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The Role of Reading Strategies in the Teaching Practices of Secondary-School French Teachers in Algeria: The Case of Tébessa

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Abstract

This study examined the role of reading comprehension strategies in the instructional practices of secondary-school teachers of French as a foreign language (FFL) in Tébessa Province, Algeria. A questionnaire was administered to a convenience sample of 10 teachers to determine whether reading strategies were taught explicitly or implicitly and the extent to which they were integrated into instructional sequences. Data were analyzed using SPSS, Version 26. The 12-item scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$). The findings revealed a notable paradox. Although all participants acknowledged the importance of reading strategies for fostering learner autonomy ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.48$), their reported practices were predominantly implicit and nonsystematic, with unequal emphasis across the before-, during-, and after-reading phases. The study therefore identified a substantial gap between teachers' stated beliefs and their reported instructional practices. These findings underscore the need for sustained professional development focused on the explicit teaching and modeling of reading comprehension strategies.

Keywords: reading strategies, reading comprehension, teaching practices, French as a foreign language, Algeria

Introduction

The rapid circulation of information and the diversification of written formats have made reading comprehension an essential skill for academic, professional, and civic success. Through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) treats reading literacy as a key indicator of

individuals' capacity to participate actively in a knowledge society (OECD, 2019, *p.* 28). In this context, reading instruction in French as a foreign language (FFL) is strategically important in Maghreb education systems, where French remains a major language of instruction, culture, and access to professional opportunities.

In Algeria, educational reforms, particularly the 2003 reform based on the competency-based approach, sought to improve learning by placing students at the center of the educational process and treating reading comprehension as a foundational skill throughout schooling (Ministry of National Education, 2015). Official secondary-school French curricula emphasize the development of strategies for autonomous text comprehension. Nevertheless, Algerian students continue to experience difficulties with reading comprehension, as reflected in national assessments and teachers' observations.

Research on language teaching indicates that expert readers are distinguished not only by their linguistic knowledge but also by their ability to select and apply reading strategies consciously and effectively in response to the text and the reading situation (Giasson, 2011, *p.* 115). Cognitive and metacognitive strategies, including planning, monitoring, inferring, summarizing, and predicting, support reader autonomy. Explicit strategy instruction therefore represents an important means of improving reading comprehension and reducing achievement gaps (Bouchaour & Boubir, 2022).

However, research in Algeria remains limited. Although several studies have examined students' reading difficulties, strategy use, or learning outcomes (Ahmadi, 2021; Boubir, 2010; Chabbia, 2023; Mazari, 2022), few have focused on the specific methods teachers use to teach reading strategies. Bouchaour and Boubir's (2022) survey of primary-school teachers found limited knowledge of reading comprehension instruction and called for changes in teacher preparation (*p.* 130). No comparable study has focused specifically on secondary-school teachers in the Tébessa region. This gap is important because ambitious curricular requirements can produce meaningful learning only when teachers understand, adopt, and implement them deliberately.

The present study addressed this gap by examining secondary-school French teachers working in Tébessa Province, in eastern Algeria. It sought to clarify the place of reading strategies in teachers' reported instructional practices. The central research question was as follows: To what extent do secondary-school French teachers in Tébessa integrate reading comprehension strategy instruction into their pedagogical practices, and is that instruction delivered explicitly or implicitly? Three hypotheses were derived from this question:

- H1:** Most teachers recognize the importance of reading strategies and report teaching them to their learners.
- H2:** When reading strategies are taught, instruction remains predominantly implicit and nonsystematic, emphasizing explanations of the text and vocabulary rather than explicit strategy modeling.

H3: Attention to the different reading phases is uneven, with during-reading strategies taught less frequently than before- and after-reading strategies.

This study was intended to improve understanding of strategic reading instruction in an understudied context and to identify needs relevant to teacher education. A questionnaire was administered to 10 French teachers working in secondary schools in Tébessa Province. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to assess reported practices and examine the three hypotheses.

Method

Participants

The target population consisted of secondary-school French teachers working in public secondary schools in Tébessa Province during the academic year in which the study was conducted. A convenience sample of 10 teachers was recruited voluntarily. Although the sample was small, it varied in professional experience (2 to more than 20 years), qualifications (primarily bachelor's degrees, with the remaining participants holding master's or Magister degrees), and grade levels taught (first, second, and third years of secondary school). All participants held permanent teaching positions. Reported class sizes ranged from 25 to 40 learners, which was consistent with typical class sizes in the region's public schools.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire written in French was developed with reference to previous studies of reading instruction (Bouchaour & Boubir, 2022; Giasson, 2011) and adapted to the Algerian educational context. The questionnaire contained two main sections.

Section 1: Teacher profile. This section collected professional and demographic information, including province and district of employment, school, age, highest degree, preservice training institution (university or École Normale Supérieure [ENS]), years of experience, employment status, participation in continuing education related to reading instruction, grade levels taught, and average class size.

Section 2: Pedagogical methods. This 15-item section formed the core of the survey. The items addressed the place of reading in the curriculum (Q1); skills developed through reading (Q2); students' reading comprehension performance (Q3); the perceived motivational value of official texts (Q4); the frequency of classroom reading activities (Q5 and Q6); boredom during reading (Q7) and its causes (open-ended); learners' preferred reading genres (Q8); methods of teaching reading comprehension (Q9); factors that facilitate comprehension (Q10 and Q15); whether reading strategies were taught (Q11); and how they were taught (open-ended). Questions 12, 13, and 14 used a three-point Likert scale (A great deal = 3, Somewhat = 2, Not at all = 1) to measure the importance teachers assigned to selected strategies before, during, and after reading.

Procedure and Data Analysis

Paper questionnaires were distributed to volunteer teachers in their schools. Participants were informed of the study's academic purpose and assured of anonymity. Completed questionnaires were collected and entered into a digital data set for analysis.

Quantitative responses from the closed-ended items and Likert scales were coded and analyzed using SPSS, Version 26. Descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, medians, modes, standard deviations, and ranges were calculated for the quantitative variables. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the 12 items across Questions 12, 13, and 14 to assess internal consistency. Content validity was supported through a review of the relevant literature and consultation of prior studies in reading instruction (Bouchaour & Boubir, 2022; Giasson, 2011). Responses to the open-ended items on the causes of boredom (Q7) and the manner in which strategies were taught (Q11) were analyzed qualitatively to identify recurring themes and meaningful patterns. When responses were incomplete or ambiguous, only clearly interpretable information was included in the analysis of the relevant item.

Instrument Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's alpha for the 12 Likert-scale items was .83. According to commonly used psychometric criteria, coefficients above .70 are acceptable, and coefficients above .80 indicate good internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The obtained coefficient therefore supported the reliability of the scale. Construct validity was supported by the questionnaire's theoretical alignment with established models of strategic reading instruction (Giasson, 2011).

Results

Analysis of the responses from the 10 participating teachers revealed several patterns in their views and reported practices related to reading strategy instruction.

Teacher Profile and Instructional Context

All participants held permanent teaching positions. Their professional experience ranged from 2 to more than 20 years, with an average of about 10 to 12 years. Most participants (8 of 10) held a bachelor's degree in French; the remaining two held a master's or Magister degree. All had completed their preservice education at a university or an École Normale Supérieure. Only a minority reported participating in specialized continuing education on reading instruction, suggesting limited formal preparation in this area. Reported class sizes generally ranged from 30 to 40 learners, which may constrain differentiated and strategy-focused instruction.

Role and Perceived Value of Reading

All participants (100%) agreed that reading occupies an essential place in the school curriculum. They also considered reading comprehension fundamental to the development of students' skills and reported that it primarily supports textual and discourse competence rather than grammatical and sociocultural competence. When evaluating their students' reading

comprehension performance, 7 of 10 teachers rated it as average, two rated it as poor, and one rated it as good. None rated students' performance as excellent. In addition, 8 of 10 teachers reported that texts in the official curriculum did not engage their students, and 7 of 10 reported that students became bored during classroom reading. Commonly identified causes included the length of the texts, topics removed from students' experiences, difficult vocabulary, and learners' limited reading habits.

Reported Reading Instruction Practices

Despite these concerns, 9 of 10 teachers reported that they regularly asked learners to read in class. The same proportion believed that their learners did not read enough. In response to Q9, 8 of 10 teachers reported combining explanations of difficult vocabulary with a general explanation of the text rather than asking learners to read and answer questions independently. This teacher-centered approach suggests that responsibility for clarifying meaning remained primarily with the teacher.

Teaching Reading Strategies: A Paradox in Self-Reported Practices

All participants (10 of 10) stated that they taught reading strategies in class, which supported H1. However, their explanations of how they taught these strategies substantially qualified this finding and supported H2.

In their open-ended responses to Q11, most teachers (7 of 10) provided broad descriptions that did not indicate explicit, structured instruction. Common responses included guiding learners, asking questions, using reading activities, and helping learners understand the text. Only two teachers provided more specific descriptions, such as using progressive questioning or encouraging learners to formulate hypotheses about the text. No participant referred to modeling, guided practice, independent practice, or the distinction between cognitive and metacognitive strategies. The responses therefore suggested a general awareness of the need to support reading but no consistent methodological framework for explicit strategy instruction.

Descriptive Statistics for Strategy Instruction

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the 12 Likert-scale items in Questions 12, 13, and 14 to quantify the importance teachers assigned to the selected reading strategies. Table 1 presents the principal indicators.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Reading Strategy Instruction

Statistical Indicator	Value
Mean (<i>M</i>)	2.17
Median (<i>Mdn</i>)	2.20
Mode (<i>Mo</i>)	2.40

Statistical Indicator	Value
Standard deviation (<i>SD</i>)	0.48
Range (maximum–minimum)	1.40
Minimum	1.30
Maximum	2.70
Cronbach's alpha (α)	.83

Note. $N = 10$. M = mean; Mdn = median; Mo = mode; SD = standard deviation. Values are based on questionnaire data.

The overall mean of 2.17 on a 1-to-3 scale indicated that teachers assigned moderate to high importance to reading strategy instruction. The median (2.20) and mode (2.40) supported this central tendency. The relatively small standard deviation (0.48) indicated moderate dispersion around the mean and some agreement among teachers about the relative importance of the strategies. Nevertheless, the range of 1.40 (1.30–2.70) indicated meaningful individual variation in reported practices.

Strategy Instruction by Reading Phase

Analysis of Questions 12, 13, and 14 provided a more detailed picture of strategy instruction across the three reading phases and partially supported H3.

Before Reading

Teachers assigned considerable importance to prereading strategies (see Table 2). Activating prior knowledge received the highest rating ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.42$), followed by determining the purpose for reading ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.48$). Predicting subsequent events was taught less consistently ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.82$).

Table 2

Importance Assigned to Strategies Before Reading

Strategy	M	SD	3	2	1
Predict subsequent events	2.30	0.82	6	2	2
Determine the purpose for reading	2.70	0.48	8	2	0
Activate prior knowledge	2.80	0.42	9	1	0

Note. $N = 10$. 3 = A great deal; 2 = Somewhat; 1 = Not at all. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

During Reading

The during-reading phase showed the greatest variation and raised the most concern (see Table 3). Monitoring comprehension received the highest rating ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.48$), a

positive result because it represents a metacognitive strategy. The remaining strategies received lower and more variable ratings. Making connections ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.88$) and analyzing text structure ($M = 1.80$, $SD = 0.92$) were the least frequently emphasized strategies in this phase.

Table 3

Importance Assigned to Strategies During Reading

Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	3	2	1
Monitor comprehension	2.70	0.48	8	2	0
Make connections	1.90	0.88	3	4	3
Identify main ideas	2.20	0.79	5	3	2
Ask questions	2.10	0.74	4	4	2
Analyze text structure	1.80	0.92	3	3	4

Note. $N = 10$. 3 = A great deal; 2 = Somewhat; 1 = Not at all. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

After Reading

After-reading strategies received somewhat greater attention than during-reading strategies, although the pattern remained uneven (see Table 4). Summarizing received the highest rating ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.71$), followed by rereading and reflecting ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 0.70$). Critical analysis received the lowest rating in this phase ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.74$).

Table 4

Importance Assigned to Strategies After Reading

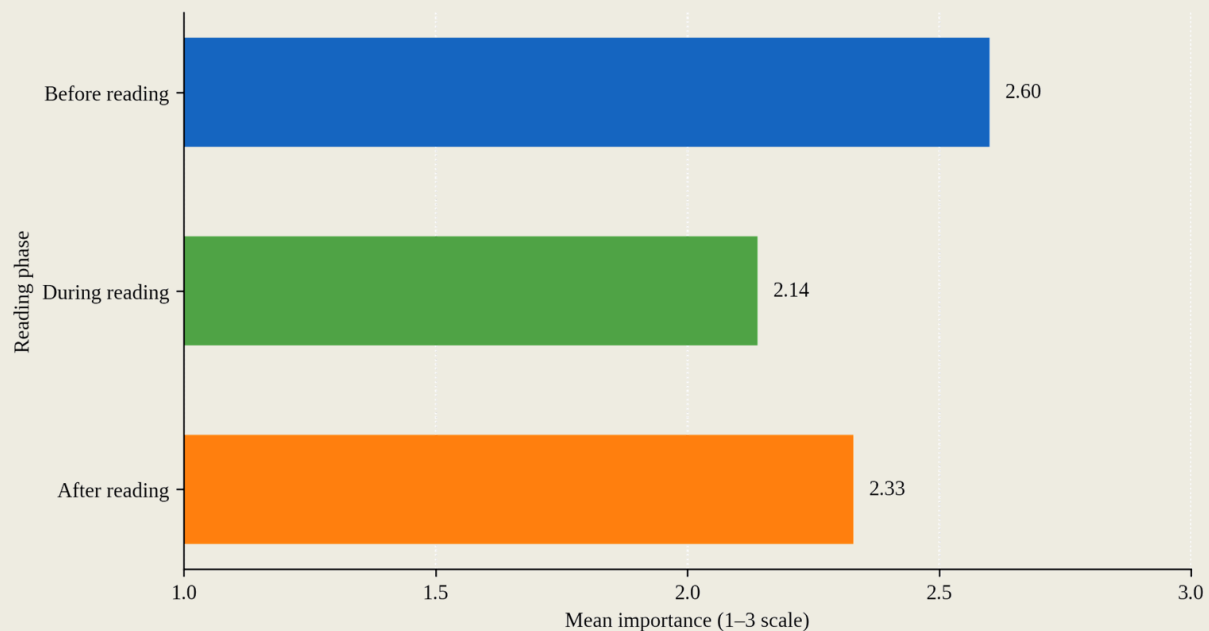
Strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	3	2	1
Critically analyze the text	2.10	0.74	4	5	1
Reread and reflect	2.40	0.70	6	4	0
Summarize	2.50	0.71	7	3	0

Note. $N = 10$. 3 = A great deal; 2 = Somewhat; 1 = Not at all. M = mean; SD = standard deviation.

Graphical Summary of Results

Figure 1 summarizes the mean importance assigned to strategies across the three reading phases. The before-reading phase had the highest mean ($M = 2.60$), followed by the after-reading phase ($M = 2.33$). The during-reading phase had the lowest mean ($M = 2.14$).

Figure 1

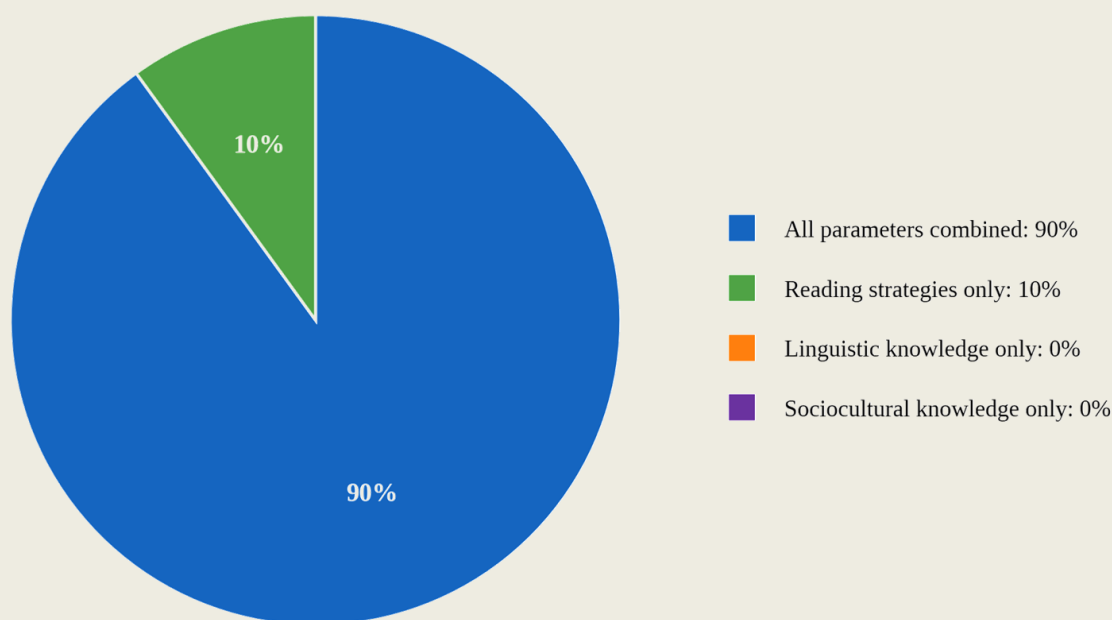
Mean Importance Assigned to Strategies by Reading Phase

Note. Mean ratings were calculated on a scale from 1 (Not at all) to 3 (A great deal). Data are based on responses from 10 teachers.

Figure 2 presents teachers' responses concerning the factors that help overcome comprehension difficulties (Q15). Nine of 10 participants (90%) selected the combined contribution of linguistic knowledge, sociocultural knowledge, and reading strategies, whereas one participant (10%) selected reading strategies alone. No participant selected linguistic or sociocultural knowledge alone.

Figure 2

Factors Contributing to Overcoming Comprehension Difficulties



Note. $N = 10$. All parameters combined refer to linguistic knowledge, sociocultural knowledge, and reading strategies.

Factors Facilitating Comprehension

Consistent with Figure 2, responses to Q15 were nearly unanimous: 9 of 10 teachers considered linguistic knowledge, sociocultural knowledge, and reading strategies jointly necessary for overcoming comprehension difficulties. This response indicated professional awareness of the multidimensional nature of reading. However, the reported instructional practices did not reflect an equally balanced and systematic approach to strategy instruction.

Discussion

This study examined the role of reading strategies in the reported practices of secondary-school French teachers in Tébessa and considered whether strategy instruction was explicit or implicit. Although the sample was small, the findings supported the three hypotheses and were consistent with earlier research in other Francophone contexts.

H1 proposed that teachers would recognize the importance of reading strategies and report teaching them. The unanimous responses to Q11 supported this hypothesis. This finding is consistent with Giasson's (2011) observation that the value of strategy instruction has become widely recognized in professional discourse. Algerian curricula have reinforced this pedagogical principle through the competency-based approach (Ministry of National

Education, 2015), and teachers appear to have incorporated strategic instruction into their professional thinking.

H2 proposed that strategy instruction would remain predominantly implicit and nonsystematic. The qualitative responses strongly supported this hypothesis. Broad descriptions such as guiding learners and asking questions indicated limited access to the concepts and procedures required for structured explicit instruction rather than a lack of commitment. This pattern is consistent with Bouchaour and Boubir's (2022) finding that primary-school teachers in Algeria possessed insufficient knowledge of reading comprehension strategy instruction (*p.* 130). The present findings suggest that a similar difficulty exists at the secondary-school level. Teachers helped students understand particular texts, but they did not clearly describe teaching transferable processes that students could apply independently to new texts. The central instructional problem therefore lies in the distinction between helping students understand a text and teaching them how to understand texts.

The absence of modeling in participants' responses was especially noteworthy. Explicit strategy instruction requires teachers to make their thinking visible through demonstration and guided practice (Giasson, 2011). No participant referred to such modeling or to a progression from guided to independent practice. This omission suggests that preservice and continuing education may not have provided sufficient preparation for designing and implementing explicit strategy instruction.

H3 proposed an imbalance across the three reading phases. The mean ratings supported this hypothesis: before reading received the greatest emphasis ($M = 2.60$), followed by after reading ($M = 2.33$), whereas during reading received the least emphasis ($M = 2.14$). Prereading strategies such as activating prior knowledge and establishing a purpose may be more readily incorporated into traditional lesson introductions. By contrast, during-reading strategies require metacognitive pauses, ongoing monitoring, and a more interactive instructional dialogue. The limited attention given to text structure ($M = 1.80$) and critical analysis ($M = 2.10$) is concerning because these strategies are central to expert reading and to a nuanced, evaluative understanding of texts.

Overall, the findings revealed a paradox between teachers' endorsement of reading strategies and their limited integration into reported practice. This pattern may reflect insufficient continuing education, pressure to complete the curriculum, difficult teaching conditions, and textbooks that prioritize comprehension questions over explicit strategy instruction. Because these possible explanations were not measured directly, future studies should examine them through classroom observation and teacher interviews.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between official expectations for strategic reading instruction and the reported practices of 10 secondary-school French teachers in Tébessa. The

12-item scale showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$). The findings revealed a complex pattern. Teachers strongly endorsed the importance of reading strategies for learner autonomy ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.48$), yet their reported instruction remained largely intuitive, implicit, and uneven. Greater emphasis was placed on prereading ($M = 2.60$), monitoring comprehension ($M = 2.70$), and summarizing ($M = 2.50$) than on critical analysis ($M = 2.10$) and analysis of text structure ($M = 1.80$).

The results indicate that institutional guidance alone is insufficient to transform teaching practices. The gap between teachers' beliefs and their capacity to describe explicit strategy instruction points to a need for specialized training, practical instructional resources, and sustained professional support. The study's small convenience sample and restricted geographic scope limit the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, the results contribute to the study of FFL pedagogy in Algeria and support the need for larger investigations that combine questionnaires with classroom observations and interviews focused on teachers' instructional decision-making.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen preservice and continuing education.** Teacher education should include dedicated modules on reading comprehension pedagogy, with particular emphasis on explicit strategy instruction, teacher modeling, guided practice, independent practice, and formative assessment.
2. **Develop explicit instructional resources.** Textbook designers should integrate comprehension strategies more systematically and provide practical tools, such as strategy boxes and worked examples, that show how specific strategies can be applied to texts.
3. **Promote peer-based professional development.** Local and online communities of practice should be encouraged so that teachers can share experiences, successes, and challenges and collaboratively design innovative reading instruction sequences.
4. **Conduct larger-scale action research.** Future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of teacher training in explicit strategy instruction by comparing student progress with that of a control group and generating evidence that can inform educational policy.

Investing in teacher education can help Algerian learners become autonomous and critical readers by enabling teachers to develop learners' strategic skills rather than merely explain individual texts.

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