Integrating Theory and Practice: Strategies for Teaching Reading in English Language Classrooms

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Abstract

This study investigates effective reading strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms by bridging theoretical frameworks with practical instructional approaches. Drawing on a qualitative content analysis of seven peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2009 and 2025, the study identifies key strategies aligned with schema theory, metacognitive strategy instruction, and the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach. These strategies are categorized into three stages of reading instruction: pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading. The findings highlight the importance of activating background knowledge, combining intensive and extensive reading practices, promoting reading strategy awareness, and integrating reading and writing in subject-based instruction. The study also addresses the instructional adaptations required in low-resource settings, emphasizing the need for teacher training and contextualized support. By connecting theoretical insights with real classroom practices, the research offers a comprehensive model for enhancing reading comprehension and fostering learner autonomy in EFL contexts.

Keywords: *Reading Instruction, EFL, Schema Theory, Metacognitive Strategies, Clil*

Introduction

Reading plays a crucial role in mastering the English language, functioning both as a fundamental skill and as a means for students to access knowledge across various disciplines. Sirait, Hutauruk, and Herman (2020) emphasize reading as an activity that can build students cognitive development in decision making. However, learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often face difficulties in reading comprehension due to limited interaction with English texts, a lack of intrinsic motivation, and the implementation of less effective teaching methods (Ali et al. 2022). In the Indonesian context, while some students show enthusiasm for reading, the broader culture leans more toward oral traditions than literacy practices. As observed by Nyimo (2023), reading books has yet to become a common routine for the majority of Indonesians. Rather than being a simple act, reading is a complex process involving cognitive, emotional, and social elements. According to Demiröz (2010), reading entails constructing meaning from texts through the integration of cognitive strategies, metacognitive awareness, motivation, and social interaction.

Successful readers must draw on attention, memory, analytical skills, and self-regulation to understand what they read.

Fluency in a language depends on the balanced development of four core competencies: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Fluency refers to the smoothness someone in speaking (Chambers 1997).Among these, reading not only facilitates access to information but also strengthens overall language development. As Demiröz (2010) further explains, reading remains a crucial skill throughout one's academic and personal life—especially in the digital era, where access to written information is more prevalent than ever.

Delivering effective reading instruction requires more than providing texts; it necessitates the use of thoughtful, student-centered teaching approaches. Asnawi, et al. (2025) define teaching strategies as deliberate pedagogical decisions aimed at achieving learning objectives. They suggest that the use of interactive tools—such as digital media, educational games, and cooperative learning—can significantly increase student engagement. When instruction is delivered through well-organized and accessible methods, learners are better equipped to understand complex concepts and transfer their knowledge to new contexts. Such strategies help create a learning environment that encourages curiosity, critical inquiry, and active participation.

Method

This research utilizes a qualitative content analysis method to explore various instructional techniques employed in teaching reading within English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Seven peer-reviewed journal articles, published between 2009 and 2025, were deliberately chosen due to their strong alignment with both theoretical perspectives and practical approaches to EFL reading pedagogy. Data were gathered through document analysis and examined using thematic coding to identify recurring educational themes and teaching methods. These instructional strategies were systematically grouped based on the stages of reading—namely pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading—and were analysed through the lens of key educational theories, such as schema theory, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and cognitive/metacognitive learning frameworks.

Findings & Discussions

The results of this research reveal that a variety of reading techniques based on accepted educational theories are successfully applied in EFL classes. Because it helps students make connections between new textual information and what they have already learned, schema theory has become a crucial foundation for promoting reading comprehension. By connecting new information to preexisting mental models, instructional practices that draw on prior knowledge—like visual aids or pre-reading questions—help students comprehend new material (Uprety, 2011). Furthermore, there are complementing advantages to both extensive and focused reading strategies. Extensive reading encourages fluency and enjoyment through self-selected texts, whereas intensive reading assists students in analyzing grammar and vocabulary through teacher-guided exercises (Ali et al., 2022; Sinaga et al., 2025).

Metacognitive strategies are also frequently used, especially monitoring and rehearsal, indicating a reliance on surface-level techniques such as rereading and highlighting. However, deeper

comprehension depends on the combination of these with elaborative and regulatory practices (Sunggingwati & Ungau, 2023). The integration of reading and writing tasks within the CLIL framework supports dual learning goals: content mastery and language acquisition. These integrated tasks improve students' engagement and critical thinking skills (Loranc-Paszylk, 2009). Furthermore, students who are explicitly taught cognitive and metacognitive strategies—such as outlining, note-taking, and goal-setting—show improvements in comprehension and independent reading habits (Sunggingwati & Ungau, 2023). In limited-resource environments, teachers implement reading strategies across three instructional stages, though many express uncertainty in applying them effectively, highlighting a need for professional development and contextualized support (Nyimo, 2023).

Schema theory serves as a key perspective in understanding how readers make sense of texts by linking new content to their existing knowledge. It suggests that readers rely on mental frameworks called "schemas" to interpret new information based on what they already know. In the classroom, this theory highlights the importance of activating students' prior knowledge before introducing a new reading. This can be done through strategies like visual aids, guiding questions, or short discussions related to the topic. For example, offering a brief overview or showing relevant images of Vancouver before reading about the city helps students build stronger mental connections to the content. This activation of background knowledge supports better comprehension and helps learners stay engaged while reading (Uprety, 2011).

Reading instruction typically involves two main approaches: intensive and extensive reading. Extensive reading focuses on improving fluency and understanding the general meaning of longer texts, while intensive reading emphasizes detailed analysis, such as vocabulary building and grammar study. Research supports the combined use of both approaches to enhance language proficiency (Sinaga et al., 2025). Intensive reading often requires students to closely analyse short passages with teacher assistance. Techniques such as reading aloud, posing questions, and predicting outcomes are commonly used. The reading material is usually teacher-selected and aims to develop specific reading skills like skimming, scanning, and inferencing. In contrast, extensive reading encourages students to select and read books for enjoyment, focusing more on the overall meaning than on word-by-word comprehension. This method fosters a more enjoyable and engaging reading environment, particularly for students who are less motivated to read (Ali et al., 2022).

Metacognitive strategies are crucial for improving comprehension because they allow learners to reflect on and regulate their own reading processes. These strategies include setting goals for reading, monitoring one's understanding, and adjusting reading tactics as needed. Among metacognitive strategies, monitoring is most frequently used—students often reread passages or ask themselves questions to ensure understanding. Within the realm of cognitive strategies—such as rehearsal, elaboration, and organization—students tend to favour rehearsal methods like underlining, repeating key words, or using memory tricks. While these strategies assist with retention, they may not result in deep understanding unless combined with more complex thinking techniques. Therefore, it is essential that teachers provide direct instruction on how to use

metacognitive strategies effectively, encouraging students to become more reflective and intentional in their reading habits (Sunggingwati & Ungau, 2023).

In Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) classrooms, reading and writing are used together to support both subject mastery and language growth. Reading academic texts exposes students to important content, which can be used as input for related writing tasks. This method also strengthens student engagement with the material. Writing based on reading helps students sort, analyse, and evaluate information, enhancing their critical thinking abilities. CLIL teachers usually address both language development and subject content, and they are typically trained to meet both instructional demands successfully (Loranc-Paszylk, 2009).

Reading strategies consist of various mental and emotional techniques that support comprehension, especially for students with limited English proficiency. Cognitive strategies include mental activities such as summarizing, outlining, using background knowledge, and identifying patterns in a text, which help readers interact more deeply with the material (Sunggingwati & Ungau, 2023). Metacognitive strategies, by contrast, involve planning how to approach a text, tracking one's understanding, and evaluating the reading outcome. Students who receive training in these strategies tend to become more confident and independent readers. Teachers are encouraged to model and teach both types of strategies and give students opportunities to practice and reflect on them. Over time, this allows learners to internalize these approaches and become more skilled readers (Sunggingwati & Ungau, 2023).

In low-resource school settings, teachers often adapt their reading instruction to meet the needs of their students despite limited tools or materials. They commonly use a three-stage reading model: pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading. Before reading, strategies like brainstorming, using dictionaries, or predicting content are used to activate prior knowledge. While reading, students read aloud, clarify vocabulary, and engage in meaning-making activities such as questioning and discussion. After reading, learners are asked to summarize, interpret key ideas, and reflect on their understanding. Although many teachers are familiar with these stages and related techniques, some still face difficulties in applying them effectively. This highlights the need for ongoing teacher development, especially training that is hands-on and tailored to limited-resource environments (Nyimo, 2023).

Conclusion and Suggestions

The integration of theory and practice in teaching reading in EFL classrooms is essential for enhancing both comprehension and language development. This study has highlighted how foundational theories—such as Schema Theory, CLIL, and metacognitive frameworks—can be operationalized through evidence-based strategies that support learners at every stage of the reading process. From activating prior knowledge through pre-reading tasks to encouraging reflection and synthesis through writing and post-reading activities, each strategy contributes meaningfully to learners' ability to process, understand, and engage with texts. Intensive and extensive reading approaches, when balanced, also offer a comprehensive framework for skill-building and motivation, especially in contexts where reading habits are not yet firmly established.

Moreover, these findings underscore the importance of equipping educators with theory-informed strategies that can be adapted flexibly to diverse classroom settings. Equally important is the recognition that instructional practices must be context-sensitive, particularly in low-resource settings where teachers often need to modify or simplify strategies without compromising effectiveness. Despite the challenges, many teachers demonstrated resourcefulness and a commitment to applying reading strategies that promote active learning. Overall, bridging the gap between theoretical insights and classroom application requires not only sound pedagogical design but also ongoing teacher training and institutional support.

Then, the suggestion that can be offer to enhance the effectiveness of reading instruction in EFL classrooms such as, several pedagogical and institutional measures should be considered. First, teacher training programs must provide explicit instruction on how to apply cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies, supported by practical workshops, peer mentoring, and real-classroom modelling. In addition, schools should encourage a shift from traditional text-based instruction to strategy-based teaching, emphasizing schema activation, collaborative reading, and self-regulated learning. English programs are also advised to balance intensive and extensive reading activities to develop both linguistic accuracy and reading fluency, with teachers guiding students in selecting materials that are appropriate and engaging.

In under-resourced environments, locally available or simplified materials can be adapted to support strategic reading objectives, and professional development should equip teachers with the skills to customize content based on context. Furthermore, CLIL classrooms should actively integrate reading and writing tasks to support dual learning outcomes—language acquisition and content mastery—by engaging students in structured written responses based on subject-specific texts. Finally, to foster lifelong reading habits, schools and communities should work collaboratively to build a strong reading culture by establishing reading spaces, organizing reading campaigns, and integrating reading into school-wide programs, especially in cultures where oral traditions are more dominant.

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