 5 Kuningan on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract

Reading comprehension remains one of the most challenging skills for Indonesian junior high school students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. In line with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes learner autonomy, higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), and reflective learning, students are expected to develop strong metacognitive awareness in managing their reading processes. This study investigates students' metacognitive strategies in learning English reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 5 Kuningan. Employing a descriptive qualitative design supported by quantitative questionnaire data, this research involved 16 seventh-grade students. Data were collected through the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS), classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that students predominantly employ planning strategies, such as memorization and independent study, while monitoring and evaluating strategies remain underdeveloped. Affective factors, particularly fear of making mistakes and anxiety, significantly influence students' strategic engagement. The results indicate a discrepancy between the Merdeka Curriculum's goal of fostering independent and reflective learners and the actual metacognitive practices observed in the classroom. The study underscores the need for explicit metacognitive instruction, teacher scaffolding, and supportive classroom environments to enhance students' reading comprehension and self-regulated learning in EFL settings.

Keywords: reading comprehension; EFL; Merdeka curriculum; metacognitive strategies; junior high school.

INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a foundational literacy competence that determines students' academic achievement across disciplines. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, reading serves not only as a receptive skill but also as a gateway to vocabulary acquisition, grammatical awareness, and critical thinking development. However, numerous studies in Indonesia indicate

that junior high school students frequently encounter difficulties in comprehending English texts, particularly at inferential and evaluative levels. Students often focus on word-by-word translation rather than constructing meaning holistically. The world has now become a global village where people are learning different languages for communication (wael et al. 2025)

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum introduces a paradigm shift in Indonesian education. The curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiation, reflective thinking, and higher-order cognitive processes. Students are expected to become independent learners capable of planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own learning. In reading instruction, this expectation aligns closely with the concept of metacognitive strategies. Metacognition, first introduced by Flavell (1979), refers to individuals' awareness and regulation of their own cognitive processes. In reading contexts, metacognitive strategies typically include planning (setting goals and previewing texts), monitoring (checking comprehension during reading), and evaluating (assessing understanding after reading). These strategies are central to self-regulated learning, where learners actively control their cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes.

Despite its importance, research suggests that many Indonesian EFL students demonstrate limited metacognitive awareness. Students tend to rely heavily on surface-level strategies such as memorization, dictionary use, and teacher guidance. The gap between curricular expectations and classroom realities becomes particularly relevant under the Merdeka Curriculum framework. While previous studies have examined metacognitive strategies in EFL reading, limited research has explored how these strategies are enacted within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' metacognitive strategies in learning English reading comprehension at SMP Negeri 5 Kuningan and to analyze their alignment with the principles of independent and reflective learning promoted by the current curriculum.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design supported by quantitative data from questionnaires. The qualitative approach was selected to explore students' internal learning processes and contextual classroom dynamics without manipulating variables. This design allows in-depth examination of students' perceptions, behaviors, and affective responses related to reading strategies. The participants were 16 students from class VII B of SMP Negeri 5 Kuningan. The selection was based on accessibility and the school's implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The participants represented diverse levels of English proficiency.

Data were collected using three instruments:

1. Questionnaire Adapted from the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS), the questionnaire measured students' awareness and frequency of strategy use across planning, monitoring, and evaluative dimensions.
2. Classroom Observations were conducted during English reading sessions to document students' real-time behaviors and engagement.
3. Semi-structured Interviews were conducted to obtain deeper insights into students' perceptions, challenges, and emotional experiences during reading activities.

Data collection followed these steps: instrument preparation, questionnaire distribution, classroom observation, interviews, and data triangulation to ensure credibility. Quantitative questionnaire data were analyzed descriptively using percentages. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed through thematic coding. Data triangulation was employed to ensure credibility and consistency across instruments. Ethical considerations included obtaining permission from the school and ensuring students' confidentiality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on questionnaire data, classroom observations, and interviews. The results are organized into three main categories: affective barriers, self-regulated learning strategies, and overall patterns of metacognitive strategies.

The data reveal that affective factors influence students' engagement in reading activities.

Table 1. Students' Affective Barriers in Reading Activities

Affective Factors	Number of Student	Percentage
Fear of making mistakes	9	56%
Fear of being laughed at	4	25%
Other factors	3	19%

Table 1 shows that fear of making mistakes was the most dominant affective barrier reported by students, accounting for more than half of the participants. Fear of being laughed at and other factors were reported less frequently. The questionnaire results indicate variations in the strategies used by students during reading activities.

Table 2. Students' Affective Barriers in Reading Activities

Strategy	Number of Student	Percentage
Self-study/memorization	7	44%
Reading books	3	19%
Other/unclear strategies	6	37%

Table 2 indicates that self-study and memorization were the most commonly reported strategies, followed by other unclear strategies. Only a small number of students reported reading books as their strategy. Observation and interview data were analyzed to identify the overall condition of metacognitive strategy use.

Table 3. Overall Pattern of Metacognitive Strategies

Strategy	Condition
Planning	Moderately developed
Monitoring	Weak
Evaluating	Very limited

Table 3 illustrates that planning strategies were moderately developed among students, while monitoring strategies were weak and evaluating strategies were very limited.

The findings demonstrate that students predominantly utilize planning strategies, particularly memorization and preparation before reading tasks. This pattern reflects partial metacognitive awareness, consistent with Flavell's conceptualization of early-stage metacognitive development. However, the limited presence of monitoring and evaluating strategies indicates insufficient self-regulation. From a pedagogical perspective, the dominance of planning strategies may be influenced by traditional instructional practices that emphasize task completion rather than reflective engagement. Students may perceive reading as a decoding activity rather than a meaning-construction process. Consequently, they focus on vocabulary memorization rather than comprehension monitoring.

The weak development of monitoring strategies suggests that students are not accustomed to questioning their understanding during reading. Effective readers typically employ self-questioning, re-reading, summarizing, and inference-making. The absence of these strategies implies limited scaffolding in metacognitive instruction. Affective factors further complicate students' metacognitive engagement. Fear of making mistakes and anxiety reduce students' willingness to take cognitive risks. Anxiety may consume cognitive resources that should otherwise support comprehension monitoring. Therefore, emotional regulation becomes intertwined with metacognitive functioning.

When analyzed within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, a significant gap emerges. The curriculum promotes independent, reflective, and critical learners aligned with the Profil Pelajar Pancasila dimensions. However, classroom observations reveal that students still depend heavily on teacher guidance and demonstrate limited evaluative reflection. This discrepancy suggests that curricular reform alone is insufficient without parallel instructional transformation. Teachers require professional development in explicit metacognitive instruction. Techniques such as think-aloud modeling, guided questioning, and structured reflection journals can foster deeper metacognitive engagement. Theoretically, this study contributes to EFL research by highlighting the interaction between metacognitive awareness, affective factors, and curricular reform at the junior high school level. It underscores that metacognitive development is not solely cognitive but also socio-emotional and pedagogical.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students at SMP Negeri 5 Kuningan demonstrate moderate use of planning strategies but limited engagement in monitoring and evaluating strategies. Affective barriers, particularly fear of making mistakes, significantly influence strategy use. Although the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes independent and reflective learning, its objectives have not been fully realized in classroom practice. Strengthening explicit metacognitive instruction and fostering supportive learning environments are essential to bridge this gap.

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