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STUDENT'S READING STRATEGIES IN UNDERSTANDING ENGLISH TEXTS OF FOURTH SEMESTER AT FKIP UIR

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Abstract: Reading comprehension is an essential skill for English department students, yet many students still face difficulties in understanding English texts due to limited vocabulary, weak grammar mastery, and the complexity of academic reading materials. To cope with these difficulties, students rely on various reading strategies. This study aims to explore how fourth-semester students at FKIP Islamic University of Riau use reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension of English texts. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, involving 20 fourth-semester students as participants. Data were collected through a 15-item Likert-scale questionnaire distributed via Google Forms, supported by interviews, observation, and documentation, and were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that students commonly apply strategies such as previewing titles, predicting content, guessing word meaning from context, rereading, highlighting, summarizing, self-questioning, and relating texts to prior knowledge. The majority of respondents agreed that these strategies improved both their comprehension and their confidence in reading English texts, although limited vocabulary and complex sentence structures remained persistent challenges. The study concludes that the deliberate use of reading strategies plays an important role in helping students overcome reading difficulties and achieve better comprehension of English texts.

Keywords: reading strategies, reading comprehension, English texts, qualitative study

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1. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the most important skills in learning English because it helps students obtain information, increase knowledge, and understand written materials used in academic activities. Through reading, students can learn new vocabulary, understand grammar structures, and improve their language skills. In higher education, especially in English departments, students are required to read various English texts such as articles, journals, textbooks, and academic passages. Reading comprehension therefore becomes an essential ability for students to support their learning process and academic achievement, as students with good comprehension are usually able to understand ideas, interpret information, and respond to texts more effectively.

However, many students still experience difficulties in comprehending English texts. Some students have limited vocabulary, lack understanding of grammar, and find it difficult to identify the main ideas and supporting details in a text. Long and complex texts often make

students feel confused and less motivated to read, so that they need more time to understand the meaning of the text and may misunderstand the information presented in the reading materials. These problems can influence students' reading performance and make the learning process less effective.

To overcome these difficulties, students usually use different reading strategies, namely techniques or methods used during reading activities such as skimming, scanning, predicting, translating difficult words, rereading texts, underlining important information, and identifying main ideas. These strategies help students understand vocabulary, find important information, and improve their comprehension of the text. Since each student may use different strategies depending on their reading ability and the difficulty level of the text, understanding students' reading strategies is important to identify how students process information while reading English texts.

Based on preliminary observation of fourth-semester students at FKIP Islamic University of Riau, several students still face challenges in understanding English reading materials and often need more time to comprehend the texts. Some students also appear to rely on dictionaries or reread texts repeatedly to understand the content, indicating that students use different reading strategies in reading comprehension. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the reading strategies used by students in understanding English texts and to describe how these strategies help improve their reading comprehension. The research problem addressed in this study is: how do reading strategies help students' reading comprehension? Based on this problem, the objective of this research is to explore how fourth-semester students at FKIP Islamic University of Riau use reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension of English texts.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Reading Strategies

Reading strategies are techniques or methods used by learners to facilitate comprehension and improve understanding while reading texts. Oxford (1990) defines learning strategies as specific actions taken by learners to make learning easier, faster, and more effective. In a similar vein, Paris, Wasik, and Turner (1991) describe reading strategies as deliberate actions selected by readers to construct meaning from texts, while Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) state that reading strategies are conscious and purposeful processes used before, during, and after reading to enhance comprehension.

Grabe and Stoller (2011) explain that reading strategies involve cognitive activities such as predicting, questioning, summarizing, and monitoring comprehension. Brown (2004) adds that reading strategies enable learners to become more efficient readers through techniques such as skimming, scanning, guessing meaning from context, and identifying main ideas. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2007) argue that effective readers preview texts, predict content, and identify key information, while Anderson (1999) emphasizes that strategic readers actively interact with texts by using prior knowledge and monitoring their understanding.

Pressley (2002) states that skilled readers use multiple comprehension strategies simultaneously to construct meaning from texts, and Duke and Pearson (2002) explain that comprehension strategies are procedures that guide readers in understanding and remembering

information from written texts. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) classify learning strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, and social-affective strategies, all of which support reading comprehension, while Garner (1987) highlights the importance of metacognitive awareness in helping readers monitor and regulate their reading processes.

2.2 Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to understand, interpret, and derive meaning from written texts. Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction with written language. Woolley (2011) further explains that reading comprehension involves understanding vocabulary, identifying main ideas, making inferences, and integrating information from texts. In academic settings, students interact with various English texts such as articles, journals, stories, textbooks, and academic passages with different levels of difficulty, so that appropriate reading strategies are needed to understand these texts effectively.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, as the researcher focused on describing and analyzing the reading strategies used by students without manipulating any variables, emphasizing students' real experiences in understanding English texts. Following Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a problem; Denzin and Lincoln (2011) describe it as a naturalistic approach that studies phenomena in their real-world settings, while Merriam (2009) states that it aims to understand how people interpret their experiences and construct their worlds.

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP), Islamic University of Riau, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants were 20 fourth-semester students who had taken reading courses and frequently interacted with English texts in their academic activities, and who were selected because they apply various reading strategies in their learning process.

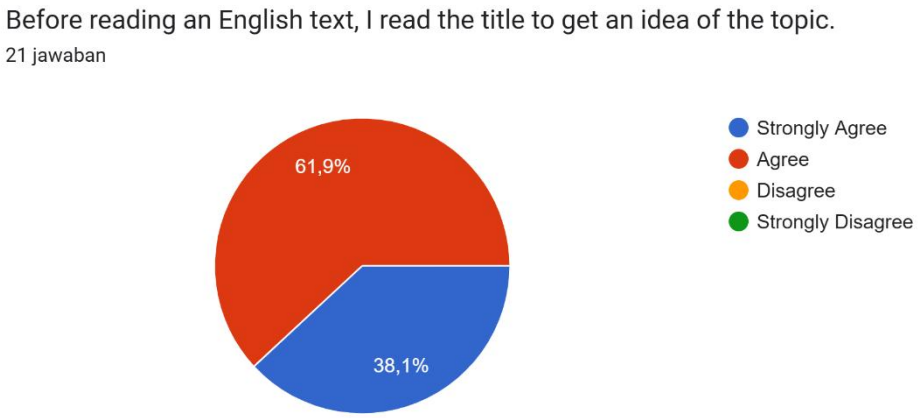
The instrument used in this research was a questionnaire consisting of 15 items developed using a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree), distributed through Google Forms to make data collection easier, faster, and more efficient. The questionnaire focused on students' reading strategies, difficulties in reading, and how reading strategies help students understand English texts. Data were also supported by interviews, observations, and documentation: interviews were used to obtain information about students' experiences and strategies, observation was used to observe students' reading activities during the learning process, and documentation (such as students' notes and reading materials) was used to support the data.

Data collection followed several procedures: obtaining permission from the lecturer and institution, determining the participants, preparing the questionnaire based on relevant theories of reading strategies, distributing the Google Form questionnaire, collecting and checking the completeness of the responses, organizing and classifying the data according to the research focus, and finally analyzing and interpreting the data to answer the research question.

The data were analyzed using the model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and focused on important information related to students' reading strategies; the data were then organized into descriptive forms such as paragraphs, tables, and summaries, before being interpreted to draw conclusions about how reading strategies help students improve their reading comprehension.

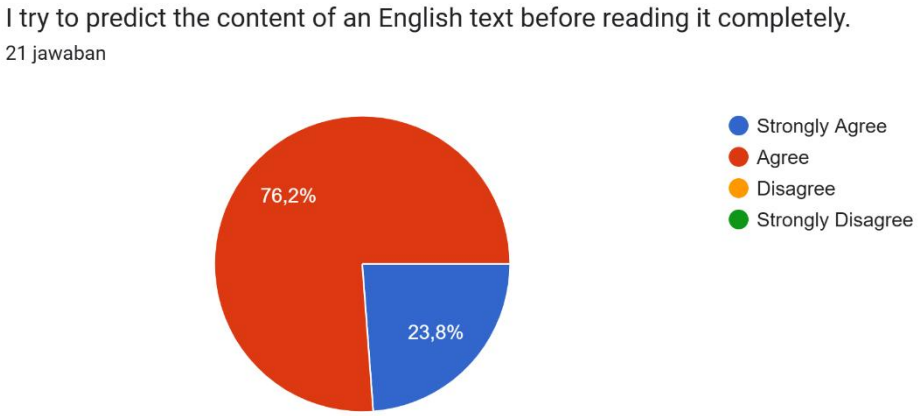
4. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the data collected from the questionnaire distributed to fourth-semester students at FKIP Islamic University of Riau. The data were analyzed using percentages to identify the reading strategies used by students in understanding English texts. The findings are presented according to each questionnaire item and interpreted based on the respondents' responses.



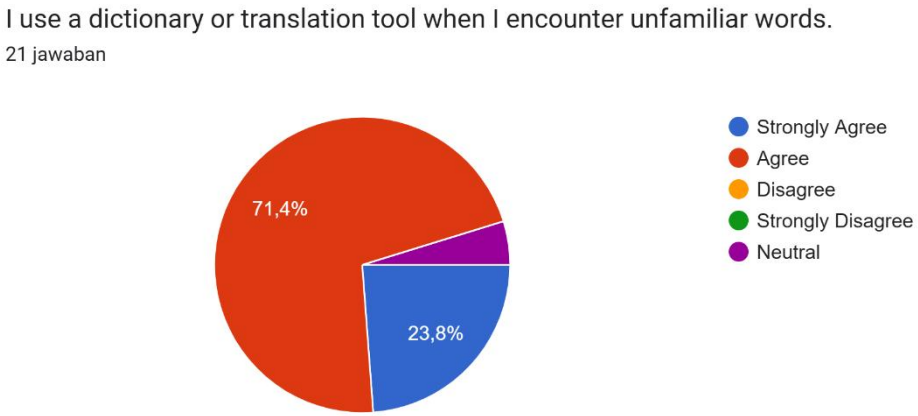
Item 1

For Item 1, "Before reading an English text, I read the title to get an idea of the topic," 61.9% of respondents agreed and 38.1% strongly agreed. No respondents selected negative responses. These findings indicate that all respondents use the title as an initial strategy to understand the topic of a text before reading it.



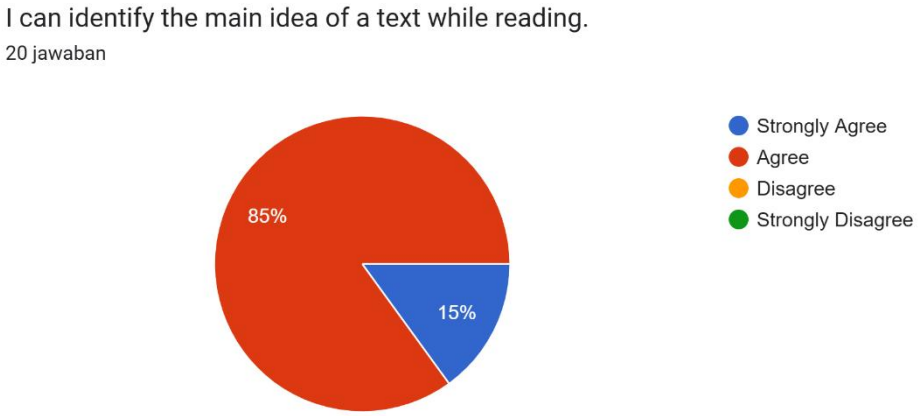
Item 2

For Item 2, "I try to predict the content of an English text before reading it completely," 76.2% of respondents agreed and 23.8% strongly agreed. No negative responses were recorded. This suggests that predicting content is a common strategy used by students before reading a text.



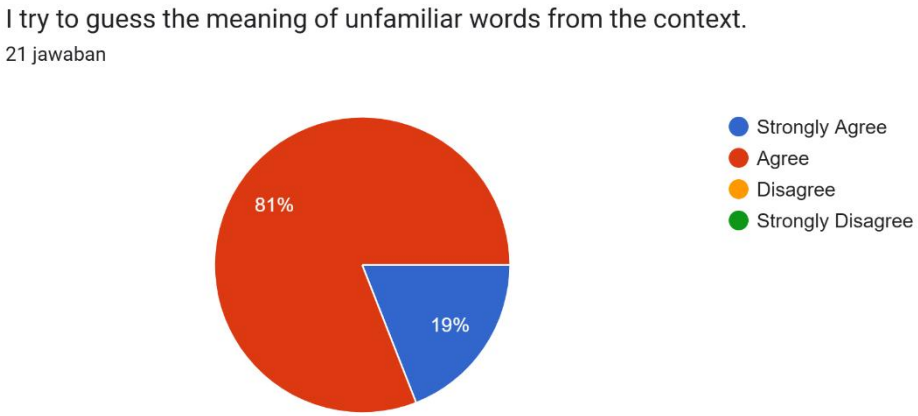
Item 3

For Item 3, "I use a dictionary or translation tool when I encounter unfamiliar words," 71.4% of respondents agreed, 23.8% strongly agreed, and 4.8% selected neutral. The findings show that most students rely on dictionaries or translation tools to help them understand unfamiliar vocabulary.



Item 4

For Item 4, “I can identify the main idea of a text while reading,” 81.0% of respondents agreed, 14.3% strongly agreed, and 4.8% did not provide a response. These results indicate that most students are able to identify the main idea while reading English texts.



Item 5

For Item 5, “I try to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context,” 81.0% of respondents agreed and 19.0% strongly agreed. No negative responses were recorded. This finding suggests that students frequently use contextual clues to understand unfamiliar words.

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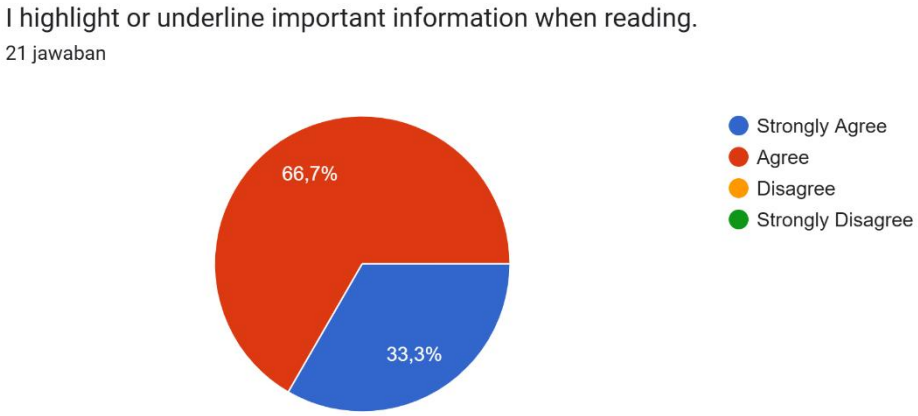
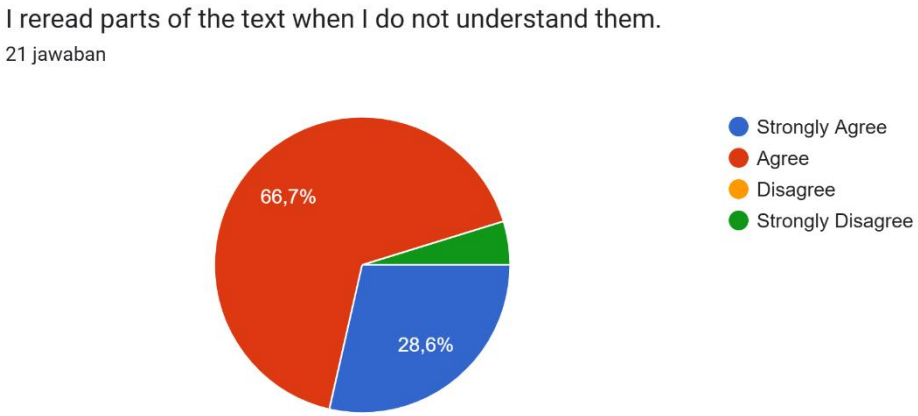


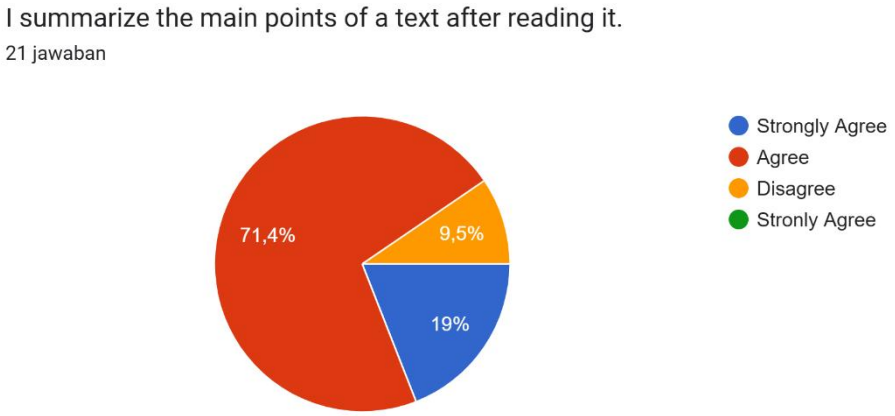
Item 6

For Item 6, “I highlight or underline important information when reading,” 66.7% of respondents agreed and 33.3% strongly agreed. No respondents expressed disagreement. This indicates that highlighting important information is a widely used reading strategy among students.



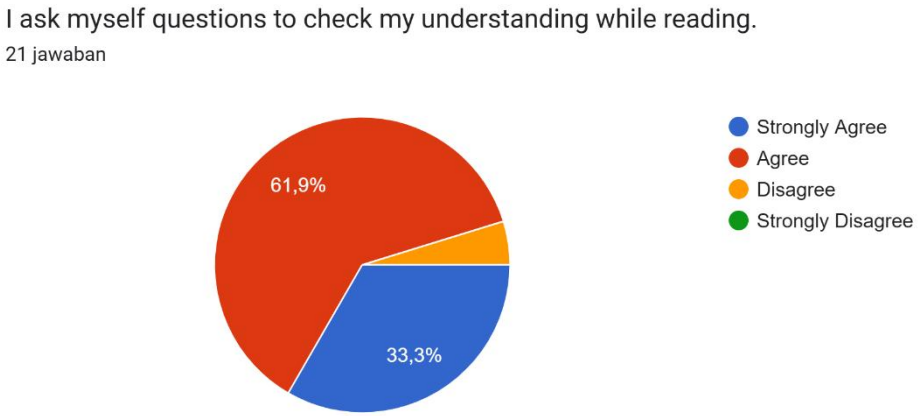
Item 7

For Item 7, “I reread parts of the text when I do not understand them,” 66.7% of respondents agreed, 28.6% strongly agreed, and 4.8% strongly disagreed. The findings show that rereading is commonly used to improve understanding when students encounter difficulties in reading.



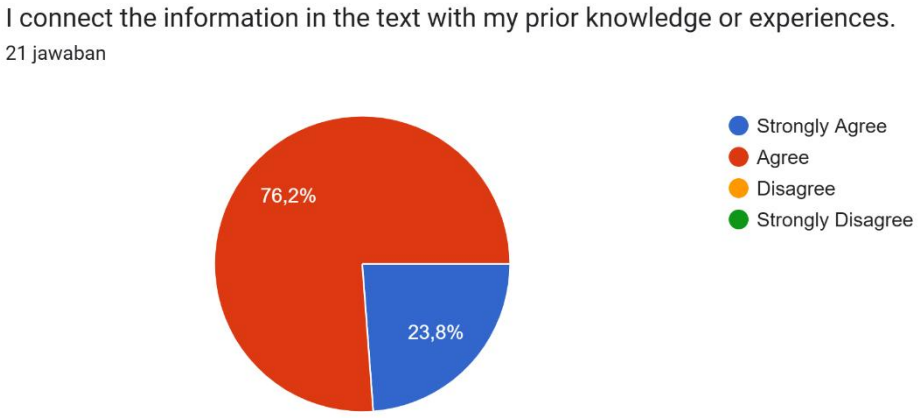
Item 8

For Item 8, “I summarize the main points of a text after reading it,” 71.4% of respondents agreed, 19.0% strongly agreed, and 9.5% disagreed. These results indicate that most students use summarizing as a strategy to reinforce their understanding of a text.



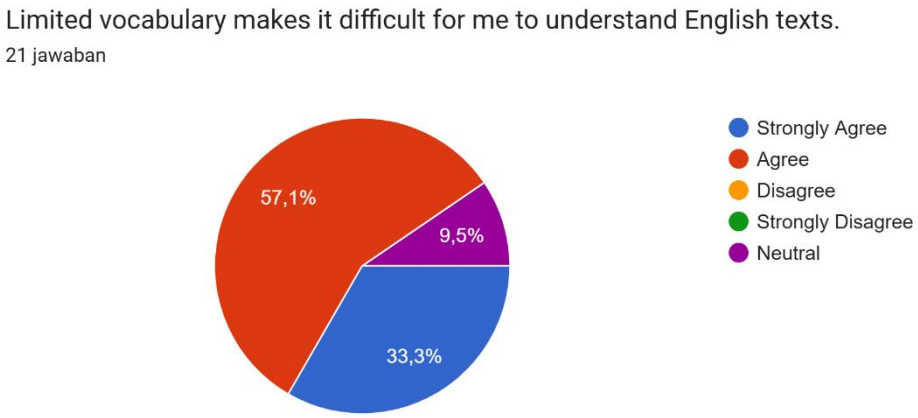
Item 9

For Item 9, “I ask myself questions to check my understanding while reading,” 61.9% of respondents agreed, 33.3% strongly agreed, and 4.8% disagreed. This finding suggests that self-questioning helps students monitor their comprehension during reading activities.



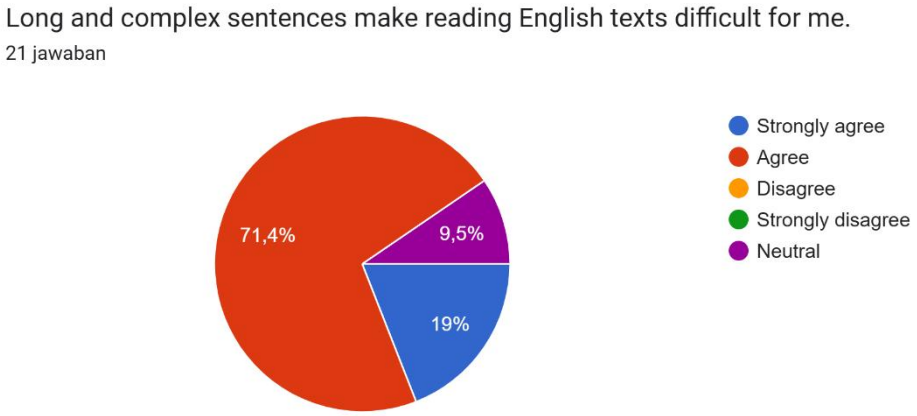
Item 10

For Item 10, "I connect the information in the text with my prior knowledge or experiences," 76.2% of respondents agreed and 23.8% strongly agreed. No negative responses were reported. This indicates that students frequently relate new information to their existing knowledge and experiences.



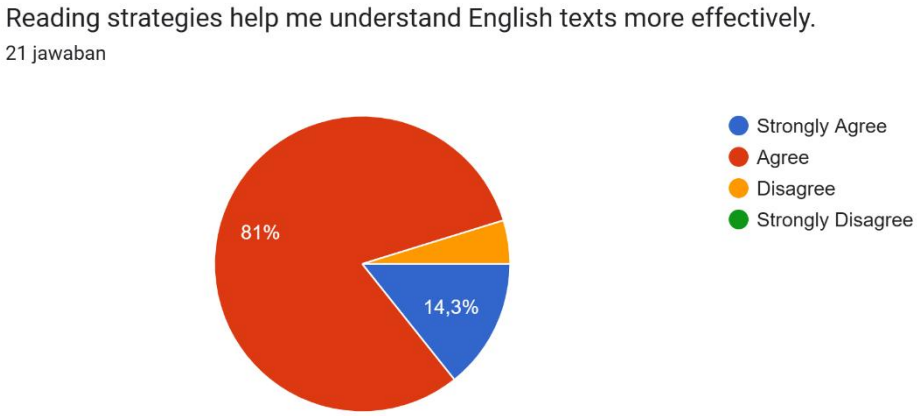
Item 11

For Item 11, "Limited vocabulary makes it difficult for me to understand English texts," 57.1% of respondents agreed, 33.3% strongly agreed, and 9.5% selected neutral. The findings indicate that limited vocabulary remains one of the main challenges faced by students when reading English texts.



Item 12

For Item 12, "Long and complex sentences make reading English texts difficult for me," 71.4% of respondents agreed, 19.0% strongly agreed, and 9.5% selected neutral. This result suggests that sentence complexity is another difficulty experienced by students during reading activities.



Item 13

For Item 13, "Reading strategies help me understand English texts more effectively," 81.0% of respondents agreed, 14.3% strongly agreed, and 4.8% disagreed. These findings demonstrate that reading strategies play an important role in improving students' reading comprehension.

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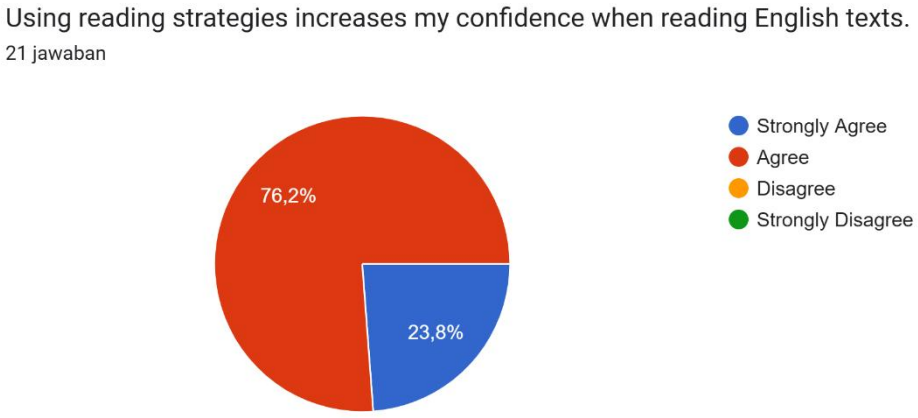

Item 14

For Item 14, "Using reading strategies increases my confidence when reading English texts," 76.2% of respondents agreed and 23.8% strongly agreed. No respondents selected negative responses. This indicates that reading strategies not only improve comprehension but also increase students' confidence when reading English texts.

Overall, the findings reveal that students frequently use various reading strategies to help them understand English texts. Most participants selected either Agree or Strongly Agree on the questionnaire items, indicating that strategies such as predicting content, identifying main ideas, using contextual clues, rereading difficult sections, and highlighting important information are commonly used during reading activities. The findings also show that reading strategies contribute positively to students' reading comprehension. Most respondents believed that these strategies help them understand texts more effectively and improve their confidence while reading.

However, some students still reported difficulties related to limited vocabulary and complex sentence structures when reading English texts. Despite these challenges, the majority of respondents viewed reading strategies as helpful in overcoming reading difficulties. The findings suggest that the use of appropriate reading strategies supports students in comprehending English texts more successfully. Therefore, reading strategies play an important role in improving students' reading comprehension.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that fourth-semester students at FKIP Islamic University of Riau actively employ various reading strategies to improve their comprehension of English texts. Strategies such as reading titles before starting a text, predicting content, using dictionaries, guessing meanings from context, highlighting important information, rereading difficult sections, summarizing, and connecting new information with prior knowledge were commonly used by the participants. These results suggest that students are aware of the importance of strategic reading in supporting their understanding of English texts.

The findings are in line with the theory proposed by Grabe and Stoller (2011), who state that effective readers use cognitive and metacognitive strategies to construct meaning from texts.

Similarly, Pressley (2002) argues that skilled readers combine multiple strategies to enhance comprehension. The high percentage of agreement on items related to predicting, identifying main ideas, and rereading demonstrates that students consciously monitor their understanding while reading.

However, the study also found that limited vocabulary and complex sentence structures remain significant obstacles for many students. Although reading strategies help students overcome some difficulties, vocabulary knowledge and grammatical understanding continue to influence reading comprehension. This finding supports Brown's (2004) view that linguistic limitations can hinder readers' ability to fully understand a text even when effective strategies are applied.

Overall, the results demonstrate that reading strategies play an important role in helping students understand English texts more effectively and increase their confidence in reading activities. Therefore, lecturers should encourage the continued use of reading strategies while also providing support for vocabulary development and exposure to more complex text structures to further improve students' reading comprehension.

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