

Reading Difficulties and Reading Strategies among French Learners in Malaysia

Kesukaran Membaca dan Strategi Membaca dalam kalangan Pelajar Bahasa Perancis di Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

In the global context, the acquisition of foreign language skills is increasingly vital for effective communication. However, learners often face challenges in achieving language proficiency and academic success, with reading difficulties identified as a critical obstacle. Reading, a critical receptive skill, demands decoding for effective comprehension. Insufficient reading abilities can lead to subpar academic achievement and misinterpretation of information, highlighting the necessity of implementing effective reading strategies. This study addresses the lack of research on reading difficulties and strategies in the Malaysian context, focusing on French language learning. The study investigates the relationship between reading difficulties and strategies, aiming to bridge the identified research gap. The study employed a quantitative approach, surveying 122 participants to explore their experiences as beginners in French language learning. The findings reveal notable reading difficulties, such as feelings of inadequacy compared to peers and persistent anxiety despite preparation. Global reading strategies, where learners attempt to guess online text content, emerge as the most employed, while critical analysis and evaluation remain less practised. Problem-solving strategies, where learners regain focus and reread difficult sections, demonstrate effectiveness. Support strategies, like using reference materials, exhibit a positive correlation with reading difficulties. In conclusion, this research sheds light on the nuanced landscape of reading difficulties and strategies in French language learning among Malaysian undergraduates. The findings underscore the importance of tailored instructional approaches and interventions to enhance foreign language reading proficiency.

Keywords: French; Foreign language learning; Reading; Reading difficulties; Reading strategies



INTRODUCTION

The importance of acquiring foreign language skills has grown significantly for effective global communication. In Malaysia, there is a dedicated effort to encourage foreign language learning to advance human development and civilisation. However, learners encounter various challenges in achieving language proficiency and satisfactory learning achievement. One major challenge is related to reading difficulties, as Nanda and Azmy (2020), Agbofa (2023), and Soares et al. (2023) identified.

Language learning comprises four essential skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Listening and reading are receptive skills for understanding and interpreting language, whereas writing and speaking are productive skills for producing language and expressing oneself. Reading is not merely identifying and understanding the words but extracting and constructing meaning from the text. Reading is a core skill because it forms the foundation for learning across all subject areas, especially foreign language learning (Smith et al., 2021). Reading is a complex process as readers are required to integrate text information into their background knowledge or prior knowledge about the language and the events in the world to form a mental representation of the text (Van Dijk et al., 1983; Gernsbacher, 1990). Reading has two important and distinct skills: decoding/word recognition and comprehension (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Septia et al., 2022). Decoding/word recognition is the ability to identify and recognise words, including phonological decoding and orthographic understanding (Soares et al., 2023). In contrast, comprehension is the ability to interpret the connection between the words and the associated context and meaning within a discourse. Hence, it is crucial to have exposure to the language itself and the immersive linguistic environment in foreign language learning.

However, foreign languages are learned predominantly through reading in the classroom, without much exposure to the language outside the classroom. Accordingly, foreign language learners often view reading as problematic due to a lack of exposure to a supportive environment, a conducive social setting, or peers proficient in the language learned (Mohammad & Hasbi, 2021). Similarly, Chandran and Shah (2019) considered several factors, such as lack of exposure to the language, inappropriate reading strategies, low motivation, and low level of interest, which caused reading difficulties in language learning. With a low level of interest, learners have difficulty concentrating on reading and cannot connect what they read to their existing knowledge. Moreover, reading difficulties also result from text complexity and decoding/word recognition problems (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Learners with limited vocabulary and difficulty decoding and recognising words find it challenging to understand the meaning of the text and cannot link it to their background knowledge (Abu Abeeleh et al., 2021).

Reading difficulties or poor reading comprehension cause adverse impacts on learners in their learning process. Learners with reading difficulties or poor reading comprehension have low self-esteem and feel unconfident and marginalised socially, resulting in an inability to concentrate on learning and negatively affecting their learning achievement (Widharyanto & Binawan, 2020). In addition, reading difficulties might hinder learners' problem-solving skills, as learners need to read and understand the text/information before solving the problem or answering the question (Nanda & Azmy, 2020). In foreign language learning, learners have already been exposed to French texts in the classroom. However, numerous learners cannot comprehend the texts or understand the texts at a superficial level. With this partial understanding, learners might misinterpret the information and influence their learning process negatively. Thus, reading strategies are required to empower learners to get the content and the meaning of the text effectively and efficiently.

Reading skills and reading strategies are needed in reading, especially in decoding, comprehending, and constructing the meaning of texts. Reading skills and reading strategies are not interchangeable but represent two distinct sets of processes. Reading skills are cognitive abilities, whereas reading strategies involve metacognitive awareness, allowing readers to decide when, how, and which strategy to use while interacting with written texts (Par, 2020). Wahyudin and Rido (2020) stated that learners

employ suitable strategies and styles in learning. In the study of Mandasari and Oktaviani (2018), most learners employ language learning strategies, including affective, memory, social, meta-cognitive, cognitive, and compensation. In addition, Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) assessed the students' metacognitive awareness and self-reported reading strategies in their study. A Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) was developed based on three reading strategies—global, problem-solving and support strategies. With various reading strategies identified in past studies, it is still important to study learners' perceived use of reading strategies due to individual differences such as gender, age, language proficiency level and education level, leading to uniqueness in the way of learning and reading (Sadeghi et al., 2012). Hence, it is important to explore the student's reading difficulties, strategies, and relationships in foreign language learning.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Learning a new language can be very overwhelming and brings many challenges for new learners. Despite the existence of various methods available to improve the reading techniques in foreign language learning, it cannot be denied that there will be obstacles to be faced by language learners in the learning process. Many studies have shown the importance of identifying reading difficulties and strategies in learning a foreign language. Learners have different strategies to tackle difficulties when reading a new foreign language. One common problem for new learners is that when they read, they have different strategies to adapt to a new language, which is so foreign to them.

Huang and Nisbet (2014) examined the relationship between reading strategy and reading proficiency among 121 adult ESL learners. Their findings revealed the importance of active mental engagement while reading texts through problem-solving strategies such as paying close attention to reading, trying to get back on track, guessing the meaning of unknown words, and adjusting reading speed.

In learning French as a foreign language context, a study of reading difficulties in learning French at Omdurman Islamic University Oman by Musa (2018) revealed that learners face many difficulties in pronunciation and reading French. Lack of knowledge of French phonetics and insufficient time allocated to reading in French are among the problems the students face.

Another study by Aydinbek (2021) of Turkish university students learning French showed that the instruction positively affected the students' reading achievement. Most students thought that reading strategies improved their reading skills. However, over half of them did not think they would use these strategies in the long term.

While many studies focused on the reading problems learners face, reading strategies used by learners or the relationship between reading strategies and language proficiency, very few studies investigate the relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies. Hence, this study is conducted to explore whether there is any relationship between reading difficulties and strategies and how they affect French language learning. Furthermore, most of the studies focus on English as a Second Language in the Malaysian context. There is a lack of studies on reading difficulties and reading strategies in learning French as a foreign language, especially in the Malaysian context. Recognising this gap, this study aims to shed light on how reading strategies and reading difficulties significantly affect learners' learning of French in the Malaysian context.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study explores beginner-level learners' perception of reading difficulties and their use of reading strategies in learning French. Specifically, this study is conducted to answer the following questions:

- How do learners perceive their reading difficulties?
- How do learners perceive their use of reading strategies?
- Is there a relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading Difficulties

In the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), reading is viewed as a product of two different skills: word decoding and linguistic comprehension. Word decoding is conceptualised as the

ability to recognise and identify written words. It can also refer to the explicit process of ‘sounding out’ a word, involving phonological decoding or alphabetic decoding (Nation, 2019). Phonological decoding serves as a foundation for beginners to start reading and learning a language. Beginning from this foundation, beginners slowly develop orthographic/alphabetic knowledge through reading to satisfactory fluency and expertise (Castles et al., 2018). Learning a language using an alphabetic system like the French language requires learners to understand the basic principle—graphemes represent phonemes. The syllable is an important component and can be represented as a phonological and orthographic unit. Difficulties in phonological decoding and a low level of phonological awareness have been identified as significant contributors to poor reading outcomes (Norton & Wolf, 2012).

Linguistic comprehension is conceptualised as the ability to extract lexical information (i.e., meaning at the word level) and generate interpretations at the sentence and discourse levels (Hoover & Gough, 1990). When learners read, they construct a mental model, which leads to a deeper understanding of the text that extends beyond its literal content. The text is considered a foundation to let the reader integrate relevant information, such as word meanings, grammatical rules, background knowledge, and a representation of the world. This information is then processed to establish connections, make inferences, and form the intended meaning (Nation, 2019). The success of reading comprehension relies heavily on these predictors—vocabulary, grammar, listening comprehension and verbal working memory (Hjetland et al., 2019).

Research in the field of foreign language learning has shown interest in reading difficulties and reading strategies, such as in the studies conducted by Fauziah (2021) and Aghajani and Gholamrezapour (2019), where the former explores reading comprehension difficulties and the latter, critical thinking skills in critical reading. Fauziah’s study (2021) focused on the challenges 35 first-grade school students face in comprehending descriptive texts. By utilising a qualitative descriptive approach with an interview, an observation, a questionnaire, and document analysis as instruments, the study identifies that 69.5% of students encountered reading difficulties, particularly due to poor vocabulary proficiency, low motivation to learn English as a foreign language (EFL), studying alone, and insufficient environmental and social support. On the other hand, Aghajani and Gholamrezapour (2019) emphasised the importance of critical thinking in the learning process, cognitive development, and information seeking and how it relates to reading anxiety in a foreign language context. Conducted with 177 intermediate Iranian EFL university learners using the Critical Reading Scale and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale as instruments, the research was done to investigate how critical thinking skills affect critical reading and reading anxiety in foreign language learning. The results show a significant predictive relationship, demonstrating a negative correlation between critical thinking skills and foreign language reading anxiety. The findings suggest that when students’ critical thinking skills improve, their foreign language reading anxiety decreases, and vice versa. This study proves that the lack of critical thinking skills in reading activities in a foreign language classroom context would lead to a higher degree of anxiety, resulting in reading difficulties in their learning process.

Furthermore, the study by Abu Abeeleh et al. (2021) focused on reading comprehension problems among university students. Using a questionnaire as an instrument, 20 EFL students were recruited as respondents. The results showed that the reading comprehension problems are due to text complexity, word decoding and anxiety. Similarly, Edward et al. (2021) investigated reading difficulties in reading English text among 25 Malaysian ESL university students using a questionnaire. The results indicated that poor vocabulary, reading anxiety related to insufficient time, lack of reading habit and interest, and inability to get the main idea during reading are the causes of reading difficulties among respondents. Chua and Sulaiman (2021) also identified reading comprehension problems in narrative texts among 80 Malaysian Primary Year 4 students using a questionnaire. The results demonstrated that poor orthographic knowledge, content knowledge, motivation, reading strategies and reading process cause reading comprehension problems.

Reading Strategies

Reading strategy and reading skills are two different processes that readers possess. Reading strategy is a controlled process involving readers' goal-directed attempts to decode, understand, and construct meaning from the text. Conversely, reading skill is an automated process that involves decoding and making meaning from the text with fluency and expertise without readers' awareness or control (Afflerbach et al., 2008). Reading is a dynamic and intentional process involving readers' active engagement with the texts (Par, 2020). Readers employ various strategies to engage actively with the texts. Generally, the strategies can be categorised into two main categories—the 'top-down' and the 'bottom-up' strategies. The 'top-down' strategy is related to using prior knowledge, such as questioning, evaluating, summarising, paraphrasing, monitoring and predicting. On the other hand, the 'bottom-up' strategy focuses on text-based analysis, such as text analysis, scanning and searching for a dictionary (Pudin et al., 2022).

Research by Lu and Liu (2015) showed that students use different reading strategies when reading English. According to research by Valizadeh (2021), reading a text in a foreign language can be difficult for students because of anxiety. Teaching reading strategies can help reduce anxiety and improve reading comprehension. Lu and Liu's study (2015) investigated the interrelationships between foreign language reading anxiety, reading strategies, and their interactive effect on reading comprehension performance. The respondents were 1702 students taking English at a public university in China. Data were collected using the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) and the Foreign Language Reading Strategy Use Scale (FLRSUS). Findings showed that the respondents use different strategies when reading English. The research also reveals that foreign language reading anxiety interacts with foreign language reading strategy use and reading performance. Furthermore, the study by Valizadeh (2021) explored the intricacies of reading in English as a Foreign Language context, identifying anxiety as a notable obstacle for learners. The respondents were 55 EFL students in Turkey. The research used a pretest-intervention-posttest design. The results showed that the group of learners who received teaching of reading strategies education reduced reading anxiety compared to the group who received standard teaching. The findings suggest that using reading strategies improves reading comprehension performance and increases learners' confidence and ability to manage ambiguities within texts.

The Survey of Reading Strategies was developed in the study by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) to measure students' metacognitive awareness and self-reported reading strategies. The survey emphasised three categories: global strategies, problem-solving strategies and support strategies. Global strategies are intentional and planned techniques to monitor the reading process, such as previewing texts, predicting the text meaning and looking at the text characteristics. Problem-solving strategies are actions readers take when facing difficulties in reading texts, such as guessing the meaning of a word, rereading the text, and visualising the text's content. Support strategies are the basic techniques helping readers comprehend texts, such as using a dictionary, taking notes and translating the target language to their first language.

Numerous studies have been conducted based on the reading strategies (global, problem-solving and support reading strategies) to identify learners' most frequently used reading strategies and which best predict reading proficiency. Amer et al. (2010) investigated the online reading strategies employed by 123 undergraduate students in their first year and 97 students in their final year at an Omani EFL university. The Survey of Reading Strategies was adapted in the study. The results showed that skilled readers used more global strategies, while low-proficient readers employed more support strategies. Additionally, the most frequently used reading strategies among EFL students of UIN Walisongo Semarang were investigated using a questionnaire in the study of Annury et al. (2019). The results indicated that the respondents frequently used problem-solving strategies, followed by global strategies and support strategies.

Reading Difficulties and Reading Strategies

Several studies have been conducted on the relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies in the Malaysian context, focusing on academic reading and the English language. Rahmat

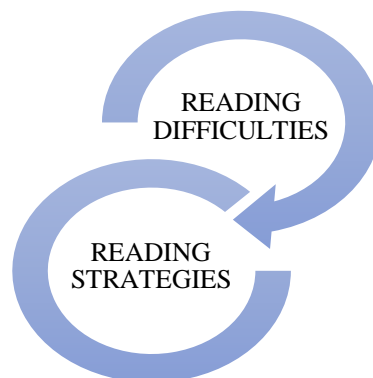
et al. (2022) studied the perceived reading difficulties and reading strategies and the influence of reading strategies on reading difficulties. An inappropriate instructional approach in the classroom is viewed as a significant cause of reading difficulties. The data showed that the respondents used cognitive strategy for reading strategies by repeating to read the text for better understanding. Next, the respondents used a metacognitive strategy by evaluating and monitoring their reading understanding. The respondents also used a social affective strategy as they sought help when they faced reading difficulties. According to the data, there is a negative association between metacognitive strategy/social affective strategy and reading difficulties. This finding implies that the metacognitive and social affective strategies reduce reading difficulties. It strengthens the idea that reading difficulties can be reduced if learners use appropriate reading strategies.

Identically, Singh et al. (2023) investigated the perceived reading difficulties and reading strategies and their relationship among ESL university students using a questionnaire as an instrument. The results showed that reading anxiety and a low level of self-confidence are the leading factors of reading difficulties. For reading strategies, the data showed that the respondents demonstrated a positive attitude towards reading and actively used global strategies in reading. The respondents also have a high level of awareness of using problem-solving reading strategies to overcome reading difficulties. However, the respondents still translated from English to their native language in reading and used it as a support strategy. Last but not least, there is a connection between reading difficulties and reading strategies, according to the data shown. The respondents used various reading strategies to overcome reading comprehension problems and enhance their understanding.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 illustrates the study's conceptual framework. This study explores factors that make learners perceive reading as difficult (Abu Abeeleh et al., 2021). Next, this study is also rooted in reading strategies by Amer et al. (2010). The strategies are global, problem-solving, and support strategies.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study explores reading difficulties and reading strategies among undergraduates in French language learning. A purposive sample of 122 respondents completed the survey, utilising a 5 Likert-scale survey as the instrument. This study involved 122 respondents who were beginner-level learners (low A1) level taking French as an elective subject. These students were chosen because they generally have limited exposure to the language, face more difficulties in reading and rely more on reading strategies in their learning. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that the selected respondents met the specific criteria to address the research objectives. Since the focus is on beginner-level learners taking French as an elective, learners with intermediate and advanced proficiency levels and those majoring in French were excluded from this study.

The survey is rooted in Abu Abeeleh et al. (2021) on reading comprehension problems and Amer et al. (2010) on readers' perceived use of online reading strategies to reveal the variables in Table 1 below.

The survey has five sections. Section A comprises five items on the demographic profile. Section B consists of fourteen items on reading difficulties. Section C includes seventeen items on global strategies. Section D consists of eight items on problem-solving strategies, and Section E includes nine items on support strategies.

Table 1: Distribution of the Items in the Survey

SECTION	VARIABLE	STRATEGY	ITEMS (PER STRATEGY)	TOTAL ITEMS (PER SECTION)
A	DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE			5
B	READING DIFFICULTIES (Abeeleh & Al-Sobh, 2021)			14
C	READING STRATEGIES (Amer et.al., 2010)	Global	17	34
D		Problem-Solving	8	
E		Support	9	
Total				53

Table 2: Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.937	48

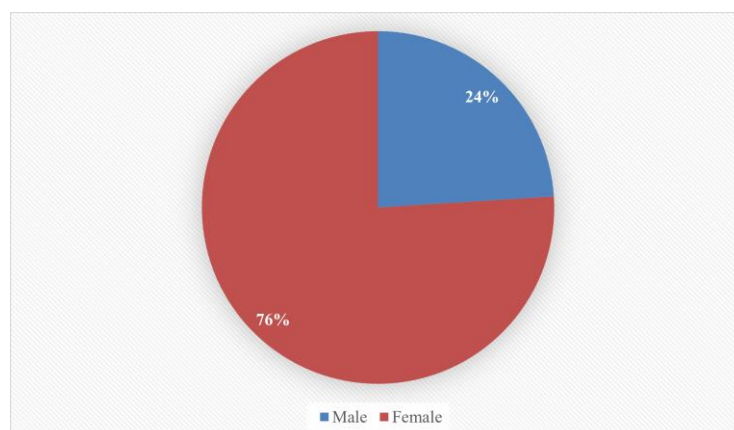
Table 2 displays the survey's reliability, indicating a Cronbach's alpha of .937, revealing strong reliability of the instrument chosen. Further analysis using SPSS presents findings to answer the research questions for this study.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study, addressing the three research questions on French beginner learners' perceived reading difficulties, their self-reported use of reading strategies (global, problem-solving, and support strategies), and the relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies. The findings are organized into four parts which are demographic profile, reading difficulties, reading strategies (global, problem-solving, and support strategies), and the relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies.

Findings for Demographic Profile

Figure 2: Percentage for Gender



A total of 122 respondents participated in the survey. Figure 2 shows 76% of participants are female, and male participants are 24 %.

Figure 3: Percentage for Level of Study

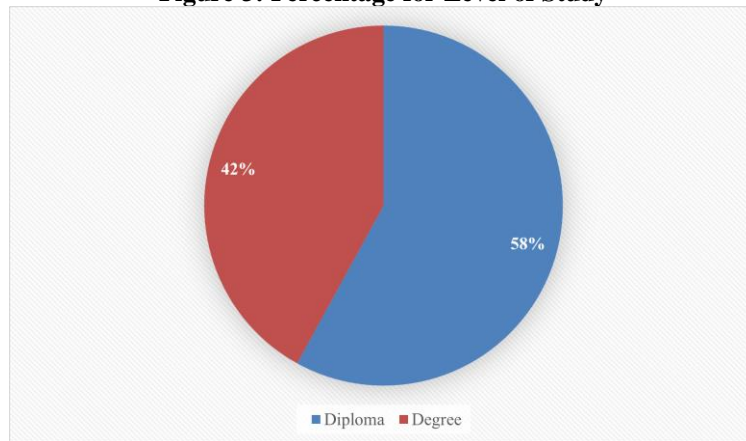


Figure 3 shows that 58% of participants are Diploma students, while 42% are Degree students.

Figure 4: Percentage for Discipline of Study

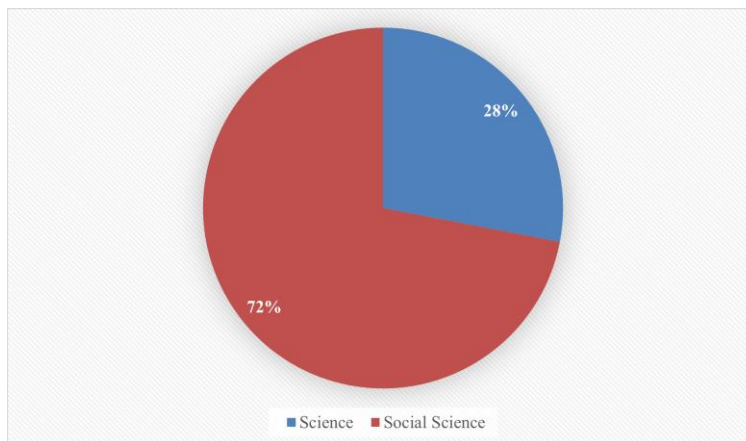


Figure 4 shows 72% of participants are social science students while 28% of participants are science students.

Figure 5: Percentage for Frequency of Reading

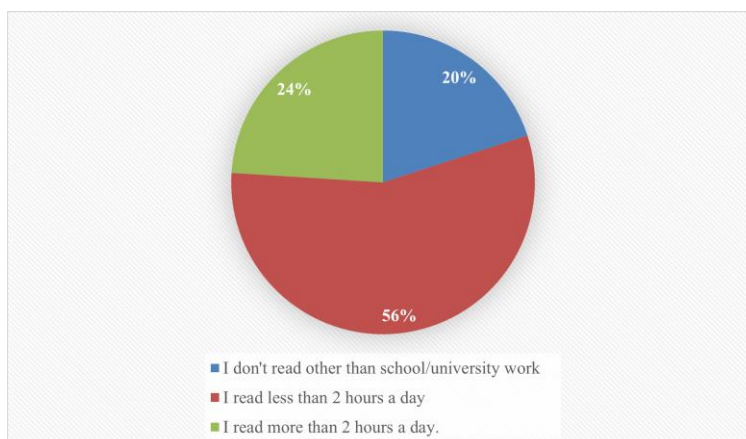


Figure 5 shows that most participants read less than 2 hours a day at 56%, followed by 24% of participants reading more than 2 hours a day and only 20% of participants do not read other than school/university work.

Figure 6: Percentage for Preference of Reading Materials

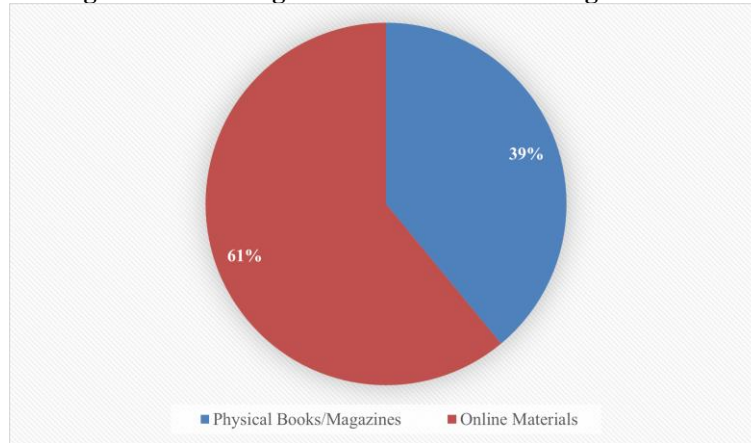


Figure 6 shows that most participants prefer online materials when they read, while only 39% of participants prefer physical books or magazines.

Findings for Reading Difficulties

This section presents data to answer research question 1: How do learners perceive their reading difficulties?

Figure 7: Mean for Reading Difficulties

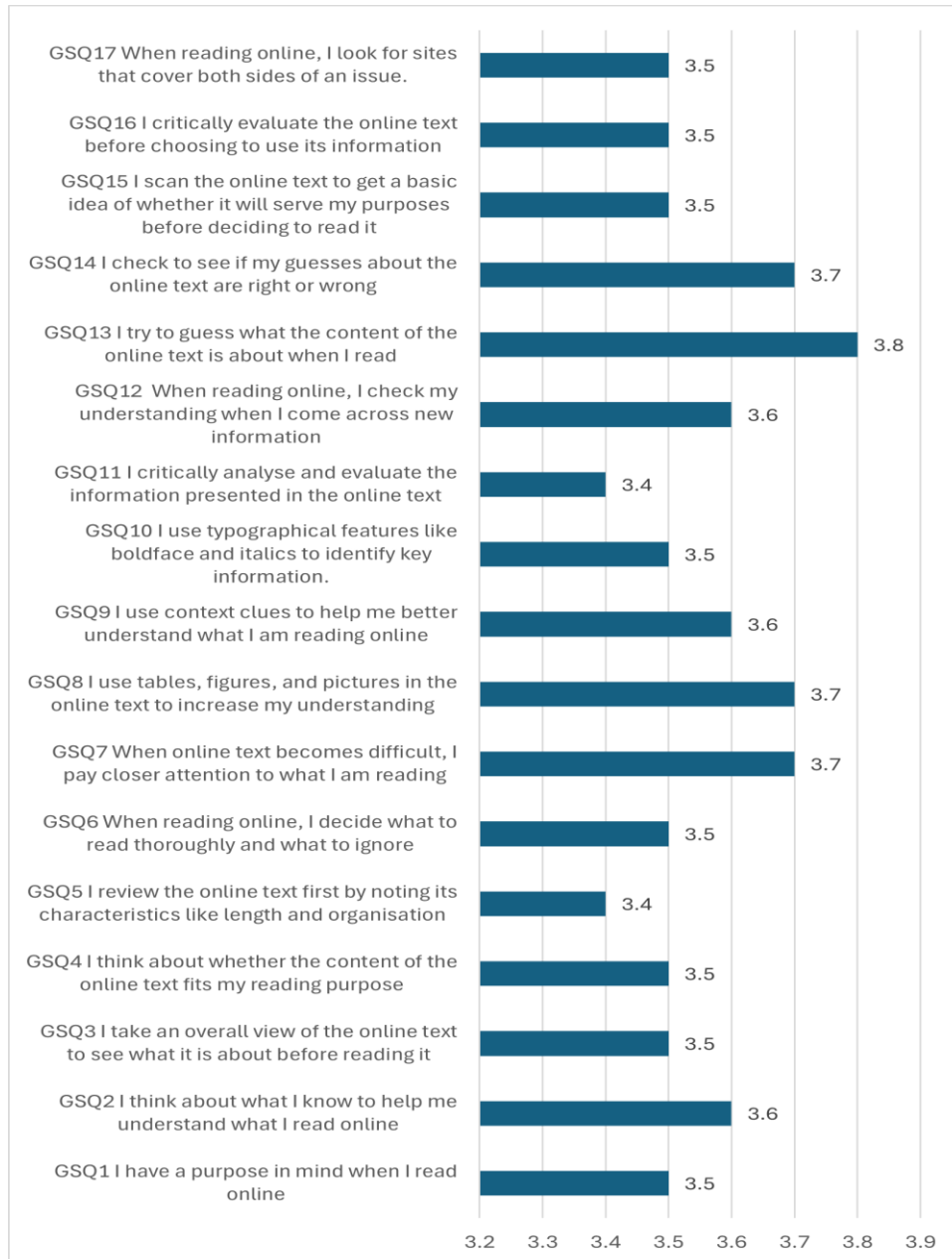


Figure 7 shows the highest mean for reading difficulties at 3.7, where the students keep thinking that the other students are better at language than them. This is followed by 3.6, where the students still feel anxious even though they are well prepared for the language classes. The lowest mean is 2.9, where the students find text mapping easy and do not face difficulty with reference questions.

Findings for Reading Strategies

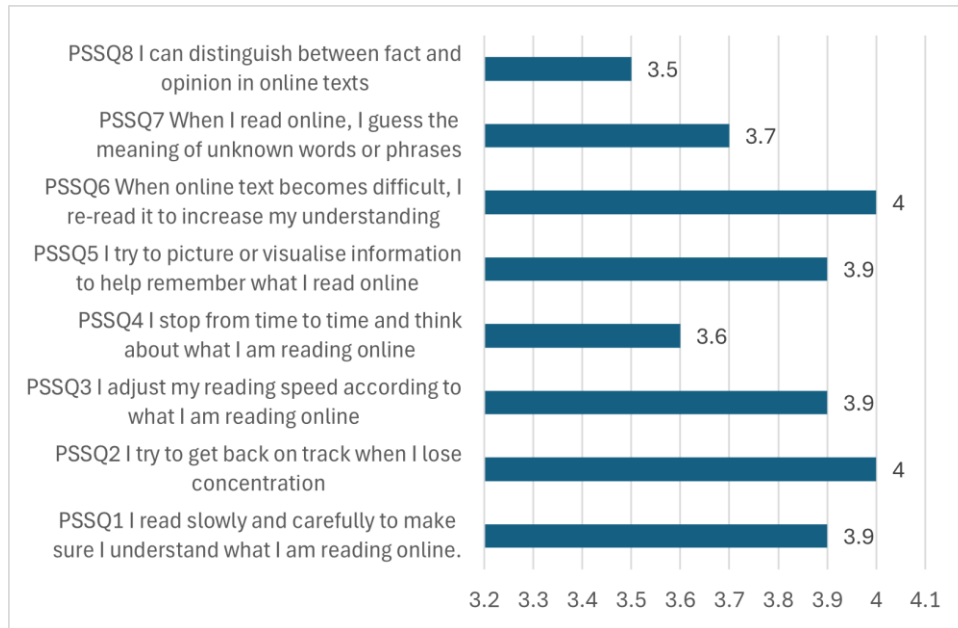
This section presents data to answer research question 2: How do learners perceive their use of reading strategies?

Figure 8: Mean for Global Strategies



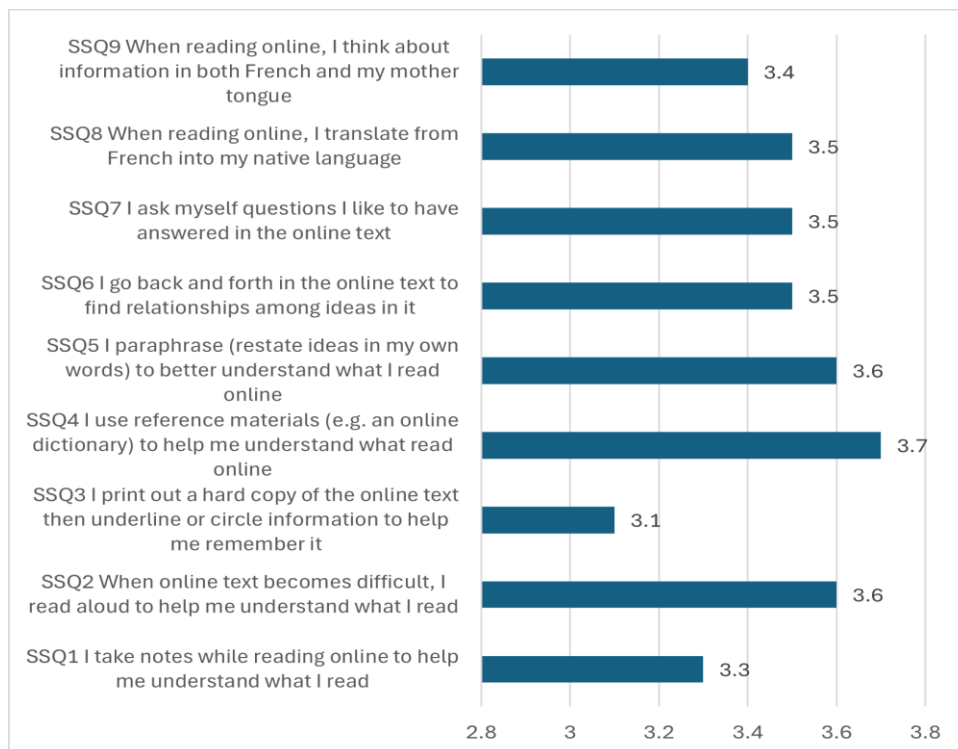
The global strategy with the highest mean value, 3.8, practised by the respondents in reading strategies shows that they try to guess the content of the online text while reading. The least mean valued strategy, 3.4, is employed when reading an online text: they tend not to critically analyse and evaluate the information presented. Additionally, this global strategy shares its lowest mean value with another strategy where students tend not to review the online text first by noting its characteristics, such as length and organisation. From the instructor's point of view, it is noteworthy to consider the students' impulsive attitude pre- and peri-reading and to focus on having them "guess" intelligently based on the characteristics and information presented in the online texts.

Figure 9: Mean for Problem-Solving Strategies



The highest mean for problem-solving strategies is 4. The students try to get back on track when they lose concentration, and when the online text becomes difficult, they reread it to increase their understanding. The lowest mean for problem-solving strategies is 3.5, and the students indicate that they can distinguish between fact and opinion in online texts.

Figure 10: Mean for Support Strategies



The highest mean for support strategies is 3.7, as reported by students who use reference materials to help them understand what they read online. The lowest mean for support strategies is 3.1, where the students print out a hard copy of the online text and then underline or circle the information to aid their memory retention.

Findings for Relationship between Reading Difficulties and Reading Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 3: Is there a relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies?

Data is analysed using SPSS for correlations to determine if there is a significant relationship in the mean scores between reading difficulties, global strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support strategies. Results are presented separately in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 below.

Table 3: Relationship between Reading Difficulties and Global Strategies

		READINGDIFF I	GLOBAL
READINGDIFFI	Pearson Correlation	1	.061
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.505
	N	122	122
GLOBAL	Pearson Correlation	.061	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.505	
	N	122	122

Table 3 shows there is no association between reading difficulties and global strategies.

Table 4: Relationship between Reading Difficulties and Problem-Solving Strategies

		READINGDIFF I	PROBLEMSOL VING
READINGDIFFI	Pearson Correlation	1	.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.243
	N	122	122
PROBLEMSOLVING	Pearson Correlation	.107	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.243	
	N	122	122

Table 4 shows there is no association between reading difficulties and problem-solving strategies.

Table 5: Relationship between Reading Difficulties and Support Strategies

		READINGDIFF I	SUPPORT
READINGDIFFI	Pearson Correlation	1	.248**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	122	122
SUPPORT	Pearson Correlation	.248**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	122	122

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows there is an association between reading difficulties and support strategies. Correlation analysis shows a low significant association between reading difficulties and support strategies. ($r=.248^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), the coefficient is significant at the .05 level,

and a 0.1 to 1.0 scale will be a positive correlation. The scale between 0.1 and 0.3 will be a weak positive correlation, from 0.3 to 0.5 will be a moderate positive correlation and a strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means a weak positive relationship exists between reading difficulties and support strategies.

DISCUSSIONS

This study explores learners' perceptions of reading difficulties and their self-reported use of reading strategies, including global, problem-solving and support strategies, answering three main research questions.

How do learners perceive their reading difficulties?

The findings reveal that the students keep thinking other students are better at language than them. The respondents perceived the reading difficulties associated with social comparison, causing low self-confidence. Specifically, the participants indicated that they often believe other students are more proficient in language skills, leading to a perception of inadequacy, which is aligned to the study of Singh et al. (2023). Furthermore, the students reported experiencing anxiety despite being well-prepared for language classes. These difficulties align with previous literature emphasising the impact of anxiety on reading difficulties (Aghajani & Gholamrezapour, 2019; Abu Abeeleh et al., 2021; Edward et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2023).

How do learners perceive their use of reading strategies?

The findings showed that most of the respondents reported that they consciously use some intentional and planned techniques to reduce reading difficulties, such as guessing and predicting the meaning of the text and paying attention while reading the text, as global strategies, which is aligned with the study of Annury et al. (2019). Moreover, most respondents reported that they re-read the text when they face difficulties in reading and get back on track when they lose concentration. The learners know their reading process and can use the appropriate problem-solving strategies to understand the text better. The strategy frequently used (re-reading the text) as reported by the respondents is similar to the findings of other studies, such as the study of Annury et al. (2019) and Singh et al. (2023). Last but not least, most respondents reported that they refer frequently to reference materials when they face reading difficulties as one of the support strategies. They rely on external aids like reference materials to assist and facilitate them in understanding the text. However, this finding contrasts with the finding of Annury et al. (2019), who discovered that using reference materials was the least preferred support strategy reported by readers.

Is there a relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies?

There is no association between reading difficulties and global strategies or between reading difficulties and problem-solving strategies. A weak positive correlation between reading difficulties and support reading strategies was discovered. This means that when students experience more reading difficulties, they prefer to use support strategies like dictionaries or translation. In this study, the respondents are beginners in learning French, which means they are low-proficient readers in reading French. In line with the study of Amer et al. (2010), low-proficient readers tend to use more support strategies than the other strategies. The respondents use support strategies and rely on external aids like reference materials to help them comprehend the text. However, the relationship between reading difficulties and support strategies is low significant. Learners who face reading difficulties tend to use support strategies. However, it is not consistent or predictable due to individual differences, which aligns with the study of Sadeghi et al. (2012). Some students may be more likely to use support strategies regardless of their difficulty level. In contrast, some other learners may use other strategies frequently, considering their proficiency level and learning styles. Moreover, using support strategies as the only strategy is not always effective in reducing reading difficulties. Students may need to develop a broader range of reading strategies, including global and problem-solving strategies, to improve their comprehension, which aligns with the study of Annury et al. (2019).

CONCLUSION

This study explores learners' perceived reading difficulties and self-reported reading strategies in French language learning. The findings revealed that social comparison and anxiety are the significant factors of reading difficulties in French texts. The respondents are aware of their reading process and employ a broad range of reading strategies including global, problem-solving and support strategies to overcome reading difficulties. Among the reading strategies, rereading the texts, referring to reference material, and guessing the meaning of the texts are the most frequently used, as reported by the respondents. There is a weak positive relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies. This indicates that students will use support strategies when they face reading difficulties, but this is not always the case. Individual differences such as proficiency level and learning styles influence the decision of which strategies to use. Using only one reading strategy, such as a support strategy, might not be effective. Thus, combining different reading strategies, including global, problem-solving and support strategies, could be more beneficial for learners.

Understanding learners' reading difficulties and strategies from their viewpoints enables educators to design more effective learning activities, specifically emphasising reading in the foreign language classroom. This approach empowers learners to be aware of reading strategies that best suit their needs in foreign language learning. Subsequent research efforts should emphasise utilising diverse research instruments and including learners across various proficiency levels.

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