



A Comparative Study Of Reading Strategies Among The English As A Second Language Learner In Context Of Gujarat State

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the reading strategies adopted by English as a Second Language (ESL) learner during three stages of the reading process — pre-reading, while reading, and post reading. Specifically, the study aims to identify differences in the use of these strategies between high and low achievers. In this study, a total of 50 Higher secondary level ESL learners from a Grant-in-Aid school in Gujarat, India responded to questionnaires adapted from the Strategy of Reading Skills (SORS). The findings of the study indicate that high achievers tend to use metacognitive reading strategies more, while low achievers lean more towards bottom-up strategies. These findings suggest that encouraging the use of appropriate and effective reading strategies is essential to improve reading comprehension and academic performance. In addition, the study provides useful guidelines for teachers to help them develop different types of reading activities for high and low achievers.

Index Terms - Reading Skill, Receptive Skills, Reading Strategies, Bottom-Up, Top-Down, Metacognitive Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the fundamental skills for a person to understand and absorb information. For English as Second Language (ESL) learners, reading is the main receptive skills acquired before the two productive skills — speaking and writing — are acquired. That is, the implementation of reading strategies in language acquisition is essential for ESL learners, as it is an important part of the language learning process. Reading strategies can be mainly of three types: bottom-up (in which letters, sounds, and words are combined with information from the text), top-down (in which the person interprets new information based on his or her own experience and prior knowledge) (A. B., Jumariati & Nasrullah, 2021), and metacognitive strategies (which are strategies that readers adopt consciously and consciously during reading) (Maasum & Maaruf, 2012). Most research on reading strategies has focused primarily on their procedural applicability and effectiveness. However, there is a lack of research on the differences in the use of reading strategies based on the level of learners. Previous studies (Nordin, Rashid, Syed Zubir & Sadjirin, 2013) have suggested that reading strategies are primarily adopted by two types of ESL learners — high achievers and low achievers. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the use of reading strategies adopted by these two groups in the current research year.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

- To identify the reading strategies that are given the highest and lowest priority by ESL learners.
- To identify the reading strategies adopted by learners with high academic achievement.
- To identify the reading strategies adopted by learners with low academic achievement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Which reading strategies do ESL learners give the highest and lowest priority to?
- What types of strategies do high-achieving learners use while reading?
- What types of reading strategies are adopted by learners with low academic achievement?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Reading strategies are also seen as a well-planned process designed to control and manage the reader's efforts — so that he or she can decode the text, interpret the words correctly, and understand the underlying meanings of the text (Albiladi, 2019). In addition, the reader can use these strategies to decide how to interpret the text, identify the type of reading material, and apply limited thinking processes to a given task (Albiladi, 2019).

Reading strategies are also associated with brain function (Albiladi, 2019). When learners try to understand the meaning of a written text in the reading process, they become aware of the process of comprehension. This awareness of comprehension during reading is extremely important for ESL learners. Therefore, when learners experience a lack of vocabulary and it affects their reading comprehension ability, teachers' guidance and encouragement (scaffolding) helps them understand the reading material (Albiladi, 2019).

The bottom-up model is also known as a directional “part-to-group” type process, in which each element of the text is assembled to form a coherent whole. This process can be compared to a reading puzzle or jigsaw; the reader can understand the author's original message by correctly connecting different words and sentence fragments. In this process, the reader constructs understanding by systematically arranging linguistic signals — first the letter, then the morpheme, then the word, then the sentence, and finally the utterance level.

According to Eunjeo (2009, as cited in Suraprajit, 2019), in this model, readers place more emphasis on word-by-word reading, re-read the text, and get stuck on grammatical obstacles. According to Valanta (2016), the bottom-up theory suggests that the reading process is the process of learning to understand the meaning of a whole text by understanding the small components of language (such as words). That is, this model of reading comprehension is the process of putting together small parts of a text to arrive at the full meaning — much like a reader putting together a “jigsaw” puzzle.

To understand meaning, the reader forms words by pronouncing the parts of a word (letters to sounds), then combining those words to form a coherent form of the author's message (Valanta, 2016). Thus, the bottom-up model is the initial stage of the reading process, which aims to develop sound-letter relationships and lexical understanding in readers.

The top-down model is a process of inference based on the reader's knowledge and prior knowledge (Goodman, 1971, as cited in Suraprajit, 2019). According to this model, readers infer the meaning of a text using their prior knowledge and experience. According to reading theories, reading is an active activity in which the reader continuously interprets the text with their prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge (Anderson, 1984; Noli & Sabariah, 2011). The reader uses inference and reasoning to find the main points and purposes of the text, which is a cognitive process that involves cognition (Suraprajit, 2019). In this model, the reader gives importance to his experience, prior knowledge and inference power for reading comprehension. General/global strategies are also associated with the top-down model, in which the reader formulates hypotheses and goals of the text through his intellect and experiences (Suraprajit, 2019).

According to Paris and Winograd (1990), metacognitive strategies should be seen as an opportunity to give learners the knowledge and confidence they need to manage their own learning. Anderson (2006) defined metacognitive reading as ‘the ability to make your thoughts visible’. Readers use metacognitive strategies to monitor their own mental processes. These are higher-order skills that help readers refine their understanding while reading. These strategies help readers increase their awareness of the reading process and themselves as learners. Learners can use these strategies to identify available resources, select the resources needed for the task, and set comprehension goals. According to Semtin and Maniam (2015), metacognitive strategies involve planning learning, reflecting on the learning process, monitoring their understanding, and evaluating information after completing the task. Single (2001) believes that learners adopt metacognitive behaviours such as planning, managing, and evaluating their learning. Such strategies include focused attention, self-assessment, planning, setting and achieving goals, and finding opportunities to study. Self-control and error correction are also considered metacognitive strategies in the reading context.

Other research has conducted diverse studies on reading strategies. For example, Semtin and Maniyam (2015) found that cognitive and metacognitive strategies are used to an almost equal extent. According to a study by Ozturk (2018) on student teachers from two prominent universities in Turkey, metacognitive

strategies are mainly adopted to solve reading problems. Rastalegar, Kermani, and Khabir (2017) used qualitative methods to analyze the relationship between metacognitive reading strategies and reading comprehension development among ESL learners in Iran. Their findings suggest that learners who adopt metacognitive reading strategies are more successful. Also, according to a study by Suraprajit (2019), top-down reading strategies are most commonly used in business and academic texts among tertiary learners in Thailand, while bottom-up strategies are least commonly used.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative method to identify the reading attitudes and types of reading strategies adopted by high and low achieving ESL (English as a Second Language) Higher secondary level learners at different stages (pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading). For this, data were collected through questionnaires, and the subjects were divided into two groups based on known criteria: high achieving (CGPA >3.50) and low achieving (CGPA <2.50) ESL learners. A total of 50 learners were selected and included in the study through snowball sampling method. The questionnaire was developed by looking at 36 items from the Reading Strategy Questionnaire (RSQ) and Strategy Of Reading Skills (SORS), in which a 4-point Likert scale was used for pre- reading, while-reading stages, counting Bottom-up, Top-down and Metacognitive approaches. The obtained data were analyzed by Microsoft Office 365 and descriptive statistical methods were used for interpretations of each strategy. The results were defined according to the Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) scale, in which a mean value of 3.5 and above is classified as high use, 2.5 to 3.49 as moderate use, and 2.49 and below as low use. The results of this study mainly present a comparative analysis of the use of the three types of strategies at different stages, and provide valuable insights into the reading behaviour of ESL Higher secondary level learners.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

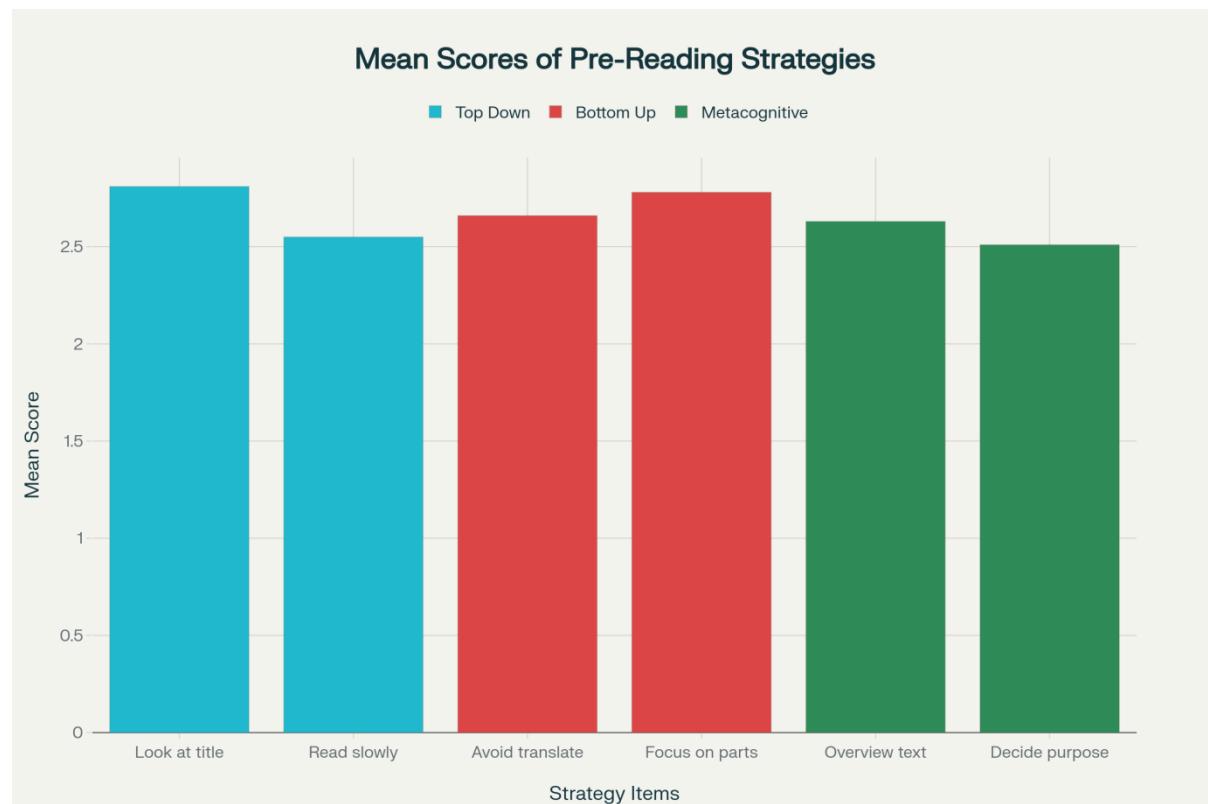
The data collected in this study have been analyzed using descriptive statistics. The three types of reading strategies used - bottom-up (BU), top-down (TD) and metacognitive (M) - have been compared with the mean measures across all stages - pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. The method of Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) has been adopted to define the results, in which a mean score in the range of 0.1 to 2.49 indicates low usage, between 2.5 and 3.49 moderate usage and a score of 3.5 to 5 indicates high usage. On this basis, the study has provided a deeper understanding of the use of reading strategies at different stages, which explains the reading behaviour of ESL learners in a comprehensive way.

❖ Learner Preferences for Pre-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

Table No. 01 Learner Preferences for Pre-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

Reading Strategies	Item (Pre-Reading Strategies)	N	M
Top Down	▪ Before I read, I look at the title to guess what the text will be about.	5 0	2.81
Top Down	▪ Before I read, I don't rush; I read slowly so I understand better.	5 0	2.55
Bottom Up	▪ Before I read, I try not to turn every sentence into my main language.	5 0	2.66
Bottom Up	▪ Before I read, I pay attention to parts of sentences that help me understand.	5 0	2.78
Metacognitive	▪ Before I read, I look over the text to see what it might talk about.	5 0	2.63
Metacognitive	▪ Before I read, I decide why I am reading this text.	5 0	2.51

Table No. 01 shows the most and least used reading strategies adopted by ESL learners in the pre-reading phase. According to the above table, the most used strategy by ESL Higher secondary level learners is the top-down approach, in which they usually infer the content from the title (mean = 2.81). On the other hand, the least used reading strategies in the pre-reading phase are the Metacognitive approach, in which ESL learners rarely decide purpose regarding to read the text (mean = 2.51).



Graph No. 01 Learner Preferences for Pre-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

❖ Learner Preferences for While-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

Table No. 02 Learner Preferences for While-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

Reading Strategies	Item (While-Reading Strategies)	N	M
Top Down	▪ I read every sentence, even if I don't understand it right away.	50	2.97
Top Down	▪ I use translation to help me understand what I'm reading.	50	2.62
Bottom Up	▪ I avoid splitting sentences into smaller parts when I read.	50	3.02
Bottom Up	▪ I do not always read the text from start to end; I focus on relevant parts.	50	2.46
Metacognitive	▪ I stay focused and pay attention while I read.	50	3.09
Metacognitive	▪ I do not evaluate or analyze the text at this stage; my goal is to understand it.	50	2.63

The most and least preferred reading strategies used by ESL learners during the While-reading phase are shown in Table No. 02. According to the above table, ESL Higher secondary level learners consistently use metacognitive strategies, where they pay special attention to reading (mean=3.09), while the least preferred strategy is bottom-up, where they do not choose to read the entire text from beginning to end (mean=2.46).



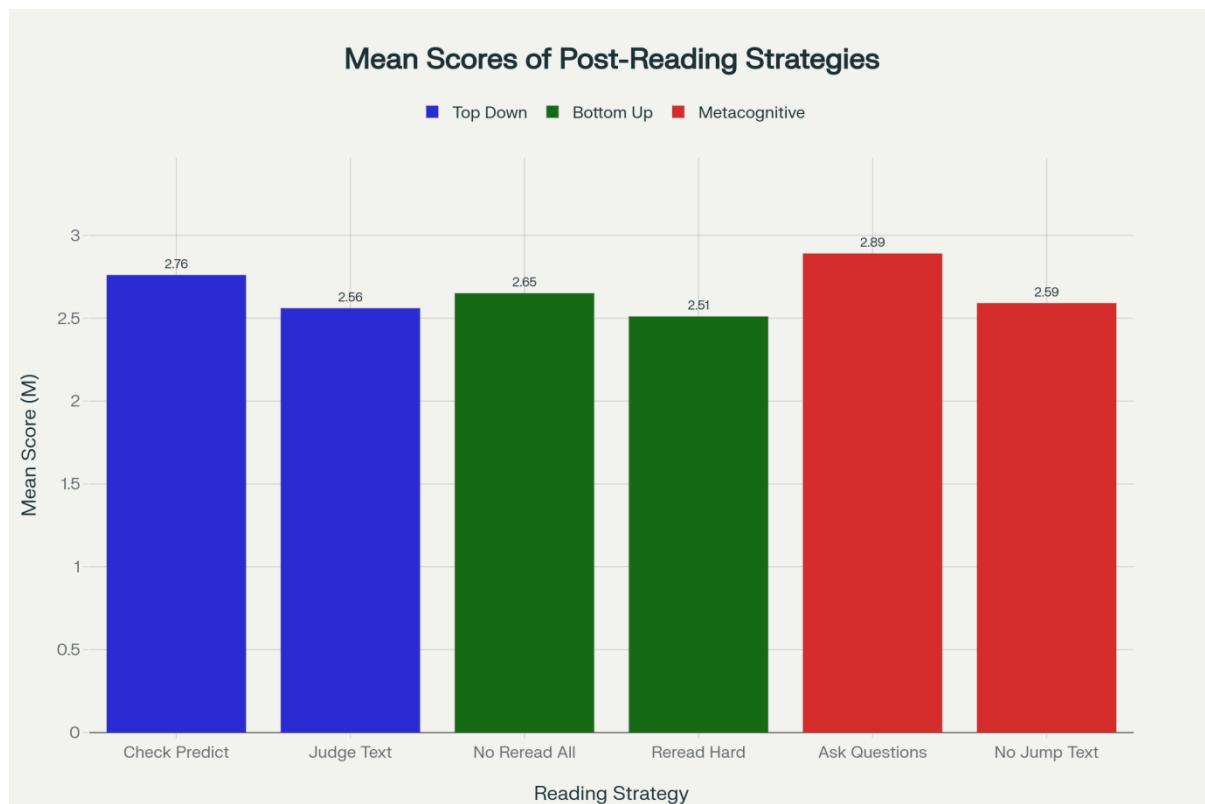
Graph No. 02 Learner Preferences for While-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

❖ **Learner Preferences for Post-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis**

Table No. 03 Learner Preferences for Post-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

Reading Strategies	Item(Post-Reading Strategies)	N	M
Top Down	▪ I check if my predictions were right after reading.	5	2.7
Top Down	▪ I judge the text and the writer after reading.	0	6
Bottom Up	▪ I don't reread the whole text out loud.	5	2.6
Bottom Up	▪ I reread only the hard parts out loud.	0	5
Metacognitive	▪ I ask myself questions about the text after reading.	5	2.8
Metacognitive	▪ I don't keep jumping back and forth in the text to find connections.	0	9

According to the data given in Table No. 03, the most and least used reading strategies by ESL learners during the post-reading phase are presented. According to the table, ESL Higher secondary level learners use metacognitive strategies the most, in which they prefer to ask themselves questions to find answers to their own questions (mean = 2.89). While the least preferred strategy during the post-reading phase is bottom-up, in which ESL Higher secondary level learners do not prefer to reread difficult sections out loud (mean = 2.51).



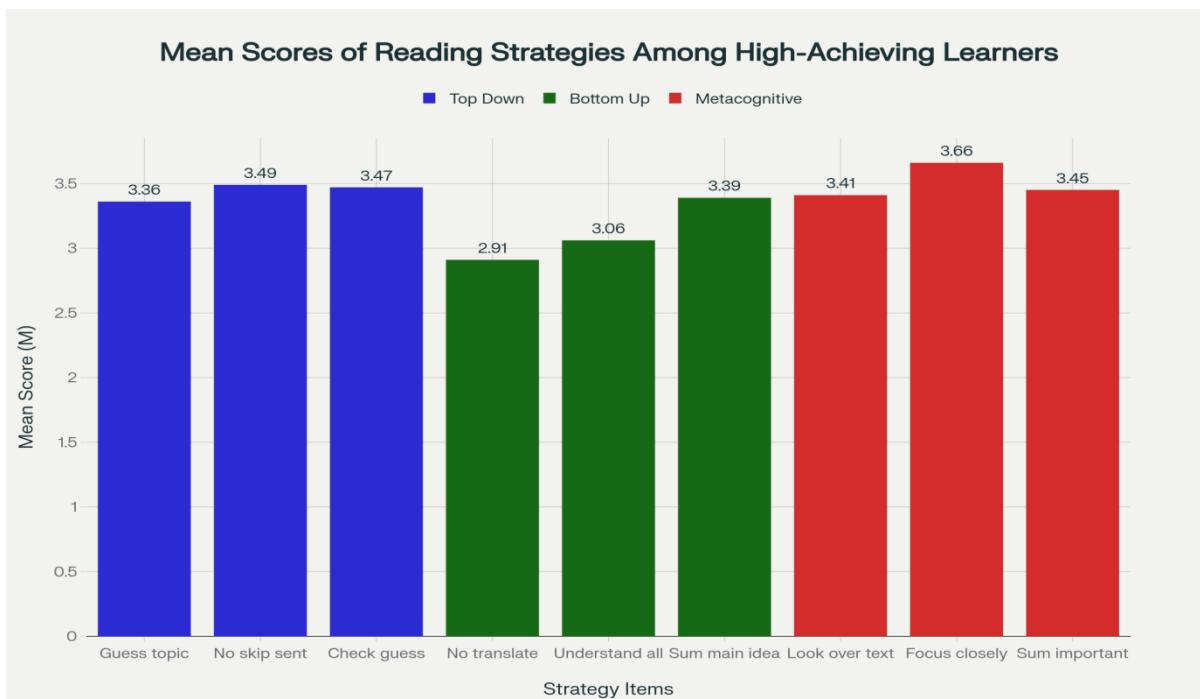
Graph No. 03 Learner Preferences for Post-Reading Strategies: A Comparative Analysis

❖ A Comparative Analysis of Reading Strategies Among High-Achieving Learners

Table No. 04 A Comparative Analysis of Reading Strategies Among High-Achieving Learners

Stage	Reading Strategies	Item	N	M
Pre	Top Down	▪ I guess the topic from the title before reading.	25	3.36
Pre	Bottom Up	▪ I don't translate every sentence into my first language before reading.	25	2.91
Pre	Metacognitive	▪ I look over the text to see what it's about before reading.	25	3.41
While	Top Down	▪ I don't skip sentences I don't understand while reading.	25	3.49
While	Bottom Up	▪ I try to understand every word while reading.	25	3.06
While	Metacognitive	▪ I focus closely while reading.	25	3.66
Post	Top Down	▪ After reading, I check if my guess was right.	25	3.47
Post	Bottom Up	▪ After reading, I summarize the main idea.	25	3.39
Post	Metacognitive	▪ After reading, I summarize the important information.	25	3.45

According to Table No. 04, during pre-reading, high-level learners made the best use of metacognitive strategies for pre-reading (mean=3.41), while-reading (mean=3.66) and post-reading (mean=3.45). Still, the least used reading strategy for high-level learners is the bottom-up approach which is used less during pre-reading (mean=2.91), while-reading (mean=3.06) and post-reading indicates (mean=3.39).



Graph No. 04 A Comparative Analysis of Reading Strategies Among High-Achieving Learners

❖ **A Comparative Analysis of Reading Strategies Among Low-Achieving Learners**

Table No. 05 A Comparative Analysis of Reading Strategies Among Low-Achieving Learners

Stages	Reading Strategies	Item	N	M
Pre	Top Down	▪ I do not use what I already know to guess before reading.	2 5	2.88
Pre	Bottom Up	▪ I do not pay attention to sentence structure before reading.	2 5	3.66
Pre	Metacognitive	▪ I do not decide what parts of the text to read carefully before reading.	2 5	2.77
While	Top Down	▪ I do not skip sentences I don't understand while reading.	2 5	2.94
While	Bottom Up	▪ I do not break up sentences with slashes while reading.	2 5	3.74
While	Metacognitive	▪ I do not take notes to help my understanding while reading.	2 5	2.64
Post	Top Down	▪ I do not summarize the text after reading.	2 5	3.12
Post	Bottom Up	▪ I do not reread the whole text out loud after reading.	2 5	3.49
Post	Metacognitive	▪ I do not check my understanding by talking with others after reading.	2 5	2.46

According to Table No. 05, during reading, low-achieving learners use the bottom-up reading strategy the most for pre-reading Stage (mean = 3.66), while-reading Stage (mean = 3.74) and at the post-reading Stage (mean = 3.49). On the other side, the least used reading strategy for low-achieving learners is the Metacognitive approach, which has a low preference during pre- reading Stage (mean = 2.77), while- reading Stage (mean = 2.64) and post- reading Stage (mean = 2.46).



Graph No. 05 A Comparative Analysis of Reading Strategies Among Low-Achieving Learners

CONCLUSION

Based on this study, the ESL Higher secondary level learners included in the research used metacognitive reading strategies in all three stages of reading—pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. These strategies, which are also followed by highly motivated ESL learners, are related to being aware of one's mental processes while reading, using knowledge, problem-solving, and cognitive thinking to understand the text. Because of the consistent presentation, metacognitive strategies encourage learners to adopt visual thinking, problem-solving strategies, global approaches, and collaborative strategies. These include setting goals for reading, rereading for greater understanding, looking up the meaning of numerical words, reading aloud or silently, translating, and taking notes.

This finding is consistent with previous studies such as Semtin and Maniam (2015), Öztürk (2018), and Rastlegar, Kermani, and Khabir (2017). Semtin and Maniam (2015) demonstrated that metacognitive strategies were used to a higher standard than cognitive strategies, which helped to increase reading comprehension for ESL learners. Öztürk (2018) observed that student teachers studying at prestigious universities in Turkey were not only aware of metacognitive strategies but also used them extensively. Similarly, Rastlegar, Kermani, and Khabir (2017) established a relationship between adopting metacognitive reading strategies and improving reading comprehension, emphasizing the success of learners who adopted cognitive strategies. ESL Higher secondary level learners are shown to be particularly attentive to their reading, asking themselves questions to gain information from the text and visualizing the writing to help them understand the information. Such a visual approach helps learners stay focused and retrieve key information from the text. Comparatively, the bottom-up approach is the least used reading strategy among ESL Higher secondary level learners. This suggests that ESL learners tend to avoid focusing on phrases and clauses in sentences, do not favour reading the entire text from beginning to end, and also avoid repeating problematic passages aloud. Despite such a general preference, ESL Higher secondary level learners tend to adopt a bottom-up approach to aid comprehension. This finding is consistent with studies by Suraprajit (2019) and Valanta (2016), who identified the bottom-up approach as the least used strategy across all three stages—pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. A possible reason for such a choice is that ESL learners are unaware of the importance of focusing on phrases, reading the entire text, rereading difficult passages, breaking the text into chunks, and reading the text aloud, or they consider such activities to be time-consuming.

According to the present research study, ESL Higher secondary level learners use reading strategies up to the middle level. Metacognitive strategies are the most used, while bottom-up strategies are the least preferred. In addition, ESL highly motivated learners use metacognitive strategies more, while ESL low-motivated learners are more inclined towards bottom-up strategies. The conclusion is that it is necessary to

adopt appropriate reading strategies according to the proficiency level of the learners. Teachers should also encourage the adoption of those between effective strategies, which can benefit low-motivated learners.

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