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## Identifying Reading Strategies to Teach Literal, Reorganisation and Inferential Comprehension Questions to ESL Students

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Reading strategies assist English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to teach reading comprehension effectively to ESL students in developing their reading comprehension abilities. This study aimed at identifying reading strategies used by teachers that help them teach literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions to ESL students. The target population was the ESL teachers teaching at the secondary school level in Penang, Malaysia. The ESL teachers from ten secondary schools who were teaching English to Form Four students were selected through convenient sampling. A questionnaire consisting of reading strategies that help ESL teachers teach literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions developed by the researchers was used to collect data. The data were analysed through descriptive statistics to determine the frequency of reading strategies used by the ESL teachers. The findings, based on the quantitative analysis of data, revealed that the ESL teachers use different reading strategies for teaching literal and reorganisation comprehension questions but a small repertoire of reading strategies was employed for teaching inferential comprehension questions. Therefore, the researchers suggested a productive means of reading strategies to employ for teaching reading comprehension, particularly for teaching inferential comprehension questions in order to enhance ESL students' higher order thinking skills and reading comprehension abilities.

**Keywords:** ESL teachers, inferential questions, literal questions, reading strategies, reorganisation questions

## Introduction

Reading comprehension is an interactive process in which the reader constructs meaning from the text by using his/her prior knowledge and comprehension strategies (Brevik, 2014; Orasanu & Penney, 1986; Rumelhart, 1978). Baker and Brown (1984) and Brown and Abeywickrama (2004) state that readers who fail to use appropriate reading comprehension strategies might suffer comprehension loss and show lower performance, therefore; the readers should employ appropriate comprehension strategies and guidelines to increase their comprehension and understanding (Brown, Armbruster, & Baker, 1986).

The lower performance of Malaysian students in reading in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) literacy test 2012 for 15-year-old students (OECD, 2013) drew the researchers' attention to secondary school ESL students' proficiency in reading comprehension. According to OECD (2013), Malaysia ranked 52 out of 65 countries in the international assessment program and Malaysian students' scores were 398 in reading, below the global average score of 496. According to Chu (2013), Malaysian students' disappointing and declining results in the PISA 2012, particularly in reading, came as a blow to the Malaysian education system. The results were worse than the students of neighboring countries; Singapore (542), Thailand (441) and Vietnam (508). In spite of a good education system and infrastructure, Malaysian students were not performing in the area of reading.

The low performance of Malaysian students in reading comprehension could be due to various factors. Factors which often serve to deter ESL students from gaining better scores are environmental factors, reading comprehension abilities and the way ESL teachers teach reading comprehension to ESL students. Their performance also depends on how teachers employ reading strategies for teaching reading comprehension questions. As a result, the use of reading strategies ultimately affects ESL students' reading comprehension (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003). Therefore, in view of the situation, the current study addressed the issues of identifying reading strategies being used by ESL teachers to teach literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions at the secondary school level since teaching approach and student performance have a strong correlation (Diseth, 2011).

## Reading Comprehension Strategies

According to Maine (2013), reading comprehension strategies are conscious plans and sets of steps that good readers use to make sense of the text since teaching reading is an arduous task. The comprehension strategy instruction helps students become purposeful and active readers who are in control of their own reading comprehension. Adler (2012) emphasises that the seven strategies of monitoring comprehension, meta-cognition, graphic and semantic organisation, answering questions, generating questions, recognising story structure and summarising have a firm scientific basis for improving text comprehension. These reading strategies facilitate readers to comprehend the text properly. Moreover, a great deal of research has documented the importance of using well-developed cognitive strategies such as repetition, guessing meanings from context and summarising textual material (Lapp, Flood, Brock, & Fisher, 2013; Zimmerman & Williams, 1982). According to Keene and Zimmermann (1997) as cited in Block, Gambrell, and Pressley (2002), although there are lots of reading strategies, the most effective reading strategies are the activating of prior knowledge, prioritising information, questioning the author and the text, drawing inferences, retelling or synthesising and using fix-up strategies to repair comprehension.

According to Blachowicz, Blachowicz and Ogle (2008), cognitive and metacognitive strategies are effective strategies that readers use to accomplish the goal of comprehension. Cognitive strategies are mental processes involved in achieving something, whereas metacognitive strategies are the mental processes that help us think about and check how we are going to complete the task. Cognitive and metacognitive strategies

may overlap depending on the purpose or goal. For example, as the cognitive strategies involved in making a cake or curry proceed (following each step in order), the metacognitive strategies assess and monitor the progress (to check whether any step has been missed). Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) have stated that the term strategy has often been used synonymously with the term 'skills'. They defined reading strategies as 'deliberate goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode text, understand the words and construct meanings of the text' (p. 368).

Zare and Othman (2013) conclude in their studies that there is a strong relationship between the use of reading strategy and reading comprehension. Therefore, in connection with reading comprehension, ESL students must understand a handful of comprehension question types and their structures. They must also recognise the question types and understand the purpose of the questions to identify their answers correctly (Bickerstaff, 2010; Henderson & Buskist, 2011; Kintsch & Vipond, 2014; Pressley, 2006). According to Barrett's taxonomy, literal, reorganisation and inferential reading comprehension questions are crucial for ESL students to understand the main thrust of teaching reading skills. Appropriate reading comprehension strategies are helpful for locating the supporting details and main ideas, identifying simple cause and effect, acquiring the meanings of words by using contextual clues, making inferences and drawing conclusions in connection with the literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension skills as stated in Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984).

Furthermore, using different reading strategies for each reading skill involves embedding literacy activities to inculcate the real spirit of teaching reading comprehension (Koda, 2005). Similarly, an adequate application of reading strategies might enhance ESL students' comprehension efficiently and successfully (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thornhill, & Joshi, 2007). Therefore, ESL teachers must be aware of how to employ appropriate reading strategies for teaching reading comprehension to inculcate a body of knowledge. They must also be aware of learners' needs, existing knowledge and capabilities to provide the skills and approaches to bridge the gaps (Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 1988; Lewis, Yang, Rose, & Li, 2004). Otherwise, the reading comprehension process will not be accomplished successfully (Duke & Pearson, 2008).

In connection with the use of reading strategies, Saraswathi (2004) emphasises that different reading strategies should be used simultaneously to identify the answers for literal comprehension questions. Spörer, Brunstein, and Kieschke (2009) add that some of the reading strategies such as reading the title of the passage, topic sentence and first paragraph support in identifying keywords might help answer literal comprehension questions. With reference to using reading strategies for answering reorganisation comprehension questions, Chaka and Booi-Ncetani (2015) suggest the SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite and review) strategy to identify answers of reorganisation comprehension questions. They also advise the teachers to employ different reading strategies, namely; activating prior knowledge, paraphrasing the text and adjusting reading speed to answer reorganisation comprehension questions. On the other hand, Humos and Mustafa (2014) and Zimmerman and Smit (2014) propose skimming and scanning the text to answer reorganisation comprehension questions. Furthermore, Nuttall (2005), Othman and Jaidi (2012) and Chik (2011) recommend that ESL teachers skim the text, read the signpost questions and consolidate the information taken from different parts of the text that assist them to answer reorganisation comprehension questions. For answering inferential comprehension questions, Klingner et al. (2004) propose some effective reading strategies such as summarising, paraphrasing, asking supplementary questions, using contextual clues, making predictions and revising predictions to answer inferential comprehension questions while Tovani (2004), Sibberson and Szymusiak (2003) and Gallagher (2009) suggest employing diverse reading strategies such as activating students' previous knowledge, self-questioning the text, making connections between different ideas, using sensory images and synthesising information to answer inferential comprehension questions.

Regarding comprehension questions, literal comprehension questions can be answered based on the information explicitly stated in the text, and answers of reorganisation comprehension questions can also be answered based on the information that is explicitly stated in the passage; although, information taken from

different parts of the text needs to be analysed, integrated and synthesised. The answers of inferential comprehension questions are predicted and assumed based on the information and logical clues implicitly stated in the text. The reader must also make connections between previous knowledge and the learned information to answer inferential comprehension questions (Barrett, 1972).

Barrett's (1972) taxonomy of reading comprehension consists of five categories of reading skills: literal comprehension, reorganisation comprehension, inferential comprehension, evaluation and appreciation. The first three categories are related to teaching language skills, whereas the remaining two categories, evaluation and appreciation, concern the teaching of literature. Therefore, the present study focuses on the first three categories, namely literal comprehension, reorganisation comprehension and inferential comprehension. These categories are divided into different sub-skills in this taxonomy. All the categories and sub-skills are interlinked and interwoven with each other. This taxonomy deals specifically with reading comprehension.

Day and Park (2005) have presented a reading comprehension taxonomy including a detailed picture of six types of comprehension: literal, reorganisation, inference, prediction, evaluation and personal response. This taxonomy is very useful for ESL teachers to make their own comprehension questions for texts and students to better understand what they read. It can be used to help students become efficient interactive readers (Vongkrachang & Chinwonno, 2015). All the sub-skills presented in Day and Park's (2005) taxonomy are valuable and beneficial for ESL students to enhance their reading comprehension. However, as regards the present study, only the first three types of comprehension skills, literal, reorganisation and inference, which are similar to the first three categories of the Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension, were addressed. Likewise, similar skills such as remembering (literal comprehension), understanding (reorganisation) and analysing and creating (inferential comprehension) taken from Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives revised by Anderson et al. (2001) were also a focus in the current study since they provide assistance in setting the goals of reading comprehension. Similarly, similar-skill specifications such as literal, reorganisation and inferential taken from the Malaysian English language syllabus have also been addressed in this study.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The major objective of the study was to identify reading strategies used by ESL teachers to teach three types of comprehension questions namely literal comprehension, reorganisation comprehension and inferential comprehension questions. Therefore, the current study aims at answering the following research questions:

1. What are the reading strategies used by ESL teachers to teach literal comprehension questions?
2. What are the reading strategies used by ESL teachers to teach reorganisation comprehension questions?
3. What are the reading strategies used by ESL teachers to teach inferential comprehension questions?

### **Population and Sampling**

The population for the study consists of ESL teachers teaching English to Form Four students at the secondary school level in Penang, Malaysia. In the Malaysian National Education System, Form Four is known as upper secondary and the students are aged from 15 to 16 years (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Regarding the sample for the current study, the ESL teachers (N=84) were taken from 10 different

secondary schools from Penang, Malaysia through convenient sampling as the research was conducted in secondary schools as part of the school of educational studies' project of Universiti Sains Malaysia. The demographic characteristics of the sample are as follows:

TABLE 1  
*Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N=84)*

<i>Demographic characteristics</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
School	Urban	5(50%)
	Rural	5(50%)
Gender	Females	60 (71.43%)
	Males	24 (28.57%)
Ethnicity	Malays	21 (25%)
	Chinese	38 (45.24%)
	Indians	22 (26.19%)
	Others	3 (3.57%)
Teaching Experience (years)	Below 1-7	17 (20.24%)
	8-15	21 (25%)
	16-22	14 (16.67%)
	23-29	17 (20.24%)
	30 and above	15 (17.86%)

## Research Instrument

A close-ended questionnaire consisting of 46 items to identify reading strategies for teaching literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions was developed by the researchers to collect data. A 5 point Likert scale questionnaire with 1 indicating 'Never', 2 'Rarely', 3 'Sometimes', 4 'Frequently' and 5 'Always' was used to collect quantitative data from the respondents. The reading strategies included in the questionnaire were in line with the reading skills stated in the Descriptors of Reading Ability adopted from Abdul Rashid, Lin, and Shaik Abdul Malik (2010), Barrett's (1972) taxonomy of reading comprehension, Day and Park's (2005) taxonomy of reading comprehension, Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives revised by Anderson et al. (2001), and skill specifications in the Malaysian English language syllabus.

## Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Two content experts, who were experienced TESOL university lecturers, analysed and examined the instrument to see whether it could measure what it intended to measure. With reference to the validity of the instrument, the content experts analysed and checked the validity of the tool with regard to the suitability of the Likert scale, the constructs, items for each construct, use of language suitable for the respondents, sequence of the items, relationship of the items with each other, use of terminologies related to reading strategies used in the items and length of the questionnaire. Finally, some changes were made to modify and refine the instrument based on the feedback and valuable input provided by the content experts.

After testing the content validity, the reliability of the questionnaire was also determined. A pilot study was conducted using the questionnaire to find out the reliability. Forty-six ESL teachers from four secondary schools in Penang, Malaysia were selected for random administration of the questionnaire. Out of 46 ESL teachers, 38 respondents completed and returned the questionnaire; therefore, the return rate was 82 %. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each construct of the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha values of reading strategies for teaching literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions were 0.854, 0.943 and 0.906 respectively. These indicate a high level of reliability. The overall reliability coefficient of the

questionnaire was 0.962, which also represents a high level of internal consistency. After determining the reliability of the instrument, the data were collected for the actual research.

## Results and Discussion

The results of the current study revealed to what extent the ESL teachers used reading strategies to teach literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions. Reading strategies used by the ESL teachers for each type of comprehension question are stated below.

### Reading Strategies for Teaching Literal Comprehension Questions

Two sub-skills, namely identifying supporting detail and locating the main idea from the text, were focused on under literal comprehension in this section. Table 2 illustrates the results of the respondents regarding using reading strategies to teach literal comprehension questions in pursuance of research question 1. It also indicates which reading strategies the ESL teachers use to a great extent or a smaller extent to identify supporting details and main ideas from the text.

TABLE 2

*ESL Teachers' Use of Reading Strategies for Teaching Literal Comprehension Questions (N=84)*

Item No	Item	Never Rarely Sometimes Frequently Always					Mean	SD
		n*	n*	n*	n*	n*		
1	Read the questions first before reading the passage	5 (6)	28 (33.3)	25 (29.8)	21 (25)	5 (6)	2.92	1.144
2	Preview the text	1 (1.2)	2 (2.4)	20 (23.8)	36 (42.9)	25 (29.8)	3.99	0.829
3	Identify the keywords from the questions	2 (2.4)	2 (2.4)	16 (19)	36 (42.9)	28 (33.3)	4.03	0.849
4	Find the topic sentence	2 (2.4)	8 (9.5)	25 (29.8)	34 (40.5)	15 (17.9)	3.62	0.968
5	Identify the keywords from the passage	1 (1.2)	6 (7.1)	18 (21.4)	37 (44)	22 (26.2)	3.87	0.929
6	Scan the text for a specific piece of information	2 (2.4)	2 (2.4)	16 (19)	33 (39.3)	31 (36.9)	4.06	0.936
7	Locate supporting details from the keywords	1 (1.2)	5 (6)	23 (27.4)	37 (44)	18 (21.4)	3.79	0.893
8	Distinguish between important and unimportant supporting details	2 (2.4)	9 (10.7)	27 (32.1)	32 (38.1)	14 (16.7)	3.56	0.976
9	Skim the text to find out the main ideas/concepts	2 (2.4)	2 (2.4)	17 (20.2)	40 (47.6)	23 (27.4)	3.95	0.89
10	Read the signpost questions	1 (1.2)	31 (36.9)	28 (33.3)	18 (21.4)	6 (7.1)	2.96	0.929
11	Locate answers of the signpost questions through explicit information from the text.	1 (1.2)	29 (34.5)	30 (35.7)	15 (17.9)	9 (10.7)	3.02	0.948
Average Response and SD							3.61	0.936

\* Number of respondents.

Values in parentheses indicate percentage.

The data presented in Table 2 indicate that skimming the text to find out the main ideas or concepts was the most widely used reading strategy. It was used by 47.6 % of the ESL teachers and ranked first (mean= 3.95) amongst all other reading strategies (item 9). 44 % of the ESL teachers frequently identified the keywords from the passage and located supporting details from the keywords in order to teach literal comprehension

questions (items 5 and 7). 42.9 % of the ESL teachers responded that they frequently previewed the text and identified the keywords from the questions for teaching literal comprehension questions (items 2 and 3). Finding the topic sentence was also one of the reading strategies that was frequently employed (40.5 % of the ESL teachers) (item 4). Some other reading strategies such as scanning the text for a specific piece of information and distinguishing between important and unimportant supporting details were also frequently used by 39.3 % and 38.1 % of the ESL teachers respectively (see items 6 and 8).

The data also indicate that there were only a few reading strategies that were always used by the ESL teachers. Approximately 37 % of the ESL teachers scanned the text for a specific piece of information (item 6), whereas only 6 % read the questions first before reading the passage (item 1). It appeared from the data that the majority of the ESL teachers did not always use a variety of reading strategies. On the other hand, there were a few reading strategies which the ESL teachers used rarely. Approximately 37 % rarely read the signpost questions for better reading comprehension (item 10), and 34.5 % of the respondents rarely located answers for the signpost questions through explicit information from the text (item 11). Moreover, the data indicate that a very small number of the ESL teachers, ranging between 1 % and 6 %, never used reading strategies to teach literal comprehension questions.

Furthermore, 29.8 % of the ESL teachers sometimes read the questions first before reading the passage and approximately 35.7 % reported that sometimes they located answers of the signpost questions through explicit information from the text. In contrast, some of the reading strategies such as reading the questions first before reading the passage, reading the signpost questions and locating answers for the signpost questions through explicit information from the text were not widely used by the ESL teachers. However, the average response (3.61) indicates that the ESL teachers frequently used various reading strategies for teaching literal comprehension questions.

The findings stated above are consistent with Saraswathi (2004) who concluded that ESL teachers employ multiple reading strategies to teach literal comprehension questions. A study conducted by Spörer, Brunstein, and Kieschke (2009) reveals that ESL teachers use various reading strategies, particularly asking questions, clarifying the main idea, reading the title of the passage, topic sentence and first paragraph of the text very carefully, and identifying words or concepts to teach literal comprehension questions. Similarly, Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, and Baker (2001) conclude in their studies that ESL teachers employ manifold comprehension strategies such as asking generic questions (with wh-question words like who, where and what), rereading the text, identifying the principal components of the story/text, examining and skimming pages to find supporting details and main ideas, looking for important words, and previewing the text to enhance ESL students' literal comprehension capabilities. Moreover, the results of the study are in line with Prado and Plourde (2011) who declared that there was a significant increase in the ESL students' reading comprehension after ESL teachers employed various reading strategies.

The findings show that some of the reading strategies such as reading the questions first before reading the passage, reading the signpost questions, and locating answers of the signpost questions through explicit information from the text for teaching literal comprehension questions were not used optimally by the ESL teachers for teaching literal comprehension questions. These reading strategies were rarely used. These findings are not consistent with Nuttall (2005), Weyers and McMillan (2011), Merkuri and Boboli (2012), Saraswathi (2004), and Kirton (2012) who found in their studies that such types of reading strategies support ESL teachers in their teaching of literal comprehension questions.

## **Reading Strategies for Teaching Reorganisation Comprehension Questions**

The second objective of the study was to identify reading strategies used by ESL teachers for teaching reorganisation comprehension questions. This section shows to what extent the ESL teachers used reading

strategies to teach reorganisation comprehension questions. Three sub-skills, identifying simple cause and effect, acquiring the meanings of words by using contextual clues and extracting supporting details, were the reading strategies focused on for teaching reorganisation comprehension questions in line with research question 2. The results are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3  
*ESL Teachers' Use of Reading Strategies for Teaching Reorganisation Comprehension Questions (N=84)*

Item No	Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Mean	SD
		n*	n*	n*	n*	n*		
12	Read the questions first before reading the passage	3 (3.6)	7 (8.3)	23 (27.4)	31 (36.9)	20 (23.8)	3.69	1.041
13	Preview the text	1 (1.2)	39 (46.4)	22 (26.2)	20 (23.8)	2 (2.4)	2.80	0.841
14	Identify the key concepts from the questions	1 (1.2)	42 (50.0)	22 (26.2)	1 (1.2)	18 (21.4)	2.92	0.799
15	Read the signpost questions (questions indicated beside the text)	28 (33.3)	33 (39.3)	1 (1.2)	18 (21.4)	4 (4.8)	2.25	0.905
16	Summarise the text to identify supporting details	39 (46.4)	21 (25.0)	14 (16.7)	9 (10.7)	1 (1.2)	1.95	0.923
17	Identify the key concepts from the passage	1 (1.2)	2 (2.4)	18 (21.4)	42 (50.0)	21 (25.0)	3.95	0.820
18	Identify difficult/new words to figure out their meanings with the contextual clues	2 (2.4)	7 (8.3)	13 (15.5)	36 (42.9)	26 (31.0)	3.92	1.008
19	Skim the text to find out the cause and effect	1 (1.2)	38 (45.2)	22 (26.2)	6 (7.1)	17 (20.2)	3.00	0.900
20	Scan the text to find out the cause and effect	2 (2.4)	6 (7.1)	25 (29.8)	36 (42.9)	15 (17.9)	3.67	0.936
21	Connect the previous knowledge with the learned information	3 (3.6)	2 (2.4)	27 (32.1)	39 (46.4)	13 (15.5)	3.68	0.894
22	Analyse the information to find the answers	22 (26.2)	38 (45.2)	21 (25.0)	2 (2.4)	1 (1.2)	2.07	0.847
23	Reorganise the information to locate the answers	2 (2.4)	5 (6.0)	28 (33.3)	35 (41.7)	14 (16.7)	3.64	0.914
24	Locate supporting details from the keywords	1 (1.2)	42 (50.0)	23 (27.4)	13 (15.5)	5 (6.0)	2.75	0.841
25	Distinguish between important and unimportant supporting details	2 (2.4)	6 (7.1)	23 (27.4)	39 (46.4)	14 (16.7)	3.68	0.920
26	Reread the text to find supporting details	5 (6.0)	12 (14.3)	37 (44.0)	22 (26.2)	8 (9.5)	3.19	1.000
27	Synthesise the information not clearly stated in the text	2 (2.4)	10 (11.9)	32 (38.1)	34 (40.5)	6 (7.1)	3.38	0.877
28	Consolidate (combine) the information from more than a single source	34 (40.5)	28 (33.3)	15 (17.9)	1 (1.2)	6 (7.1)	2.01	0.883
29	Integrate the information clearly stated from the text to support the main points	2 (2.4)	8 (9.5)	36 (42.9)	32 (38.1)	6 (7.1)	3.38	0.849
30	Formulate the correct answer of the questions	3 (3.6)	1 (1.2)	31 (36.9)	35 (41.7)	14 (16.7)	3.67	0.896
Average Response and SD							3.14	0.899

\* Number of respondents.

Values in parentheses indicate percentage.

The data presented in Table 3 indicate that the respondents frequently used some of the reading strategies for teaching reorganisation comprehension questions (see items 12, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29 and 30). 50 % of the ESL teachers frequently identified the key concepts from the passage (item 17) and 46.4 % frequently connected their previous knowledge with the learned information (item 21) and distinguished between important and unimportant supporting details (item 25). 42.9 % of respondents identified difficult

and/or new words to figure out their meanings from the contextual clues (item 18) and scanned the text to find the cause and effect relationship (item 20). In addition, 41.7 % of informants reported that they reorganised information (item 23) and formulated the correct answer of the reorganisation comprehension questions (item 30) to answer reorganisation comprehension questions.

The data also reflect that very few ESL teachers constantly used certain reading strategies. For example, only 1 % ESL teachers always summarised the text to identify supporting details (item 16) and analysed the information to locate the answers (item 22). However, 25 % ESL teachers always identified the key concepts from the passage to find the answers for reorganisation comprehension questions (item 17).

There were some reading strategies that were rarely or sometimes used by the ESL teachers for teaching reorganisation comprehension questions. In this regard, 50 % of the ESL teachers rarely identified the key concepts from the questions (item 14) and located supporting details from the keywords (item 24), and 45.2 % of respondents reported that they rarely skimmed the text to find out the cause and effect relationship (item 19) or analysed the information to answer reorganisation comprehension questions (item 22).

The ESL teachers reported that they sometimes employed different reading strategies. 44 % of the respondents thought that rereading the text to find supporting details was helpful (item 26), whereas, 42.9 % believed that sometimes integrating the information clearly stated in the text to support the main points was important for teaching reorganisation comprehension questions (item 29).

The above-mentioned findings are consistent with Chaka and Booi-Ncetani (2015) who have employed various similar reading strategies. They found in their study that ESL teachers employed the SQ3R (survey, question, read, recite and review) strategy to teach reading comprehension to Grade 10 ESL learners at a senior secondary school level. Their study also indicates that the ESL teachers used diverse reading strategies such as paraphrasing the text in order to simplify the text, adjusting reading speed in line with the purpose and nature of the text, and activating prior knowledge to answer reorganisation comprehension questions. In addition, Humos and Mustafa (2014) and Zimmerman and Smit (2014) revealed in their studies that two reading strategies, namely skimming and scanning, helped ESL teachers to enhance ESL students' reading comprehension abilities.

Based on the findings of the study, more than 46 % of the respondents assumed that summarising the text to identify supporting details never helped them (item 16) and 40 % of the ESL teachers were of the view that consolidating the information from more than a single source also did not support them to teach reorganisation comprehension questions (item 28). Likewise, a small number of the respondents, ranging between 1 % and 7 %, stated that they never used reading strategies (see items 12-14, 17-21 and 23-27). Finally, it can be concluded, based on the average response (3.14), that most of the reading strategies were sometimes used by the ESL teachers rather than frequently or always.

This finding is inconsistent with Nuttall (2005), Othman and Jaidi (2012), and Chik (2011) who concluded in their studies that different reading strategies, particularly reading the signpost questions, skimming the text to find out the cause and effect relation, and consolidating the information from more than a single source should be employed as these reading strategies are beneficial not only for ESL teachers, but also for ESL students to enhance their reading abilities.

## **Reading Strategies for Teaching Inferential Comprehension Questions**

Research question three was formulated to identify reading strategies used by the ESL teachers for teaching inferential comprehension questions such as making inferences and drawing conclusions. This section indicates to what extent the ESL teachers use reading strategies to teach inferential comprehension questions. The results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4

*ESL Teachers' Use of Reading Strategies for Teaching Inferential Comprehension Questions (N=84)*

Item No	Items	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Mean	SD
		n*	n*	n*	n*	n*		
31	Test the students' previous knowledge about the current topic	33 (39.3)	34 (40.5)	14 (16.7)	2 (2.4)	1 (1.2)	1.86	0.855
32	Read the questions first before reading the passage	29 (34.5)	26 (31.0)	21 (25.0)	6 (7.1)	2 (2.4)	2.12	0.998
33	Identify the clue words from the questions	1 (1.2)	4 (4.8)	19 (22.6)	38 (45.2)	22 (26.2)	3.90	0.887
34	Identify the contextual clues from the text	1 (1.2)	3 (3.6)	22 (26.2)	37 (44.0)	21 (25.0)	3.88	0.870
35	Reread the text to draw conclusion	1 (1.2)	4 (4.8)	16 (19.0)	40 (47.6)	23 (27.4)	3.95	0.877
36	Utilise prior knowledge to infer details from the key concepts	1 (1.2)	1 (1.2)	30 (35.7)	37 (44.0)	15 (17.9)	3.76	0.801
37	Try to understand the writer's intention	35 (41.7)	30 (35.7)	13 (15.5)	5 (6.0)	1 (1.2)	1.89	0.859
38	Make assumptions	33 (39.3)	34 (40.5)	8 (9.5)	5 (6.0)	4 (4.8)	1.96	0.910
39	Provide justification for the acceptance or rejection of the assumptions	35 (41.7)	33 (39.3)	9 (10.7)	4 (4.8)	3 (3.6)	1.89	0.886
40	Reformulate the assumptions	33 (39.3)	27 (32.1)	10 (11.9)	11 (13.1)	3 (3.6)	2.10	0.987
41	Relate the text to personal experiences	2 (2.4)	2 (2.4)	24 (28.6)	41 (48.8)	15 (17.9)	3.77	0.855
42	Guide the students to share the reasoning regarding predictions	1 (1.2)	2 (2.4)	27 (32.1)	38 (45.2)	16 (19.0)	3.57	0.854
43	Make multiple interpretations about the inference	36 (42.9)	32 (38.1)	10 (11.9)	4 (4.8)	2 (2.4)	1.86	0.854
44	Recollect information from the memory	1 (1.2)	6 (7.1)	26 (31.0)	39 (46.4)	12 (14.3)	3.65	0.857
45	Ask the students to make inferences about the text	2 (2.4)	3 (3.6)	23 (27.4)	44 (52.4)	12 (14.3)	3.73	0.841
46	Ask the students to draw conclusions from the text	2 (2.4)	3 (3.6)	29 (34.5)	33 (39.3)	17 (20.2)	3.71	0.913
Average Response and SD							2.98	0.881

\* Number of respondents.

Values in parentheses indicate percentage.

Table 4 shows that 52.4 % of the ESL teachers frequently asked the students to make inferences about the text (item 45) since it is an effective reading strategy. 48.8 % respondents believed in frequently relating the text to personal experiences (item 41), which they felt was more helpful as compared to other reading strategies. A small number of the informants (4.8 %) reported that they frequently provided justifications for the acceptance or rejection of the assumptions they formed and made multiple interpretations about the inferences (item 39). In addition, only 2.4 % of the ESL teachers tested the students' previous knowledge about the current topic (item 31).

Table 4 also indicates that there were some reading strategies, which the ESL teachers rarely or sometimes used rather than frequently. 40.5 % of the ESL teachers rarely tested their students' previous knowledge about the current topic (item 31) and made assumptions (item 38). Approximately 39 % of the respondents rarely provided justifications for the acceptance or rejection of the assumptions they formed (item 39) and made

multiple interpretations for making inferences (item 43).

Moreover, 9.5 % of the respondents sometimes made assumptions (item 38), whereas 34.5 % of the respondents asked their students to draw conclusions from the text (item 46). 35.7 % of the ESL teachers sometimes utilised their prior knowledge to infer details from the key concepts (item 36). Approximately 43 % of the ESL teachers never made multiple interpretations about the inferences (item 43), while approximately 42 % of the respondents never tried to understand the writer's intentions (item 37) and provide justifications for the acceptance or rejection of the assumptions they formulated (item 39).

The data presented in Table 4 also indicate that asking the students to make inferences about the text was the most widely used reading strategy by the ESL teachers for teaching inferential comprehension questions (see item 45).

The findings reveal that the ESL teachers frequently used various reading strategies for teaching inferential comprehension questions. The results show that making assumptions or guessing to make inferences was a frequently used reading strategy. This finding is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Klingner et al. (2004) who employed different reading comprehension strategies such as making predictions, revising predictions, summarising, paraphrasing, generating different questions, using contextual clues and monitoring understanding to teach inferential comprehension questions to ESL students at the secondary school level. The finding is also in line with the results of Tovani (2004), Sibberson and Szymusiak (2003) and Gallagher (2009) who concluded that ESL teachers use multiple reading strategies such as to activate students' background knowledge, make connections, self-question the text, locate contextual clues from the text, use sensory images and synthesise information to teach inferential comprehension questions.

The ESL teachers ignored a number of the reading strategies, namely; testing the students' previous knowledge about the current topic and reading the questions first before reading the passage for answering inferential comprehension questions. This finding is inconsistent with Darling-Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, and Rothstein (2012), Liu, Chen, and Chang (2010) and Nuttall (2005) who revealed that ESL teachers found such types of reading strategies useful to answer inferential comprehension questions. The results are also inconsistent with a study carried out by Lee (2011) who found that using graphic organising was an effective reading strategy for better comprehension.

To sum up, it can be concluded on the basis of the results of the current study that the ESL teachers tended to use more reading strategies to answer literal comprehension questions than they did when teaching how to answer reorganisation and/or inferential comprehension questions.

Based on the data presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4, it can be concluded that the ESL teachers indeed used reading comprehension strategies to enhance their students' literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension. A comparison is made in Figure 1 based on the mean scores of the reading strategies used by the ESL teachers for teaching literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions.

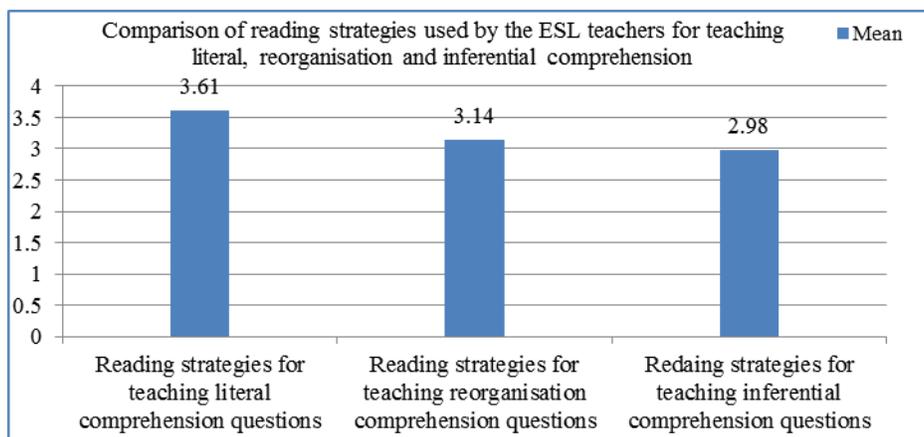


Figure 1. A comparison of reading strategies used by the ESL teachers to teach reading comprehension questions.

Figure 1 indicates that the mean scores for teaching literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension were 3.61, 3.14, and 2.98, respectively. These scores reveal that the ESL teachers used more reading comprehension strategies to teach how to answer literal comprehension questions as compared to reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions.

## Conclusions

Reading comprehension strategies help readers to make sense of what the text is about and ultimately they play a vital role in developing ESL students' reading abilities to enhance their academic performance. The analysis of the current study provides in-depth information about what reading comprehension strategies ESL teachers used for teaching different types of comprehension questions. The study concluded that the teachers used a range of reading strategies for teaching literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions. Nevertheless, they used a small repertoire of reading strategies for teaching inferential comprehension questions. Therefore, there is still a need for more diverse reading strategies for teaching inferential comprehension questions to enhance the reading comprehension abilities and higher order thinking capabilities of Malaysian ESL students. Hence, the researchers would like to recommend that ESL teachers develop an array of reading strategies to be used for teaching reading comprehension questions, particularly for inferential comprehension questions, since they enhance ESL students' reading comprehension abilities and higher order thinking skills.

## Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the current study is that the researchers addressed only three major reading skills, literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension, from Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension, Day and Park's taxonomy of reading comprehension, Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives and the Malaysian English language syllabus. This was because only these reading skills are used for teaching reading comprehension, whereas the rest of the reading skills stated in the aforementioned taxonomies and Malaysian English language syllabus are used for teaching literature.

The final limitation of the current study is that the study included only 84 ESL teachers teaching Form Four

students from Penang, Malaysia. Targeting more participants can help identify more reading strategies for answering literal, reorganisation and inferential comprehension questions. Future studies could select participants from other states of Malaysia to identify more reading strategies being used by ESL teachers for teaching comprehension questions.

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