

Teachers' Strategies for Teaching Reading: A Case Study at SMAN 1 Srengat

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Abstract: This study explores the challenges, strategies, and evaluation methods in teaching reading at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat, where students often struggle with comprehension due to limited vocabulary, low motivation, and varied reading abilities. The purpose of this research was to examine the difficulties faced by teachers, the strategies they employed to address those challenges, and the approaches used to evaluate students' reading comprehension. A qualitative case study design was applied, involving one English teacher and three eleventh-grade students selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings indicate that teachers encountered difficulties in material preparation, lesson planning, classroom management, and student engagement. To overcome these challenges, the teacher implemented scaffolding techniques, group-based activities, contextual material selection, and the use of digital tools. Evaluation of reading comprehension was carried out through classroom observation, reading tasks, written assessments, and formative feedback. The study concludes that effective reading instruction requires adaptive, student-centered, and reflective strategies supported by institutional resources. These results highlight the importance of continuous teacher professional development and the provision of adequate learning facilities to improve reading engagement and comprehension outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, English has become a central tool for communication, education, technology, and cultural exchange. Its position as a lingua franca allows people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to interact across borders without being hindered by language differences (Crystal, D.a-Marchena, 2003). English is not only the most widely taught foreign language in the world but also a requirement in professional and academic domains (Harmer, 2007). For countries like Indonesia, where English is considered a foreign language,

mastering English has become a crucial part of education policy because it equips students with access to global knowledge and opportunities. Among the four skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing, reading holds a particularly significant role because it acts as the foundation of academic literacy and lifelong learning (Grabe, 2009). Through reading, students gain access to scientific knowledge, sharpen their critical thinking skills, and develop the ability to participate in global discourses.

Reading, however, is not a simple skill to master. It requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive strategies, and contextual understanding (Grabe, W., & Stoller, 2011). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, reading becomes even more challenging since students often encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammatical structures, and culturally specific references that hinder comprehension. Despite these challenges, the ability to read effectively remains a critical component of students' success in secondary schools, particularly in Indonesia where the curriculum emphasizes reading various types of texts such as narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative ones (Permendikbud, 2018). This policy highlights that reading is not only about decoding words but also about developing comprehension, inference, and analytical skills that align with 21st-century learning demands.

Unfortunately, evidence from both international assessments and local research shows that Indonesian students' reading comprehension skills remain relatively low. For instance, the Programmed for International Student Assessment (PISA) reports have repeatedly placed Indonesian students below the global average in reading literacy. Local studies reinforce this picture. (Indrayadi et al., 2020) found that students often struggle with vocabulary, have limited strategies to approach texts, and demonstrate low levels of engagement during reading lessons. Similarly, (Yunita, L., & Fauziah, 2022) identified passivity and lack of effective strategies as major obstacles to reading comprehension in Indonesian high schools. These findings highlight a significant gap between the goals outlined in national education policies and the actual outcomes observed in classrooms. It also signals

the urgent need to explore more effective strategies for teaching reading that align with students' real needs.

In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a compulsory subject from junior high school to senior high school. The objective is not merely to equip students with communication skills but also to foster the ability to access information, broaden their horizons, and support academic development. Reading is central to this objective because most of the knowledge in school subjects is mediated through texts. As (Grabe, 2009) emphasizes, reading provides access to written knowledge, and for EFL learners, it becomes the gateway to academic success. However, teachers are often confronted with practical challenges such as large class sizes, limited teaching materials, insufficient time allocation, and diverse student abilities (Richards, J. C., & Farrell, 2005). These challenges make the teaching of reading more complex and often hinder the achievement of curriculum goals.

In addition to systemic challenges, classroom-level obstacles also affect reading instruction. Teachers often report that students have low motivation to read, limited vocabulary knowledge, and insufficient strategies for comprehension. Based on preliminary observations at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat, many students are reluctant to engage with English texts unless instructed, and only a small number display strong reading competence. This observation aligns with the teacher's statement that students tend to be passive and lack deep comprehension of texts. Such conditions make the teacher's task even more demanding, as they need to design lessons that are engaging, comprehensible, and aligned with the curriculum.

Another critical factor in teaching reading is the selection of appropriate instructional strategies. Studies suggest that effective reading instruction cannot rely solely on conventional teacher-centered methods such as grammar translation or lecturing (Sari, N. L., & Wardani, 2019). Instead, more interactive and student-centered strategies are needed to foster engagement and comprehension. Scaffolding, as proposed by (Vygotsky, 1978), has been shown to help students gradually build their understanding with teacher guidance. Reciprocal teaching, which involves summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting (Palincsar &

Brown, 1984), also fosters deeper comprehension and collaborative learning. Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) approaches connect texts to students' real-life experiences, making reading more meaningful and motivating (Sinaga, M., Riyantika, M., & Puteri, 2023). These strategies demonstrate that innovation in pedagogy is key to overcoming reading challenges.

Nonetheless, the implementation of such strategies is not straightforward. Teachers face constraints in terms of time, resources, and administrative demands, which limit their ability to experiment with interactive methods. Many teachers also struggle to balance curriculum requirements with the diverse needs of students. ([Nama Depan] Afzal, 2020; N. Afzal, 2019) emphasizes that effective reading instruction requires careful planning, selection of appropriate materials, and adaptation to students' abilities and interests. In many cases, the gap between theoretical models of teaching and the practical realities of classrooms becomes apparent, leaving teachers to navigate challenges with limited support.

Given these realities, it is important to explore teachers' experiences in teaching reading, particularly in specific school contexts that have their own challenges and dynamics. SMA Negeri 1 Srengat, located in Blitar Regency, East Java, represents such a context. The school is known for its academic achievements and is currently implementing both the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. This dual curriculum implementation provides a unique opportunity to study how teachers adapt their strategies to different policy frameworks. Furthermore, the school has diverse student populations in terms of academic abilities, motivation, and socio-economic backgrounds, making reading instruction particularly complex.

Preliminary findings from the school indicate that teachers face difficulties such as low student interest in reading, varied levels of reading ability, and limited time to employ diverse instructional strategies. Despite these challenges, teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat also demonstrate innovative practices, such as integrating formative assessments through self-reflection, peer evaluation, and reading journals. These practices represent unique strategies not commonly found in other schools in the region, such as SMA Negeri Garum or SMA Negeri 1 Ponggok. This

makes SMA Negeri 1 Srengat a compelling case study for exploring the real challenges and strategies of teaching reading in an Indonesian high school context.

The state of the art in existing research provides important insights but also reveals gaps. Studies by (Rahmah, R., & Nurwени, 2019) show the effectiveness of reciprocal teaching in improving comprehension. (Setiawan, B., & Apsari, 2020) demonstrate the role of scaffolding in supporting students' gradual understanding of texts. Meanwhile, (Syahroni, M., Mardiana, H., & Wulan, 2021) highlight the major obstacles teachers face, such as time limitations and low motivation. (Vina et al., 2022) report on strategies such as grouping students and implementing pre- and post-reading activities. While these studies contribute to our understanding of teaching reading, most of them focus either on specific strategies or on general challenges. Few studies integrate challenges, strategies, and evaluations into a holistic framework that reflects teachers' real experiences.

This study, therefore, addresses the following research questions: (1) what challenges do teachers face in teaching reading at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat? (2) what strategies do teachers implement to address these challenges? (3) how do teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their reading instruction? These questions are designed to capture the complexity of teaching reading in a real school context, moving beyond isolated strategies or abstract challenges to consider the dynamic interaction between challenges, strategies, and evaluations.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to describe the challenges faced by teachers in teaching reading skills at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat, (2) to analyze the strategies employed by teachers to overcome those challenges, and (3) to explain the evaluation methods used by teachers to assess students' reading comprehension. By achieving these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of reading instruction in a specific Indonesian high school context.

The significance of this study lies in its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches the field of EFL teaching by providing empirical evidence of how teachers negotiate challenges and strategies in teaching reading, thereby expanding the discussion beyond isolated pedagogical techniques.

Practically, the findings can inform teachers in designing more adaptive and contextualized reading instruction, schools in strengthening literacy programs, and policymakers in developing professional development initiatives. The novelty of this study is its integration of three key dimensions challenges, strategies, and evaluation within a single framework, something that has rarely been addressed in previous research.

In conclusion, teaching reading in EFL contexts, particularly in Indonesian high schools, remains a complex endeavor influenced by multiple factors including student motivation, teacher pedagogy, and systemic constraints. By focusing on the lived experiences of teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat, this study contributes to filling the gap in literature by offering a holistic picture of challenges, strategies, and evaluation practices. The insights gained are expected to advance both the theory and practice of reading instruction in EFL contexts, with implications not only for local schools but also for broader educational policy and pedagogy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the challenges faced by English teachers and the strategies they used in teaching reading at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat, East Java. The school was purposefully selected because it represents diverse student characteristics and implements both the 2013 Curriculum and Merdeka Curriculum, providing a rich context for studying reading instruction. The main subject was one English teacher with direct responsibility for teaching reading, supported by several students chosen through purposive and snowball sampling to provide learners' perspectives.

Data were collected from April to May 2025 using three techniques: semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, non-participant classroom observations, and documentation of lesson plans, teaching materials, and students' reading tasks. These techniques were combined to ensure triangulation and to capture a comprehensive picture of teaching practices. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer, recording classroom dynamics through field notes and observation sheets while also transcribing interviews verbatim for analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data were coded and categorized thematically into challenges, strategies, and evaluation practices, and then interpreted to identify patterns and meanings. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation across data sources and methods was applied, alongside member checking and systematic documentation of the research process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that English teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat face several challenges in teaching reading. Students' low motivation emerged as the most pressing issue, reflected in their limited engagement with texts unless instructed directly. Teachers also highlighted heterogeneous reading abilities within the same classroom, making it difficult to design lessons that address all students' needs simultaneously. Limited vocabulary knowledge and time constraints further compounded these challenges. Such findings resonate with (Richards & Farrell, 2005) and (N. Afzal, 2019), who argue that lack of motivation and varied abilities are typical barriers in EFL classrooms. These challenges indicate that effective reading instruction cannot rely on a one-size-fits-all model but requires adaptive approaches that respond to diverse learner profiles.

From an academic perspective, these challenges highlight the gap between curriculum expectations and classroom realities. Although the national curriculum demands students to master various text genres, in practice, teachers struggle to meet these goals due to external and internal constraints. This echoes previous research by (Yunita, L., & Fauziah, 2022), which also observed passivity and comprehension difficulties among Indonesian high school students. The persistence of such challenges suggests that systemic solutions are needed, such as differentiated instruction and increased support for vocabulary development.

To address these difficulties, teachers employed a range of strategies. Pre-reading activities, such as vocabulary introduction and context building, were consistently used to prepare students for comprehension. During-reading strategies

included guiding questions, group discussions, and reciprocal teaching, while post-reading activities focused on summarizing and reflection. Teachers also integrated digital platforms and school's LMS to assign tasks and monitor progress. These strategies reflect a shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to more student-centered practices.

The findings support previous studies that emphasize the effectiveness of scaffolding (Setiawan, B., & Apsari, 2020) and reciprocal teaching (Rahmah, R., & Nurwени, 2019) in enhancing comprehension. However, this study extends the discussion by showing how these strategies are not applied in isolation but are adapted flexibly to different classroom conditions. For example, while reciprocal teaching was used with higher-achieving students, scaffolding was more prominent for those with limited vocabulary. This demonstrates teachers' agency in tailoring strategies to meet varied needs, reinforcing (Vygotsky, 1978) notion of learning within the zone of proximal development.

Evaluation practices at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat were found to be multifaceted. Teachers used both formative and summative assessments, including individual assignments, group presentations, and online submissions via the LMS. Classroom discussions were also treated as evaluation opportunities, allowing teachers to assess comprehension in real time. Assessment criteria covered vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, grammar, and participation. Moreover, teachers provided feedback both orally and in writing, and encouraged students to revise their work.

This comprehensive evaluation system illustrates that assessment is not merely a tool for grading but also a pedagogical strategy to promote learning. The approach aligns with (Palincsar, A. S., & Brown, 1984) argument that assessment should be integrated into the learning process to foster growth. The emphasis on feedback and opportunities for self-correction also reflects principles of formative assessment, which have been shown to improve learner autonomy and motivation (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Academically, these findings highlight the need to view evaluation as a continuous cycle that bridges teaching and learning, rather than as a final step. The findings of this study can be summarized in the following table:

Table1.

Challenges	Strategies	Evaluation
Low motivation	Pre-reading (vocabulary, context building)	Formative & summative tasks
Varied abilities	During reading (guiding question, group discussion, reciprocal teaching)	Group presentation & discussion
Limited vocabulary	Post-reading (summarizing, reflection, vocabulary reinforcement)	Online submission via LMS
Time constraints	Digital platform (LMS task, extended learning outside class)	Feedback & revision opportunities

Overall, the findings provide three important contributions. First, by mapping the challenges teachers face, the study reinforces the argument that EFL reading instruction in Indonesia is shaped by contextual constraints rather than solely by curriculum goals. Second, by examining strategies, the study demonstrates how teachers exercise pedagogical creativity by integrating and adapting approaches, thus contributing to discussions on flexible and context-based pedagogy. Third, by analyzing evaluation, the study positions assessment as an integral part of instruction, offering empirical evidence of how feedback and multimodal evaluations enhance learning outcomes.

Compared with previous research, this study's novelty lies in its holistic integration of challenges, strategies, and evaluation within a single framework. Earlier studies examined these aspects separately, while this research provides a comprehensive understanding of how they interrelate in practice. This contributes not only to the academic literature on EFL reading but also to practical pedagogy, offering insights for teachers, schools, and policymakers to design more responsive and effective literacy instruction.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study explored the challenges, strategies, and evaluation practices in teaching reading skills at SMA Negeri 1 Srengat. The findings indicate that teachers face significant challenges, such as students' low motivation, limited vocabulary, varied reading abilities, and time constraints. To address these issues, teachers applied a range of strategies across pre-, during-, and post-reading stages, including

vocabulary activation, guided comprehension tasks, discussions, and digital learning platforms. Evaluation was conducted both formatively and summatively through comprehension tasks, group presentations, online submissions, and feedback with revision opportunities. These findings answer the research objectives by showing that teaching reading requires adaptive strategies and evaluation integrated into the learning cycle.

Theoretically, this study contributes by confirming that linguistic and affective factors strongly influence reading outcomes and by showing how scaffolding and formative assessment are operationalized in classroom practice. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of teacher adaptability, institutional support, and contextualized materials in overcoming reading challenges. However, the research is limited by its scope, focusing on a single school with a small participant group, and its qualitative approach that does not measure the direct impact of strategies on learning outcomes. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, adopt mixed methods, and evaluate specific instructional strategies more systematically to strengthen both theory and practice in EFL reading instruction.

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