

# Teaching and Application of Reading Strategies in Croatian Language Teaching<sup>1</sup>

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• <https://doi.org/10.31823/d.32.2.6> •

UDK: 371:811.163.42 • Original Scientific Paper

Received: 27<sup>th</sup> December 2023 • Accepted: 19<sup>th</sup> 2024

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**Summary:** *Reading is one of the most challenging fields in the educational system. Reading comprehension is an interactive process of deriving meaning from a text that involves the interaction of different variables (reader, text, environment). It is considered a complex of cognitive activities that includes many skills and dimensions such as word perception, clear understanding, meaning, reflection, reaction, and integration. Teachers can assist students in improving comprehension by teaching them reading strategies—various methods that are consciously and intentionally applied to manage their interaction with the written text. The aim of this paper is to investigate whether teachers of the Croatian language apply reading strategies in their teaching and whether they teach them to their students. The results have showcased that the students who apply and combine reading strategies are more active, engaged, and satisfied readers.*

**Keywords:** *reading comprehension; reading strategies; application of reading strategies; teaching reading strategies; Croatian language teaching; reading as a multifaceted activity.*

## Introduction

Reading is considered a fundamental life(long) skill, relevant for personal fulfilment and success in all activities, including education. It is one of the most challenging fields

<sup>1</sup> The paper is based on Sara Soldo Mutshaus' master's thesis, entitled: Reading in teaching verbal expression.

in the educational system, with a growing need for a high literacy level, enabling individuals to navigate well in contemporary society. If students want to exhaust the assigned written material, they must be able to read it—critically or analytically. While reading, two layers of reality meet, the visible and the invisible; therefore, the purpose of reading is to make the invisible layer, the fundamental meaning, visible and clear (Küçüköğlu 709–14). All readers should aim to understand what they are reading (Teele) because good readers are actively involved in the text they are reading and are aware of the processes they use to understand what they are reading. In this process, teachers can help students improve their reading comprehension by teaching them reading strategies—various methods that are consciously and intentionally applied to manage their interaction with the written text and are associated with effective reading comprehension. Predicting, connecting, visualising, inferring, and asking questions are some of the strategies for improving reading comprehension (Block and Israel). It is important to teach students strategies by naming them, but also by learning how to apply them: by modelling through the process of thinking aloud, when learning in groups, in pairs or independent strategy application (Duke and Pearson 205–41). The aim of this paper is to analyse reading as a multi-layered activity, analyse the interactive process of reading comprehension as a complex cognitive activity, describe and classify reading strategies and emphasise the importance of teaching reading strategies. Furthermore, the aim is to investigate whether teachers of the Croatian language apply reading strategies in their teaching and whether they teach them to the students.

## **1. Teaching as a multi-layered activity**

Reading is a verbal expression activity mastered by teaching, as well as by encouragement and continuous practice. To clearly and accurately comprehend written information (Težak 47), that is, to meaningfully interpret written speech symbols (Šego), long-term practice and the application of a number of different cognitive abilities are required (Čudina-Obradović 15). In addition to the activation of physiological processes while reading, that is, the engagement of the visual system, reading also requires the involvement of feelings, associations and experiential levels; therefore, it also belongs to the realm of spiritual activity. Since communication is established between the reader and the text while reading, reading is a communicative activity, and it is also a linguistic one because it is about receiving written signs, the meaning of words and sentences, and the text and its meaning. In this cognitive effort, the processing of the text, the reshaping of spoken messages and, at the highest level, the creation of one's own text takes place; hence, reading is also a creative activity (Rosandić 175). If reading is viewed in the context of teaching, that is, learning, we can also refer to it as a methodological activity. Similarly, read-

ing is a psychological activity that begins with perception, continues with analysis, comparison, and memorising, and eventually results in understanding the message and the meaning of what has been read. Considering reading as a multi-layered activity, one should definitely mention its artistic dimension in interpretive reading, which comprises the act of text interpretation (Pavličević-Franić 98).

## 2. Reading comprehension

Good reading, meaning smooth reading comprehension, indicates the students' active involvement in the text and awareness of the processes they use to understand what they have read. »Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process. It has been studied by various experts considering the multidimensional components, processes and factors involved in different settings with the aim of finding a better way of developing it among students. Reading comprehension is an interactive process of deriving meaning from a text« (Rumelhart qtd. in Meniado 117–29). This process includes the interaction of different variables (reader, text, and environment) in a social and cultural context (Meniado 117–29). »It is also viewed as a complex of cognitive activities including many skills and dimensions such as word perception, clear understanding, meaning, reflection, reaction and integration« (Hermosa qtd. in Meniado 117–29). »There are different variables that influence student success in reading comprehension. They include vocabulary range, basic student knowledge, knowledge of the grammatical spectrum, metacognitive awareness, syntactic knowledge and reading strategies« (Koda qtd. in Meniado 117–29). The reading performance is influenced by the components that contribute to reading comprehension and other specific factors. They include » ... students' attitudes towards reading, that is, student motivation, the breadth and depth of reading engagement, effective teaching of comprehension techniques, rich vocabulary and knowledge of the world, fluidity, structure or genre of the text, opportunities for oral and written expression, and awareness of different reading strategies« (Meniado 117–29). Furthermore, in identifying comprehension factors, Perfetti, Landi, and Oakhill (227–47) emphasise three key ones: »sensitivity to story structure, inference generation, and comprehension monitoring. Extracurricular influential factors are also important as they are quite relevant in reading comprehension, and they relate primarily to the opportunities and position, that is, the cooperation of students in the family framework, and to the students' reading habits outside of school and at school« (Geske and Ozola 71–77). Different programmes promoting reading significantly improve comprehension and performance, but the application of educational technology also improves the motivational effect on students and their reading comprehension (Meniado 117–29).

### 3. Reading strategies

Although the concept of strategy is not primarily inherent in the educational discourse, it is deeply rooted in the educational system. It is used in the sense of a systematic plan that is conscious, adapted, and monitored, aimed at improving the individual's performance in learning. Its use in different teaching and learning contexts is also evident. One of them is the context of reading, where it is used to denote the cognitive aspects of information processing (Afflerbach et al. 364–373). This means that strategies are connected by a conscious and systematic plan. »They became popular in psychology with the emergence of information processing models, in which strategies, such as rehearsal, can be applied to information in short-term memory to preserve it and relocate the information to long-term memory« (Atkinson and Shiffrin 89–195). Strategies represent the intention of the reader who, by applying them, moves towards the goal, »... whether it is understanding a textbook, a lyric poem, or instructions for assembling a bicycle. They are deliberate, goal-oriented attempts at control and modification, as well as the reader's efforts to decode the text, understand the words, and construct the meaning of the text« (Afflerbach et al. 364–73). It is precisely the reader's intentional control, goal orientation, and awareness that define strategy as action. »Awareness helps the reader select the intended path, the means to the goal, and the processes leading to it, including volitional control (Corno qtd. in Afflerbach et al. 364–73) that prevents distractions and preserves commitment to the goal. Being a strategic reader means examining the strategy, monitoring its effectiveness, and revising goals or means, if required. The characteristics of strategic readers are the flexibility and adaptability of their actions while reading« (Afflerbach et al. 364–73). Reading strategies are interesting not only because of what they reveal about how readers manage their interaction with written text but also because of how strategies are related to effective reading comprehension. »Good readers consciously and unconsciously use a range of comprehension strategies when reading a text. (...) Weak readers, on the other hand, have an extremely modest repertoire of strategies for understanding the written text and often decide to continue reading the text even though they do not understand it« (Eurydice 36). There is a surprisingly wide variety of strategies used when reading a text, which spans a range of traditionally known and recognised reading behaviours such as skimming the text, then scanning the text for specific information, contextually recognising meaning, predicting, confirming or rejecting inferences, identifying the main ideas, re-reading and using related concepts for understanding, up to strategies such as activating prior knowledge and recognising the structure of the text (Carrell). »In recent years, there has been a great deal of support for the direct teaching of reading comprehension strategies during schooling. The idea of this approach, as stated by the National Committee

on Reading (NICHHD), is that reading comprehension can be improved by teaching the application of special cognitive strategies or strategic thinking when they encounter comprehension obstacles when reading a text<sup>2</sup> (Eurydice 37).

### 3.1. COGNITIVE AND METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES

Reading strategies can be cognitive—used while reading to actively construct the meaning of the text, and metacognitive—used to regulate one's own reading, including monitoring comprehension while reading and checking comprehension after reading by summarising what has been read. Metacognitive instruction on how and why to use strategies can be very effective (Afflerbach et al. 364–73). Metacognitive reading strategies are based on Flavell's model of cognitive monitoring, which includes four categories: (1) metacognitive knowledge,<sup>3</sup> (2) metacognitive experiences,<sup>4</sup> (3) goals/tasks,<sup>5</sup> and (4) actions/strategies (Yuko 150–58). When it comes to strategies or actions, the last category of Flavell's model, we can talk about their application to achieve cognitive abilities and metacognitive goals. That is, metacognitive strategies exist to be able to monitor cognitive development, control thought activities, and decide whether cognitive activities and goals have been met (Yuko 150–58). Metacognitive reading strategies are specific reading strategies and can be classified

<sup>2</sup> »Seven strategies have been identified, as a result of the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis of studies addressing strategy instruction, which appear to be most effective for improving reading comprehension in pupils: comprehension monitoring, where readers learn to monitor how well they comprehend; cooperative learning, where pupils learn reading strategies and discuss reading materials together; use of graphic and semantic organisers (including story maps), where readers make graphic representations of the material to assist comprehension and memory; question answering, where readers answer questions posed by the teacher and receive immediate feedback; question generation, where readers learn to ask themselves and answer inferential questions; story structure, where pupils learn to use the structure of the story as a means of helping them recall story content and answer questions about what they have read; and summarisation, where readers are taught to summarise ideas and generalise from the text information« (Eurydice 37).

<sup>3</sup> »Metacognitive knowledge, the first category in the cognitive monitoring model, refers to a person's knowledge or beliefs about factors that influence cognitive achievement. The knowledge about one's cognitive process and different cognitive tasks, goals, actions, and experiences encompasses three variables: person, task and strategy« (Yuko 150–58).

<sup>4</sup> »The second category, metacognitive experiences, are internal responses that people have regarding their metacognitive processing. Flavell defined metacognitive experiences as any conscious cognitive or affective experiences that accompany an individual. For example, when a person is talking to another person, one of them may be surprised or feel insecure about what the other person said. An individual's awareness of failure, success, uncertainty, or satisfaction with things are included in this category« (Yuko 150–58).

<sup>5</sup> »Goals (or tasks), the third category in Flavell's model of cognitive monitoring, represent the goals of a cognitive endeavour« (Yuko 150–58). For example, if students are reading a text, then the goal or task might be to compare amphibians and reptiles mentioned in the passage.

into three groups: planning strategies, monitoring strategies and evaluation strategies (Israel Pressley and Afflerbach qtd. in Yuko 150–58). Each group covers different strategies that require the reader's metacognitive processing and can be applied before reading (planning), while reading (monitoring), and after reading (evaluation).

### *Planning strategies*

Planning strategies are used before reading and may include activating the students' prior knowledge, reviewing titles, pictures, illustrations, titles, subtitles, or general information in the text (Almasi; Paris, Wasik and Turner 609–40). Furthermore, students can check whether their reading material has a specific text structure, such as cause and effect, question and answer, comparison, and contrast. Highlighting a reading objective can also be categorised as a planning strategy (Paris, Wasik, and Turner 609–40; Pressley 291–309).

### *Monitoring strategies*

Monitoring strategies are applied while reading, and they include: vocabulary comprehension, self-reflection (students' reflection on whether they have understood what they have read), summarising and reaching a conclusion on the main idea of each passage (Israel; Pressley 291–09). Readers can also identify and focus on key information or keywords (Hudson 89–91).

### *Evaluation strategies*

Evaluation strategies are applied after reading and involve the student's thinking about the application of what they have read in some other situations. They can also identify with the author, narration or the main character and have a better perspective of what they have read (Yuko 150–58).

#### *3.1.1. Application of prior knowledge*

This strategy can be used before, during, and after reading. In teaching practice, prior knowledge before reading is identified to prepare students for a new text by activating previously acquired knowledge and experiences, usually through teacher instructions or questions.<sup>6</sup> The application of prior knowledge in the process of reading can occur spontaneously, and when we want to make it more conscious, students can be assigned a specific passage of the text to activate prior knowledge<sup>7</sup> (Visinko 96).

<sup>6</sup> For example: *Last year, we visited the birthplace of Ivan Kozarac. What do you know about his life and literary work?*

<sup>7</sup> For example: *While reading the passage, pay attention to patriotic motives. Recall what you learned about the motive level of Croatian literary romanticism.*

### 3.1.2. *Monitoring*

By applying this strategy, students monitor their reading to monitor their understanding of the text they are reading. Also, it is necessary to set a goal because, in this way, students learn how to plan. While reading, one should identify and subsequently remove all the possible obstacles in achieving the set goal. Sometimes, owing to external distractions such as noise, rush, interruptions or lack of time, students do not comprehend what they have read, so they re-read the same parts of the text. However, re-reading parts of the text that have already been read can also be attributed to additional clarification of unclear parts that may appear mainly due to unfamiliarity with certain words and misunderstanding of the context. This way, one manages one's reading, controlling thoughts and motivation (Visinko 98).

### 3.1.3. *Creating visual presentations*

The visual presentation of the text (being) read can be achieved by using different types of notes,<sup>8</sup> a double-entry reading journal,<sup>9</sup> and by creating maps<sup>10</sup> or diagrams. While reading, students simultaneously take notes, which can be used for further text study, retelling, learning or as a reminder (Visinko 207–212). Good readers use visualisation to comprehend the text, and teachers can encourage students to draw a picture as a visualisation of the text, for example, the characters and action in the story, which requires the reader to create an image of what has been read (Küçüköglü 709–14).

### 3.1.4. *Answering questions*

This strategy checks the student's comprehension of the text at two levels: the basic layer of the literary text is determined by answering the questions: Who, What, Where and When, and for more complex analyses, the questions Why and How are used, encompassing deeper discussions about the topics of the work, which ultimately shows a wide range of different reader reflections. If a non-literary text is in focus, the questions arise from the set goal (Visinko 101–103).

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<sup>8</sup> There are three types of notes: a branched note – supported by citations from the text; a linear note – contains a record in the form of sentences or phrases with or without citations from the text; and a vertical note – implies a list of keywords, usually in columns with or without citations (Visinko 207–12).

<sup>9</sup> A double-entry reading journal is a procedure that enables directed reading of the text while taking notes, whereby students write down a fragment of the text on the left side of the journal that is important, impressive, or striking to them in some way, and on the right side of the journal their comment on that fragment with the possibility of asking questions (Bjedov 98).

<sup>10</sup> Maps can be, for example: mind map, hierarchical map, cluster, thought films and other.

### 3.1.5. *Drawing conclusions or interpretations / Asking questions*

The process of asking questions requires readers to ask themselves questions in order to construct meaning, improve understanding, find answers, solve a problem, find information, or discover new information (Harvey and Goudvis). By applying this strategy, students return to the text throughout the reading process to find answers to the questions before, during and after reading (Küçüköğlü 709–14) and to draw conclusions and interpret possible ambiguities. Inferring means reading between the lines, where students should use their own knowledge and data from the text (Serafini qtd. in Küçüköğlü 709–14).

### 3.1.6. *Identifying main ideas*

Several ideas, or key points, can be observed in each text. They are contextually connected, and the readers show their understanding of what has been read by identifying and linking them together (Visinko 104). Identifying the deeper meaning of the text being read is desirable because this is how important messages, new worldviews and life lessons can be discovered. Reading during which the reader draws conclusions increases concentration, slows down the rhythm and leads to more thorough thinking. This results in better reading comprehension and the discovery of the text's numerous interesting layers and ideas (Zimmermann, Hutchins 88–90).

### 3.1.7. *Text structure/ Linking different parts of the text*

Determining the structure of a literary text helps in understanding the chronology of events, the relationship before and after, cause and effect, but also in creative retelling. When it comes to non-literary texts, determining the structure results in a better observation of parts of the text in order to remember key terms and the related content (Visinko 104–09).

### 3.1.8. *Summarising*

The process of summarising requires the readers to determine what is important while reading and to summarise the information in their own words. During the process of summarising, students will be able to distinguish between primary and secondary ideas, as well as distinguish related knowledge from unrelated, which is another point in the process of summarising that will help students improve their understanding of the text (Küçüköğlü 709–14).

### 3.1.9. *Prediction*

Reader expectations lie at the heart of the prediction strategy. With the help of the title, basic motif, first and last name of the author or some other essential components of the text, the readers can express or write down their assumptions and ex-



pectations (Visinko 111–14). In addition, reading can be organised with the help of a prediction table. It is a way of reading the text with pauses in certain places with the intention of the students predicting what would happen next or confirming their predictions (Steele et al. 13).

#### 3.1.10. *Text browsing*

The strategy of reviewing the text involves browsing through the book and familiarising yourself with the contents, chapters, indexes, titles, subtitles or highlighted terms. The reader can thus browse the text to obtain specific information (scanning) or for general insight into its content and purpose (skimming). Orientation reading is closely related to the browsing strategy, which aims to receive basic information about the text in a short time, but also selective reading, which is based on searching for details that interest the reader (Visinko 114–16).

#### 3.1.11. *Collaborative learning*

This strategy is realised so that students read and work on the same text in a collaborative relationship, thereby developing not only the reading skills they already possess but also new ones. Mutual interactions activate the systems of prior knowledge, and collaborative relationships contribute to correcting and supplementing interpretations and inferences (Visinko 116).

### **4. Teaching reading strategies**

Students should be taught reading strategies, which means they should be given explicit instructions about the strategies and their application. Traditional worksheets and frequent practice may be sufficient for younger students to practice basic reading skills, such as letter recognition and phonemic awareness. However, for higher cognitive text processing, it is essential to teach students specific strategies for visual and auditory discrimination so that they know what they need to pay attention to, how to process it and why it is necessary. Namely, cognitive explanations to students about what they are doing and why it is important are of great assistance to them, and, in addition, they belong to a crucial spectrum of key features of learning. In the same way, specific strategies can help beginner readers decode words and understand text (Afflerbach et al. 364–73). »Teaching pupils to use reading comprehension strategies can help them to understand a text before, during and after reading. Reading comprehension strategies are specific procedures that enable pupils to become aware of how well they are comprehending the text as they read, and improve their understanding and learning from it« (Eurydice 37). Explicit teaching of reading strategies in Croatian language classrooms is crucial, especially since students are expected to recount, summarise, critically review, find information or ideas, and perform similar tasks.

This means that teachers are also expected to teach students how to think, which presupposes the teacher's modelling, describing, referring, and applying appropriate reading strategies. For example, a teacher can think aloud when looking for the main idea in a text, justifying the choice of each sentence or idea. These considerations may include the difference between the topic sentence and the main idea, the difference between the implicit and explicit main idea, and the difference between the main idea and the supporting details in their discussion. This is undoubtedly a complex and demanding task; however, it is also necessary because if the teachers think or assume that only instructing the students is enough, they may not understand the students' possible misconceptions and difficulties that cannot be diagnosed without more detailed teaching of strategies. The teachers must demonstrate skills in explaining how to think while reading (Afflerbach et al. 364–73).

## 5. Research methodology

To examine whether Croatian language teachers apply reading strategies in their classrooms and whether they teach them to students, a study was conducted using a methodological survey conducted at the end of 2021 via the *Google Forms* platform. This survey method provided for a diverse sample of teachers from numerous schools throughout the Republic of Croatia. The respondents were informed about the research through *Facebook groups*, whose members are teachers of the Croatian language. The sample included a total of forty (40) primary school Croatian language teachers from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and secondary school Croatian language teachers. The survey included questions about gender, the type of educational institution the teacher is employed at, and several claims. Regarding the claim of *whether they apply reading strategies in their lessons*, the participants were offered *yes* and *no* answers. Regarding the claim of *whether they teach students reading strategies*, answers were provided on a five-point scale: *strongly disagree* (1), *mostly disagree* (2), *neither agree nor disagree* (3), *mostly agree* (4) and *strongly agree* (5). Regarding the *application of different reading strategies in teaching*, the participants declared their opinion by selecting one of the three provided answers: *never* (1), *sometimes* (2) or *always* (3). The survey was anonymous. The results obtained are presented on the total sample in numerical and percentage ratios, and they were analysed in their entirety. In addition to individual answers, the participants were also asked for clarifications, which are fully stated in this paper, in their original form, without rewriting and language editing, and were subsequently interpreted.

### 5.1. PARTICIPANTS

Four of the research participants were male, and thirty-six were female. Data on the structure of participants by gender are presented in Figure 1.

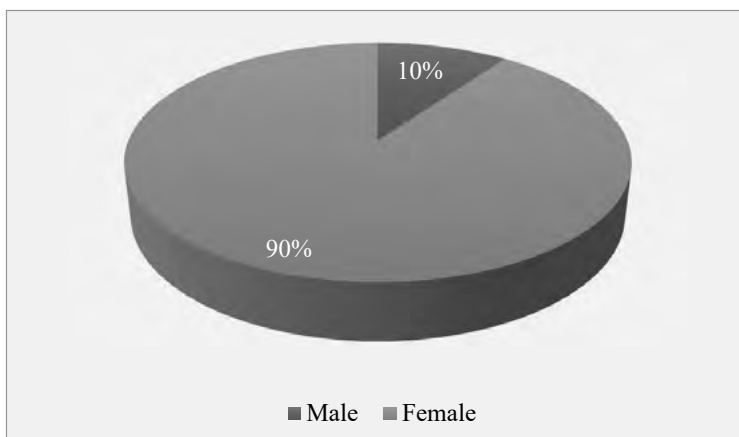


Fig. 1. Structure of participants by gender

## 5.2. STRUCTURE OF PARTICIPANTS WITH REGARD TO THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION AT WHICH THEY WORK

Of the forty teachers surveyed, nineteen work in an elementary school, three in a grammar school, and thirteen indicated that they work in a secondary vocational school. Only one respondent works as a teacher in an elementary school and as a professional associate librarian, and four respondents are simultaneously employed in a grammar school and a secondary vocational school. Not a single respondent indicated that they work in an art secondary school. The data are shown in Figure 2.

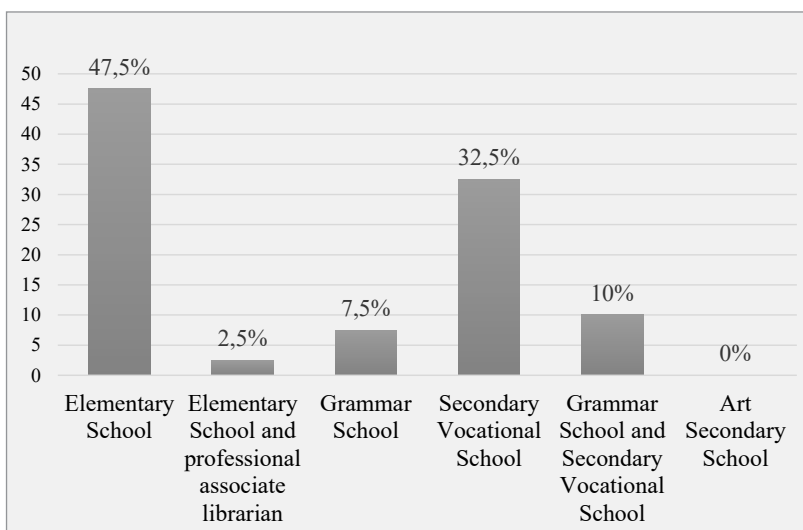


Fig. 2. Structure of participants with regard to the educational institution at which they work

## 6. Results and discussion

### 6.1. APPLICATION OF READING STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Regarding the application of reading strategies in their classrooms, all forty participants answered *yes*, that is, 100%. The results are shown in Figure 3.

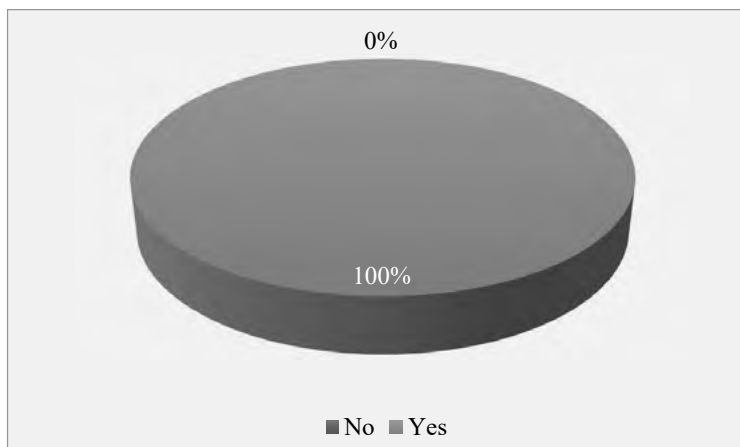


Fig. 3. Application of reading strategies in the classroom

In addition to this statement, the surveyed teachers were asked to clarify their answers. Since all participants answered *yes*, their explanations are given in example (1).

#### (1) *yes*

*I give the students the assignment to read independently. Before reading, I ask them to identify the length of the text, the title, excerpts, to try to determine the topic based on the title... While reading, they should underline the important parts, look up the meaning of unknown words, write important terms from the text in a notebook, give titles to the paragraphs, predict what will happen next ... After reading, they discuss the text, organise notes, summarise, answer questions, fill in a graphic organiser, create a mind map ... / Students are faced with different types of literary and non-literary texts on which I apply analytical, problem-solving, critical and creative reading. / In class, I apply various reading strategies, depending on the age: retelling, summarising, spotting key words and ideas, asking questions... / Since the children did not read during online classes, they started to read more slowly and to stutter, which is why I let them each read part of the text. / I give students the opportunity to read a work of their choice one or more times and thus apply reading comprehension that is close to them. / High school students are expected to have mastered reading strategies in elementary school, but there is a visible problem because they lack comprehension of what they have read. / I often use predictive reading,*

*the insert method, reading for the main idea, reading with inference, etc. / In every class, students apply one of the reading strategies because it is impossible to hold a class without at least one strategy... / E.g. students are summarising information from the text, asking questions and searching for answers, predicting the content of the text, etc. / I use reading lessons, reading with predictions, a complete reading of works, reading fiction and literary books... / By motivation. / Reading with comprehension, drawing conclusions, answering questions, etc. / Guided reading, reading aloud, fast reading... / In fact, I always activate students' previous knowledge to connect them with the upcoming text and to facilitate the understanding of the text they will read. It is clear to me that reading with my students in the vocational school must be focused and thoughtfully guided (by questions, making notes, drawing conclusions...). / Every class, students work on a text, read, connect it with the given topic, draw their own conclusions... / I use methods and strategies of reading and writing to develop students' critical thinking. / Without applying different reading strategies, it is impossible to achieve in-depth reading. / We read different texts using different strategies, so we analyse the text better. / We learn the elements of interpretive reading, we read texts in every literature lesson. / Comprehension of what has been read, drawing conclusions, changing the ending, summarising. / Through various projects in 1st grade, and when they love reading, it is much easier. / Monitoring, creating visual presentations, summarising, predicting... / Reading strategy is the basis of the subject I teach (Croatian language). / start of each lesson. / use very often. / The text is the starting point in the teaching of the Croatian language, and in order to understand the text, to understand it, to connect it with the world around us and to learn something from it, the application of reading strategies is inevitable. / In the Croatian language class, students re-read a poem or text, retell the text, highlight key words, determine the order of events...all this is necessary in language expression classes, communication. / Reading strategies are indispensable in teaching the Croatian language – in every lesson, I try to develop the students' reading literacy segmentally – in steps. It is also important to emphasise that the skill of strategic reading is important regardless of whether students will later take the state exam and study or work. It is also unfortunate that the reading literacy of our children is very poor, and the number of Croatian language lessons is not suitable at all. / Together with the students, I determine the purpose of reading, we plan what we will read and review the text, I ask questions about the text, the students look for answers to the questions, connect parts of the text, summarise information and draw conclusions. / I determine the goal, we go through the text, determine the meaning based on the context, underline and note key terms, draw conclusions based on questions and answers, paraphrase, connect with experience, create graphic organisers. / Before reading – conversation, brainstorming, prediction ...; during reading – taking notes, completing tables with key terms from the text...; after reading – answering questions, formulating a summary of the read text and the like. / In literature classes when reading a text that is the subject of analysis and in language classes when reading a text in which a new linguistic fact will be learned. / Regularly, every month. We set aside 3-4 school hours for*

*each reading. / They help better understand what has been read and connect the facts. / Reading is an important part of language expression and creation. / Students understand and remember the text better, they can imagine the text. / Because I can't imagine teaching without it. / encouraging reading at a younger age. / Helps develop skills. / It is necessary.*

The very fact that all participants answered *yes* to the question of whether they apply reading strategies in their teaching indicates the awareness of the surveyed Croatian language teachers regarding the importance of strategic reading and reading in general as a language activity that should be part of all subject fields. It also indicates the belief of the surveyed teachers that reading in Croatian language classes is unimaginable without the application of reading strategies (*Because I can't imagine teaching without it. / It is necessary.*), and laying specific emphasis on reading comprehension, that is, in-depth reading: *The text is the starting point in the teaching of the Croatian language, and in order to understand the text, to understand it, to connect it with the world around us and to learn something from it, the application of reading strategies is inevitable. / I use methods and strategies of reading and writing to develop students' critical thinking. / Without applying different reading strategies, it is impossible to achieve in-depth reading.* This intensity of the teacher's reflection on the necessity of applying reading strategies and their effect on the students' reading comprehension has definitely positive implications for the students, for whom reading is important not only as a language activity but also as a learning process. (*In every class, students apply one of the reading strategies because it is impossible to hold a class without at least one strategy...*) It is also evident that the teachers are well acquainted with different types of strategies, especially planning strategies (*...asking questions and looking for answers, predicting the content of the text*) and monitoring strategies (*Reading comprehension, drawing conclusions, (...) summarising*). Furthermore, teachers apply different strategies before, during, and after reading: *Before reading, I ask them to identify the length of the text, the title, excerpts, to try to determine the topic based on the title... While reading, they should underline the important parts, look up the meaning of unknown words, write important terms from the text in a notebook, give titles to the paragraphs, predict what will happen next ... After reading, they discuss the text, organise notes, summarise, answer questions, fill in a graphic organiser, create a mind map ....* Although the participants explained the application of reading strategies in their teaching with the above answers, other interesting data can be derived from their statements. For example, the representation of literary and non-literary texts in classes and the application of *analytical, problem-solving, critical and creative reading*. Furthermore, teachers' comments reveal their care about the students, their needs, and their occupations: *I give students the opportunity to read a work of their choice one or more times and thus apply reading comprehension that is close to them.* It is undoubtedly a great idea and a motivating approach that can

positively influence the development of students' reading habits, including reading literacy, which is still not at a desirable level: *It is also unfortunate that the reading literacy of our children is very poor.* The teacher's interest and effort are significant and valuable contributions to developing students' reading competence. Namely, the teacher's comment about the fact that *Reading strategies are indispensable in teaching the Croatian language – in every lesson, I try to develop the student's reading literacy segmentally – in steps,* reflects a systematic and consistent effort to develop reading literacy, whereby strategic reading is important *regardless of whether students will later take the state exam and study or work.* That the text, as well as its reading, is part of language teaching, and not only literature teaching, is also supported by the explanation: *In literature classes, when reading a text that is the subject of analysis, and in language classes, when reading a text where a new linguistic fact will be learned.* This thinking is in accordance with the methodological aspects of teaching the Croatian language, which includes the text as a source and end (Težak) in the teaching and learning the Croatian language, in which the student needs to see how the Croatian word works. The Croatian language as a subject is the basis for learning throughout life, and reading with comprehension is essential for mastering knowledge in other subjects as well; therefore, the efforts exerted by the teachers who develop a reading culture and love for reading in their students are valuable.

## 6.2. TEACHING STUDENTS READING STRATEGIES

Regarding the claim that referred to teaching reading strategies to the students, most teachers responded by saying that they *strongly agree*, twenty-four of them (60%). A little more than a third of the participants (35%), fourteen of them to be precise, *mostly agree* with the claim, and only two teachers (5%) marked the answer *neither agree nor disagree*. The answers *strongly disagree* and *mostly disagree* were not recorded. The results are shown in Figure 4.

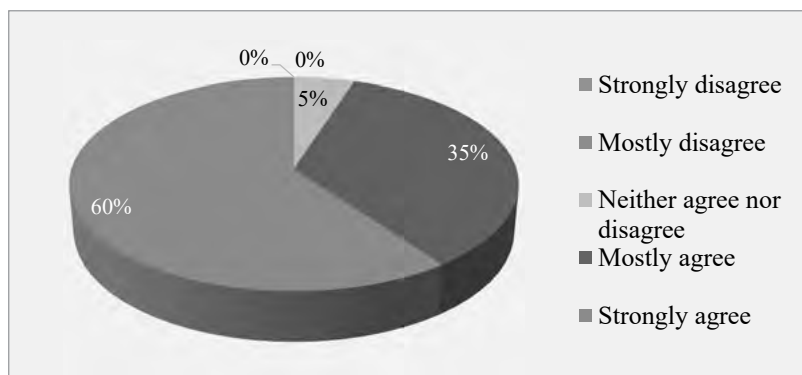


Fig. 4. Teaching students reading strategies

An explanation of the answer was also requested for this claim. Since none of the respondents selected the answers *strongly disagree* and *mostly disagree*, there was no explanation for these claims. Almost all respondents, thirty-eight or 95%, explained their answer, which is stated in examples (2a), (2b) and (2c).

### **(2a) neither agree nor disagree**

*I do not teach reading strategies as a teaching unit, but I explain which strategy is used when reading.*

In the explanation above, the teachers' emphasis on not teaching *reading strategies as a teaching unit* can be observed, but also the statement: *I explain which strategy is used*. This means there is a certain instruction for students in applying the reading strategy, which can help them while reading the text. However, as already pointed out, direct teaching of reading strategies to students has its own particularity and importance, especially for elementary school students in subject teaching or high school students. Namely, the more demanding cognitive processing of the text, which includes processing messages, experiencing, actualising and using them in practice, as well as creating one's own messages, is undoubtedly a complex task that requires advance preparation of students by explicitly directing them into the way of thinking while reading, that is, by teaching them how to apply a reading strategy and explaining its objectives.

### **(2b) mostly agree**

*I teach them practically; for example, I explain the method to them if they are unfamiliar with it when we need to use it in class. / When using each strategy, I explain to the students why a specific strategy is used. I apply strategies often and try to make them diverse. / Lack of time. / High school students lack reading comprehension, they are not concentrated and the final result of reading – comprehension – is missing. / I explain to them the meaning and purpose of a particular strategy. / I implement reading strategies every day in class because reading and reading comprehension are among the key outcomes of my course. / Mandatory reading of a literary text in class. / Students keep a reading journal. / Verbal expression is based on vocabulary, understanding, style... / If we left them to pursue independent reading without using reading strategies, vocational school students would give up on reading very quickly because they mostly have a significant problem with the motivation to read, with a concentration on reading and with reading comprehension. Most vocational school students come from elementary school without developed reading habits (according to them, many do not read, many read without comprehension, and only very, very few read for fun...). / Developing summary skills, the ability to retell, form an opinion about what has been read. / The understanding of the*



*course content is better. / Without reading strategies, there is no complete reading comprehension, determination of topics, messages, thinking, conclusions and experiences. / Before using the strategy, I explain how to use it and why it is necessary to understand the text better.*

In the above explanations, the teachers pointed out many interesting facts. First of all, the respondents' awareness of the importance of teaching strategies that contribute to the development of the ability to *summarise, retell, form an opinion about what has been read and reading comprehension* is evident as the final, ultimate goal of their application.

Furthermore, the explanations indicate the teachers' interest in the students, especially in vocational schools, and their reading development by teaching and applying reading strategies, the absence of which would undoubtedly have more severe consequences on students' reading habits (*If we left them to pursue independent reading without using reading strategies, vocational school students would give up on reading very quickly because they mostly have a significant problem with the motivation to read, with a concentration on reading and with reading comprehension*). The stated attitudes of the respondents are encouraging and positive, especially in encouraging concentration when reading and motivation for reading. However, the rationale, *Lack of time*, although individual, is worth paying attention to. Namely, highlighting the lack of time as a reason for not carrying out a particular activity in class or not applying a more methodologically demanding model of learning, that is, teaching, can be doubtful and debatable. If modern teaching advocates the students' active, that is, independent and/or creative engagement, then this requires (additional) involvement from the teacher in creating the conditions for such teaching, which certainly requires a specific (additional) time. This line of thinking, setting aside time and dedication to teaching students reading strategies actually means investing in students, their progress in reading, comprehension, concentration, motivation, and ultimately their better verbal expression, that is, literacy: *Verbal expression is based on vocabulary, comprehension, style...*

### **(2c) strongly agree**

*Students read both literary and non-literary texts in which they find key words necessary for comprehension. / It is necessary to teach students to read correctly. / I explain specific strategies to the students while implementing them in class. / I introduce different strategies because they are more motivated that way. / In verbal expression classes, we also work on texts.... / Necessary for work. / We read every day, we also read with the librarian,.. / Teaching reading strategies is a fundamental part of the Croatian language subject. / Reading is very important for shaping one's own verbal expression. / I try to*

*teach students to use as many different reading strategies as possible, I explain why specific strategies are important, how they help them and how they will make it easier for them to follow and understand the text, etc. / expressive reading respecting spoken language values. / The student needs to learn to read different types of texts to learn to study, to read in other subjects as well. / encouraging reading and comprehension, vocabulary enrichment. / Students write different types of texts: essays, critiques, reviews, presentations, discussions... / Reading strategies are excellent for developing speaking skills. / We learn the elements of interpretive reading and practice reading comprehension. / Each thematic unit is based on a reading strategy. / Because it helps them in different situations during schooling... / Although students often apply reading strategies unconsciously, it is necessary to teach them reading strategies to raise their awareness and apply them to all types of texts and in all language situations. / The students must always know which strategy they are applying and why they are applying it. / I encourage students to practice reading comprehension in almost every lesson. / I definitely emphasise to them that they read with comprehension, write a double-entry journal, and underline unknown words. / I have already answered. I explained to the students what reading strategies are, why they are important, when and how to apply them...*

The above explanations are understandable, logical and well-founded. It is completely clear to the participants that *Teaching reading strategies is a fundamental part of the Croatian language subject and that Reading is very important for shaping one's own verbal expression*. Likewise, in the explanations, one can read the connection between reading and written (*Students write different types of texts: essays, critiques, reviews, presentations, discussions...*) and spoken verbal expression (*Reading strategies are excellent for developing speaking skills. / We learn the elements of interpretative reading*) and vocabulary formation (*encouraging reading and comprehension, vocabulary enrichment*). The concern for the students and their linguistic development is evident in the reflections of the surveyed Croatian language teachers. In this context, teaching reading strategies is an integral part of that process so that students become aware of them *and apply them to all types of texts and in all language situations*. However, although the explanations above clearly emphasise the need to teach students reading strategies, as well as the goals that are achieved by the teaching, it can still be noted that there is a lack of precise methodical descriptions and concrete explanations of the methodological models the teachers apply in teaching students reading strategies.<sup>11</sup> The only things mentioned in the explanations are double-entry journaling and underlining unknown words.

<sup>11</sup> Konsuo conducted research on the application of reading strategies of secondary school students of the high school and vocational program for the needs of her graduation thesis in two Zagreb secondary schools, XII. Gymnasium and the Nursing School (Vinogradska). The objective was to »...examine the use and representation of more common cognitive and metacognitive strategies in

### 6.3. APPLICATION OF DIFFERENT READING STRATEGIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Regarding the application of different reading strategies in the Croatian language classroom, the teachers were offered eleven different reading strategies, described in the theoretical part of this paper, and asked to comment on the frequency of their application in the classroom by selecting one of the three answers offered: *never*, *sometimes*, or *always*. The results are presented in Figure 5.

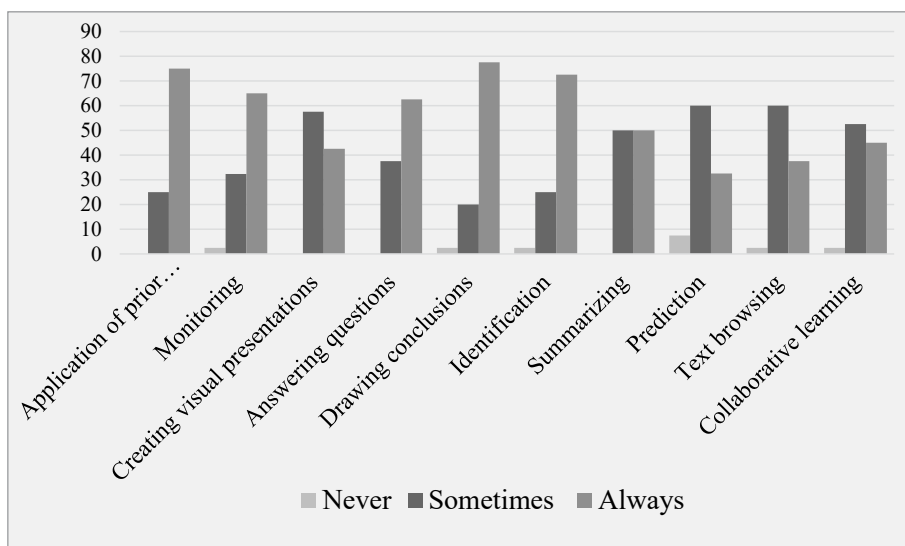


Fig. 5. Application of different reading strategies in the classroom

For the **application of prior knowledge**, most participants selected the answer *always*, thirty or 75% of them, and a quarter (25%) claim that they *sometimes* apply this strategy in their teaching. None of the interviewed teachers selected the

the reading of literary texts by secondary school students in the secondary school and vocational programme« (Konsuo 29). The author pointed out that she considered the fact »...that reading strategies are not taught directly in Croatian teaching practice...« (Konsuo 29) they don't teach directly...« (Konsuo 29). In the discussion part of the Master's thesis, it is stated that »...no significant differences were observed in the use of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies by male and female students of the first grade, compared to the male and female students of the second grade. There would probably be a more significant difference in the results if teaching strategic reading was carried out in Croatian teaching practice« (Konsuo 29). Although in the aforementioned thesis, the focus was on the use of reading strategies by secondary school students of the high school and vocational programme, and the respondents were students, the mentioned observations in the discursive part of the diploma thesis can give indirect insight into the teaching of reading strategies.

answer *never*. As a reading strategy, **monitoring** is *always* used by twenty-six participants or 65%, *sometimes* by thirteen or 32.5% of the participants, and *never* by one research participant or 2.5%. For **creating visual presentations**, more than half of the participants, twenty-three or 57.5%, answered *sometimes*, and seventeen participants or 42.5%, answered *always*. None of the participants answered *never*. **Answering questions** as a reading strategy is *always* used by twenty-five participants, 62.5%, and *sometimes* by fifteen teachers, or 37.5%. None of the teachers answered *never*. The strategy of **drawing conclusions or interpreting/asking questions** is *always* used by the highest number of participants, thirty-one or 77.5%. Only eight participants, or 20 %, selected the answer *sometimes*, and only one selected *never* (2.5 %). Regarding **identifying the main idea** as a reading strategy, the overwhelming majority of respondents answered *always*, twenty-nine of them or 72.5%, while a quarter of teachers or ten of them (25%) answered *sometimes*. One of the surveyed teachers answered *never* regarding the application of this reading strategy. Regarding the **text structure / connecting different parts of the text**, the majority of teachers, twenty-six or 65 %, selected *always* in response to the application of this strategy; a third of them, thirteen or 32.5%, selected *sometimes*, and one teacher (2.5 %) selected the answer *never*. The obtained result regarding the application of **summarising** as a reading strategy is interesting. Namely, the answers are equally distributed 50%-50% between two categories: *always* and *sometimes*. When it comes to **prediction**, the dominant answer is *sometimes* selected by twenty-four respondents or 60%. A little more than a third of respondents, 32.5% or thirteen of them, selected *always*, while three respondents, or 7.5%, selected the answer *never*. **Text browsing**, as a reading strategy, is *sometimes* used by twenty-four teachers (60%), *always* by fifteen (37.5%) and *never* by one (2.5%) teacher. Half of the surveyed teachers (52.5% or twenty-one of them) answered *sometimes* when it comes to **collaborative learning** as a reading strategy; slightly fewer participants answered *always* (45% or eighteen of them), and one participant (2.5%) answered *never*.

## Conclusion

Reading is a complex activity of receiving information in written form that depends on several gradually developed abilities and skills. This multi-layered activity of verbal expression is mastered by teaching and continuous practice with an emphasis on reading comprehension. The complex cognitive process of reading comprehension includes complex activities, such as perception, reflection, integration, inference, derivation of meaning, and others. It represents a great challenge and a demanding methodological spectrum placed before Croatian language teachers. Namely, students are expected to read well – demonstrating reading comprehen-

sion – which implies their active involvement in the text they are reading and the awareness of the processes they use to understand what they are reading. For this purpose, reading strategies are applied: cognitive – with the aim of actively constructing the meaning of the text, and metacognitive – with the aim of regulating one's own reading and monitoring comprehension. For the reading strategies to be effectively applied before reading (planning), during reading (monitoring) or after reading (evaluation), it is important to teach them to the students, which means explicitly explaining the strategy and its application to them. This research on the application and teaching of reading strategies in teaching the Croatian language has showcased that the surveyed teachers are aware of the need not only to apply reading strategies but also to teach the strategies to students. However, there were no concrete methodical descriptions of how teachers practice this in class. The teaching of the Croatian language should be the starting point of students' literacy; therefore, teachers should be the ones to encourage and promote the development of students' reading habits and their overall literacy. In this context, the choice of reading strategies and the methodological toolkit that will interest students in the written word is important. The results of the conducted research have reminded us of the already well-known problem of lack of motivation and interest in reading among our students, followed by the misunderstanding of what they have read and the lack of concentration and focus while reading. The results have showcased that the students who apply and combine reading strategies are more active, engaged, and satisfied readers who use a different approach to the text. Since the research was conducted in the Year of Reading, in which the positive effects of reading were highlighted, it is a valuable and important indicator confirming that programmes and activities aimed at raising awareness of the importance of reading are desirable for forming an active readership. This topic should continue to receive attention at all levels, and its numerous aspects should be researched and analysed more deeply, which would undoubtedly assist teachers in defining, teaching and applying reading strategies in the Croatian language classroom.

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## POUČAVANJE I PRIMJENA STRATEGIJA ČITANJA U NASTAVI HRVATSKOGA JEZIKA

Vesna BJEDOV\* – Sara SOLDI MUTSHAUS\*\*

**Sažetak:** Čitanje je jedno od najizazovnijih područja u nastavnome sustavu. Razumijevanje pročitana interaktivan je proces izvođenja značenja iz teksta koji uključuje interakciju različitih varijabli (čitatelj, tekst, okolina). Promatra se kao kompleks kognitivnih aktivnosti koji uključuje mnoge vještine i dimenzije kao što su percepcija riječi, jasno razumijevanje, značenje, promišljanje, reakcija i integracija. Nastavnici mogu pomoći učenicima poboljšati razumijevanje poučavajući ih strategijama čitanja – različitim postupcima koji se svjesno i namjerno primjenjuju radi upravljanja svojom interakcijom s pisanim tekstom. Namjera je ovoga rada istražiti primjenjuju li nastavnici hrvatskoga jezika strategije čitanja u svojoj nastavi te poučavaju li učenike njima. Rezultati su pokazali da su učenici koji primjenjuju i kombiniraju strategije čitanja aktivniji, angažiraniji i zadovoljniji čitači.

**Ključne riječi:** čitanje s razumijevanjem; strategije čitanja; primjena strategija čitanja; poučavanje strategijama čitanja; nastava Hrvatskoga jezika; čitanje – višeslojna djelatnost.

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