Teaching Beyond the Text: How Gender, Experience, and Grade Level Shape Reading Comprehension Instruction among EFL Teachers in Qatar

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Abstract. Persistent gaps in reading achievement among students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Qatar have raised concerns about the effectiveness of reading comprehension instruction. This quantitative, descriptive study investigates the ways in which EFL teachers' reading comprehension instruction in Qatar government schools varies according to each teacher's gender, length of teaching experience, and grade level. Data were collected from 754 EFL teachers via an online questionnaire distributed through the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The survey measured teachers' use of reading comprehension strategies and explicit instruction. Descriptive statistics and multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVA) were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed significant trends and variations across these variables. Female teachers scored higher in both the implementation of reading strategies (M = 50.68) and explicit strategy instruction (M = 24.68) compared to male teachers (M = 48.46; M = 23.8). Conversely, no significant multivariate effect was found for teaching experience or grade level, although novice (0–5 years) and secondary-level teachers consistently reported lower strategy use than their peers. The implications of these findings suggest the need for targeted professional development to enhance strategy use, particularly among male and secondary-level teachers, and tailored programs to support novice teachers' transition from explicit to flexible instruction. The study contributes to a better understanding of the demographic influences on reading comprehension instruction in EFL contexts and informs efforts to improve literacy outcomes through teacher development.

Keywords: Reading Comprehension Instruction; Teaching Experience; Gender Differences; Teaching Grade Level

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1. Introduction

Developing students' reading comprehension is a cornerstone of successful education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting, wherein learners must decode, understand, and engage with texts in a non-native language. In this context, the teachers' role becomes increasingly critical, as they are responsible for equipping students with effective reading strategies—such as making predictions, summarizing, and using context clues—which can significantly improve learners' comprehension outcomes when taught intentionally and systematically.

A robust body of literature has previously documented the benefits of using metacognitive reading strategies and explicit instruction techniques to support student learning (Brevik, 2019; Duffy et al., 1986; Duke & Pearson, 2002; Oxford, 1990; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Such approaches have been associated with improved student outcomes when implemented consistently. A particularly effective approach is explicit strategy instruction, which teaches students not only what strategies to use, but also how, when, and why to use them (Oxford, 1990; Duke & Pearson, 2002). Instructional frameworks that emphasize modeling, guided practice, and the gradual release of responsibility support this process (Duffy et al., 1986; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983).

However, in Qatar's government schools, gaps persist in reading comprehension instruction, as evidenced by repeatedly low national and international assessment scores (OECD, 2010; 2014; 2019; 2023). For example, according to the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 results, 15-year-old students in Qatar achieved an average reading score of 419 points, whereas the OECD average is 476 points. This indicates that Qatari students scored below the OECD average in reading, highlighting an urgent need to understand how teachers' instructional practices contribute to these outcomes.

Despite ongoing reforms in Qatar aimed at student-centered and evidence-based instruction, existing research suggests that EFL teachers in Qatar government schools rely heavily on basic strategies such as *identifying the main ideas* and *activating prior knowledge* while underutilizing more complex and reflective strategies such as *think-aloud* and *summarizing,* and without integrating multiple approaches (Morsy et al., 2021).

Moreover, while prior research has examined reading instruction generally, little is yet known about the ways in which demographic factors such as gender, years of teaching experience, and teaching level may shape the implementation of these strategies. International literature suggests that instructional practices may vary across these variables (Berliner, 1988; Kadah, 2005; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989), but few studies to date have explored them together in a single educational context—especially in the Gulf region.

Therefore, this study—which forms a part of a broader study investigating reading comprehension instruction in government schools in Qatar—addresses these gaps by examining how reading comprehension instruction varies according to gender, teaching experience, and grade level among EFL teachers. By analyzing these variables, the study seeks to provide insights into the ways in which demographic factors influence the use of reading comprehension

strategies and explicit instruction practices. Findings from this study are intended to inform targeted professional development and policy decisions to support more equitable and effective literacy instruction in EFL classrooms.

In order to achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research question: How does reading comprehension instruction vary among EFL teachers in Qatar according to gender, years of teaching experience, and grade level taught?

2. Literature Review
2.1 Factors Associated with the Use of Language Learning Strategies
Various studies have examined the differences in strategy use associated with variables related to the learners (Odofin et al., 2024; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Price-Mohr et al., 2017). However, the focus of the present study is on three variables related to the teachers: gender (Bećirović, 2018; Dadour & Robbins, 1996; Kadah, 2005; Kaylani, 1996; Oxford & Nyikos, 1989; Oxford, 1990; Oxford & Leaver, 1996; Price-Mohr et al., 2017); teaching experience (Berliner, 1988; Anna Uhl Chamot, 2004; McAninch, 2015; Reyna-Barron, 2016; Xing, 2009); and grade level taught (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Baily, 1996; Kadah, 2005; Keatley, 1999; Ness, 2006; Nguyen, 2022; Odofin et al., 2024; White, 2011). In the following sections, each of the demographic variables selected for the present study will be briefly discussed in relation to the accessible literature.

2.1.1 Gender Factor
Numerous studies have examined gender differences in language learning and instructional strategies, often finding that female learners and teachers demonstrate greater engagement in strategic language practices. International assessments, such as those reviewed by Price-Mohr et al. (2017), consistently show that girls outperform boys in reading across all age groups. This performance gap has been partly attributed to females' more frequent and reflective use of language learning strategies.

A range of research confirms that females tend to adopt a wider array of strategies compared to their male counterparts. For instance, Kadah (2005) found a significant correlation between gender and the use of 13 reading strategies, with female teachers of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) using them more frequently. Similarly, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) reported that female learners demonstrated higher usage across three categories of learning strategies, while males did not exhibit dominant use in any category. Furthermore, in a study involving 149 Iranian EFL learners, Zeynali (2012) confirmed that females employed strategies more frequently than males, highlighting gender as a significant factor in language learning behavior.

Supporting this, Rianto (2021) found that female students used overall, problem-solving, and support strategies significantly more than males, indicating stronger metacognitive engagement. Recent research by Kanmaz (2022) further confirms that gender differences exist in reading strategy instruction among EFL teachers. Female Turkish EFL teachers were found to use comprehension strategies more frequently and with greater variety than their male colleagues. In addition to this, Çakıcı (2016) investigated the beliefs of EFL teachers regarding reading strategies in classroom instruction, finding that female teachers—although fewer in number than their male counterparts—

demonstrated a strong commitment to employing reading strategies consistently across different stages of reading. While no significant gender differences were found regarding specific strategy preferences, female teachers notably emphasized activating prior knowledge, visualizing content, and encouraging students to engage deeply with texts through repeated reading, dictionary use, and connecting new information to existing knowledge.

This aligns with existing literature that highlights females' strong inclination toward strategy use in language teaching contexts. Similarly, Rahimi and Asadollahi (2012) found that female Iranian EFL teachers preferred extroverting, sensing, and kinesthetic teaching styles more than males, favoring interactive and sensory-based activities and emphasizing personal rapport and group interactions. Such patterns resonate with the results of the current study, in which female teachers consistently reported higher usage across modeling, guided practice, and collaborative learning.

However, not all studies confirm these gender-based distinctions. In contrast, Kaylani (1996)'s study of Jordanian secondary school EFL learners reported no significant gender differences in overall strategy use. Similarly, Dadour and Robbins (1996) observed that male and female university students in Egypt used language learning strategies with comparable frequency, suggesting that cultural or institutional contexts may mediate gender effects. Additionally, Tercanlioglu (2005) investigated whether gender differences have any significant influence on EFL pre-service teachers' beliefs about language learning, with the results indicating no significant differences between males and females.

In the Qatari context, gender has also been linked to differences in attitudes and instructional practices. Al-Khwaiter (2001) explored the beliefs and practices related to English language teaching and learning in Qatar through questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. Findings revealed that female students exhibited more positive attitudes toward learning English. Gender was also found to have a statistically significant effect on teachers' attitudes toward English instruction, with more positive attitudes being identified among male teachers toward teaching the language.

Similarly, a classroom observational study by Palmer et al. (2016) concluded that female teachers were more active than their male counterparts in asking and answering questions, checking students' understanding, and engaging with their students in the classroom. Collectively, these studies underscore the nuanced role of gender in shaping instructional and learning strategies in EFL contexts. While females often appear to be more strategic and reflective in their instructional choices, variations nevertheless exist across contexts, reinforcing the need for gender-responsive pedagogical training and further localized research.

2.1.2 Years of Teaching Experience Factor
Berliner (1988) categorized the development of pedagogical expertise into five stages: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert. Each stage engenders distinct characteristics. Novice teachers exhibit rational yet inflexible behavior, with minimal performance expectations. Advanced beginners develop strategic knowledge but struggle to prioritize effectively. Competent teachers

make deliberate choices and set goals, though they lack speed and flexibility. Proficient teachers demonstrate intuitive decision-making and holistic recognition of situations, enabling them to predict events accurately. Finally, experts perform fluidly and qualitatively, engaging deeply with teaching processes.

Several studies have investigated the differences inherent across these stages of expertise (Berliner, 1988; Johnson, 2011; Langenthal, 2004; Reyna-Barron, 2016; Xing, 2009). For example, Xing (2009) explored levels of consistency between beliefs and practices among 464 EFL teachers, finding that experienced teachers exhibited stronger alignment between their instructional beliefs and classroom behaviors compared to novices. Experienced teachers favored strategies such as encouraging students to self-correct errors and demonstrated greater awareness of their own instructional choices and the rationale behind them.

Building on this, Fuchs et al. (2021) surveyed 167 EFL elementary school teachers and found that experienced teachers reported higher self-efficacy, positively influencing their instructional practices. Experienced teachers were found to be more confident in their ability to teach literacy effectively and were more likely to use diverse instructional components. Conversely, novice teachers often had lower self-efficacy, impacting their effectiveness and their ability to select appropriate instructional strategies. Professional development and support were recommended to help novice teachers to increase their confidence and develop their skills.

Another key area influenced by teaching experience is the use of assessments to guide instruction. Langenthal (2004) interviewed 20 first-grade teachers, finding that experienced teachers demonstrated greater flexibility in using formal and informal assessment tools to evaluate students' reading progress. Furthermore, experienced teachers were better at linking assessment results to instructional practices and adapting their methods to meet diverse student needs.

Interestingly, some studies have reported contrasting findings regarding strategy instruction. Reyna-Barron (2016) observed 12 EFL teachers and found that beginner teachers (0–3 years) spent more time teaching comprehension strategies in seventh-grade classrooms compared to seasoned teachers (15+ years), who implemented no such activities during the observed lessons. Similarly, after analyzing 60 video-recorded English L2 lessons, Brevik (2019) found that novice teachers excelled in the explicit instruction of reading strategies, which is crucial for building students' comprehension skills. On the other hand, experienced teachers focused more on guided strategy practice and integrating strategies into daily activities.

Further contrasting with these findings, Johnson (2011) investigated the effect of teaching experience on EFL instructional practices among 59 teachers and found minimal differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers. Years of experience appeared to have little influence on teachers' reported use of reading strategies. Nevertheless, the observed differences between novice and experienced teachers can be attributed to several factors. Berliner (1988) suggested that years of experience alone do not define a teacher's skill development stage, as teachers may demonstrate various characteristics

associated with different stages, depending on the situation. Borko and Livingston (1989) attributed the differences to novices' less complex and less interconnected cognitive schemata, which rendered their pedagogical knowledge less efficient. In the same vein, Hill, Rowan, and Ball (2005) emphasized that teachers with greater knowledge of teaching simply make better instructional decisions. Johnson (1992) noted that novice teachers often prioritized maintaining the flow of planned activities, making the lessons more teacher-centered and the teachers less responsive to their students' needs.

2.1.3 Grade-level Factor
Research on the association between the grade level taught and the use of language learning strategies has shown that students at different grade levels vary significantly in terms of their strategy use, with older students reporting more frequent use (Baily, 1996; Keatley, 1999; Oxford, 1994). In one of the largest studies in this field, Oxford and Nyikos (1989) examined the factors influencing strategy use among 1,200 foreign language university students in the USA. Using the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) as their primary instrument, the researchers found that the number of years spent studying a language had a significant effect on strategy use. Students who had already undertaken four to five years of study reported more frequent strategy use than those with less experience.

Moreover, studies examining language strategy instruction have indicated that the frequency of strategy instruction also varies according to grade level (Kadah, 2005; Ness, 2006; White, 2011). Kadah (2005) conducted a quantitative study investigating the use of 22 reading comprehension strategies among teachers of Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) with K–12 students in the USA. The findings revealed a positive correlation between the grade level taught and the frequency with which five particular strategies were used. For example, elementary students were taught the 'organize' strategy more frequently, while preparatory and secondary students were more often taught strategies such as 'make predictions,' 'access information sources,' 'use imagery,' and 'use selective attention.'

In contrast, White (2011) explored the relationship between grade levels and instructional variety among 2,844 teachers of grades 4–12 in California. This quantitative correlational study revealed a negative correlation between grade level and instructional variety in English/Language Arts classes. Teachers at higher grade levels used fewer illustrations, less independent work, and less partner work compared to teachers of lower grades. However, Ness (2006) reported findings that were incongruent with White's study. Having examined the frequency of reading comprehension instruction in preparatory and secondary school content-area classes, Ness (2006) found that more reading comprehension instruction occurred in preparatory school classes.

Further broadening the discussion, Sun et al. (2021) conducted a meta-analysis synthesizing data from 57 studies involving 21,548 readers to examine the relationship between reading strategies and comprehension across different grade levels. Using Weinstein and Mayer's reading strategy model, the study

revealed that higher grade levels tend to employ more advanced reading strategies, which are more effective in enhancing comprehension.

Similarly, Roberts et al. (2021) focused on reading interventions for English learners in grades K–3, analyzing 10 studies and evaluating the effects of seven instructional programs. Their best-evidence synthesis revealed that younger students benefited more from explicit strategy instruction, highlighting the importance of early intervention and targeted strategy instruction in supporting foundational reading skills.

Collectively, these findings underscore the dynamic relationship between grade level and reading comprehension strategy instruction, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches that align with students' developmental stages and instructional needs. Although there exists an extensive body of literature on this topic, most studies to date have focused on the attributes of learners rather than teachers, and few have yet examined the ways in which gender, teaching experience, and grade level simultaneously shape reading comprehension instruction.

Moreover, limited research has thus far attempted to address these variables within the context of EFL instruction in Qatari government schools. By investigating how these demographic factors influence teachers' instructional practices, the present study contributes a novel perspective, shifting the focus from learners' strategies to teachers as the implementers of reading instruction. Thus, this research fills a critical gap in the literature by offering empirical evidence to inform targeted professional development efforts in Qatar and similar EFL contexts.

3. Research Methods
3.1 Research Design
A descriptive, quantitative research design was employed in this study to examine current instructional practices in reading comprehension among EFL teachers in government schools in Qatar. Specifically, the study aimed to describe the patterns and variations in teachers' use of comprehension strategies across their gender, years of teaching experience, and grade level taught.

Descriptive studies are particularly suitable for capturing and summarizing existing conditions, behaviors, and trends without manipulating variables (Cohen et al., 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By administering a structured survey, this study systematically collected data from a large population of EFL teachers to quantify and describe the correlations between demographic factors and instructional practices. Due to their efficiency in collecting standardized data from many participants, surveys are effective tools in descriptive research, allowing researchers to identify trends, compare subgroups, and make informed generalizations (Johnson & Christensen, 2020; Ponto, 2015).

Therefore, this design was deemed appropriate for providing a comprehensive overview of the instructional variations among EFL teachers in Qatar and establishing a foundation for future inquiry. In this study, the independent variables were gender, years of teaching experience, and grade level taught, while the dependent variables were the reported frequency of reading comprehension strategy use and explicit strategy instruction.

3.2 Participants and Sampling Process

Participants in the study were EFL teachers from Qatari government (public) schools, representing a significant segment of the total teaching workforce in Qatar's government schools. The total population of EFL teachers at the time of the study was 1,815, comprising 72% female (n = 1,313) and 28% male (n = 502), distributed across 103 elementary, 58 preparatory, and 55 secondary schools. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) granted access to this population and distributed an invitation to participate via official email.

A convenience sampling strategy was employed, whereby all EFL teachers were invited to voluntarily participate through an online survey. This method was chosen due to the accessibility of the full teaching population via centralized MOEHE communication, and to ensure broad coverage across all teaching levels and school types. Convenience sampling is a commonly used method in large-scale educational research, especially when access to a full population list is facilitated by a central authority (Cohen et al., 2013).
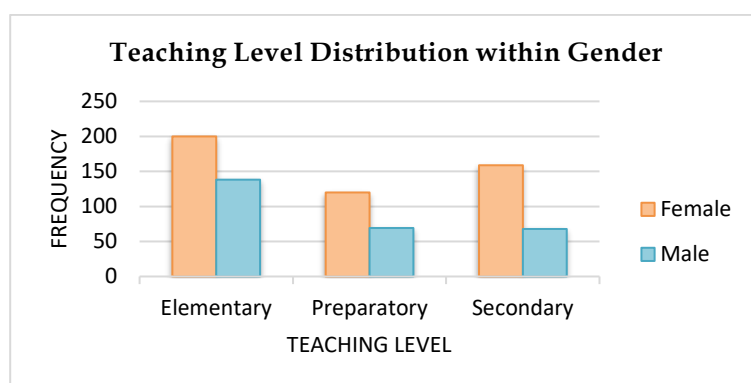

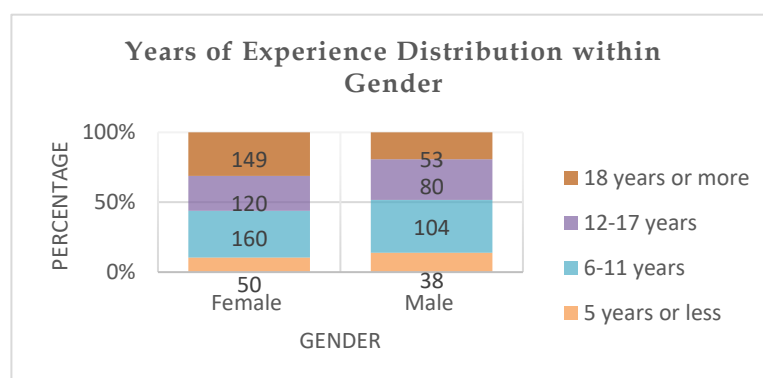**Figure 1 Teaching Level Distribution within Gender**

Figure 2 Years of Experience Distribution within Gender

3.3 Research Instrument and its Validity

This study employed the *Reading Comprehension Strategy Instruction* survey, developed by Hernandez-Laboy (2009) and grounded in cognitive/social constructivist theories (Ballou, 2012; Hernandez-Laboy, 2009; Negari & Askani, 2014) and Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (Ballou, 2012; Grabe,

2009). The instrument included demographic questions (gender, grade level, years of experience), 12 items on reading strategy use, and six items on explicit strategy instruction, rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always).

To ensure the instrument's validity and reliability, a panel of three experts in ESL curriculum, methodology, and assessment validated the instrument, providing feedback on its pertinence, wording, and adequacy. Their cognitive interviews affirmed the content validity with mean scores of 3.00, 3.00, and 2.97 (maximum 3), and the instrument showed high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = .880). A pilot study in Qatar's government schools confirmed the questionnaire's clarity, indicating that it required no modifications. Internal consistency was measured with 754 participants, resulting in Cronbach's Alpha of .901, indicating strong reliability.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from both Qatar University and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE). Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and anonymous. All participants were informed of the study's purpose and procedures through the invitation email, and consent was implied by the completion and submission of the online questionnaire. The confidentiality of responses was maintained throughout the study, and no identifying information was collected.

3.4 Data Collection
The questionnaire survey (Appendix 1) was administered online via Survey Monkey, and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) distributed the survey link through an official email invitation to all EFL teachers, which ensured wide coverage and accessibility.

Of the 1,815 teachers invited, 871 responded, with 754 completing the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 41.5%. Completed responses were received from 479 females (63.5%) and 275 males (36.5%), reflecting the general gender imbalance in the national teaching population. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Although the sample was generally representative of the population in terms of gender and teaching level distribution, certain imbalances were noted. More female than male teachers responded, and participation was not equally distributed across elementary, preparatory, and secondary levels. These discrepancies are acknowledged as limitations in the interpretation of the findings.

To ensure further representativeness, the study also analyzed the distribution of participants based on years of teaching experience within each gender group and teaching level. This allowed for a more nuanced analysis of instructional trends by demographic subgroup. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the teaching level and years of experience distributions by gender.

3.5 Data Analysis
Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 24) to address the research question. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were calculated for each questionnaire item to provide an exploratory understanding of the data. After

being collected on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), responses were analyzed to examine variations in the use of reading comprehension strategies.

To determine whether significant differences existed in terms of gender, teaching level, or years of teaching experience, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. Post-hoc tests (Scheffe and Tukey) were applied to further investigate significant group differences. This analysis aimed to reveal the ways in which demographic factors influence the instructional strategies used by EFL teachers.

4. Results

4.1 Gender and Reading Comprehension Strategy Instruction

Descriptive statistics revealed that female teachers consistently scored higher mean values (4.22) compared to male teachers (4.04) in nearly all reading comprehension strategies, with the exception of Item #11 (Handle unfamiliar words using context clues), in which both genders scored equally. Specifically, females demonstrated a higher use of such strategies as identifying the purpose of reading (Item #1, 4.50 vs. 4.49), making predictions (Item #3, 4.63 vs. 4.28), and creating visual representations (Item #7, 4.01 vs. 3.77). As shown in Figure 3, these results highlight the overall trend that female teachers more frequently implement various reading comprehension strategies compared to their male counterparts.
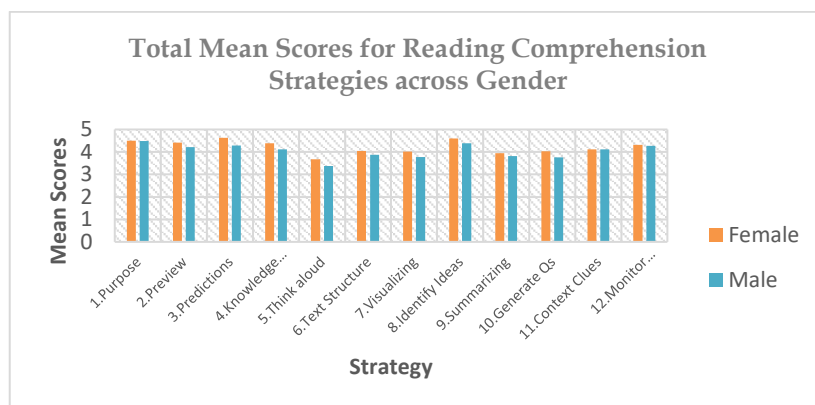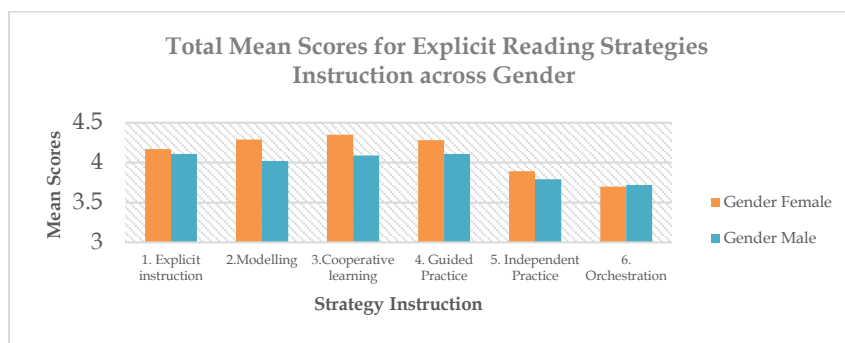

Figure 3 Total Mean Scores for Reading Comprehension Strategies across Gender

Furthermore, female teachers outperformed male teachers in explicit strategy instruction, with a mean score of 4.11 compared to 3.97. Notable differences were observed in strategies such as modeling (Item #2), in which females scored 4.29 versus 4.02 for males, and collaborative use (Item #3), in which females scored 4.35 compared to 4.09 for males. Additionally, in guided practice (Item #4), females scored significantly higher (4.28) than males (4.11). These results suggest that female teachers engage more frequently in explicit instruction practices that emphasize modeling, collaboration, and guided practice. As illustrated in Figure 4, these results suggest that female teachers engage more frequently in explicit instruction practices that emphasize modeling, collaboration, and guided practice.

Figure 4 Total Mean Scores for Explicit Reading Strategies Instruction across Gender

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the impact of gender on the use of reading comprehension strategies and explicit instruction. The analysis showed a significant multivariate main effect of gender, Wilks' λ = .975, F (2, 751) = 9.505, p < .001, indicating that gender differences are statistically significant. Further univariate tests revealed that females achieved significantly higher scores for both reading strategies implementation (M = 50.68, SD = 6.85) and explicit instruction (M = 24.68, SD = 3.65) compared to males (M = 48.46, SD = 6.5; M = 23.8, SD = 3.44, respectively). A one-way MANOVA revealed a significant multivariate main effect for gender, Wilks' λ = .975, F (2, 751.000) = 9.505, p <. 001. Table 1 presents multivariate test results, showing the significant gender effect across the two dependent variables.

Table 1: Multivariate Tests[a] for Gender Effect on Two Dependent Variables

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.982	21041.030[b]	2.000	751.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.018	21041.030[b]	2.000	751.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	56.035	21041.030[b]	2.000	751.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	56.035	21041.030[b]	2.000	751.000	.000
Gender	Pillai's Trace	.025	9.505[b]	2.000	751.000	.000
	Wilks' Lambda	.975	9.505[b]	2.000	751.000	.000
	Hotelling's Trace	.025	9.505[b]	2.000	751.000	.000
	Roy's Largest Root	.025	9.505[b]	2.000	751.000	.000
a. Design: Intercept + Gender						
b. Exact statistic						
c. Computed using alpha = .05						

In view of the significance of the overall MANOVA test, univariate main effects were further examined. Significant differences were found for gender in both teaching strategies, F (1, 860.043) = 18.973, p < .0005, and explicit teaching of the strategies, F (1, 124.214) = 9.692, p < .002. Table 2 provides a detailed summary of the univariate F results for these dependent variables.

Table 2: Univariate F Results of Two Dependent Variables

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gender	Teaching_Strategies	860.043	1	860.043	18.973	.000
	Explicit_Teaching	124.214	1	124.214	9.692	.002
a. R Squared = .025 (Adjusted R Squared = .023)						
b. R Squared = .013 (Adjusted R Squared = .011)						
c. Computed using alpha = .05						

An independent sample t-test further confirmed these gender differences. For Item #2 (Modeling the strategy in action), females scored significantly higher (M = 4.29, SD = .837) than males (M = 4.02, SD = .794), t (752) = 4.47, p < .001. Similarly, for Item #3 (Collaborative use of the strategy), females (M = 4.35, SD = .756) outscored males (M = 4.09, SD = .767), t (752) = 4.52, p < .001. Furthermore, for Item #4 (Guided practice of the strategy), females also scored significantly higher (M = 4.28, SD = .798) than males (M = 4.11, SD = .733), t (752) = 2.94, p = .003. Collectively, these findings highlight the greater frequency and emphasis female teachers place on explicit reading strategy instruction compared to their male counterparts.

4.1.1 Teaching Experience and Reading Comprehension Strategy Instruction
Cross-tabulation analysis revealed notable differences based on years of teaching experience. Teachers with 6-11 years of experience exhibited the highest mean score (4.21), surpassing the overall sample mean (4.16). In contrast, the lowest mean score (4.10) was attributed to teachers with 0-5 years of experience. Interestingly, however, this least experienced group (0-5 years) scored highest (3.72) on Item #5 (Think Aloud Strategy), compared to more experienced teachers and the total sample mean of 3.56. Figure 5 presents these mean scores across different experience levels.
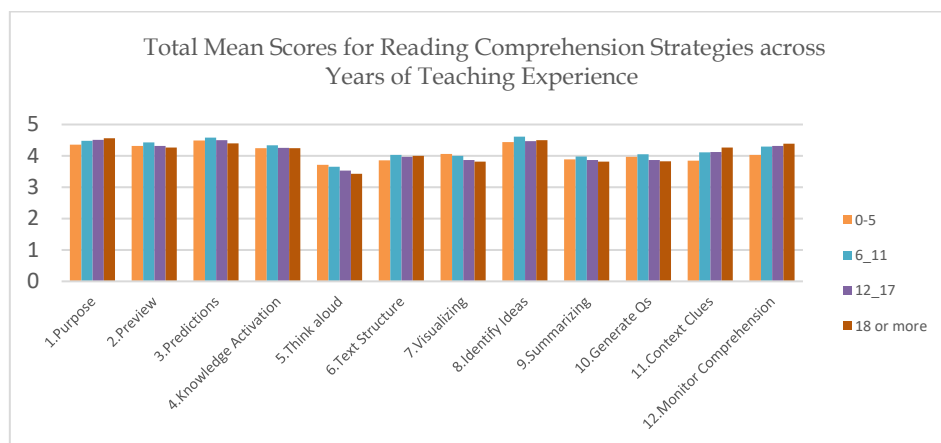
Figure 5 Total Mean Scores for Reading Comprehension Strategies across Teaching Experience

Cross tabulations revealed notable findings on explicit strategy instruction. Teachers with 0-5 years of experience achieved the highest mean score (4.14) compared to their more experienced counterparts. Given that nearly 90% of these teachers were female (79 out of 88) and 85% taught at the elementary level (288 out of 338), these results align with the higher use frequency observed among female and elementary school teachers. Figure 6 shows the total mean scores for explicit reading strategies instruction across different experience levels.
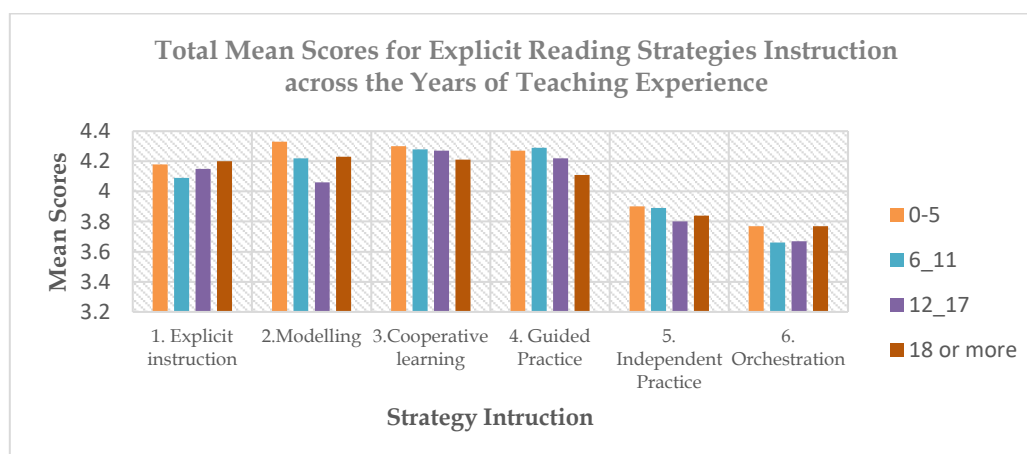
Figure 6 Total Mean Scores for Explicit Reading Strategies Instruction across Teaching Experience

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess the impact of years of teaching experience on EFL reading strategies implementation and explicit instruction. Experience was categorized into four groups: 0-5, 6-11, 12-17, and 18 or more years. Teachers with 0-5 years of experience were found to have the lowest mean score for reading strategies implementation (M = 49.2, SD = 7.38) but the highest for explicit instruction (M = 24.7, SD = 3.99) compared to more experienced teachers. Despite these

differences, the MANOVA showed no significant multivariate effect, Wilks' λ = .986, F (4, 1500) = 1.784, p = .099.

Higher scores in explicit instruction among less experienced teachers may suggest that newer educators are more likely to adhere to structured and explicit teaching methods, possibly due to recent training or reliance on formal strategies as they develop their confidence and teaching style. In contrast, more experienced teachers may have developed a preference for more implicit or flexible approaches over time. The lack of a significant overall effect could indicate that, despite variations, years of experience do not strongly influence the overall implementation of these strategies.

4.1.2 Grade Level and Reading Comprehension Strategy Instruction
Descriptive statistics revealed notable variations in reading comprehension strategy instruction across grade levels. Both elementary and preparatory teachers scored higher mean values (4.18 and 4.19, respectively) compared to secondary teachers (4.09). Items #1 (Identify their purpose of reading), 6 (Use text structure to support comprehension), 9 (Summarize what they read), 11 (Handle unfamiliar words using context clues), and #12 (Monitor their comprehension during reading) showed the most variance, with elementary teachers often scoring above the total sample meaning.

Specifically, Item #5 (Think aloud while reading) was accorded with the lowest mean score overall (3.56), with secondary teachers scoring the lowest (3.43) and elementary teachers scoring the highest (3.69). As shown in Figure 7, the total mean scores for reading comprehension strategies vary across grade levels, with elementary and preparatory teachers generally scoring higher than secondary teachers.
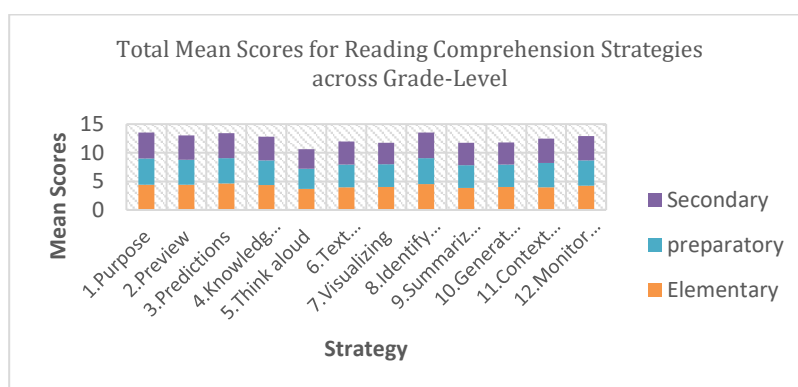
Figure 7 Total Mean Scores for Reading Comprehension Strategies across Grade Levels

Tabulations of explicit strategy instruction across grade levels showed that elementary and preparatory teachers generally achieved higher mean scores compared to the overall sample. For instance, for Item #2 (Modeling the strategy), elementary teachers scored a mean of 4.33, surpassing both the sample mean (4.15) and the scores for preparatory and secondary teachers (4.08 each). Similarly, for Item #3 (Collaborative use of the strategy), elementary teachers

scored 4.31, exceeding the overall mean of 4.26. Secondary teachers consistently scored the lowest mean results, with a total mean of 3.9, which is below the overall mean of 4.06. For Item #5 (Independent practice of the strategy), only 28% of elementary teachers selected "always," compared to 25% of preparatory and 22% of secondary teachers. Responses for Item #6 (Combination of multiple reading strategies) followed a similar pattern, with secondary teachers showing the lowest consistency across all items. The results of explicit reading strategies instruction across different grade levels are illustrated in Figure 8. This figure highlights the total mean scores for elementary, preparatory, and secondary teachers, providing a visual comparison of the ways in which instructional practices vary by grade level.
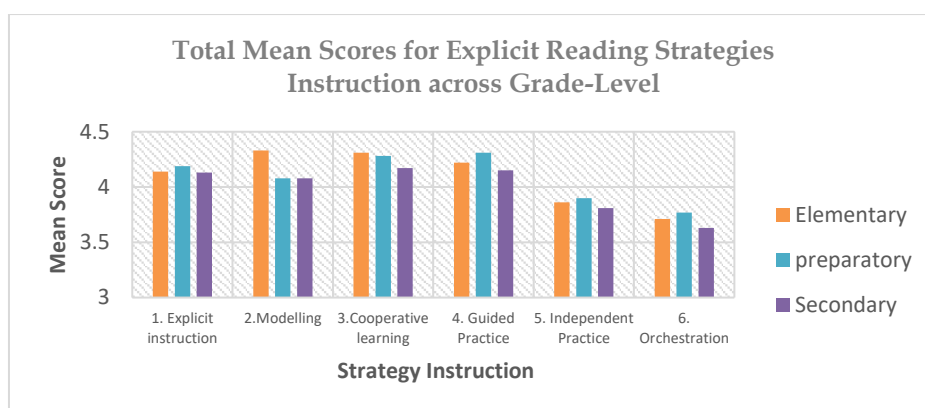
Figure 8 Total Mean Scores for Explicit Reading Strategies Instruction across Grade Levels

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to assess the impact of grade level on the implementation of EFL reading comprehension strategies and the explicit instruction of these strategies. Grade levels were categorized into three groups: elementary, preparatory, and secondary. According to the results, secondary school teachers achieved the lowest mean scores for both reading strategies implementation (M = 49.1, SD = 7.44) and explicit strategy instruction (M = 23.97, SD = 3.69).

In contrast, elementary and preparatory teachers scored similarly, with mean scores of 50.15 (SD = 6.78) and 50.2 (SD = 5.97) for strategy implementation, and 24.56 (SD = 3.67) and 24.53 (SD = 3.31) for explicit strategy instruction, respectively. Despite these differences, the one-way MANOVA indicated no significant multivariate main effect for grade level, Wilks' λ = .993, $F (4, 1500)$ = 1.234, p = .294.

Nonetheless, these inconsistencies suggest that while teachers are familiar with the explicit strategy instruction approach, other strategies may present greater challenges, particularly those requiring more extensive planning, differentiated approaches, and greater time commitment. Secondary teachers' consistently lower mean scores, including a total mean of 3.9 (below the overall mean of 4.06), underscore potential gaps in the consistent application of these strategies. Taken together, the data implies that secondary teachers may struggle more

with implementing strategies that demand ongoing monitoring and adjustment to meet diverse student needs.

5. Discussion
5.1 Gender and Reading Comprehension Strategies
In the context of gender, female teachers in this study reported a higher frequency of use for reading comprehension strategies and explicit instructional practices compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, cross-tabulation by gender revealed that female teachers consistently teach more reading comprehension strategies than male teachers. Statistical analyses, including a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and t-tests, identified significant differences between female and male participants in the use of three instructional practices: *modeling*, *collaborative learning*, and *guided practice*. Collectively, these findings indicate that comprehension strategy instruction varies by gender, with female teachers employing strategies more frequently than males.

Moreover, the findings of this study echo to a broad body of research across FL contexts, consistently showing gender-based differences in strategy use. Studies by Oxford (1990), Oxford and Leaver (1996), and Kadah (2005) found that females reported higher strategy use than males, a trend reinforced by more recent work (Rianto, 2021; Kanmaz, 2022; Çakıcı, 2016; Rahimi & Asadollahi, 2012). Studies such as these highlight females' stronger engagement with metacognitive, reflective, and student-centered strategies. Similarly, the current study found that female EFL teachers in Qatar use modeling, guided practice, and collaborative learning more frequently than their male counterparts, confirming gender to be a significant factor in comprehension strategy instruction.

However, the findings of the present study contrast with other research conducted in Qatar and similar EFL contexts. For instance, Al-Khwaiter (2001) found a significant difference in attitudes toward teaching English between male and female teachers, with male teachers demonstrating more positive attitudes. Similarly, studies by Dadour and Robbins (1996) and Kaylani (1996) found no significant gender differences in strategy use among EFL learners and teachers in Egypt and Jordan, respectively. Thus, these conflicting findings suggest that the relationship between gender and strategy instruction may vary, depending on cultural, contextual, or methodological factors.

Overall, the findings of this study underscore the importance of recognizing gender as a variable that influences instructional practices in EFL contexts. While female teachers appear to use more varied and frequent strategies, male teachers may require targeted professional development to enhance their use of comprehension strategies, particularly those that emphasize collaborative and guided learning. Addressing these differences can contribute to more equitable and effective teaching practices in EFL classrooms.

5.2 Teaching Experience and Reading Comprehension Strategies
Concerning years of teaching experience, the present study found that teachers with 0–5 years of experience reported the lowest overall use of reading comprehension strategies. This finding contrasts with Reyna-Barron's (2016)

study, which observed beginner teachers (0–3 years) dedicating more than five times the amount of instructional time to teaching comprehension strategies compared to seasoned teachers (15 or more years). However, the results of this study align with other aspects of Reyna-Barron's findings, as beginner teachers (0–5 years) demonstrated the highest frequency of use for specific reading comprehension strategies and explicit comprehension strategy instructional practices.

This apparent contradiction can be explained by Berliner's (1988) framework of teacher development, which posits that teachers cannot necessarily be placed squarely within one of the five skill development stages—novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert—based solely on the number of years of teaching experience they have acquired. Although each stage is characterized by particular qualities and skills, teachers may demonstrate characteristics attributed to other stages, depending on specific contexts.

For example, while novice teachers are generally categorized as being less experienced, they may nevertheless exhibit advanced skills or behaviors typically associated with more experienced teachers. This flexibility in skill application may clarify why novice teachers in this study outperformed experienced teachers in certain strategies, effectively blending qualities of both novice and experienced practitioners.

Findings from Fuchs et al. (2021) support this interpretation, emphasizing that experienced teachers often have higher self-efficacy, enabling them to confidently implement diverse instructional components. In contrast, novice teachers, though less experienced, may rely more on explicit strategy instruction, which offers structure and clarity in their teaching practices. Similarly, Brevik (2019) found that novice teachers excel in explicit reading strategy instruction, a key factor in enhancing comprehension. These teachers often focus directly on teaching new strategies, which can be particularly effective in fostering students' foundational reading skills. Conversely, experienced teachers tend to integrate strategies more seamlessly into broader instructional activities, emphasizing guided practice tailored to students' needs.

Further supporting these findings, Langenthal (2004) reported that experienced teachers exhibit greater flexibility in using assessment tools and linking results to instructional practices. While beginner teachers may rely more on explicit, structured strategies to navigate their initial teaching experiences, experienced teachers leverage their broader knowledge to adapt instruction dynamically.

On the other hand, Johnson (2011) found minimal differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers in terms of strategy use, suggesting that years of experience alone may not directly correlate with effective instructional practices. Similarly, Xing (2009) highlighted that while experienced teachers tend to exhibit stronger consistency between their beliefs and classroom practices, beginner teachers are often more experimental and open to adopting explicit instructional methods.

In summary, the findings from this study highlight the complexity of teaching experience as a factor in strategy instruction. Novice teachers may rely heavily on explicit strategies, demonstrating a structured and deliberate approach,

whereas experienced teachers often adapt strategies more flexibly. Therefore, these results underscore the importance of providing targeted professional development to support teachers at all stages of their careers, ensuring they are well equipped with the necessary tools to implement effective reading comprehension strategies tailored to their students' needs.

5.3 Grade Level and Reading Comprehension Strategies

With respect to grade level, the secondary school teachers in the present study reported the lowest use of reading comprehension strategies and explicit strategy instruction among the three grade levels. This finding suggests that secondary school teachers may not fully understand or value the instructional benefits of modeling and coaching students in the use of reading comprehension strategies. Additionally, they may lack the requisite knowledge or confidence to implement such instruction with the consistency and effectiveness expected at this level.

This observation aligns with findings by Ness (2006), who reported that secondary school teachers often recognize struggling readers but are unable to provide adequate support to enhance their reading skills. Similarly, Alexander and Jetton (2000) noted that as academic demands increase for secondary school students, explicit reading instruction tends to decline. Golkowska (2013) also highlighted this issue in the Qatari context, reporting that Qatari university students studying abroad often became struggling readers due to the absence of effective reading comprehension strategy instruction during their secondary education.

In the present study, certain strategies were reported to be more frequently used by teachers at specific grade levels. For example, the "think aloud" strategy, which scored the lowest in overall frequency, was most commonly implemented by elementary school teachers, while secondary school teachers reported its least frequent use. This variation in strategy use according to the grade level taught is consistent with Kadah's (2005) findings, which concluded that specific strategies were associated with different grade levels. Kadah observed that elementary school teachers frequently use strategies such as "organize," while preparatory and secondary school teachers employ such strategies as "make predictions," "access information sources," and "use imagery" more often.

The decline in strategy use at higher grade levels is also consistent with White's (2011) findings, which reported a negative correlation between grade level and instructional variety in English/Language Arts classes. Specifically, it was reported that, as grade levels increase, teachers use fewer illustrations, less partner work, and less independent work, potentially reflecting a shift away from engaging and explicit instructional practices. However, these results contrast with Ness's (2006) findings, which indicated that preparatory school classes receive more frequent reading comprehension instruction than secondary classes, thereby emphasizing the variability in instructional practices across contexts.

Sun et al.'s (2021) meta-analysis further supports the importance of using advanced strategies at higher grade levels. Their study demonstrated that more advanced reading strategies, which are particularly effective for enhancing

comprehension, are often employed by older students. This suggests a potential gap in secondary teachers' ability to implement these advanced strategies effectively.

One possible explanation for these findings is that teachers may choose strategies based on what they perceive to work best for their students, informed by their classroom experiences. For instance, elementary school teachers may prioritize strategies such as "think aloud" to foster foundational skills, while secondary teachers, facing greater academic demands, might focus on other instructional areas. These patterns underscore the need for professional development programs tailored to equip secondary teachers with the necessary skills and confidence to integrate explicit reading strategy instruction effectively into their classrooms.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the ways in which gender, teaching experience, and grade level influence EFL teachers' use of reading comprehension strategies in Qatar's government schools. The results showed that female teachers reported significantly higher use of reading strategies and explicit instructional practices than males. Novice teachers demonstrated greater engagement with structured and explicit strategies, while experienced teachers showed more flexibility in applying practices.

Additionally, secondary teachers reported the lowest use of reading comprehension strategies compared to those teaching elementary and preparatory levels. Collectively, these findings suggest that gender, experience, and grade level all play a role in shaping instructional practices. Targeted support and professional learning opportunities are therefore necessary to address disparities and promote effective reading comprehension instruction.

Despite its contribution to the topic, this study has limitations. First, the use of self-reported data may introduce bias in the results. Additionally, the gender and grade-level distributions were uneven. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations, and the convenience sampling method restricts the generalizability of the results. Also, relying solely on quantitative methods meant that the depth of instructional reasoning was not captured within this study. These limitations should therefore be considered in future research design and interpretation.

To address gender disparities, professional development should be tailored to male teachers to strengthen their use of reflective, collaborative, and modeling strategies. Differentiated training for novice and experienced teachers is essential in order to build confidence in early-career teachers while fostering strategy refinement among experienced educators. Mentorship programs that pair experienced teachers with novices can further support professional growth.

Regarding grade-level variation, the secondary curriculum should be enhanced by integrating explicit reading strategy instruction with targeted support provided through subject-specific training for secondary teachers. In terms of research and policy, future studies should adopt mixed methods approaches and stratified sampling to achieve balanced representation and gain deeper insights into teachers' instructional practices. By addressing these areas,

education leaders can promote more equitable and effective reading comprehension strategy instruction, ultimately improving outcomes for EFL learners.

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Appendix 1

Survey Questions: Reading Comprehension Strategy Instruction

I. Demographic Information
1. What is your gender?
a) Female
b) Male

2. What is your highest academic qualification?
a) Bachelor's degree
b) Bachelor's degree plus credits towards master's degree
c) Master's degree
d) Master's degree plus credits towards Doctoral degree
e) Doctoral degree

3. What grade level do you teach?
a) Elementary
b) Preparatory
c) Secondary

4. Are you certified at that level?
a) Yes
b) No

5. How many years of experience do you have as an English teacher?
a) 0-5
b) 6-11
c) 12-17
d) 18 or more

6. Did you take any courses on the teaching of reading comprehension during your studies for a bachelor's degree?
a) Yes
b) No

II: Instructional Strategies in the Classroom
A. How frequently are students taught the following reading comprehension strategies in your class?

Strategy	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. Identify their purpose for reading					
2. Preview a text before reading					
3. Make predictions before and during reading					
4. Think aloud while reading					

5. Activate relevant background knowledge for reading					
6. Use text structure to support comprehension					
7. Create visual representation to aid comprehension and recall (visualizing)					
8. Identify the important ideas in a text					
9. Summarize what they have read					
10. Generate questions for text					
11. Handle unfamiliar words using context clues					
12. Monitor their comprehension during reading					

B. How often do you include the following teaching practices in your reading lessons?

Practice	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1. Explicit instruction of the strategy					
2. Modeling of the strategy in action					
3. Collaborative use of the strategy (cooperative learning)					
4. Guided practice using the strategy					
5. Independent practice using the strategy					
6. Combination of multiple reading strategies (orchestration)					