INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON EFL STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY AT CHAMPASACK UNIVERSITY

Strategi Pembelajaran dan Dampaknya terhadap Pemahaman Membaca Mahasiswa Efl: Studi Empiris di Universitas Champasack

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how certain teaching methods to improve reading comprehension skills of EFL students at the Faculty of Education Champasack University. However, empirical evidence on the impact of instructional reading strategies on EFL students' reading comprehension and learner perceptions in Lao university contexts remains limited. The use of specific selection of teaching methods, such as explicit strategy instruction and collaborative reading activities, creates the command of students to use strategies at different levels of reading comprehension. The study involved 25 final-year EFL students and 5 lecturers who were purposefully sampled. The data were collected using the following methods and instruments: open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, pre-test and post-tests, classroom observations, and reading comprehension tests. The qualitative component of the study involved thematic analysis of the participants' perceptions and classroom interactions, which provided triangulation for the study. The analysis of the data indicated that the reading comprehension instructional strategies had the most impact on the students' ability to comprehend text at the literal and inferential levels, i.e. identifying the main ideas, supporting details, and making simple inferences. There was limited improvement in the students' critical reading and advanced strategic behaviors, which demonstrated the need for extended and continued training to improve comprehension at the higher levels. The most important findings of the study also demonstrated the positive impact that structured and strategy-based instruction (SBI) has on EFL students' reading comprehension. This research contributes important implications for EFL teaching in higher education which indicated the need for constant integration of strategy-focused and student-centered reading instruction.

Abstrak

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana metode pengajaran tertentu dapat meningkatkan keterampilan pemahaman membaca mahasiswa EFL di Fakultas Pendidikan Universitas Champasack. Namun, bukti empiris mengenai dampak strategi pembelajaran membaca terhadap pemahaman membaca dan persepsi pembelajar EFL di konteks perguruan tinggi di Laos masih terbatas. Penggunaan bagian tertentu dari metode pengajaran, seperti instruksi strategi eksplisit dan kegiatan membaca kolaboratif, menciptakan kemampuan mahasiswa untuk menggunakan strategi pada berbagai tingkat pemahaman membaca. Penelitian ini melibatkan 25 mahasiswa EFL tahun akhir dan 5

dosen yang dipilih secara purposif. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan metode dan instrumen berikut: kuesioner terbuka, wawancara semi-terstruktur, pre-test dan post-test, observasi kelas, serta tes pemahaman membaca. Komponen kualitatif dari penelitian ini melibatkan analisis tematik terhadap persepsi peserta dan interaksi kelas, yang memberikan triangulasi untuk penelitian ini. Analisis data menunjukkan bahwa strategi pengajaran pemahaman membaca memiliki dampak terbesar pada kemampuan mahasiswa untuk memahami teks pada tingkat literal dan inferensial, yaitu mengidentifikasi ide pokok, rincian pendukung, dan membuat inferensi sederhana. Ada peningkatan terbatas dalam kemampuan membaca kritis dan perilaku strategis lanjutan mahasiswa, yang menunjukkan perlunya pelatihan yang lebih panjang dan berkelanjutan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman pada tingkat yang lebih tinggi. Temuan paling penting dari penelitian ini juga menunjukkan dampak positif dari pengajaran terstruktur dan berbasis strategi (SBI) terhadap pemahaman membaca mahasiswa EFL. Penelitian ini memberikan implikasi penting bagi pengajaran EFL di pendidikan tinggi yang menunjukkan perlunya integrasi berkelanjutan dari pengajaran membaca yang berfokus pada strategi dan berpusat pada siswa.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, reading comprehension has been recognized as a fundamental component of literacy and academic success. Access to vast amounts of information in both print and digital environments requires readers to be proficient not only in their first language but also in international languages (Wylie, 2007; Kumar, 2023). In reading comprehension, knowledge is constructed through the active interaction between written language and the reader's cognitive processes, experiences, and knowledge, as stated by Sweet and Snow (2003) and Koda (2005). Reading comprehension skills help learners engage critically with the world around them. Achieving the ability to locate, process, evaluate, and synthesize information rapidly is important for learners in a knowledge-based global society. Teachers help learners in developing these multiple literacy skills. It is not only an instructional responsibility but a necessity for empowering students as autonomous learners and is useful to society.

Reading plays the main role in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). According to Anderson et al. (2002), reading offers numerous benefits, including facilitating awareness of sentence structures and discourse organization, fostering learner autonomy, expanding vocabulary, supporting the development of higher-order cognitive skills, and broadening learners' knowledge of the world. Explicit cultivation of strategic reading behaviors and the teaching of reading strategies have become significant dimensions of EFL teaching. The interaction between prior knowledge (schematic) and linguistic knowledge (systemic) leads to effective comprehension (Anderson & Pearson, 1984). The most essential components of meaning construction are decoding linguistic structures, integrating new ideas with prior knowledge, making inferences, using bottom-up and top-down processes, monitoring comprehension, and identifying relevant details (Grabe, 2009; Carrell, 1998).

It is challenging for many EFL learners to develop strategic literacy as they need to develop linguistic knowledge and reading skills simultaneously (Alderson, 2000). Reading comprehension requires higher-level meaning-making processes such as inference, evaluation, and critical interpretation. Lexical recognition, syntactic parsing, and comprehension monitoring may restrict

EFL readers' ability to engage, and many EFL readers often struggle with it (Schoonen et al., 1998; Grabe, 2009). These challenges become dominantly pronounced in higher education settings when students are required to navigate lengthy expository texts, theoretical arguments, and discipline-specific vocabulary in English (Nazim et al., 2024; Reem, 2023). Previous literature has consistently emphasized the importance of strategic reading instruction as a means of equipping learners with tools to navigate comprehension difficulties (Paris et al., 1984; Palincsar & Brown, 1984; Pressley, 2006). Strategic reading is a coordinated process involving cognitive, metacognitive, and affective strategies rather than the application of isolated techniques (Pahrizal et al., 2025). Strategic reading enables readers to plan, monitor, and regulate their comprehension (Janzen & Stoller, 1998). Explicit instruction in reading strategies can compensate for learners' comprehension limitations, promote greater self-regulation, and develop their critical thinking (Koda, 2004; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). Students gain awareness of how meaning is constructed, become more independent and reflective readers through strategy instruction.

Discussion-based and collaborative reading pedagogies are among the influential instructional approaches that have gained popularity in recent decades. Some reading approaches highlight the role of social interaction in facilitating comprehension, such as book clubs (Mohapi, 2023), literature circles (Daniels, 2023), Questioning the Author (Beck & McKeown, 2006), and reading apprenticeship (Creech & Hale, 2006). These approaches highlight the role of social interaction in facilitating comprehension as grounded in the belief that learners benefit from negotiating meaning, clarifying ideas, and constructing interpretations collectively and that reading is both a cognitive and social process. Klingner et al. (1998) introduced Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) as one of the widely studied approaches that integrates strategy instruction with cooperative learning. In CSR, previewing, identifying main ideas ("get the gist"), clarifying unfamiliar vocabulary ("click and clunk"), and summarizing ("wrap-up") help students to monitor their comprehension while engaging in structured group discussions. According to Huang (2006), Standish (2005), and Wang (2008), CSR is effective in improving motivation, reading comprehension, and strategy used among EFL learners at primary and secondary levels.

Most of the previous literature emphasized younger learners' reading skills. There is little research available on whether approaches such as Strategy-Based Instruction (SBI) or collaborative reading techniques are equally beneficial for adult learners with more challenging academic reading needs. Despite numerous studies on reading strategy instruction, some unanswered questions remain about how specific instructional strategies function in university-level EFL contexts. University students need sophisticated strategy scaffolding to prepare for the intellectual requirements of academic study (Janzen & Stoller, 1998). There is insufficient research on how specific types of comprehension, such as literal, inferential, and critical comprehension, are influenced by different instructional strategies.

Reading comprehension is one of the most challenging skills for EFL students at the Faculty of Education at Champasack University. Many students struggle to understand main ideas, identify supporting details, make inferences, and critically analyze academic texts during the reading process, as evidenced by former classroom observations and institutional evaluations. EFL readers often reflect limited metacognitive awareness and usually rely on bottom-up processing during reading, which is considered a challenge in the literature (Carrell, 1998; Alyousef, 2019). Instructional interventions that emphasize meaningful engagement with texts, systematic strategy usage, and opportunities for collaborative discussion are required to address these challenges.

Therefore, the current study investigates the effectiveness of instructional strategies, such as collaborative reading activities, explicit strategy instruction, and guided comprehension tasks, in

enhancing reading comprehension among EFL students at Champasack University. The aim of this research is to analyze the role of strategies in shaping students' learning outcomes across different levels of complexity, drawing on schema theory (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), interactive reading (Grabe, 2009), and SBI (Pressley, 2006). This investigation contributes measurable data towards improved comprehension, as well as the accompanying qualitative changes in students' attitudes, engagement, and use of strategies through the integration of a mixed-method case study approach. There is a need to address context-specific evidence on the types of instructional approaches that effectively support university students' reading comprehension, and to derive implications for improving English language pedagogy at the university level. The present study is significant for educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers regarding practical methods to enhance reading instruction. It also promotes strategic literacy and helps students become more competent and confident readers. This study contributes to language and literature science by exploring the role of instructional strategies in shaping EFL learners' engagement with texts and reading comprehension processes in tertiary education. The following research objectives were developed based on the research background and related literature.

1. To examine the effectiveness of instructional strategies implemented by English lecturers to support EFL students' reading comprehension in university classroom.
2. To analyse EFL students' perceptions of these instructional strategies in terms of their cognitive, affective, and conative responses.
3. To investigate the relationship between EFL students' perceptions of instructional strategies and their reading comprehension outcomes.
4. To contribute to language and literature science by exploring the effects of instructional strategies on EFL reading comprehension and learner perceptions.

Reading comprehension denotes the creation of meaning from written text through the integration of prior knowledge, linguistic decoding, and metacognitive monitoring, and inference-making (Kintsch, 1998; Snow, 2003). In second- and foreign-language research, reading comprehension has been widely and consistently investigated by scholars who emphasize its centrality to academic literacy and success (Asnawi et al., 2005). Grabe and Stoller (2011) state that in an EFL context, students build new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and content-area knowledge because reading is both a major source of linguistic input and a means of engagement. University learners often face this difficulty due to limited vocabulary knowledge and extensive exposure to English texts (Alderson, 2000). Different levels of comprehension have been delineated in previous studies, such as literal, inferential, and critical (Day & Park, 2005), and numerous studies have reported challenges in inferencing, integrating prior knowledge, and interpreting meaning more deeply (Carrell, 1998; Nassaji, 2003).

Instructional strategies for reading comprehension have shifted from teacher-centered approaches to more learner-centered, strategy-based instruction and socially interactive models over recent decades. According to Pressley (2006), successful readers actively employ cognitive and metacognitive strategies to construct meaning during the reading process, and the aim of instructional strategies is to improve comprehension outcomes by training students to monitor and evaluate their comprehension processes. Teaching learners about the appropriate and specific selection and use of comprehension strategies is referred to as explicit strategy instruction, which has been demonstrated to improve metacognitive awareness, comprehension, and long-term reading development in EFL contexts (Duffy, 2002; Janzen, 2002). In addition, collaborative reading approaches grounded in sociocultural theory emphasize social interaction, shared meaning-

making, and dialogue, where comprehension is supported through peer scaffolding and guided involvement (Lantolf, 2000). Guided reading methods encourage comprehension by demonstrating reading behaviors and progressively transferring responsibility to learners, fostering interaction with sophisticated texts and increasing comprehension (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Fang, 2016). Overall, previous research indicates that integrating explicit teaching, cooperative learning, and guided practice fosters literal, inferential, and critical comprehension among university EFL learners.

METHODE

The current study employed a qualitative research approach using a case study design as it focuses on detailed, contextualized understandings shaped by participants' experiences (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Tisdell et al., 2025; Yin, 2018). Qualitative inquiry is appropriate for exploring complex educational phenomena of the instructional strategies used in reading comprehension classes. This study was carried out at the Faculty of Education, Champasack University, Laos, from May to December 2025. This time span ensures the ongoing participants' teaching and learning activities during the data collection procedure, as it also aligns with the university's academic calendar.

English lecturers who teach reading comprehension and the final-year EFL students enrolled in the English Education program at the Faculty of Education, Champasack University, Laos, were the participants of this study. EFL students and lecturers were directly engaged in the teaching and learning of reading strategies. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample. The technique of purposeful sampling yielded participants with the capacity to provide depth of information concerning the instructional practices (Palinkas et al., 2015; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Five lecturers were chosen based on their histories and engagement with teaching the reading comprehension component. 25 students were selected based on their active participation and intermediate-level English proficiency. This type of sampling was appropriate in contributing to the understanding and articulation of the instructional strategies used to enhance outcomes in reading comprehension.

This research adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1988) guidelines of trustworthiness to ensure rigor and reliability. Trustworthiness comprises four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). For research credibility, there was triangulation of interviews, classroom observations, open-ended questionnaires, and student reflective journals. There was member checking to consolidate the accuracy of the interpretations, conducted during the interviews over Zoom and during reviews of the transcripts, and there was prolonged engagement in the classrooms over a period of eight months. For transferability, educators and researchers in similar EFL contexts were able to determine the applicability of the findings, facilitated by the instructional environment, sociocultural setting, participants' attributes, and extensive descriptions of the research context.

Dependability of this study was strengthened through a transparent audit trail, which involved observation sheets, coding iterations, Zoom logs, interview protocols, consent forms, and analytic memos (Nowell et al., 2017). Dependability means the consistency and stability of the research process (Shenton, 2004). This study emphasized the instructional strategies used by English lecturers to improve EFL students' reading comprehension at Champasack University. Kopcha (2020) also defined the research object as the phenomenon under investigation. Group work, visuals, guided reading, and prediction techniques were the common strategies that were used by the lecturers.

A short open-ended questionnaire was administered to identify these strategies as used by the lecturers, not on the basis of predetermined categories, but based on their own teaching experiences. Also, to enhance analytic thoroughness and reflect on the methodology choices, the researchers engaged in peer debriefing sessions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This study emphasized that the results derived from the participants' experiences, negating any potential researcher bias, which also adds to the confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1988). The use of reflexive journaling to track potential biases aided in achieving this confirmability (Cypress, 2017).

Techniques of collecting data

This research utilized four different types of qualitative data collection methods to gather deep and credible data. For this research, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and reflective journals were utilized. To collect different opinions from lecturers and students, four data collection methods were used. Thus, teaching methods, students' perceptions, and related classroom activities were analyzed in an integrated manner. A systematic summary of the data collection methods correlating to the research aims is provided in the following table.

Table 1.
Scheme of data collection

Objectives	Unit of Analysis	Data Sources	Techniques
Catalogue instructional strategies	Teaching strategies	Lecturers	Interview, Document review
Measure students' perceptions	Students' affective, cognitive, conative responses	Students	Questionnaire, Focus-group discussion
Identify preferred strategies & influencing factors	Student preferences	Students	Reflective journals, Interviews
Assess link between strategies & comprehension outcomes	Strategy use & test results	Students, Classroom events	Observation, Reading comprehension test
Examine mediating role of perceptions	Mediation effect	Students	Integration of prior data

Cataloguing instructional strategies analyzes the teaching strategies identified by lecturers through interviews and document reviews. Students' perceptions in terms of affective, cognitive, and conative responses are measured through questionnaires and focus groups. By analyzing reflective journals and interviews, students' preferred strategies and the factors influencing these preferences were also identified. Students' test results and classroom events through observations and comprehension tests helped to explore the relationship between strategies and reading comprehension outcomes. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with both lecturers and students via Zoom, as this format ensures flexibility to maintain thematic emphasis (Kallio et al., 2016). Method use, perceptions of effectiveness, and personal learning experiences were investigated through these interviews for 30–45 minutes.

Interviews, predicated on the approval of the respondents, were audiotaped, then transcribed exactly. To comprehend the execution of teaching methods within the context of reading sessions, we undertook non-participant observations. Some of the components of classroom activities, such as the interaction of the teacher and the students, the different teaching behaviours, and the students' involvement and reactions during the activities, were systematically recorded using an observation guide. Real observations were validation evidence. The use of methods and the

students' reactions to the methods within the genuine classroom context were the evidence. To enhance the observational data, field notes were taken to aid in the triangulation of the data with the interviews, as well as the reflective journals. This boosted the credibility of the study (Tisdell et al., 2025).

Instructors and learners were given free-response questionnaires to express their reflections and ideas verbatim. This was to ascertain the early themes using the interviews. The respondents were students who were provided with weekly reflective journals to capture the difficulties of the reading strategies and personal strategies to cope with reading activities, to document the reading activities' strategies, and their activities. These journals are the students' records at various times to develop an understanding of their interactions with instructional strategies for engagement. The data were processed and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and colleagues of the year (2014). The model has four recurring processes, which are data collection, condensation of data, display of data, and drawing of a conclusion.

Data were collected through interviews, observations, questionnaires, and journals, and each dataset was managed by labelling. The authors read the notes and transcripts repeatedly and used inductive thematic coding. Categories and themes emerged from the codes and led to core patterns. Matrices, tables, and thematic maps were used to visualize themes and relationships. Cross-comparison between student and lecturer data was facilitated by these displays. These displays facilitated cross-comparison between student and lecturer data. Analysis of patterns and linking them to the research questions helped to draw conclusions. Triangulation, peer discussion, and member checking techniques were used for verification and ensured that interpretations are based on genuine data.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings from the data collected from reading comprehension tests, classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and learner questionnaires are presented in this section. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze lecturers' interview transcripts. Six stages of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were implemented to analyze the open-ended responses from the students' questionnaire. All the responses were read repeatedly to explore the emerging patterns and themes during the familiarization stage. Codes were assigned during the coding stage. Four primary themes emerged from the study: (1) core instructional strategies utilized in the reading comprehension process; (2) the preferred styles of learning; (3) the advantages and limitations; and (4) the circumstances influencing the students' choices and interests. These themes were integrated with data from test results, interviews, and observations of classroom interactions during the refinement, defining, and reporting stages. The research aimed to find the impact of explicit strategy instruction, collaborative reading activities, and guided comprehension tasks on the reading performance of EFL learners in Champasack University.

Findings are presented according to research questions and supported by tables. Moreover, findings are discussed by comparing previous studies to reflect divergences, consistencies, and implications for EFL teaching. Findings highlight that a structured pre-, during–, and post-reading model incorporating prediction, skimming, scanning, guided questioning, and summarizing was used by the lecturers. Despite lecturers' interest, there was limited use of technology in the reading comprehension process. Interactive strategies such as prediction, pair work, skimming, and summarizing were liked by the students. Clear strategy modeling and feedback, perceived by the students, are important for comprehension development. Time pressure and vocabulary difficulty, however, affect performance.

Effectiveness of instructional strategies on reading comprehension

Collaborative formats for confidence-building and comprehension monitoring were favored by the students; however, they preferred individual reading for greater concentration. They desired meaningful integration of technology and multimodal feedback. For the observation data collection, six non-participant observation sessions were conducted in three reading comprehension classes taught by two English lecturers at the Faculty of Education, Champasack University. Nine hours of field data were collected across the six 90-minute sessions. The structured observation was documented and aligned with the study's themes, along with detailed field notes focusing on teacher-student interactions. To ensure construct validity, the checklist was adapted from established reading strategy frameworks (Grabe, 2009; Oxford, 2016). The frequency of instructional strategy implementation within the classroom is mentioned below.

Table 2.
Frequency of Instructional Strategy Implementation Across Six Lessons

Instructional Strategy	Frequency Observed
Teacher Modeling of Strategies	19 times
Direct Explanation of Strategies	26 times
Guided Practice with Scaffolding	14 times

It was observed that lecturers consistently used explicit strategy instruction in the classroom. Think-aloud modelling was used by the lecturers to teach idea identification, highlight key details, and draw out the hidden meaning. Students asked 7-9 questions for clarification in each session, took notes, underlined important texts, and responded actively. It shows students' sustained cognitive engagement. Collaborative reading activities were also observed frequently in classrooms, and almost 80-90% of students actively participated in pair or group activities. It was observed that some students were more autonomous while others were relying more on other group members. Students engaged in reading independently for 18-22 minutes, and approximately, there were 15 to 18 interactions between the teacher and the students. It was also observed that most students were unable to answer higher-level inferential and critical thinking questions.

Students' preferences for reading strategies were based on resource availability, previous reading experiences, classroom environment, learning styles, mixed-ability grouping, and emotional states, e.g., confidence or anxiety (Babekir, 2024). The findings indicate that using SBI in teaching is effective and preferred by the students. Students reported that their confidence and motivation increased due to the improvement in reading strategies. For instance, Student 7 stated, "I can read confidently without the help of the teacher." Similarly, Student 21 remarked, "I am not perfect in my reading, but I enjoy it and feel more motivated to read a text than before." However, due to some obstacles like difficult vocabulary, inconsistent support from the teachers, and limited resources, learning is not as successful as it could be.

The primary design of the research was qualitative, but a clear improvement in students' literal and inferential comprehension was indicated through test scores. The comparison and summary of students' reading comprehension performance before and after the teaching is shown as pre-test and post-test in the table below. Students' skills changed across comprehension types after participating in reading activities or strategy instruction, as shown below. In the pre-test, students performed poorly on literal, inferential, and critical comprehension. However, their skills improved after the teaching through instructional strategies in the post-test performance, as observed by lecturers and reported by students. Table 3 highlights the performance of the students

in the pre-test and post-test, and the areas that improved the most or least. Based on lecturer reports and student feedback, scores were aggregated descriptively. Moreover, no precise numerical scores were provided.

Table 3.
Summary of pre- and post-test performance (N = 25)

Comprehension Type	Pre-Test Performance	Post-Test Performance	Observable Change
Literal comprehension	Moderate difficulty identifying main ideas and supporting details	Marked improvement; students could locate information faster using scanning	High positive change
Inferential comprehension	Difficulty making connections, interpreting implied meaning	Noticeable improvement; students used context clues and prediction	Moderate positive change
Critical comprehension	Limited ability to evaluate ideas or the author's stance	Minimal improvement; relied heavily on teacher input	Low change

The results of the pre-test and post-test are aligned with the literature. Numerous studies showed that explicit strategy instruction is useful in literal comprehension, moderately beneficial in inferential skills, and less beneficial in critical comprehension (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; Pressley & Gaskins, 2006; Khezrlou, 2012). A paired-sample t-test result could explain these improvements if numerical scores had been available. A bar graph would show steep growth from pre- to post-test in literal comprehension, and moderate growth in inferential comprehension. Seven major instructional strategy clusters were revealed after the analysis of 25 student questionnaires, two classroom observations, and interviews with five lecturers. The findings from teachers' interviews revealed that students enhanced their confidence and improved their literal inference making; however, critical reading remains weak. Triangulation data confirmed that explicit strategy instruction is effective but needs long-term and sustained implementation. Moreover, instructional strategies are not enough to fully develop advanced critical reading skills.

Table 4.
Core Instructional Strategies Used in Reading Comprehension

Strategy Cluster	Typical Classroom Practice	Evidence Sources
Skimming & Scanning	Gist identification → selective reading for details	Lecturers, observations, student interviews
Pre–During–Post Structure	Prediction → guided questions → summarizing/discussion	Lecturers, observations
Visual Organizers	KWL charts, mind maps, diagrams	Lecturers, questionnaires
Metacognitive Prompts	Self-questioning: *What is the author's purpose?*	Lecturers, questionnaires
Collaborative Learning	Pair/group reading, summarizing, and idea exchange	Observations, student interviews
Individualization of Tasks	Individual summaries, comprehension questions	Lecturers, observations
Technology Use	Online dictionaries, LMS for homework	Questionnaires, interviews

Universal trends in EFL contexts show skimming and scanning as the dominant strategies, which are important for increasing reading efficiency (Grabe, 2009; Anderson, 2002). The structured pre-, during–, and post-model corresponds with schema activation principles (Anderson & Pearson, 1984) and matches recommendations from Duke and Pearson (2002). The use of technology is portrayed as limited, in contrast to the widespread evidence that technological

reading tools increase motivation and comprehension (Alshehri, 2025; Rinantanti et al., 2024; Alharbi, 2021). Lecturers' overall perceptions were positive; however, limited application shows infrastructural constraints generally found in Southeast Asian EFL settings (Alfaruqi & Nurwahidah, 2025).

Students prefer some strategies from their teachers most, for example, immediate feedback, step-by-step modelling, and teacher think-aloud. Previous findings (Pressley & Gaskins, 2006) also highlight these preferences and argue that explicit strategy demonstration is essential for EFL readers. Explicit strategy instruction helps improve literal comprehension and inference-making. All five teachers responded positively regarding literal comprehension as a noticeable improvement was observed in identifying main ideas, summarizing, and predicting the text during the reading process among students. Teacher 1 remarked, "Instead of translating every word, students now look for the main idea first." Moreover, Teacher 4 stated, "Students improved their ability to understand basic inference questions much better than before."

Similarly, Grabe (2009) highlighted that basic comprehension is enhanced by cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies. Student 6 stated that prediction, pair work, and summarizing "make reading less boring," facilitate recall, and enhance curiosity in reading tasks. Student 19 also remarked, "Prediction strategy helps me more in reading comprehension. It also makes reading enjoyable and interesting when I guess the idea before reading." Motivational models by Ryan and Deci (2000) also stress competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Students also reported the improvement in their ability to summarize texts, learning vocabulary through contexts, and identify main ideas. Findings from Zhang (2010), Song (1998), and Khezrlou (2012) on the benefits of strategy training correspond to these self-reported gains.

Students' cognitive, affective, and conative perceptions

Students also reported some challenges that they faced during the implementation of reading instructional strategies. Student 20 shared, "Sometimes long sentences make me confused, and I don't understand the hidden meaning of the text." Student 6 also shared the challenge about the expression of ideas: "I understand the meaning of the text, but sometimes it becomes difficult for me to answer critical questions that require opinion." The most commonly highlighted obstacles were limited time for reflection, unsure about pronunciation, overloaded vocabulary, shy to ask questions, and reading anxiety. Teacher 1 also revealed the challenges about inference in reading process, "Many students ask me, 'Miss, what and where is the answer in the text?', even after the strategy training and they still struggle with inference questions." Previous literature also indicates that reading anxiety is a major challenge to comprehension (Alshehri, 2025; Alharbi, 2021), aligning with current findings. Students' perceived benefits and challenges about instructional strategies are summarized in the table below.

Table 5.
Students Perceived Benefits and Challenges

Dimension	Evidence	Implication
Engagement	Increased interest through prediction and group work	Maintain interactive strategy integration
Comprehension Benefits	Better summarizing, main idea identification	Continue explicit strategy modelling
Vocabulary Burden	Students lose motivation when faced with dense vocabulary	Pre-teach key words; promote context-clue training

Anxiety	Fear of reading aloud inhibits participation	Use low-stakes practice and pair rehearsals

Students' preferred learning methods, identified through the data collected from them, are grouped into three categories, and collaborative learning is the most favorite. Pairs or group work are preferred by most students as they support their vocabulary understanding, allow them to clarify ideas more easily, and help reduce their anxiety. Teacher 5 also identified the weaknesses and strengths of peer support and group work by stating, "They participate more actively in group and peer activities, but sometimes some students stop thinking for themselves and rely too much on stronger peers." Sociocultural theory by Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes learning through social interaction and supports this finding; however, Slavin (2014) emphasized that peer and group learning should be structured and well-managed. CSR increases peer support and enhances comprehension, as confirmed by previous researchers (Klingner et al., 1998; Huang, 2006).

Some students did not favor group activities, as Student 9 stated, "I'm afraid to respond in group work, what if I give the wrong answer?" Similarly, Student 24 commented, "We know vocabulary only when we work in groups, but I wish to discuss the deeper meaning of the text." Participants' responses suggested that group collaboration did not facilitate higher-order thinking skills as much as it positively affected students' self-efficacy as readers. Students expressed their preference for self-directed study. Some participants reported that, within the context of their reading assignments, individual reading facilitated better mastery of self-regulation, allowing them to fully attend to the material and control the rate at which they read.

Mokhtari and Reichard's (2004) study indicated that learners' autonomy and focus are enhanced through self-regulated reading strategies. According to Alshehri (2025), technology plays an important role in assisting language learning and improving reading comprehension. Therefore, students are attracted to these digital resources, which also reflect broader global trends toward multimodal literacy environments. Moreover, technology is considered more beneficial for EFL learners because they can boost their reading comprehension during the reading process (Rinantanti et al., 2024; Asnawi et al., 2005). Open-ended questionnaire data from the students also demonstrated the effectiveness of online dictionaries, e-books, and text-to-speech applications. These digital tools are interactive, convenient, and make reading more accessible for the students. Students' preferred learning styles are summarized in the table below.

Table 6.
Students' Preferred Learning Styles

Preferred Method	Rationale	When Most Effective
Pair/group work	Confidence, idea exchange	During reading, summarizing
Individual work	Focus, autonomy	Homework, assessment
Immediate oral feedback	Clarifies confusion instantly	In-class tasks
Written feedback	Reviewable, precise	Summaries, homework
Digital tools	Accessible, multimodal input	Pre-reading, independent practice

Students' learning preferences were shaped by four key factors, e.g., Prior experiences, learning style, graphics, and digital tools (Babekir, 2024). Firstly, some auditory students preferred to use tools such as text-to-speech applications, while visual learners preferred charts, diagrams, and other graphic organizers. It became challenging to adapt to skimming and scanning as these students previously relied heavily on translation-based approaches. Teacher 3 commented, "Most of the time, students use a dictionary. Now, many students can identify the main idea more quickly

just because of explicit strategy instruction." Alderson's (2000) view also supports that second-language readers often depend on bottom-up processing and struggle to shift toward more efficient top-down strategies. Secondly, learners' choices are also affected by the affective filter.

Relationship between perceptions and reading outcomes

According to Krashen (1982), the affective filter hypothesis describes that emotional barriers can hinder language processing. Students avoid whole-class reading tasks while adopting peer-supported activities to overcome their feelings of anxiety. Thirdly, perceptions about suitable methods were affected by resource and environmental conditions. Students wished for digital tools that were not always available during the reading comprehension process. This creates a gap between the actual environment and the learning environment they preferred. Lastly, diverse preferences and perceptions come from mixed-ability levels within the classroom. Teacher 3 commented, "The main focus of group activities is to understand the surface meaning of the text rather than a deeper understanding. Usually, the weak students wait for the best student to answer first." It also becomes difficult for teachers to manage such classrooms with stronger and weaker readers to meet the diverse needs of students. This challenge is also reported by Ahmed et al. (2025) and Jusoh and Abdullah (2015) in Asian EFL reading contexts. Overall, flexible and responsive teaching strategies are required to be adopted by the teachers to address the different preferences of students. The summary of factors that affect the preferences of EFL students is given below.

Table 7.
Factors Shaping Student Preferences

Factor	Impact on Preference	Suggested Mitigation
Learning style	Students choose strategies matching modalities	Provide multimodal input
Anxiety	Preference for pair work and low-stakes tasks	Normalize errors; encourage supportive climate
Resource constraints	Limits technology use	Integrate low-effort tools (phone dictionaries)
Mixed abilities	Some prefer independent work; others prefer peer support	Use flexible grouping; differentiate tasks

The balanced use of strategy instruction, such as collaborative learning activities and metacognitive prompting, played an important role in improving students' reading comprehension (Pahrizal et al., 2025) as shown by the data collected from tests, observations, interviews, and student questionnaires. A supportive learning environment, where students not only practiced the strategies but also understood why and how to use them, was created through the interaction among these strategies. Finally, students showed improvement in literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, and in organizing information effectively during text summarization. In this way, students benefit from direct modelling, peer-supported reflection, and guided practice.

However, limited improvement was observed in critical comprehension. According to Teacher 2, students were still weak in expressing their ideas, although behavioral improvements were observed in them: "Students started to read without help and improved their confidence, but they lacked critical reading skills." Critical literacy, such as questioning authors' perspectives or evaluating arguments, needs sustained, extended instruction and cannot be developed in a short intervention (Wallace, 2003; Grabe, 2009). Teacher 4 commented, "We need more time for deeper understanding because students can't master higher-order strategies only in one semester." Therefore, sustainable instruction is required to achieve mastery in reading. Foundational comprehension skills can be strengthened quickly; however, higher-order thinking skills require longer-term pedagogical commitment, as revealed by the evidence.

Overall effects of instructional strategies and contribution of the study

The current findings offer a meta-analytic interpretation of the effectiveness of instructional strategies in shaping students' comprehension outcomes in the context of EFL reading research. Students reported significant increases in engagement, confidence, and clarity, which reflect a medium-to-strong instructional effect. This finding is consistent with international findings on strategy-based instruction (Younus & Khan, 2017). Janzen (2002), Pressley (2008), and Nguyen (2022) reported important benefits in identifying main ideas, supporting details, and making basic inferences, to mirror patterns. Explicit instruction in prediction, skimming, scanning, questioning, and summarizing was strongly associated with the improvement in comprehension. Schema theory, which emphasizes the importance of activating prior knowledge and reducing cognitive load through pre-reading tasks (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), is the base of these strategies. Grabe's (2009) interactive reading model stresses both top-down and bottom-up processing, and students reported that prediction and vocabulary previews made texts more accessible.

The conclusion of less improvement in higher-order critical reading and remarkable improvement in literal comprehension is consistent with earlier findings that critical comprehension skills develop slowly with the passage of time and require long-term, iterative training (Pressley, 2008; Zhang, 2010). The results about the effectiveness of collaborative reading comprehension are aligned with empirical evidence from CSR (Klingner et al., 1998; Huang, 2006) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Although differential responses developed, such as high-performing students perceived group work as slow and weaker students sometimes relied too heavily on peers, increased students' confidence and willingness to participate reflected the motivational and cognitive benefits of peer interaction. Unstructured group work can increase ability gaps, highlighting the need for intentional task design and flexible grouping, consistent with Dhakal (2025).

Metacognitive prompting is another important dimension of instructional effectiveness (Pahrizal et al., 2025). Students developed their metacognitive awareness, although they did not always identify these prompts explicitly. Metacognitive prompts were indicated by observed behaviors of students, for example, observing lexical ambiguities, monitoring comprehension, and reflecting on meaning, a finding consistent with Jozwik and Douglas (2016). Metacognitive benefits function slowly and tend to affect long-term comprehension more than short-term performance, as previous research reported (Pressley, 2008). Challenges such as reading anxiety, vocabulary overload, and mixed-ability dynamics moderated the effectiveness of the overall instructional approach (Nazim et al., 2024; Busa & Chung, 2024). Alderson (2000) and Grabe (2009) also found that vocabulary difficulty is a major obstacle and remarked that lexical knowledge was the strongest predictor of L2 reading success. Students' involvement was inhibited by the fear of public error and mispronunciation anxiety, consistent with the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) and socio-affective findings (Jusoh & Abdullah, 2015). The findings that stronger students felt slowed down, while the weaker students often became dependent on stronger peers in mixed-ability classrooms, create the need for differentiated instruction customized to the diverse proficiency levels of students.

Students reported that technology-supported reading reduced their cognitive load and increased their access as they expressed their enthusiasm for digital dictionaries, translation tools, and audio-visual features. Similarly, it is demonstrated in international findings that digital tools increase motivation and strategic engagement in reading (Alharbi, 2021; Alshehri, 2025). Champasack University educators' inadequate application of technology in their reading classes is

a result of the regional constraints acknowledged in the Southeast Asian Higher Education sector, which in turn informs the bypassing of such opportunities. Cognitive, metacognitive, and social processes working in conjunction enhance reading comprehension (Pahrizal et al., 2025). The findings substantiate integrated reading theory, social theories of culture, and schema theory.

This research adds to the scant literature on strategy-based teaching in Lao tertiary education. In addition, it adds to EFL reading research in a number of ways. First, it illustrates that employing a combination of instructional strategies is more effective in comprehending than using a single one in isolation. It also shows how the students' success in achieving comprehension is influenced by their affective, cognitive, and conative domains. The findings recommend the incorporation of inexpensive digital tools that enhance tactical reading. It is also recommended that teachers use metacognitive prompts, structured vocabulary scaffolding, and differentiated collaboration in reading comprehension classes. In order to acquire a wider pedagogical knowledge in EFL tertiary education, EFL teachers need to practice differentiated, sustained, and techno-scaffolded methods of teaching reading.

CONCLUSION

The simulation of language and reading instruction practices utilized by EFL teachers at Champasack University shows that the effective techniques for reading comprehension are offered through explicit instruction and address prediction, skimming, scanning, guided questioning, and summarizing. These techniques are folded within the pre-, during, and post-reading instruction and greatly assist EFL readers' cognitive and emotional development. These instructional strategies are instrumental in boosting students' comprehension both at the surface and inferential levels. Likewise, instructional strategies increase students' engagement in reading and increase confidence and awareness in the use of effective reading strategies. The arch of the reading instruction serves the principles of interaction and the use of prior knowledge in reading. The students demonstrate a strong preference for the use of multimodal feedback, as well as collaborative instruction and the use of digital tools. These factors demonstrate the importance of social and technological integration as well as student-centered approaches in Education for foreign languages. The factors of reading instructional practices of EFL teachers at Champasack University highlight the difficulties of reading anxiety, vocabulary overload, the challenges of technology, and the mixed dynamics of students within a class. These instructional methods require the need of better differentiated instruction, scaffolded instruction, and instructional resources. There are certain aspects of reading instruction that would benefit from the development of more systematic vocabulary instruction, more flexible digital tools, and the structures in place that support flexible student groups. This research is a small part of a growing body of research related to student-centered and multi-strategy approaches to tertiary EFL contexts. This study is a starting point for future research to analyze the long-term effects of ongoing strategy instruction and the pedagogical value of suitable digital devices. The relatively small sample size and focus on a single university context may limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the short duration of the intervention restricts conclusions about the long-term effects of instructional strategies on reading comprehension. Therefore, future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies with larger and more diverse samples across multiple institutions, and to further explore the stable impact of strategy-based instruction on higher-level reading comprehension and learner autonomy in EFL contexts.

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