

Senior High School Students' Comprehension Monitoring and Repair Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Comprehending an English text requires readers not only to construct meaning but also to monitor their understanding and repair comprehension breakdowns as they occur. However, previous research and classroom assessment have often emphasized reading outcomes rather than examining how EFL learners monitor comprehension and select repair strategies during the reading process. This study describes how senior high school students monitored their comprehension and repaired breakdowns while reading an English text. A descriptive qualitative design was employed with six students from one class, using non-participant observation and think-aloud verbalization to capture their reading processes. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of qualitative data analysis. The findings showed that comprehension monitoring was expressed primarily through nonverbal behaviors, including frowning, pausing, and slower reading, rather than explicit verbal statements of understanding or confusion. Repair strategies relied predominantly on rereading, while peer assistance occurred only once, and no students were observed reading ahead, skipping difficult parts, or consulting a dictionary. These findings suggest that students' repair strategies were relatively limited, highlighting the need for explicit instruction and guided practice in using a wider range of comprehension-monitoring and repair strategies.

Keywords: *Comprehension Monitoring, Repair Strategies, Fix-Up Strategies, Think-Aloud Protocol, EFL Reading*

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a complex process in which readers construct meaning by integrating linguistic information with prior knowledge, making inferences, and continuously evaluating whether the text is understood. For EFL learners, this process can be particularly demanding because reading involves not only vocabulary and grammatical knowledge but also the ability to regulate comprehension while processing a text. A reader may recognize individual words and produce relatively accurate oral pronunciation without necessarily constructing an adequate interpretation of the text. Therefore, successful reading requires readers to attend not only to what the text means but also to whether their interpretation is coherent and sufficient. This regulatory dimension of reading has become increasingly important in research on metacognition because comprehension is not simply a product achieved after reading but an ongoing process that requires readers to monitor and adjust their understanding.

Comprehension monitoring refers to the metacognitive process through which readers evaluate their ongoing understanding of a text and recognize whether meaning has been successfully constructed. Monitoring may involve checking whether a sentence makes sense, noticing inconsistency between information, recognizing unfamiliar or confusing expressions, and evaluating whether the reader can connect information across parts of the text. It is therefore different from simply knowing that one has completed a reading task. Effective readers continually assess their understanding while reading and become aware when their interpretation is incomplete or uncertain. This awareness is particularly important for EFL

learners because linguistic difficulties can interfere with meaning construction. Recent research with secondary and EFL learners indicates that metacognitive strategies are closely associated with reading comprehension, with monitoring emerging as an important component of strategic reading. For example, [Sunggingwati & Ungau \(2023\)](#) found that metacognitive strategies were significantly related to reading comprehension achievement among Indonesian twelfth-grade students, while [Pahrizal et al. \(2024\)](#) reported that Indonesian EFL learners demonstrated relatively high awareness of metacognitive reading strategies, particularly problem-solving strategies.

When readers recognize that their understanding is incomplete, inconsistent, or unclear, a comprehension breakdown has occurred. Comprehension breakdown refers to a temporary disruption in meaning construction in which readers are unable to interpret, connect, or integrate information successfully. Recognizing such a breakdown is only the first stage of regulation; readers must then determine how to respond to the difficulty. Repair strategies, also referred to as fix-up strategies, are deliberate actions used to restore or improve comprehension after a breakdown has been detected. These actions may include rereading a word, sentence, or passage; slowing down reading; using contextual clues; connecting information with prior knowledge; asking another person for assistance; consulting a dictionary or other reference source; or temporarily moving beyond a difficult section and returning to it later. Thus, repair is not synonymous with rereading alone. The choice of a repair strategy reflects how readers diagnose the source of difficulty and determine an appropriate response to restore meaning.

The theoretical relationship between monitoring and repair is consequently sequential but interdependent. Readers need to detect a comprehension problem before they can initiate an appropriate repair action, while the success or failure of a repair attempt may lead them to monitor their comprehension again. In this sense, comprehension monitoring and repair form part of a cyclical process of regulation during reading. [Harvey and Goudvis \(2017\)](#) emphasize that strategic readers monitor their understanding and employ fix-up strategies when comprehension becomes uncertain. Metacognitive reading research similarly distinguishes monitoring from other regulatory processes such as planning and evaluation, while recognizing that these processes operate together to support comprehension. Evidence from secondary-school research also suggests that explicit metacognitive instruction can strengthen students' awareness of reading processes and their ability to manage comprehension. A study of secondary students in Singapore, for example, found that metacognitive strategy instruction was associated with increased metacognitive awareness and gains in reading comprehension ([Dabarera et al., 2014](#)). More recent Indonesian research likewise indicates that monitoring and other metacognitive strategies remain important areas for developing students' strategic reading abilities.

Previous empirical studies have provided valuable evidence about students' use of metacognitive strategies during English reading. [Sunggingwati & Ungau \(2023\)](#), for instance, examined 127 Indonesian twelfth-grade students and found that metacognitive strategies were the most frequently used category and were significantly related to reading comprehension achievement. [Pahrizal et al. \(2024\)](#), working with 114 Indonesian EFL learners, reported high awareness of metacognitive reading strategies, particularly problem-solving strategies, although the relationship between metacognitive awareness and reading comprehension was relatively weak. Research conducted in junior high school contexts has similarly shown that students do not necessarily employ all metacognitive processes equally. [Rachimsyah & Budie Nugroho \(2026\)](#), for example, found that Indonesian junior high school students relied more heavily on planning strategies, while monitoring and evaluation were less developed. These findings demonstrate that students are capable of using metacognitive strategies, but the extent and form of their strategic engagement may vary according to educational level and learning context.

Despite these contributions, an important gap remains in understanding what students actually do when comprehension difficulties arise during the real-time reading of an English text. Much of the existing empirical research has examined metacognitive strategy use through

questionnaires, inventories, reading tests, or retrospective interviews. Such methods are useful for identifying students' perceived strategy preferences and relationships with comprehension outcomes, but they provide limited access to the moment-by-moment processes through which students recognize a comprehension breakdown and respond to it. Recent qualitative research has begun to address this issue through think-aloud methods. For example, Li et al. (2025) used think-aloud protocols to compare good and poor EFL readers and found differences in inference-making and comprehension monitoring, demonstrating the value of verbal protocols for examining reading processes. However, this study focused on university-level Chinese EFL learners and compared readers according to proficiency, rather than examining how senior high school students manifest comprehension monitoring and select repair strategies during classroom reading. Thus, less is known about the observable and verbal indicators of comprehension monitoring among senior high school EFL learners, particularly the specific repair actions they employ when comprehension breaks down.

Building on this gap, the present study focuses on the real-time processes through which senior high school students monitor their comprehension and repair comprehension breakdowns while reading an English text. Rather than relying solely on students' retrospective accounts of strategy use, the study combines non-participant observation with think-aloud verbalization to examine both observable reading behaviors and students' verbalized thoughts during the reading process. This approach allows the study to identify how comprehension monitoring is manifested, what situations appear to trigger comprehension breakdowns, and which repair strategies students use in response. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: How do senior high school students monitor their comprehension and repair the breakdowns they encounter while reading an English text? The objective of the study is to describe the patterns of comprehension monitoring displayed by the students and the repair strategies they employ to resolve comprehension difficulties during English reading.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design because the study aimed to provide a detailed description of how senior high school students monitored their comprehension and responded to comprehension breakdowns while reading an English text. This approach was appropriate because the research focused on naturally occurring reading behaviors and students' verbalized thoughts rather than testing a hypothesis, manipulating an intervention, or measuring relationships between predetermined variables. A descriptive qualitative design enabled the researchers to examine students' comprehension-monitoring processes as they occurred during the reading activity and to describe the specific behaviors, verbalizations, and repair strategies that emerged from the data. Data were collected through non-participant observation and think-aloud verbalization, which provided complementary evidence of students' observable reading behaviors and their verbalized cognitive processes. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by [Miles & Huberman \(1994\)](#), involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

Respondents

This study involved six senior high school students from a single class who were taking part in an ongoing English reading comprehension lesson. Consistent with the purposive sampling logic outlined by [Sugiyono \(2022\)](#), the class was not selected to represent a wider population but because it offered a natural setting in which reading behaviour, and the thinking that accompanies it, could be observed as it actually occurred rather than under artificial testing conditions. All six students were present and actively engaged in the reading task throughout the observed session.

Instruments

Data were gathered using two complementary instruments: an observation checklist and a think-aloud protocol, both supported by descriptive field notes. The checklist was built around the monitoring and fix-up indicators identified by [Harvey & Goudvis \(2017\)](#) – for example, pausing at a difficult word, rereading a passage, or seeking outside help – so that each occurrence could be marked as it happened. The think-aloud protocol invited students to voice their thoughts as they read, giving the researcher direct, real-time access to moments of recognised difficulty that a checklist alone might miss. Field notes then captured contextual detail, such as tone of voice or facial expression, that neither instrument could record on its own.

Procedures

Data collection proceeded as non-participant observation during a regular English reading lesson, so that students' engagement with the text remained as natural as possible. The researcher sat unobtrusively at the back of the classroom, marking indicators on the checklist as they arose while writing accompanying field notes, without interrupting the lesson or prompting any particular response from the students.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using [Miles & Huberman \(1994\)](#) interactive model, which treats data collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing as overlapping rather than strictly sequential stages. Field notes and checklist entries were first reduced by isolating behaviour directly relevant to monitoring and repair; the reduced data were then displayed descriptively by strategy type, frequency, and the textual moment at which each instance occurred, before patterns were drawn out and cross-checked against the raw records for consistency.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Comprehension Monitoring Patterns

Across the six participants (S1–S6), no student announced comprehension out loud; expressions such as “oh, I understand” never appeared in the data, suggesting that successful understanding, when it happened, passed without any verbal signal. A breakdown in comprehension, by contrast, left visible traces. S1 stopped reading and frowned upon meeting an unfamiliar word; S3 and S4 showed a comparable reaction through a drop in vocal intonation and raised eyebrows; and S2, S5, and S6 each paused their reading whenever a difficult word appeared. Not one of the six, however, put this difficulty into words such as “I don’t understand this part.” A further monitoring signal appeared in reading pace: S3 was the only student who audibly slowed her reading down, while the tempo of the other five students dropped in a comparable way through a softer, less confident intonation. Read together, these behaviours suggest that monitoring, for this group, operated mainly beneath the surface of conscious verbal report – students seemed to sense trouble before they were able, or willing, to name it.

Repair (Fix-Up) Strategies Employed

Once a breakdown was registered, rereading emerged as the participants’ primary means of repair: S2, S3, S4, and S6 all returned to a portion of the text they had not understood, most often the exact sentence containing the difficulty. No student, however, was observed reading ahead in search of a clarifying clue later in the text, nor did any student skip a difficult section and come back to it once the rest had been read – both strategies were entirely absent from the six-student sample. Outside help was used sparingly: S5 asked a classmate for the meaning of an unfamiliar word, making her the only participant to seek assistance from another person, while no student consulted a dictionary or approached the teacher at any point during the session. Taken as a set, these findings show a repair repertoire concentrated almost

entirely on one technique—returning to the point of difficulty—while forward-looking or externally supported alternatives went largely untried. This is consistent with intervention studies showing that explicit fix-up strategy training can improve Indonesian EFL learners' reading comprehension (Asnidah et al., 2024; Rusmiati et al., 2022).

Discussion

These findings speak directly to the research question by showing that monitoring and repair, while closely connected as Harvey & Goudvis (2017) propose, were not equally visible: breakdowns were noticed consistently, yet named out loud almost never. This pattern is consistent with the Center (n.d.) observation that struggling readers often sense that comprehension has stalled without being able to consciously locate or articulate the source of the difficulty. A reader who reacts to trouble without naming it is arguably less equipped to choose among several possible repair options than one who can state, in words, exactly what has gone wrong—an asymmetry that may help explain why rereading, rather than a more targeted response, became this group's default repair action.

The near-exclusive reliance on rereading also aligns with Rockets (n.d.) description of less fluent readers processing text word by word, with most of their attention consumed by decoding rather than by the surrounding sentence or paragraph; returning to reread the same words, rather than reading forward for contextual clues, is a strategy well suited to that word-level focus but poorly suited to resolving difficulties that context, rather than repetition, would clarify. This pattern also fits the idea that a more demanding repair technique, such as searching later sentences for clues, may simply not be available in the moment difficulty arises when decoding itself already consumes most of a struggling reader's attention, leaving rereading as the least costly option. This is broadly consistent with research linking working memory capacity to EFL students' reading comprehension performance (Heriyawati et al., 2018).

That only one student turned to a peer, and that no student used a dictionary or asked the teacher, further suggests that external help-seeking had not yet become a habitual part of these students' reading behaviour, even though it was available to them within the classroom. This narrow range is pedagogically significant: Readers (n.d.) lists monitoring comprehension, drawing on prior knowledge, making predictions, questioning, and summarising among the strategic actions skilled readers draw on consciously to keep the flow of reading intact when difficulty arises. The students in this study, by contrast, appeared to have only one dependable move once comprehension broke down, which may leave them poorly placed to resolve difficulties that a single rereading cannot clear up.

Taken together, the findings answer the research question by portraying a group of readers who were reasonably consistent at noticing when meaning had stalled, chiefly through nonverbal cues, but who possessed only a narrow set of tools for repairing that stall once it was noticed. This pattern is consistent with Zargar et al. (2020), who found that readers detected inconsistencies and attempted to regulate comprehension through rereading, while stronger reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge were associated with greater use of repair strategies. This combination—reliable but silent monitoring paired with a single dominant repair move—points toward a specific and addressable target for classroom instruction, one that a purely score-based assessment of reading comprehension would be unlikely to reveal.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that senior high school students monitored their reading comprehension primarily through observable nonverbal behaviors, such as frowning, pausing, and slowing their reading pace, while explicit verbal expressions of understanding or confusion were less frequent. When comprehension breakdowns occurred, students predominantly relied on rereading as their repair strategy. Peer assistance appeared only once, while no observed instances involved reading ahead, skipping and returning to difficult

sections, or consulting a dictionary. These findings indicate that students were able to recognize signs of comprehension difficulty, but their repertoire of repair strategies remained relatively limited. Thus, comprehension monitoring was mainly manifested through students' observable responses to reading difficulties, whereas comprehension repair was strongly characterized by rereading. The findings suggest that English reading instruction should explicitly model and provide guided practice in a broader range of repair strategies, enabling students to respond more flexibly when comprehension breaks down. Future research should involve larger and more diverse groups of students and examine whether reading proficiency, text characteristics, or explicit strategy instruction influences patterns of comprehension monitoring and repair.

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