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## Investigating Test-Taking Strategies in an English Reading Comprehension Used by Secondary High School Students

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### Abstract

Reading is a crucial skill that Indonesian learners are expected to master, as outlined in the 2013 Curriculum. Students are required to develop comprehension skills to understand both explicit and implicit information in a text. To assess students' knowledge, teachers often use tests. During these reading tests, students may employ strategies to aid their comprehension. This study investigates the strategies used by secondary high school students at MA Darul Ihsan Samarinda during an English reading comprehension test, along with the challenges they face when using these strategies. This study employs a qualitative design to examine the strategies utilized by six students: high score, middle score, and lowest score. The data, gathered through the think-aloud method and interviews, is analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that students employed 23 out of 31 strategies to answer factual questions and 19 strategies for inferential questions. Both the high score and middle score students predominantly used the strategy of reading the text for clues in both types of questions. Conversely, the lowest score student primarily relied on the strategy of rereading the question. Despite the differences, all students utilized a meaning-based text strategy to choose their answers. The middle score and lowest score students frequently faced challenges with time management and complex vocabulary. Additionally, using mixed-method research designs could provide deeper insights into test-taking strategies. This study focused on the strategies used by high school students during reading tests, while other research has examined test-taking strategies in high-stakes language tests.

**Keywords:** test-taking strategies; reading comprehension; factual questions; inferential questions

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## 1. Introduction

In contemporary times, reading has become an essential tool for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to enhance their proficiency in the language. Additionally, reading plays a crucial role in fostering the socio-cultural competence of EFL learners. Within the realm of education, reading stands as a mandatory activity that both students and teachers are required to engage in consistently. The government also stated in 2013 Curriculum that



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learners should be master in reading since reading is one of the main competencies besides listening, speaking, and writing. Through the act of reading, learners have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge, gain new perspectives, solve problems, and enhance their capacity for critical thinking (Firman *et al.*, 2021).

Reading comprehension for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is not solely about understanding the meaning of individual vocabulary or words, but rather about comprehending the content of information that is written both explicitly and implicitly in paragraphs or texts (Haerazi *et al.*, 2019; Thamrin & Agustin, 2019). Students are expected to have strong comprehension skills to understand the messages or information conveyed in texts. Consequently, mastering reading skills is crucial for helping students understand English texts effectively. According to Lin *et al.*, (2021), when language learners read, they mostly face two kinds of level of comprehension; literal comprehension and inferential comprehension.

As stated by Nurjanah and Putri (2022), literal reading involves students accurately reproducing the facts presented by the author. This includes understanding word meanings, recalling explicitly stated concepts, summarizing ideas, remembering key points, and recognizing the order of events or information. Moreover, inferential comprehension demands that the reader depend more on elements not explicitly stated in the text. The student must integrate information from prior knowledge, the content itself, and subtle differences in language, such as syntactic and semantic variations (Kamagi, 2020). Based on Alali *et al.*, (2020) the inferential comprehension level enables the reader to make inferences or guesses by drawing on their prior knowledge.

Commonly, testing the students' knowledge is a must to measure their capability in using their knowledge. In Indonesia, teachers typically design tests in line with the national curriculum. For assessing reading skills, they focus mainly on comprehension, vocabulary, and grammar. To evaluate reading comprehension specifically, teachers might use factual



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questions to check the understanding of explicit details, and inferential questions to assess the ability to interpret information and draw conclusions from the text.

Therefore, the test-takers generally use the 3 types of strategies to finish language assessments. As stated by Cohen (2022) in Cohen *et al.*, (2023), the categorization of test-taking strategies, a recently updated conceptual framework differentiates between three types: language learner strategies, which rely on the test-taker's language skills and subskills; test-management strategies, which involve responding effectively to test items and tasks; and test-deviousness strategies or test-wiseness before, which are used to avoid revealing true knowledge, such as selecting a multiple-choice option by matching a word in the text with the same word in the choices without understanding its meaning.

The research of test-taking strategies has been explored in paper based test (Ketworrachai & Sappapan, 2022), computer based test (Waiprakhon & Jaturapitakkul, 2018), find the differences between paper based test and computer based test (Yeom & Jun, 2020), or in the other skill like listening (Low & Aryadoust, 2023). Several studies examined the test-taking strategies in high-stakes language test. Because of that, the researcher got inspired to investigate test-taking strategies used by MA Darul Ihsan's students. This study used high school reading tests which include factual or literal questions and inferential questions. The researcher also compared the strategy used by the high score student with the other students. The aims of this research are; 1) What test-taking strategies in an English reading comprehension test are used by students of grade XI at MA Darul Ihsan Samarinda to face factual questions?; 2) What test-taking strategies in an English reading comprehension test are used by students of grade XI at MA Darul Ihsan Samarinda to face inferential questions?; 3) What challenges do the students face in using the two test-taking strategies?

The findings of the present study are expected to add and complement the previous studies related to the test-taking strategies theory in reading comprehension test. The findings are also expected to be a reference for other researchers. This study may be valuable inputs for all EFL teachers to give training or introduce the test-taking strategies to the students.



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## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design and Research Subject

The research used qualitative design to gain insight of the particular phenomenon which focused on the participants' test-taking strategies in a reading comprehension test. This research used the case study as it studies contemporary phenomenon within its real life context when there are no clear boundaries between phenomenon and its context. The researcher applied case study as it carried out to a group of participants.

The research took place at MA Darul Ihsan Samarinda and focused on grade XI who used 2013 Curriculum. Grade XI consists of 119 students divided into four classes: XI IPA 1, XI IPA 2, XI IPS 1, and XI IPS 2. XI IPA 1 has 34 students, XI IPA 2 has 25 students, XI IPS 1 has 35 students, and XI IPS 2 has 25 students. Among this population, the researcher selected 6 learners from each of the highest, medium, and lowest English score groups as representatives based on their reading scores in the first semester. These learners are expected to serve as examples for other learners in solving the questions.

### 2.2. Research Instrument

Several instruments used by the researcher in this study, namely reading test, verbal report from think aloud, and interview. The reading test was developed by the researcher based on English syllabus of 2013 Curriculum. The researcher checked the validity and reliability of factual questions and inferential questions in multiple-choice format before it is distributed to the students. The validity, measured by Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (above 0.404), was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27. For the reliability measured by Cronbach Alpha, all the items were above 0.7 which means the test items were reliable. After the validity and reliability measurements, the reading test was divided into 10 inferential questions and 10 factual questions.

The next instrument is verbal report. In exploring what test-taking strategies readers apply when they complete a reading task, some researchers used verbal report as the instrument of their research (Cohen & Upton, 2006; Lee, 2018; Singh *et al.*, 2021). According to Cohen (2013), there are three types of verbal reports for collecting data on test-



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taking strategies: self-report, self-observation, and self-revelation. The researcher used self-revelation or “think-aloud” in this study. It involves the spontaneous disclosure of cognitive processes while engaging with the test material.

The last instrument is interview. Following the think-aloud protocols, an open-ended interview was conducted after the student finished their reading test. The interview was carried out to know how the students’ experiences in completing the English reading test. The researcher also asked their strategy when they were answering the reading test. The interview was also to find the challenges faced by the students when they applied the strategy in taking an English reading comprehension test.

### **2.3. Data Collection Procedure**

In this study, the researcher used a think aloud method to gather the data because think-aloud data provides valuable insights into the cognitive processes of human thinking as stated by Zhang and Zhang (2019) in McKinley and Rose (2019). The researcher asked the test-takers to think out loud and describe everything that test-takers were thinking about and doing as they deal with each multiple-choice items.

Before the actual act of thinking aloud was carried out, the researcher gave a training first to the students. Zhang and Zhang (2019) in McKinley and Rose (2019) suggest the training was also needed to avoid the challenges that may occur in collecting the data through the think-aloud method. In this training, the researcher gave all the students a form sheet of think aloud. The researcher explained about the think aloud and the purpose of it in this study in Indonesian. The researcher gave the example how to do it. After that, the researcher gave a text with a question of reading test and asked each students to do think aloud as a practice. After they already familiar with it, the researcher conducted the think aloud method.

The researcher gave an English reading comprehension test to each of participants where they took a test in different time. When they were analyzing and trying to complete the test, the researcher asked them to think aloud the process of it. The researcher used recorder



to record the words from students. Once they stopped to think aloud, the researcher approached them and asked what they are thinking about.

The interview was conducted after they finished the English reading test and was an open-ended interview. The researcher asked their strategies when they were completing a reading test as a triangulation from the verbal report. The researcher also asked their challenge when they were applying those strategies.

#### 2.4. Data Analysis Technique

After collecting the data, the researcher used thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) provide six phase in using thematic analysis: become familiar with the data; generate initial codes; search for themes; review themes; define themes; and write-up. The first thing researcher did after gathering the data was transcript the data. After that, the researcher reading and re-reading the transcript data. Next, the researcher started to code the data into test management (TM) and test wiseness (TW) as the second step. The third step, the researcher examined the codes and categorized theme into the same theme because some codes fitted together into a theme. The next step the researcher and the other coders reviewed the themes in step 3 to make sure the themes were correct. In the fifth step, the researcher was defining and naming the themes. The last step or the final result of this analysis is a journal article. The themes for the TM and TW codes as following;

Table 1 Themes for the Test Management (TM) and Test Wiseness (TW)

Themes	Sub Themes	Code
Clarification and understanding	Clarifying the question	TM1, TM2, TM3
Reading and predicting	Reading for clues	TM4, TM5
	Predicting answers	TM6, TM7, TM8
Vocabulary focus	Identifying and checking vocabulary	TM9, TM10, TM11



	Defining and paraphrasing vocabulary	TM13, TM14
	Locating vocabulary in context	TM20
Considering, selecting, and discarding options	Preliminary consideration and selection	TM12
	Postponement and reconsideration	TM16, TM17, TM19
	Background knowledge application	TM18, TM23, TM26
	Meaning-based selection and discarding	TM15, TM21, TM24, TM25, TM27
	Discourse structure application	TM22, TM28
Test-wiseness strategies	Elimination process	TW1
	Using clues	TW2
	Key word matching	TW3

## 2.5 Triangulation

Triangulation is a process of verification that increases validity by incorporating several viewpoints and method. Miles et al., (2014) distinguished five kinds of triangulation in qualitative research. One of them is triangulation by method which used in this research to compare the result from think aloud protocol and interview.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

This study aims to address three primary questions: the strategies students used to answer factual questions, the approaches they adopted for inferential questions, and the challenges they encountered while taking these tests.

### 3.1 Test-Taking Strategy Used to Answer Factual Question

The research findings on test-taking strategies used by grade XI students at MA Darul Ihsan Samarinda to answer factual questions in English reading comprehension tests reveal a



variety strategies employed by the students. Each student used either different or the same strategies as each other. The students' strategies and the frequency with which they used these strategies are shown in Table 2. Test management is coded as TM, and test wiseness is coded as TW. The highest score students are coded as HS1 and HS2, the medium score students as MS1 and MS2, and the lowest score students as LS1 and LS2.

Table 2 Test-Taking Strategy Used to Answer Factual Question

Question Type	Test-Taking Strategy (TM & TW)	Students' Test-Taking Frequency						Overall Strategies Frequencies
		HS1	HS2	MS1	MS2	LS1	LS2	
Factual	TM1	3	4	3	3	6	3	22
	TM4	2	-	2	1	1	1	7
	TM5	5	6	5	4	4	3	27
	TM6	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
	TM10	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
	TM11	-	-	1	2	2	3	8
	TM12	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
	TM13	-	-	4	3	-	-	7
	TM14	-	3	2	4	-	-	9
	TM16	1	1	1	-	-	2	5
	TM17	1	2	-	2	-	3	8
	TM18	3	2	-	1	-	-	6
	TM19	2	1	-	-	1	2	6
	TM21	2	-	2	1	-	-	5
	TM22	6	7	7	5	2	2	29
	TM23	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
TM24	2	-	3	4	-	-	9	
TM26	-	3	2	-	-	-	5	





TM27	2	-	1	-	-	-	3
TM28	2	-	2	2	-	-	6
TW1	1	-	-	-	1	4	6
TW2	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
TW3	-	-	-	-	6	3	9
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>183</b>

Notes:

- TM1: Goes back to the question for clarification: Rereads the question.
- TM4: Reads the question and considers the options before going back to the passage/portion.
- TM5: Reads the question and then reads the passage/portion to look for clues to the answer, either before or while considering options.
- TM6: Predicts or produces own answer after reading the portion of the text referred to by the question.
- TM10: Considers the options and checks the vocabulary option in context.
- TM11: Considers the options and focuses on a familiar option.
- TM12: Considers the options and selects preliminary option(s) (lack Of certainty indicated).
- TM13: Considers the options and defines the vocabulary option.
- TM14: Considers the options and paraphrases the meaning
- TM16: Considers the options and postpones consideration of the option.
- TM17: Considers the options and wrestles with the option meaning.
- TM18: Makes an educated guess (e.g., using background knowledge or extra -textual knowledge).
- TM19: Reconsiders or double-checks the response.
- TM21: Selects options through background knowledge.
- TM22: Selects options through vocabulary, sentence, paragraph, or passage overall meaning (depending on item type).
- TM23: Selects options through elimination of other option(s) as unreasonable based on background knowledge.
- TM24: Selects options through elimination of other option(s) as unreasonable based on paragraph/overall passage meaning.
- TM26: Selects options through their discourse structure.
- TM27: Discards option(s) based on background knowledge.
- TM28: Discards option(s) based on vocabulary, sentence, paragraph, or passage overall meaning as well as discourse structure.
- TW1: Uses the process of elimination (i.e., selecting an option even though it is not understood, out of a vague sense that the other options couldn't be correct).
- TW2: Uses clues in other items to answer an item under consideration.
- TW3: Selects the option because it appears to have a word or phrase from the passage in it—possibly a key word.

From the table 2, it can be seen that the highest score student (HS1 and HS2) employed a wide range of strategies (14 different strategies) with a total usage frequency of 65 times. Furthermore, the medium score students (MS1 and MS2) also used 14 different



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strategies, but with a higher overall frequency (69 times). The lowest score students (LS1 and LS2), in contrast, used fewer strategies (8 strategies) and with a significantly lower frequency (49 times).

Reading for clues (TM5) was among the most commonly used strategies by the highest and medium score students, indicating their focus on understanding the text to find answers. Beside of that, clarifying the question (TM1) was frequently used by the lowest score students, suggesting that these students often needed to reread and better understand the questions before attempting to answer. Meaning-based selection (TM22) was another strategy heavily relied upon by the highest and medium score students, showing their ability to select answers based on the overall meaning of the text.

The strategies categorized under test management (TM) were more frequently used by all student groups compared to test wiseness (TW) strategies. This suggests that most students were more focused on directly engaging with the text and the questions rather than using test-taking shortcuts or strategies that could prevent a deep understanding of the text. However, the lowest score students were more inclined to use test wiseness strategies like keyword matching (TW3), which may indicate a reliance on superficial text cues rather than deeper comprehension.

In conclusion, the highest and medium score students used a broader range of strategies more frequently when answering the factual question, particularly those that involved deep engagement with the text, such as reading for clues and meaning-based selection. In contrast, the lowest score students demonstrated a more limited strategy repertoire and relied more on test wiseness strategies like keyword matching. This suggests that high scoring students were more focused on understanding the text and employing comprehensive strategies, whereas low scoring students tended to depend on surface-level cues and needed more effort to understand the questions, potentially limiting their overall effectiveness during the test.



### 3.2 Test-Taking Strategy Used to Answer Inferential Question

The research findings on test-taking strategies used by grade XI students at MA Darul Ihsan Samarinda to answer inferential questions in English reading comprehension tests reveal a variety of strategies employed by the students. Similar to Table 2, the strategies are categorized into test management (TM) and test wiseness (TW) strategies. The table shows how frequently these strategies were used by different groups of students; highest score students (HS1 and HS2), medium score students (MS1 and MS2), and lowest score students (LS1 and LS2).

Table 3 Test-Taking Strategy Used to Answer Inferential Question

Question Type	Test-Taking Strategy (TM & TW)	Students' Test-Taking Frequency						Overall Strategies Frequencies
		HS1	HS2	MS1	MS2	LS1	LS2	
Inferential	TM1	3	4	1	3	4	3	18
	TM4	4	1	4	2	1	3	15
	TM5	3	4	4	3	4	5	23
	TM11	-	-	-	2	5	3	10
	TM12	2	-	-	-	-	-	2
	TM13	-	-	4	2	-	-	6
	TM14	-	4	2	2	-	-	8
	TM16	2	2	1	1	-	1	7
	TM17	1	2	-	1	-	-	4
	TM18	3	-	-	-	-	-	3
	TM19	-	4	1	1	-	1	7
	TM21	3	-	1	-	-	-	4
	TM22	7	7	9	6	6	3	38
	TM24	2	-	3	3	-	-	8
TM26	1	2	1	1	-	1	6	



TM27	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
TM28	-	-	2	-	-	-	2
TW1	1	1	-	-	1	4	7
TW3	-	-	-	-	4	-	4
<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>173</b>

Notes:

- TM1: Goes back to the question for clarification: Rereads the question.
- TM4: Reads the question and considers the options before going back to the passage/portion.
- TM5: Reads the question and then reads the passage/portion to look for clues to the answer, either before or while considering options.
- TM11: Considers the options and focuses on a familiar option.
- TM12: Considers the options and selects preliminary option(s) (lack Of certainty indicated).
- TM13: Considers the options and defines the vocabulary option.
- TM14: Considers the options and paraphrases the meaning
- TM16: Considers the options and postpones consideration of the option.
- TM17: Considers the options and wrestles with the option meaning.
- TM18: Makes an educated guess (e.g., using background knowledge or extra-textual knowledge).
- TM19: Reconsiders or double-checks the response.
- TM21: Selects options through background knowledge.
- TM22: Selects options through vocabulary, sentence, paragraph, or passage overall meaning (depending on item type).
- TM24: Selects options through elimination of other option(s) as unreasonable based on paragraph/overall passage meaning.
- TM26: Selects options through their discourse structure.
- TM27: Discards option(s) based on background knowledge.
- TM28: Discards option(s) based on vocabulary, sentence, paragraph, or passage overall meaning as well as discourse structure.
- TW1: Uses the process of elimination (i.e., selecting an option even though it is not understood, out of a vague sense that the other options couldn't be correct).
- TW3: Selects the option because it appears to have a word or phrase from the passage in it—possibly a key word

Based on the table 3, it can be identified that the strategies all students used to answer inferential questions. Highest score students (HS1 and HS2) used 13 different strategies with a combined frequency of 63 times. They demonstrated a balanced use of various strategies, showing flexibility in their approach to inferential questions. Medium score students (MS1 and MS2) employed 12 different strategies, using them 61 times in total. Although their strategy use was somewhat similar to the highest score students, they relied slightly more on specific strategies. Lowest score students (LS1 and LS2) used fewer strategies (9 strategies),



with a total frequency of 49 times. They demonstrated a more limited range of strategies compared to their higher score peers.

Reading for clues (TM5) and selecting options based on overall meaning (TM22) were among the most frequently used strategies by both the highest and medium score students. This suggests that these students often revisited the text to gather clues and relied on their understanding of the overall text meaning to answer inferential questions. Clarifying the question (TM1) was frequently used by all groups, especially by the lowest score students, indicating that rereading and ensuring a clear understanding of the question was a common approach across the board. Medium score students notably used strategies like defining and paraphrasing vocabulary (TM13 and TM14) more often than their peers, reflecting their need to break down complex language to understand the text better.

The process of elimination (TW1) was the TW strategies used by all students groups, though it was more prevalent among the lowest score students, indicating their reliance on selecting option though they did not understand the meaning. Not only that, but keyword matching (TW3) also the TW strategy employed by the lowest score students as a way to match words from the question with the text without necessarily understanding the deeper meaning. The reliance on this strategy suggests a struggle with more sophisticated comprehension and a tendency to depend on surface-level cues.

The analysis of strategies used by students to answer inferential questions highlights significant differences in their approach based on their score levels. Highest and medium score students exhibited a broad and balanced use of strategies, frequently revisiting the text and utilizing their understanding of the overall meaning to answer questions. In contrast, the lowest score students demonstrated a more limited range of strategies and relied more heavily on superficial techniques like process of elimination and keyword matching. This suggests that while highest and medium score students were more adept at deeper comprehension and flexible in their strategy use, lower-scoring students struggled with complex text interpretation and often depended on surface-level cues to answer inferential questions.



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### 3.3 The Challenges in Applying The Test-Taking Strategy

The interview conducted to get the information about students' attitude toward English, their test-taking strategies and their challenge when applying those strategies in dealing the reading test.

#### 3.3.1 Participant Attitudes Towards English

The students' attitudes towards English had a significant influence on how they approached and performed in the test.

**HS1 (High Score Student 1)** : "I love English." This positive attitude likely contributed to HS1's confidence and willingness to engage with challenging texts.

**HS2 (High Score Student 2)** : "I'd say that I like English. If I had to express in percent, it would be 70%." This positive but not overly enthusiastic attitude likely helped HS2 stay engaged and confident during the test, allowing him to use a balanced variety of strategies.

**MS1 (Medium Score Student 1)** : "I like it quite a bit although it requires some understanding of the words." MS1's enjoyment of English is contingent upon comprehension, indicating a balanced view towards the language.

**MS2 (Medium Score Student 2)** : "I don't know if I like English or not, but I enjoy it when I learn English." MS2 is uncertain about his feeling towards English but enjoys learning it. This ambivalence may lead MS2 to employ strategies like rereading and clarifying vocabulary, reflecting his need for reassurance and deeper understanding when faced with challenging texts.

**LS1 (Low Score Student 1)** : "I think English is difficult. I don't understand the words if I don't interpret them first." LS1's negative attitude reflects the struggle with vocabulary, which can hinder performance and strategy use.

**LS2 (Low Score Student 2)** : "I don't really like English because I don't know much about the vocabulary or grammar." LS2 has a negative attitude towards English, mainly due to difficulties with vocabulary and grammar. This negative perception likely hindered LS's



confidence and led to a reliance on superficial strategies like keyword matching, rather than engaging deeply with the text.

### 3.3.2 Strategies Used During the Test

The students employed several strategies when completing the reading comprehension test. When students faced the challenges, they also used those strategies to manage and overcome the challenges.

**HS1 (High Score Student 1)** : “I would like read the question first then the text, like, the narrative and stuff, and then I would read the options, and I would exclude the option that I didn't think were right. And then the option that I think was right, usually, there's, like, 2 options. I would hesitate, but then I would decide which one is more correct to me.” This methodical approach allowed HS1 to systematically narrow down choices and make informed decisions.

**HS2 (High Score Student 2)** : “I read the question first. After that, I read the text and read the options. If I forget the question, I will reread it and then select the answer that I think is the correct one. When I find a difficult question, I usually look at the text again to find the answer or get the clue in the text. Sometimes, I also look at the other options that may give me other clues about which one the correct answer.” The student used a combination of direct text engagement and test-management techniques to ensure a thorough and thoughtful response to each question.

**MS1 (Medium Score Student 1)** : “Usually I read the text first. If I find something difficult, I reread the text. If there is a text, I reread it until find an answer that connects with the choice.” This strategy indicates a reliance on textual clues, which can be effective but time-consuming.

**MS2 (Medium Score Student 2)** : “I read the question and then the text. After that, I find the clues on the text and select the answer based on the text.” This strategy reflects a methodical approach where the student prioritizes understanding the question, finding



specific textual clues, and making an answer choice directly supported by the text. This suggests a strong focus on comprehension and accuracy in responding to test questions.

**LS1 (Low Score Student 1)** : “I read the question first, then read the text. I read a little bit of the multiple choices. After that, I looked for similarities in the words from the text with the multiple choice. I reread it again and then looked for a match.” This keyword matching strategy suggests a surface-level approach that might overlook deeper comprehension.

**LS2 (Low Score Student 2)** : “I read the question and the text. If I don't understand the meaning, I select the option that I think is the right one even though I don't understand the meaning of it.” This strategy suggests that the student struggles with comprehension and often relies on guessing when unsure of the meaning. This approach may lead to less accurate answers and indicates a need for stronger reading comprehension skills.

### 3.3.3 Challenges Encountered

The challenges faced by the students were varied and affected their ability to apply strategies effectively.

**HS1 (High Score Student 1)** : “For me, it's easy because I'm used to reading the questions first to save time.” HS1 did not report significant challenges, suggesting familiarity and comfort with the test format.

**HS2 (High Score Student 2)** : “I think there are no difficulties when using those strategies because I usually do that when I am dealing with reading comprehension.” The student feels comfortable and confident in using the strategies for reading comprehension, suggesting that these methods have become a routine part of his approach to reading tests.

**MS1 (Medium Score Student 1)** : “Sometimes there are things that are difficult. Sometimes I feel that the multiple choices and the text are not connected. Sometimes I suddenly feel blank about the meaning of the words.” This highlights issues with comprehension and connection between questions and text.

**MS2 (Medium Score Student 2)** : “Yes, I find difficulties. Because sometimes I don't understand some vocabularies so I have to read again and until I understand or get the clue





from the text.” MS2 faces difficulties, particularly with vocabulary, which often requires him to reread the text multiple times.

**LS1 (Low Score Student 1)** : “Yes, I have difficulties. Sometimes I don't know what to do first because I don't really understand English.” LS1's difficulty with understanding English and determining a starting point underscores the need for better foundational skills

**LS2 (Low Score Student 2)** : “I think I have. Usually I don't understand much about English because I have to translate first into Indonesian. When I'm doing a reading test, I usually don't know what to do first. So I apply strategy that I can to complete the test.” LS2 struggles with understanding English directly and often relies on translation into Indonesian, which complicates his test-taking process.

### 3.4 Discussion

The findings from this study reveal distinct patterns in how students of varying proficiency levels approach reading comprehension tests. High and medium score students tend to employ a broader and more balanced range of strategies, focusing on deep engagement with the text, such as reading for clues and understanding the overall meaning before selecting answers. In contrast, low score students exhibit a more limited strategy range, often relying on superficial methods like keyword matching and guessing when they do not fully understand the text.

The students' attitudes towards English significantly influenced their strategy use and test performance. High score students generally have positive attitudes towards English, which contributes to their confidence and willingness to engage with challenging texts. This positive disposition enables them to employ a variety of strategies effectively, such as rereading the text for clues and considering different options before making a final decision. Conversely, low score students who have negative attitudes towards English struggle with vocabulary and comprehension, leading them to rely on less effective strategies like keyword matching or guessing.



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The challenges faced by students also varied based on their proficiency levels. High score students did not report significant difficulties, indicating that their familiarity with the strategies allowed them to use them effectively without much hindrance. However, medium and low score students reported difficulties related to vocabulary comprehension and the connection between questions and text. These challenges often led to repeated rereading of the text and reliance on translation, which could slow down their process and affect overall performance.

According to those findings, the teachers should focus on vocabulary enhancement, particularly for lower-performing students who struggle with understanding English texts. Introducing targeted vocabulary exercises and contextual learning can help students build a stronger foundation, reducing their reliance on superficial strategies and translation. Given the varied effectiveness of strategies employed by different student groups, teachers should provide explicit instruction on test-taking strategies. This includes training students on how to effectively engage with the text, identify key information, and make informed answer choices based on evidence from the text.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study provides valuable insights into the test-taking strategies employed by secondary high school students during English reading comprehension tests, highlighting the distinct differences in strategy use among students with varying proficiency levels. However, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

One of the primary limitations is the small sample size, which included only six students across three proficiency levels (high, medium, and low). This limited sample may not fully represent the broader population of students, making it difficult to generalize the findings to all secondary high school students. The results reflect the experiences and strategies of a specific group, which may not be applicable to students with different backgrounds, educational contexts, or learning environments.



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To address the limitation, future research could expand on this study by using a larger and more diverse sample. Including students from different schools, regions, and educational backgrounds would provide a more comprehensive understanding of test-taking strategies across a broader population. This would enhance the generalizability of the findings and allow for more robust conclusions.

Additionally, future studies could incorporate quantitative methods to measure the effectiveness of specific strategies. For example, researchers could use experimental designs to compare the performance of students who receive explicit instruction in test-taking strategies with those who do not. Moreover, mixed-method research designs that combine qualitative and quantitative approaches could offer a more holistic view of students' test-taking strategies. By triangulating data from different sources, researchers can validate findings and reduce the potential biases associated with any single method, leading to more reliable and comprehensive conclusions.

In conclusion, while this study sheds light on important aspects of students' test-taking strategies, addressing its limitations and exploring new research avenues will be crucial for furthering our understanding and improving educational practices in reading comprehension.

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