CHAPTER 10
DO READING STRATEGIES HELP? UNDERSTANDING WHAT MOTIVATES NORWEGIAN HIGH SCHOOLERS TO READ IN ENGLISH CLASS

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Introduction

Educators across Norway are observing a troubling trend: students' reading stamina and overall reading proficiency appear to be declining. These anecdotal observations lead to lively discussions among colleagues about possible causes of this decline. Are digital technologies, particularly smartphones and the fragmented nature of online information, reshaping students' reading habits? Are the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupting literacy development? Or is it the education system's increasing focus on teaching students to read analytically, unintentionally reducing their opportunities to read books extensively for pleasure? Whatever the underlying reasons, teachers increasingly face the challenge of supporting students whose reading skills no longer align with the expectations embedded within the national curriculum. The Norwegian national curriculum for English in upper-secondary school emphasises students' ability to reflect, interpret, and critically read different text types (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2019). Strong reading ability is especially crucial for students taking English as an elective in their final years of upper-secondary school, because they do not receive preparatory reading materials prior to the national written exam. This practice will likely become the norm as examination formats are adapted to address challenges posed by the use of artificial intelligence (AI). Consequently, preparing students to become proficient and independent readers is more important than ever. As AI platforms become a primary source of information, often providing content without transparent

information about its origins or underlying assumptions, the need for students to read consciously and critically will become even more important in the coming decades.

The purpose of this study was two-fold: 1) to gain insight into my students' knowledge of reading strategies and how they apply them before, during, and after reading, and 2) to explore what motivates students to read. Accordingly, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1) What reading strategies do my students know, and to what extent do they use them?
2) Does the use of reading strategies increase students' motivation to read?

Prior research indicates that adept readers actively use reading strategies more frequently and more efficiently than struggling readers (Bensaad & Ouahmiche, 2020). Based on these findings, this study examined whether students' awareness and effective use of reading strategies influenced their attitudes towards reading.

Method

Participants

The findings from this study were collected from four English classes at a vocational upper-secondary school near Drammen, Norway. Data collection took place during the second semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. Three of the classes were for first-year students, while the fourth was an elective course typically taken during the third year of study. All four classes followed the national requirement of 140 hours of English instruction over the academic year.

The students in the three compulsory first-year English classes were enrolled in one of three different vocational programmes of study: 1) Healthcare, Child and Youth Development, 2) Sales, Service and Tourism, and 3) Hairdressing, Floral, Interior and Retail Design. Each class consisted of 10-16 students, most of whom were between 17 and 19 years old. One of the three classes consisted exclusively of female students, while the other two included both male and female students. The elective English course taken during the third year of study composed 20 students of both genders, ranging in age from 19 to 23. Most students had been learning English for at least ten years, and their proficiency levels generally ranged from intermediate to upper-intermediate. Students in all the classes

described above were eligible to be selected for the national examinations in written and/or oral English at the end of the academic year.

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. Quantitative data were collected using the Survey for Reading Strategies to address the first research question regarding students' knowledge of reading strategies and how often they use them (Mokhtarti & Sheorey, 2002). The second research question examined the relationship between reading strategy use and motivation. To explore this relationship in greater depth, qualitative data were gathered through the think-aloud method and semi-structured interviews. The quantitative results from the Survey for Reading Strategies, together with qualitative data from the think-aloud method and observational notes throughout the process, informed the development of the semi-structured interview questions. During the interviews, students were then given the opportunity to further develop their responses and clarify their experiences through probing follow-up questions.

Data Collection Instruments and Research Process

An adapted version of the Survey for Reading Strategies (SORS), modified to suit the Norwegian language context, was used to collect quantitative data in this study (See Appendix). Designed by Mokhtarti and Sheorey (2002), the SORS is based on the Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI). It has been widely adopted in research examining EFL students' awareness of metacognitive reading strategies when engaging with academic documents in English (Bensaad & Ouahmiche, 2020). Both the SORS and MARSI aim "to assess students' metacognitive awareness or perceived use of reading strategies when reading texts for academic purposes" (Mokhtari et al., 2018, p. 222). However, the SORS is better suited to the purpose of this study, given that "there is a practical value in using the SORS when assessing students with lower levels of English proficiency" (Mokhtari et al., 2018, p. 239). The SORS is composed of three reading categories: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading strategies. The instrument includes a total of 32 items, each using a specified response scale.

Prior to administering the SORS, students in each class were informed about the purpose of the study and the procedures for handling the collected data. They were then invited to ask questions about the study to ensure clarity and

understanding to be able to give their informed consent. The contents of the SORS questionnaire were subsequently reviewed together in class, with special attention paid to terms or phrases students found difficult or confusing. Additionally, the response scale used in the questionnaire was carefully clarified and displayed on the classroom whiteboard in Norwegian. Students were encouraged to respond to the questions honestly and reminded that there were no right or wrong answers. Students were also instructed not to write their names on the questionnaires. This was intended to reduce response bias and encourage students to base their answers on their actual use of reading strategies, rather than on perceived expectations of the researcher. Each class took about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire, which was then collected by the researcher. The SORS was administered to the students a second time, following the same procedure as described above. This was done after the completion of a two-week instructional series of lessons on reading strategies. The resulting data were used to answer the first research question, which examines students' knowledge of reading strategies and how often they employ them.

To evaluate whether students used reading strategies and how these strategies influenced their motivation to read, qualitative data were collected through the think-aloud method. Although the think-aloud method has its origins in the field of psychology, it is currently widely used across many fields, spanning from computer usability to education. The technique asks participants to verbalise their thoughts while carrying out a task or solving a problem, thereby providing insight into underlying cognitive processes (Noushad et al., 2023, p. 892). The reliability of the think-aloud method is grounded in the theory that verbal reports allow researchers to assess higher-level thinking processes, particularly those involving working memory, before ideas are stored in long-term memory, where they become more abstract and non-verbal (Charters, 2003, p. 70). The method has therefore been used to shed light on thought processes involved in reading comprehension and strategy use (Charters, 2003).

Prior to administering the think-aloud task, students in each class were given detailed instructions. Clear and explicit instructions were essential, as none of the students had previously engaged in verbalising their thoughts while reading, and a thorough understanding of the process was necessary to elicit meaningful verbal reports. Students were first instructed to verbalise any thoughts or ideas that occurred to them while reading the text and to read a story without pausing. Students were provided with further instructions recommended by Ericsson and Simon (1993) for think-aloud protocols: a) to speak all thoughts, even if they are

unrelated to the task; b) to refrain from explaining the thoughts; c) to not try to plan out what to say; d) to imagine the participants are alone and speak to themselves; and e) to speak continuously. Across all classes, students raised similar follow-up questions, which we collectively addressed prior to determining how to proceed. The first issue to evaluate was whether students should be permitted to talk-aloud in Norwegian instead of English. The second question related to whether students had to read the story aloud as well as verbalising their thoughts. After some discussion, it was decided that they could choose to conduct the talk-aloud task in Norwegian instead of English, and they were permitted to read the story aloud if doing so facilitated the process. These decisions were intended to reduce the cognitive and procedural load of a task that many students perceived as unfamiliar. To ensure that each student completed the task in a quiet and comfortable environment, free from external interruptions or influences, the think-aloud task was assigned as homework. Students were asked to submit an audio recording of their verbal report. Upon receipt, the recordings were transcribed as closely as possible, including pauses, changes in tone, and reactions. Due to the time-consuming nature of the transcriptions, it was not possible to conduct participant verification of the transcripts by allowing students to review or amend them.

Not all students' verbal reports were thorough or adhered to the think-aloud instructions. In these cases, the recordings were excluded from transcription due to concerns regarding quality. Most students, however, delivered verbal reports that successfully employed the think-aloud technique. These recordings typically ranged between 10 and 20 minutes. With respect to language use, some students conducted the think-aloud entirely in English. However, the most common approach involved switching between English and Norwegian. Interestingly, only a few students verbalised their thoughts exclusively in Norwegian.

The final stage of data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews carried out with each student. These interviews took place outside of the classroom between the student and the researcher. The duration of each interview varied, depending on the extent of students' responses, but most typically lasted between 15-30 minutes. During the interviews, students were invited to reflect on and give feedback on the entire research process, from completing the questionnaire to participating in the think-aloud task. Some of the questions were predetermined, such as: 1) Did you have an aha moment or a key takeaway from this experience? 2) Do you feel differently about reading now than you did before? and 3) What was the think-aloud experience like for you? However, most of the interview

questions were either follow-up inquiries related to students' responses or tailored to individual participants, informed by observations made during teaching reading strategies and analysis of their verbal reports. Notes were taken during the interviews and expanded on to produce more detailed records afterwards.

The qualitative data derived from the interviews were used to gain insight into students' perceptions of their experiences. The interview data were interpreted holistically, bringing together the results from the questionnaire, participants' verbal reports from the think-aloud task, and the information shared during our conversations, as well as my own observations and contextual understanding. During the analytical process, attention was directed to identifying patterns indicative of preferred or effective reading strategies used by the students. Moreover, the analysis explored specific aspects of texts that appeared to hinder students' understanding and examined how students responded when encountering such difficulties. The analysis of the qualitative data was influenced by the researcher's close relationship with the data. Accordingly, it is acknowledged that "qualitative research leads to as many interpretations as there are researchers" (Kvale, 1996, p. 279).

Research Context

During the two weeks following the administration of the SORS, each class received roughly the same series of lessons on reading strategies. The instructional materials were drawn from the coursebook, Citizens YF (Andersen et al., 2020), which is assigned to the first-year students. The unit on reading strategies included materials and exercises on skimming, scanning, close reading, and a section on working with literary texts. The purpose of this instructional sequence was to introduce students to reading strategies with which they may not have been previously familiar and to demonstrate how and why these strategies can support reading comprehension.

The short story "Robert and the Dog" by Ken Saro-Wiwa (1986) was selected as the reading task for the think-aloud component of the study. This text was chosen for several reasons. First, it addresses themes with which students were likely familiar, having worked with similar topics in class for nearly a month prior to this study. Secondly, the length and level of difficulty of the story were considered appropriate for the students. Short stories and novel extracts are representative of the texts students typically encounter in their coursebook and are frequently assigned to read. At the same time, short stories are also difficult for students because they often rely on background knowledge or lack explicit

information, requiring readers to infer meaning and read between the lines. Selecting a text that was neither too simple nor too demanding was therefore important for the think-aloud method to be effective.

In summarising existing research on task suitability for think-aloud studies, Charters (2003) explains, "…a language-based activity at an intermediate level of difficulty for the target group is probably an appropriate task for think-aloud research because it requires more than an automatic response but should not be cognitively overwhelming" (p. 72). Taking this into consideration, "Robert and the Dog" was seen as somewhat challenging for students due to its advanced vocabulary, topic, and text type, while not being so overwhelmingly difficult as to impede the production of meaningful verbal reports. Finally, it was ensured that students had not previously read the story, as task novelty is critical to the effectiveness of the think-aloud technique. When participants are familiar with a task, they are more likely to produce automatic responses rather than verbalise their underlying thought processes (Ericsson & Simon, 1980).

Findings and Discussion

Data from the Questionnaires

The questionnaires administered both before and after the two-week teaching period on reading strategies were collected and organised into separate Excel files for each class. For each of the 32 questionnaire items, the mean, average, and standard deviation were calculated. Then, the pre- and post-instruction averages were compared to identify changes in students' responses following the teaching intervention. The calculated means and standard deviations were also used to identify any potential outliers in the data.

The results from the questionnaires showed only a slight difference between first-year and third-year students in their reported use of reading strategies. However, the mean scores for all items across both groups reached a value of 4, corresponding to "I always do this." Overall, responses generally fell between a mean of 2 ("I rarely do this") and 3 ("I frequently do this"), suggesting moderate but not consistent use of reading strategies among students at both levels.

Table 1 Frequently reported strategies

Item #	Average	Mean	Standard Deviation
4: I look at the text surface features and organizational clues (e.g. titles, subtitles, diagrams, etc.)	2.84	3	0.72
6: I read headings and subheadings, etc. to understand the organization of text	2.89	3	0.75
10: I try to guess the meaning of difficult words through contextual clues	2.98	3	0.69
13: I read slowly and carefully when looking for specific information	3.10	3	0.70
14: I connect what I read to what I already know while reading	2.96	3	0.68
24: I re-read text to check my understanding	3.17	3	0.64
29: I re-read to summarize the text	2.85	3	0.91

The items that were reported as least frequently used by all students were the following:

Table 2 Infrequently reported reading strategies

Item #	Average	Mean	Standard Deviation
2: I make a list of all ideas I may have about the topic of the text	1.75	2	0.67
3: I make a list of predictions to anticipate possible content of text	1.81	2	0.65
5: I make some comments on organizational aspects of text (e.g. title, author, source, visual aids, etc.)	2.08	2	0.64
9: I read aloud to concentrate well and understand what I read	2.19	2	0.90
15: I annotate and mark the text while reading	1.94	2	0.80
16: I summarize the general idea of each paragraph in written form	2.08	2	0.75
19: I identify main idea and supporting details of each paragraph	2.27	2	0.78
22: I control my understanding of text by identifying topic sentences of paragraphs or inventing topic sentences if none exist	2.29	2	0.70
23: I take notes while reading to understand what I read	2.10	2	0.88
32: I make a list of new words and terminology to learn and build vocabulary	1.90	2	0.83

The following items were reported by all classes as being used significantly more frequently after the two-week teaching period:

Table 3 Most frequently reported strategies post-intervention

Item #	Average	Mean	Standard Deviation	Improvement
2: I make a list of all ideas I may have about the topic of the text	2.13	2	0.69	0.39
3: I make a list of predictions to anticipate possible content of text	2.16	2	0.57	0.35
5: I make some comments on organizational aspects of text (e.g. title, author, source, visual aids, etc.)	2.48	2	0.71	0.40
9: I read aloud to concentrate well and understand what I read.	2.47	3	0.87	0.28
11: When guessing meaning from context is also difficult, I use translation into Norwegian	2.92	3	0.80	0.36
17: I look for logical relationships between paragraphs.	2.63	3	0.74	0.30
18: I look for logical relationships between paragraphs and visual aids (e.g. diagrams…)	2.73	3	0.72	0.35
19: I identify main idea and supporting details of each paragraph	2.52	2	0.71	0.24
22: I control my understanding of text by identifying topic sentences of paragraphs or inventing topic sentences if none exist	2.69	3	0.70	0.40
26: I check if my predictions about the text are right or wrong	2.88	3	0.80	0.25
28: I make critical comments on text	2.54	2	0.77	0.28
32: I make a list of new words and terminology to learn and build vocabulary	2	2.22	0.76	0.32

Three questionnaire items also showed a slight regression rather than improvement. However, these decreases were not consistent across respondents, as there was little overlap among the specific items reported as being used less frequently. In other words, students had largely different responses regarding which items were used less frequently following the two-week teaching period. Thus, from the data above, it can be deduced that students tend to favour reading strategies that do not involve active engagement with the text through writing. Strategies such as making lists, taking notes, writing comments, marking, and annotating were reported as infrequently used. In contrast, strategies involving visual or surface-level engagement – such as examining headings, pictures, and diagrams – were reported as frequently used. Similarly, students indicated frequent use of rereading texts to check understanding and reading slowly when looking for specific information.

On the one hand, these results are unsurprising, as they align with my own observations of students' reading behaviours. Students, in general, found tasks requiring them to summarise texts particularly challenging. Furthermore, opportunities to observe students taking notes or annotating texts while working with them were rare. When students did take notes, these were often near-verbatim transcriptions of the original text, rather than evidence of more critical engagements, such as posing questions in the margins, highlighting key terms or examples, or taking notes on the gist of each paragraph. Students frequently explained that copying content helps them remember the material, which might be true to some extent. However, this practice suggests limited analytical processing during reading, as notes tend to reproduce content rather than reflect interpretation or critical evaluation. In contrast, students demonstrated an ability to skim through texts to extract information from visual and structural features, such as illustrations and captions, diagrams, titles, and subtitles. Taken together, these results indicate that students are more proficient in surface-level reading strategies than in close reading or engaging in active conversation with the text while reading.

On the other hand, the results were striking because most of the items reported as being used least frequently by students are those featured most prominently in their coursebooks. Exercises related to these strategies appear not only in sections dedicated to reading strategies but are integrated throughout all chapters of the course materials. As previously discussed, critical reading plays a central role in the national English curriculum, and this emphasis is clearly reflected in the coursebooks. It is also possible that the authors of the coursebooks have identified these strategies as areas of difficulty for students and have therefore prioritised them for repeated practice.

The coursebook strongly encourages students to isolate key ideas in texts for use in subsequent discussion and writing assignments. Nevertheless, the apparent lack of familiarity with critical reading strategies among students is striking. This finding is thought-provoking for educators and should be considered when assigning such exercises and when monitoring and supporting student progress. It can be assumed that students need explicit modelling and guidance during these activities, as well as ongoing teacher monitoring to ensure understanding. Most importantly, however, these findings suggest that despite the coursebook's strong emphasis on critical reading strategies, students use these strategies infrequently. This discrepancy raises questions about whether students have developed a sufficient understanding of how to apply the coursebook's guidance on critical reading in practice.

The strategies that showed increased use among students after the two-week teaching period were those reading strategies that had been explicitly taught and practiced during that time. As the instructional materials were drawn from the coursebook, it is unsurprising that students reported more frequent use of these critical reading strategies. In contrast, the reasons why certain strategies were used less frequently after the two-week teaching period are harder to explain. One possible explanation is that, because of the instruction, students became more aware of their reading behaviours. Increased metacognitive awareness may have led students to recognise which strategies, they were, in fact, not using.

Think-Aloud Data

The verbal reports reveal that students found the short story very challenging to read. Most struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary and demonstrated limited ability to infer meaning from context. However, the words that caused the greatest difficulty were those with multiple meanings, such as bachelor. Misinterpretations of such words often led to misunderstandings that snowballed throughout the think-aloud task. For example, students who interpreted bachelor as referring to a person holding an undergraduate academic degree, rather than an unmarried man, used this incorrect assumption as a basis for further inferences. As a result, these initial misunderstandings frequently snowballed into broader misinterpretations of the text as a whole.

Many students experienced considerable difficulty keeping track of the characters and understanding their locations within the story. Analysis of the verbal reports revealed that this confusion stemmed largely from the story's limited use of proper names: only two characters are explicitly named, while others are referred to using descriptive labels such as "the young man" or "the lady." Consequently, students often conflated these character descriptions. In several instances, students interpreted sentences as referring to one character when, in fact, they described another, leading to ongoing misinterpretations throughout the reading process. Many students were unable to clearly distinguish between the characters and thus interpreted the text as if Robert and "the young man" were the same person. This misunderstanding led to considerable confusion and frustration. While some students eventually realised by the end of the story that more characters were present than they had first identified, others completed the reading without reaching this understanding.

The setting was also challenging for students. Although the story explicitly states that the characters are in a house in Africa, the contrasting location was not

sufficiently clear to many students. This secondary setting is described as "a one-bedroom apartment in The Jungle", and because students interpreted this description literally, they struggled to recognise its symbolic or referential meaning. Many students understood this description as indicating that Robert lived in an overgrown and dense forest rather than recognising it as a colloquial name for an under-resourced neighbourhood. This further complicated students' already fragile understanding of the characters and their relationships. Thus, several students began to question whether the characters were even human, with several expressing confusion during the think-aloud task (e.g. "But are these characters actually human? They don't seem human to me, so confusing").

The characters' relationship with the dog was also a source of confusion for students. The dog's presence in the title created strong expectations, and many students expressed disappointment when the dog did not appear immediately in the story. Many asked several times: "When is the dog coming?" When the dog finally appeared, many felt that the story had truly begun at that point. However, this was followed by uncertainty, as Robert's behaviour toward the dog did not align with students' expectations (e.g., "I thought that Robert and the dog would become best friends or something. That would be a better ending."). For many students, understanding Robert's perspective and treatment of the dog proved extremely challenging. Several expressed strong emotional reactions to his behaviour, questioning how he could treat a dog so poorly. As one student expressed: "Wow, what a story, what an ending. How could you have so much hatred towards a dog? I don't understand. How could you hate him so much? How could you be so jealous of a dog?"

Some students were able to pick up on contextual clues to infer possible motivations behind Robert's actions (e.g., "I feel like it is about where he lives, and he is so poor" and "He has a poor lifestyle and he meets the dog and it makes him angry."). However, many students were unable to make this connection, and as a result, Robert's behaviour remained illogical to them.

Data from the Semi-Structured Interviews

During the retrospective interviews, students were given the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences with reading strategies throughout the entire process. This included feedback on the questionnaire, lessons on reading strategies, the think-aloud task, and any additional experiences they wanted to share. Although students reported varied experiences, their responses revealed more similarities than differences. These explanations provided valuable

contextual insight and contributed to a more complete understanding of the data collected from the questionnaires and verbal reports.

Students, in general, related that they had learned some reading strategies in Norwegian class since the first grade. However, they did not necessarily apply these strategies actively when reading in English. Strategies common to skimming and scanning were reported as the most frequently used by students. Many students indicated that they commonly relied on visual clues, such as examining pictures and reading headings and subheadings rapidly. Rereading texts to confirm understanding was also frequently mentioned. While some expressed a good understanding of how to skim and scan a text, many reported that they had not received adequate explicit instruction in these strategies before they were addressed in greater detail during classroom instruction. For example, one student explained: "We learned how to skim through a text in elementary school, but they never said it so clearly, like, to look for words from the questions in the book below the text. I never really thought of it." Many students indicated that they first learned to identify topic sentences during this course, a strategy widely regarded as helpful. Several reported they now apply this strategy not only in English but also across other subject areas. Some students, however, reported that the lessons on reading strategies were not useful, because they believed they already employed strategies that worked well for them. When questioned further, these self-reported strategies typically corresponded to the same skimming and scanning approaches described earlier by other students.

In contrast, close reading was a strategy that most students reported being introduced to for the first time in our lessons together. When reflecting on their experiences with close reading, many students expressed uncertainty about what the strategy entails in practice. For multiple students, close reading was mainly understood as reading slowly or rereading the same paragraph several times. One student, however, was able to explain clearly how he engages in close reading:

> I first read multiple times. If writing an exam, I will read once and then look at the task again. Then I will find examples I want to include in the text. If need to analyse, I will read a couple of times. I know what I'm looking for. If something stands out without having to think about it too much, then it might be a literary feature. I also use prior knowledge and make connections while reading, especially in history class.

This student represented an exception in demonstrating a clear awareness of close reading strategies and an understanding of how they can be applied across

different school contexts. In general, however, students tended to associate close reading with reading sentences slowly and trying harder to understand the text, rather than working more actively with it through strategies such as taking notes, asking questions, or identify textual evidence to support main ideas.

The distinction between skimming and scanning strategies and close reading was also apparent in students' responses regarding the motivational impact of reading strategies. Many students reported that the reading strategies focusing on skimming or scanning, which were addressed during lessons, increased their motivation to read. One student explained: "I will remember it and use it in school. I used to hate reading. Now I feel like I know how to read more efficiently and to not use too much energy. This motivates me much more." Similarly, another student related:

> It has been helpful because I don't know much about finding the main purpose of the text. Then I feel like, 'am I missing something'? If I start answering the questions beneath the text, I wonder if I am going in the right direction. I feel that maybe I am missing something important. Reading strategies have helped with this. It has helped me understand how to read the most important things to try to find the answers.

One student was very animated when describing her experiences with reading strategies, expressing both surprise and appreciation for having learned them:

> Yes, it has been very helpful. When I am reading a text, I am more aware, of like skimming through a text, reading titles, looking for small hints throughout the text. I feel like it has helped me a lot. I found myself using it during the think-aloud task. I was remembering the strategies in my head. Marking words I didn't know, later looking them up. I had not really done that before. Now it's stuck in my head. I have learned reading strategies in middle school and elementary school, but just simple basic things, like, read the title and look at pictures. The teacher just mentioned it and moved on. Here we have worked on each thing thoroughly and we actually did it together.

Although strategies related to skimming and scanning were generally regarded as motivating, students had comparatively little to say about close reading. When asked specifically about how they feel about reading, students typically reported that they did not enjoy reading unless it was done for fun. One student related: "I do not like reading, it is exhausting, just the amount of brain power you use.

Literature or an article that is about something that interests me is what motivates me to read." Another described a similar perspective, explaining:

> I am not the biggest reader. If the first page of a book is fun and not boring, if it starts in the middle of the action, it is more motivating. I don't like poems. We worked on them too much in middle school Norwegian class. I don't always understand what the poem wants until I google it to find the meaning and the actual meaning. I feel like everyone else knows the meaning. But I don't. It can make you feel stupid.

This final quotation is very telling, because a poem is not a text type well suited to skimming or scanning. Rather, it requires close reading to gain a fuller understanding. Overall, the findings suggest that students are not employing close reading strategies when reading for fun, which may be related to their motivation to read. In other words, students appear to derive motivation to read from both external sources – such as completing homework tasks that require answering questions about a text – and internal sources, such as reading for pleasure. However, close reading strategies are largely absent in the contexts in which students report feeling most motivated to read.

Conclusion

The results of this study show a limited level of knowledge and practical engagement among students with respect to close and critical reading. In contrast, reading strategies related to skimming and scanning were widely used and well established among the students. Moreover, students reported that these strategies were both helpful and motivating, particularly in terms of increasing reading efficiency. Despite the strong emphasis on close and critical reading in the national curriculum and the substantial attention dedicated to these strategies in coursebooks, relatively few students reported actively using them. This limited use may also help explain why close reading was not perceived as motivating.

The discrepancy between the expectations articulated in the national curriculum and students' reading skills is disconcerting and should be addressed. Greater emphasis is needed on developing students' awareness of what constitutes close and critical reading, as well as why these skills are important to learn. Educators should provide explicit explanations of close reading processes alongside clear demonstrations of how these strategies can be applied across texts and subject areas.

Educators can play a key role by systematically modelling close and critical reading practices. However, the selection of texts for this instruction should take students' reading abilities and motivational levels into account. In classroom settings, it is not uncommon for only a small number of students to have read a book from cover to cover. There are undoubtedly numerous and interrelated factors contributing to the limited extent to which students read books. However, it is evident that sustained reading occurs infrequently in school contexts. Fewer students are required to read entire books as part of their coursework. Instead, instructional material predominantly offers shorter texts, such as articles, excerpts, and poems, with limited opportunities for extended reading

This raises the question of whether there is a connection between students' generally weak close reading competence and types of texts that are being assigned. It may be argued that learning to read closely and critically is both more accessible and more engaging when students work with an entire book, as extended texts allow for deeper engagement with ideas, themes, and textual structures over time.

This research has provided valuable insight into my students' experiences with reading from multiple perspectives. The results have informed my subsequent instructional practices and highlighted the importance of explicit and sustained work with reading strategies from the beginning of the school year. In particular, using the results of this study to explain the distinction between skimming and close reading has been very effective. Students showed strong engagement when presented with data derived from their peers, and this interest appeared to promote greater motivation to reflect on their own reading practices and explore ways of improving their reading outcomes.

Mastering reading strategies develops through the gradual accumulation of experience, and there are, unfortunately, no simple shortcuts that can substitute for this process. As such, I cannot offer students quick solutions without the foundational knowledge that comes from sustained practice. I can, however, support their development by providing clear and thorough modelling, as well as carefully selected texts that meet their current levels. Although this approach is time-consuming, I have learned to appreciate the importance of explicitly modelling critical reading practices. Reading texts aloud together as a class allows me to ensure that students are actively engaging with the material and developing a meaningful understanding of the texts.

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Appendix

Reading Strategies Awareness Questionnaire (Adapted from Mokhtari and Shery's SORS, 2022)

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information concerning the strategies you use while reading academic materials in English (e.g. reading examination texts). Each item in the questionnaire is followed by 4 numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4, and each number means the following: 1 = 'I never do this'; 2 = 'I rarely do this'; 3 = 'I frequently do this'; 4 = 'I always do this'

After reading each statement, circle the number (1, 2, 3 or 4) which applies to you. You should know that there are no right or wrong responses to any of the items of the questionnaire.

Number	Pre-reading strategies	Scale			
1	I establish a purpose for reading through raising some questions I like to have answered in the text	1	2	3	4
2	I make a list of all ideas I may have about the topic of the text	1	2	3	4
3	I make a list of predictions to anticipate possible content of text	1	2	3	4
4	I look at the text surface features and organizational clues (e.g., titles, subtitles, diagrams, etc.)	1	2	3	4
5	I make some comments on organizational aspects of text (e.g., title, author, source, visual aids, etc.)	1	2	3	4
	While-reading strategies				
6	I read headings and subheadings, etc. to understand the organization of the text	1	2	3	4
7	I keep raising questinos in mind about the text	1	2	3	4
8	I skim the text to get the general idea	1	2	3	4
9	I read aloud to concentrate well and understand what I read	1	2	3	4
10	I try to guess the meaning of difficult words through contextual clues	1	2	3	4
11	When guessing meaning from context is also difficult, I use translation into Arabic or French	1	2	3	4
12	When translation doesn't help, I ask another person (e.g., classmate, English teacher, subject specialist)	1	2	3	4
13	I read slowly and carefully when looking for specific information	1	2	3	4
14	I connect what I read to what I already know while reading	1	2	3	4
15	I annotate and mark the text while reading	1	2	3	4
16	I summarize the general idea of each paragraph in written form	1	2	3	4
17	I look for logical relatinoships between paragraphs	1	2	3	4
18	I look for logical relationships between paragraphs and visual aids (e.g. diagrams)	1	2	3	4
19	I identify main ideas and suporting details of each paragraph	1	2	3	4

20	I identify the organizational aspects of text in terms of its typical structure (e.g., cause/effect, compare/contrast, etc.)	1	2	3	4
21	I verify my understanding of text with classmates or teacher	1	2	3	4
22	I control my understanding of text by identifying topic sentences of paragraphs or inventing topic sentences if none exist	1	2	3	4
23	I take notes whiile readingn to understand what I read	1	2	3	4
24	I re-read text to check my understanding	1	2	3	4
25	I examine ideas to make difference between fact and opinion	1	2	3	4
	Post-reading strategies				
26	I check if my predictions about the text are right or wrong	1	2	3	4
27	I examine how well the text is understood through discussion with classmates, English teacher, subject specialist	1	2	3	4
28	I make critical comments on the text	1	2	3	4
29	I re-read to summarise the text	1	2	3	4
30	I check if the questions raised at the beginning are answered in the text	1	2	3	4
31	I check to what extent my purpose of reading is fulfilled	1	2	3	4
32	I make a list of new words and terminology to learn and build vocabulary	1	2	3	4