

IMPACT OF READING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION IN ENHANCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING COMPREHENSION AT SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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Abstract

This paper focused on the impact of reading strategy instruction in enhancing English language reading comprehension at secondary school level. The study was conducted in Abakaliki Education Zone. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. It was guided by four research questions. The population of the study comprised all the 67,390 secondary school students in 61 secondary schools in Abakaliki Education Zone. Using a simple random sampling technique, a sample of 120 secondary schools two students were drawn from two secondary schools in the zone. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire prepared by the researchers. The instrument was validated by three experts from the English language unit of the Department of Arts Education in Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (FUNAI) in Ebonyi State. The instrument was trial tested on 20 secondary school students selected from another education zone. The data was collected and analyzed using Cronbach Alpha Statistics and internal consistency reliability index of 0.85 was obtained. Based on the reliability index obtained, the instrument was considered reliable. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension performance is high. Also, the findings of the study indicated how reading strategy instruction affects students' motivation and confidence in reading. Again, the findings of the study revealed the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' retention and recall of information read, as well as, how reading strategy instruction influences students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons. The researchers recommended among others that teachers should incorporate reading strategy instruction into reading lessons to ensure that students have systematic exposure to strategies that improve reading comprehension.

Keywords: Reading instruction, reading comprehension, metacognition, English language

Introduction

English language is a core subject taught at all levels of education including primary and secondary schools. It is also used as a second language and the official language in Nigeria. Therefore, the teaching and learning of English language is imperative to facilitate integration in both national and global space. This is an indication that English language has a pride in Nigerian education. For this reason, English language is taught as a core subject at all levels of education in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, (FRN) 2014) and at each level, the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of English are taught. In teaching reading, for instance, summary writing and reading comprehension are taught at a different degree.

Reading comprehension is a specific type of comprehension that deals with understanding written text. According to Butterfuss and Kendeou (2020), reading comprehension is the process of actively extracting meaning through interaction and

engagement with written text. It entails the building of a mental representation of the idea in a text. In other words, reading comprehension is an active engagement with the written text to arrive at the meaning intended by the writer. Reading comprehension is one of the areas students are tested in English language.

Obviously, there seems to be poor performance of students in English reading comprehension in both internal and external examinations in secondary schools. The West African Examination Council (WAEC) Chief Examiner's report (2025) noted that students' poor performance in English reading comprehension was disheartening. It was reported that answers given by candidates exposed their weaknesses in understanding the comprehension passage and providing the expected responses. The implication of the report is that students had difficulties comprehending the reading passage and that addressing the problem of comprehension is important among others and crucial to students' success in external examinations in English language. As such, this problem of poor knowledge of reading comprehension could be attributed to reading strategies instruction used for its teaching and learning. Some English language teachers make use of inappropriate reading instruction in teaching reading comprehension. According to Ukoha, Egbe and Nnamani (2020) observed that teachers depend on the traditional reading strategy instruction, like textbook, which is mainly teacher-centered. With this reading instruction, according to them, students are not motivated; rather, their achievement in English language is inhibited. From the foregoing, it seems that the use of traditional reading strategy instruction does not give room for students' interaction and collaboration in the reading comprehension classroom, there is need, therefore, to use an innovative reading strategy instruction in the teaching and learning of English reading comprehension.

Reading strategy refers to deliberate goal-oriented methods that readers use to navigate, understand, interpret and retain text. According to Afflerbach and Cho (2009), reading strategy is the mental tool that the reader may apply consciously or semi-consciously to monitor, repair or comprehend what they read. This means that reading strategies are techniques that the reader employs that overtime may become an automatic part of the reading process that will require practice and frequent use during reading in order to become so. The use of reading strategies reflects active reading which entails reading with purpose, using prior knowledge, making inferences, summarizing, self-monitoring, etc. Some of the widely recognized reading strategies include- pre-reading strategies (previewing the text, activating prior knowledge and predicting content), during-reading strategies (skimming/scanning, questioning, visualizing/mental imagery, inferencing, summarizing/paraphrasing, monitoring comprehension), post-reading strategies (summarization, reflection, discussion, note-taking, connecting to prior knowledge or other texts) (Jaiswal, 2025). These reading strategies, especially when combined and consciously used will help transform from passive word decoding into active meaning-making using appropriate reading strategy instructions.

Reading strategy instruction is a teaching approach in which teachers explicitly show students how to use specific reading strategies such as predicting, questioning, summarizing, clarifying, monitoring and inferring to improve their reading comprehension. It involves modelling, guiding and helping students gradually use these strategies independently. Generally, it is a structured, evidence-based approach that teaches students what strategies to use and how to use them before, during and after reading to build deep comprehension. It makes students active, strategic and independent

readers, rather than passive ones. As such, teaching students reading comprehension can be made effective using appropriate reading strategy instruction.

Reading strategy instruction is a methodical and explicit approach used by teachers to teach students specific strategies or techniques to improve their learning and problem-solving abilities. These strategies can include various cognitive, metacognitive and behavioural techniques designed to help students become more effective learners, thinkers and problem solvers. The aim of reading strategy instruction is to equip students with the tools and methods they need to approach academic tasks more independently and successfully (Lerner, 2018). It involves teaching students how to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning process, as well as providing them with reading strategies for comprehension, organization, memory retention, problem-solving and critical thinking. Typically, reading strategy instruction involves key steps, including explicit instruction, modelling, guided practice, independent practice, and feedback and reflection. English language teachers provide clear and direct instruction on specific strategies, demonstrate how to use them effectively, model the use of strategies through think-aloud, demonstrations, or examples, engage students in structured practice activities with teacher guidance and support to apply the strategies in context, allow students to practice using the strategies independently, gradually building their proficiency and self-regulation skills, provide feedback on students' strategy use, and encourage reflection on their learning process, helping them identify strengths and areas for improvement (Irdamurni, Johandri & Ardisal, 2018).

Reading strategy instruction teaches learners how to approach texts deliberately, which include- planning, monitoring and repairing comprehension, rather than only teaching decoding or vocabulary. According to Mokhtair, Reichard and Sheorey (2008), reading strategy instruction incorporates reading strategies and promote strategic reading behavior which has been found to be conducive and helpful in the development of a students' reading ability. This entails that reading instruction can be effective for students when they know how to use and apply reading strategies, especially since there is no guarantee of automatic transfer from the first language (L1) (Snow, Griffin & Burns, 2005). Major studies discussed the impact of reading strategy instruction on reading comprehension (Alturki, 2017; Firat, 2019; Stevens, Vaughn, House & Stillman-Spisak, 2021; Kilag, 2023; Omar, 2025). For instance, the results of Omar (2025) investigated enhancing reading comprehension through strategy instruction for students. The study revealed that explicit strategy instruction, incorporating techniques such as summarization, questioning, and self-monitoring significantly enhances comprehension skills in students. As such, effective reading strategy instruction not only provides students with the ability to decode and comprehend texts but also cultivates thinking skills, enriches vocabulary development and fosters a deeper grasp of the language's intricacies.

This study is theoretically hinged on Flavell's metacognitive theory (1976). This theory emphasizes that skilled learners actively supervise their cognitive activities rather than processing information passively. By planning, monitoring and evaluating their learning, learners can make adjustments that improve comprehension and problem solving. The theory is widely applied in education, where learners become strategic and independent. In reading, for example, metacognitive strategies such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing and self-monitoring, helps learners understand texts more deeply. As such, this theory provides a strong foundation for reading strategy instruction, as it shows that when students are trained to reflect on and manage their own reading processes, their comprehension significantly improves.

Reading strategy instruction has demonstrated the potential to improve reading comprehension among students. By imparting reading strategy instruction or explicit strategies such as summarization, questioning, and monitoring comprehension, teachers can assist students in comprehending how they read and control their reading processes (Harris & Graham, 2019). Furthermore, prioritizing and investing in reading strategy instruction is imperative to ensure quality educational equity, nurture linguistic and cultural pride and empower students for academic success. Hence, the study examined the impact of reading strategy instruction on English language reading comprehension at the senior secondary level. Specifically, the study intended to find out the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension performance, how reading strategy instruction affect students' motivation and confidence in reading, the extent reading strategy instruction improves learners' retention and recall of information read and how reading strategy instruction influences students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does reading strategy instruction improve students' reading comprehension performance?
2. How does reading strategy instruction affect students' motivation and confidence in reading?
3. To what extent does reading strategy instruction improve learners' retention and recall of information read?
4. How does reading strategy instruction influences students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons?

Methods

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted all the 67,390 secondary school two (SSS 2) students from 61 secondary schools in Abakiliki Education Zone, Ebonyi State. The sample consisted 120 SSS 2 students from two secondary schools using a simple random sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers titled: Impact of Reading Strategy Instruction on Reading Comprehension (IRSIRC). IRSIRC has two sections A and B. Section A is on personal data of the respondents. Section B has four clusters. Cluster one elicited the extent reading strategy instruction improve students' reading comprehension performance with six items. Cluster two elicited on how reading strategy instruction affect students' motivation and confidence in reading with seven items. Cluster three elicited the extent reading strategy instruction improve learners' retention and recall of information read with six items. Cluster four elicited on how does reading strategy instruction influences students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons with six items. The questionnaire was drawn on a 4-point scale of Very High Extent-VHE (4 point), High Extent-HE (3 point), Low Extent- LE (2 point), Very Low Extent-VLE (1 point), Strongly Agree-SA (4 point), Agree-A (3 point), Disagree-D (2 point) and Strongly Disagree-SD (1 point). The instrument was face validated by three lecturers from Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo (FUNAI) after which it was used to establish reliability by administering them on 20 students. Results obtained from IRSIRC was analysed using Cronbach Alpha which yielded internal consistency reliability index of 0.85. Mean and Standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The bench mark mean was 2.50. Any mean below 2.50 was rejected while any mean above the bench mark was accepted.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension performance?

Table 1: Extent to which reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension performance.

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Reading strategy instruction has helped me to understand texts more easily	3.01	1.1	High extent
2	I can now recognize supporting details in a text more effectively after learning reading strategies	2.56	1.0	High extent
3	Reading strategy instruction has improved my ability to make predictions while reading	2.50	1.1	High extent
4	Reading strategy instruction has improved my understanding of complex/difficult texts	2.65	1.1	High extent
5	My overall reading comprehension scores have improved due to reading strategy instruction	2.55	1.0	High extent
6	I can draw better inferences form the text after learning specific reading strategies	2.57	1.1	High extent
Grand Mean		2.64		High extent

Table 1 presented findings from analysis of data collected to determine the extent to which reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension performance. The result showed high extent responses on items 1-6, with mean ratings ranging between 2.50-3.01, as being the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension performance. The grand mean of 2.64 indicated that the extent to which reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension performance is high.

Research Question 2: How does reading strategy instruction affect students' motivation and confidence in reading?

Table 2: Reading strategy instruction impact on students' motivation and confidence in reading

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Reading strategy instruction makes me motivated to read	2.55	1.1	Accept
2	Reading strategy instruction has increased my willingness to attempt difficult texts	2.50	1.1	Accept
3	Reading strategy instruction has boosted my confidence in answering comprehension questions	2.67	1.0	Accept
4	Reading strategy instruction makes me feel more in control of my reading process	2.49	1.0	Reject
5	Using reading strategies makes me believe I can succeed in reading activities	2.66	1.1	Accept
6	I feel less anxious about reading because the strategies help me understand better	2.55	1.0	Accept

Grand Mean	2.57	Accept
Table 2 presented findings from analysis of data collected to determine how reading strategy instruction affects students' motivation and confidence in reading. The result showed that respondents agreed to all the items 1-3, 5-6 with mean ratings ranging between 2.50-2.67, while some respondents disagreed to item 4 with mean ratings of 2.49, as being how reading strategy instruction affects students' motivation and confidence in reading. However, the grand mean of 2.57 indicated how reading strategy instruction affects students' motivation and confidence in reading.		

Research Question 3: To what extent reading strategy instruction improve learners' retention and recall of information read?

Table 3: Extent to which reading strategy instructions improve learners' retention and recall of information read

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Reading strategy instruction helps me remember information from texts more easily	2.57	1.1	High extent
2	Reading strategies helps me to retain information for a longer period	2.55	1.1	High extent
3	Reading strategy instruction improves my ability to recall important details from a text	2.66	1.1	High extent
4	Reading strategy instruction helps me retain information even from difficult/complex passages	2.67	1.1	High extent
5	Reading strategies help me organize information in my mind, making it easier to recall later	2.56	1.0	High extent
6	Using reading strategies strengthens my memory of the main points in a text	2.50	1.0	High extent
Grand Mean		2.58		High extent

Table 3 presented findings from analysis of data collected to determine the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' retention and recall of information read. The result showed high extent responses on items 1-6, with mean ratings ranging between 2.50-2.67, as being the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' retention and recall of information read. The grand mean of 2.58 indicated that the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' retention and recall of information read is high.

Research Question 4: How does reading strategy instruction influences students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons?

Table 4: Reading strategy instruction influence on students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Reading strategy instruction makes me more attentive during reading lessons	2.67	1.1	Accept
2	I participate more actively in reading activities after learning reading strategies	2.57	1.1	Accept
3	Reading strategies encourage me to ask questions while reading	3.02	1.1	Accept
4	Reading strategies increase my interest in	2.50	1.0	Accept

	participating in group reading activities			
5	I enjoy interacting with my peers during reading lessons when using reading strategies	2.55	1.1	Accept
6	I feel more involved in class discussions about texts because of reading strategies	2.50	1.0	Accept
Grand Mean		2.63		Accept

Table 4 presented findings from analysis of data collected to determine the extent to which reading strategy instruction improves students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons. The result showed high extent responses on items 1-6, with mean ratings ranging between 2.50-3.02, as being the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons. The grand mean of 2.63 indicated that the extent to which reading strategy instruction improves students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons is high.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed the extent to which reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension performance is high. This finding indicated that reading strategy instruction teaches students how to understand, how to regulate their thinking, how to handle cognitive load, how to activate knowledge and how to stay engaged. It transforms reading from a passive act into an intentional, strategic and metacognitive process. This finding collaborates with Wendaferew (2023), who revealed that reading strategy instruction produced statistically significant gains in students' comprehension scores; in other words, reading strategy instruction meaningfully improves comprehension. Also, the findings of the study revealed how reading strategy instruction affects students' motivation and confidence in reading. This finding indicated that reading strategy instruction gives students the tool, clarity and control they need to feel successful as readers. When learners understand how to read strategically, rather than just being told to read and understand, they become more willing, eager and confident to engage with texts. This finding is in agreement with Devi (2024), who revealed that reading strategy instruction increased students' willingness to engage with texts and their confidence in handling academic readings, especially when teachers modeled reading strategies and provided scaffolding.

Furthermore, the findings of the study revealed the extent to which reading strategy instruction improves students' retention and recall of information read is high. This finding indicated that reading strategy instruction strengthens the cognitive, metacognitive and memory-processing mechanisms that underlie long-term learning. In other words, reading strategy instruction teaches students how to process information in a way that makes it easier to remember and retrieve later. This finding collaborates with Seban, Urban and Siki (2024), who revealed that reading strategy instruction, which strategically exposed students to multiple texts on the same topic improves long-term retention. Also, the reading strategy instruction helps encode information more deeply and make it more retrievable later. Finally, the findings of the study revealed that reading strategy instruction influences students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons. This is due to the fact that learners are tools, structure and confidence they need to interact meaningfully with reading texts. As such, it introduces active reading behaviours, produces purpose and structure, builds confidence, enhances comprehension and encourages collaboration, fosters metacognitive control, reduces anxiety and increases curiosity. This finding is in line with An, Ye & Liu (2024), who revealed that reading

strategy instruction, especially of metacognitive strategies that help students plan, monitor and regulate their reading can boost engagement in real learning contexts, not just comprehension scores.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that the extent reading strategy instruction improves students' reading comprehension is high. Also, the findings of the study revealed how reading strategy instruction affects students' motivation and confidence in reading. Again, the findings of the study revealed the extent to which reading strategy instruction improves students' retention and recall of information read. Finally, the findings of the study revealed that reading strategy instruction influences students' engagement and active participation during reading lessons.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. Teachers should incorporate reading strategy instruction into reading lessons. This ensures that students have systematic exposure to strategies that improve comprehension.
2. Schools should organize professional development programs to train teachers on effective reading strategy instruction, including modeling strategies, guiding practice and monitoring students' use of strategies.
3. Teachers should regularly assess students' use of reading strategies to ensure that learners are applying them effectively.
4. Teachers should provide feedback and positive reinforcement when students successfully use reading strategies, as it boosts motivation, engagement and confidence in reading.
5. Both schools and researchers should continue to evaluate the effectiveness of reading strategy instruction in different contexts and among learners with varying proficiency levels to refine teaching patterns.

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