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BEYOND READING COMPREHENSION: PRIOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE AND METACOGNITIVE READING STRATEGY USE AMONG MALAYSIAN UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract: *Reading forms the foundation of ESL learners' language mastery. When engaging with reading texts, readers are challenged to process vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns embedded within meaningful contexts. Having said that, reading underlies nearly every element ESL learners do with the language, where they are most exposed as readers. Since making sense of a text demands more than linguistic knowledge alone, monitoring one's own thinking while reading is equally critical, and its absence is often implicated in learners' struggle. This study investigates the relationship between ESL learners' prior English language performance and their reported use of metacognitive reading strategies. The study employed a correlational research design to analyse the data collected from 361 undergraduates enrolled in English courses at a public university on Malaysia's east coast. The findings revealed that the ESL learners' SPM English results correlated significantly with all three metacognitive strategy types, i.e. planning, monitoring, and evaluating, indicating that students with stronger prior English language performance reported higher use of metacognitive strategies. The associations, however, were weak. Hence, these findings highlight the crucial role of language instructors adopting pedagogical approaches that strengthen ESL learners' linguistic foundations while explicitly nurturing their metacognitive awareness. Such an integrated approach supports learners in becoming more strategic and self-regulated readers when engaging with English texts.*

Keywords: *English Language Performance, ESL Learners, Metacognitive Reading Strategies, Reading Comprehension*

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Introduction

Reading is a critical component in language acquisition and skills development as it provides an important foundation for ESL learners' language mastery. When engaging with reading texts, learners are challenged to process vocabulary, grammar and discourse patterns embedded within meaningful contexts (Sangers et al., 2025). Extensive engagement with such texts, according to Laajan et al. (2024), has been shown to be associated with learners' broader language development and use. Since reading functions as a key enhancer in language development and academic learning, learners are required to possess linguistic knowledge and be able to actively engage with reading texts. Hence, reading involves linguistic resources and cognitive processes needed to understand and respond effectively to reading tasks.

Past literature has demonstrated associations between linguistic knowledge and reading comprehension. For example, Jeon and Yamashita's (2014) meta-analysis of reading research revealed that L2 learners' grammar and vocabulary knowledge were among the strongest correlates of their L2 reading comprehension. Similarly, Zhang (2012) found that knowledge of vocabulary was significantly associated with L2 reading comprehension through co-reference, textual inference, and gist; meanwhile, grammatical knowledge also contributed to comprehension, even though its contribution became weaker after vocabulary knowledge was controlled. However, linguistic knowledge alone does not fully account for successful reading, as effective reading also requires learners to regulate their comprehension through metacognitive reading strategies.

Recent systematic-review evidence indicates that ESL learners' use of metacognitive reading strategies was associated with enhanced English reading comprehension (Kan et al., 2024; Pahrizal et al., 2025). As Shinta (2024) observed, students' use of reading strategies during tasks directly influenced their overall reading comprehension. This suggests that those who manage to understand and apply reading skills strategically when given a task will perform better than those who struggle to employ such reading strategies when responding to reading tasks. According to Ali and Razali (2019), the reading process draws on two main types of strategies: cognitive and metacognitive. First, learners employ cognitive reading strategies to understand and use the language by activating prior knowledge, asking questions and making predictions, constructing gist, revising interpretations, and relating information. Metacognitive reading strategies, in turn, regulate these cognitive processes through planning, monitoring, and self-evaluation. The two types of strategies when combined together enable learners to actively engage with texts and regulate their reading processes.

Due to the complex linguistic and cognitive demands involved in reading comprehension, Oakhill et al. (2014) highlighted that ESL learners often struggle with reading comprehension tasks. Effective reading requires learners to possess adequate language knowledge and the ability to monitor and regulate their own thinking while engaging with texts. This deeper engagement is facilitated by metacognitive strategies, which enable learners to select and apply appropriate strategies based on the demands of a text and the purpose of reading (Nasab & Ghafournia, 2016). Without sufficient knowledge of these strategies, learners are likely to encounter significant difficulties in comprehending reading materials.

Apart from that, the use of metacognitive reading strategies in classroom settings has impacted L2 reading instruction. One significant evidence is that L2 learners benefited from exposure to a range of reading strategies which can be applied to different reading tasks. Ali and Razali (2019) agreed that the use of a diverse repertoire of reading strategies is critical in addressing

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learners' difficulties, particularly in responding to complex or unfamiliar tasks. Hence, understanding the factors related to L2 learners' use of metacognitive strategies is crucial for informing reading instruction, and more importantly, supporting learners with different levels of language proficiency and reading experience.

Although metacognitive strategies are generally associated with improved reading outcomes, their contribution seems to vary across learners and educational settings. As evident in the data drawn from PISA 2018, involving 612,004 students across 79 countries, metacognitive reading strategies were modest but significant predictors of reading achievement, with the relative importance of individual strategies differing across educational contexts (Ghimire & Mokhtari, 2025). These findings indicate that the role and contribution of metacognitive reading strategies may not be uniform across different learner populations. So, context-specific evidence is needed to establish whether undergraduates who subsequently use planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies actually have stronger English backgrounds.

Understanding the relationship between ESL learners' prior English language performance and their subsequent use of metacognitive strategies carries practical significance for language education in Malaysia. While previous research has frequently examined strategy use in relation to concurrent or subsequent reading performance, less attention has been given to whether learners' earlier English performance is associated with how they later regulate reading-related processes. The present study therefore examines the relationships between Malaysian undergraduates' self-reported SPM English grades, obtained before university enrolment, and their reported use of planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies at the tertiary level. Rather than treating prior performance as a direct determinant of strategy use, the study investigates the strength and direction of the associations across the three metacognitive components. The following literature review first outlines the theoretical development of metacognition in language learning, before reviewing Malaysian research on metacognitive strategy use and the broader evidence concerning the relationship between prior English language performance and subsequent strategy use.

Literature Review

Metacognitive Strategies in Language Learning

Flavell (1979) introduced the idea of metacognition, commonly understood as 'thinking about thinking'. In learning, metacognition concerns learners' awareness of their cognitive processes and their ability to regulate them. Brown (1987) expanded this concept by distinguishing between knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition. The former refers to learners' awareness of strategies, task demands, and their own capabilities, while the latter involves the ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning. This distinction provides a useful framework for examining how language learners manage their learning processes.

Drawing on this foundation, O'Malley and Chamot (1990) incorporated metacognition into their classification of language learning strategies. They categorised the strategies as cognitive, social/affective, and metacognitive. Metacognitive strategies were considered important to independent learning because planning, monitoring, and evaluating enable learners to organise their efforts and reflect on their progress. Likewise, Oxford (1990) described metacognitive strategies as higher-order strategies that coordinate and regulate other learning processes. Learners may, for example, plan how to attempt a language task, monitor their understanding while completing it, and evaluate whether the selected approach has been effective.

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Zimmerman (2002) later situated metacognition within self-regulated learning, where learners take an active role in setting goals, managing their performance, and thinking about outcomes. These processes broadly correspond to planning, monitoring, and evaluating. In language learning, the extent to which learners engage in these regulatory processes may be associated with their existing language knowledge and previous learning performance. Learners with stronger language knowledge may be better positioned to recognise task demands and evaluate their progress. However, learners experiencing difficulties may also engage in frequent strategy use because they need to regulate their learning more consciously.

The present study adopts Phakiti's (2006) framework, which distinguishes planning, monitoring, and evaluating as separate metacognitive components. Planning involves preparing for a task and selecting suitable procedures; monitoring involves checking comprehension and performance while the task is being completed; and evaluating involves judging the effectiveness of the strategies used and the resulting performance. Examining these components separately is crucial because learners may not engage in each regulatory process to the same extent. Consequently, prior English language performance may have different associations with planning, monitoring, and evaluating rather than demonstrating a uniform relationship with overall metacognitive strategy use.

Metacognitive Strategies and Malaysian Learners' L2 Performance

Researchers have examined the use of metacognitive strategies in Malaysian ESL contexts most often in relation to reading. Awang et al. (2024), for instance, reported that tertiary ESL learners in Kelantan used metacognitive reading strategies to manage their comprehension of academic texts. Halim et al. (2022) similarly identified a positive relationship between metacognitive awareness of reading strategies and reading comprehension among Diploma in TESL students. Their respondents reported problem-solving strategies most frequently, suggesting that learners consciously adjusted their reading when comprehension became difficult.

At the undergraduate level, Rajab et al. (2017) examined metacognitive reading strategies among students at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia. The learners reported using problem-solving strategies more frequently than global and support strategies when working with challenging texts. In online reading, for instance, Raja Yacob and Mohamad (2023) also found that Malaysian undergraduates reported the use of global, problem-solving, and support strategies when reading digital texts. Collectively, these studies show that Malaysian ESL learners engage in metacognitive activity across conventional and online reading environments.

Nevertheless, the Malaysian studies largely concern reading comprehension, reading behaviour, or preferences among the strategy categories measured by MARSI. Reading comprehension is a specific language skill, whereas an English examination grade reflects performance across a broader assessment domain. Moreover, MARSI groups strategies into global, problem-solving, and support categories, while Phakiti's (2006) questionnaire distinguishes planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Although these studies establish the relevance of metacognitive reading strategies among Malaysian learners, they provide limited direct evidence of how learners' English language performance is associated with their use of planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies. The available Malaysian evidence is therefore relevant but does not fully explain whether earlier English language performance is associated with these three metacognitive components during undergraduate study.

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Prior English Language Performance and Metacognitive Strategy Use

Research has examined the relationship between language performance and strategy use, although the findings do not indicate a uniformly strong or straightforward association. Green and Oxford (1995) found that language-learning strategy use differed according to second-language proficiency, while Lai (2009) reported that more proficient university learners generally used strategies more frequently than their less proficient counterparts. Nevertheless, learners at different proficiency levels did not necessarily prefer the same strategies. Although these studies examined language-learning strategies more broadly, they provide an initial basis for understanding how learners' language proficiency may be associated with their strategic engagement. This suggests that language performance may be associated not only with the frequency of strategy use but also with the types of strategies selected.

Evidence concerning metacognitive strategies also indicates a relationship with English language performance, although its strength appears to vary across learners, strategy categories, and assessment contexts. Madhumathi et al. (2014) found a significant positive correlation between TOEFL performance and metacognitive strategy use among below-average Indian ESL undergraduates. Phakiti (2003) similarly found that more successful test-takers reported greater metacognitive strategy use than moderately successful and unsuccessful test-takers. However, these findings do not establish that greater strategy use necessarily leads to stronger language performance or that stronger performance directly leads to greater strategy use.

Evidence from university-level learners further extends this discussion. Anggia and Habók (2024) investigated metacognitive awareness of online reading strategies among 1,412 Indonesian university students. Their findings showed statistically significant differences in metacognitive awareness across English proficiency levels. Although their study focused on online reading and used the MARSI framework, it demonstrates that English proficiency is associated with differences in learners' awareness of reading strategies at the university level. However, the study did not examine planning, monitoring, and evaluating as separate components, as operationalised in the present research.

Nevertheless, findings from other language-skill contexts suggest that the relationship may not always be substantial. Wong@Rahman et al. (2026), in a study involving 171 Malaysian ESL pre-university students, examined the relationship between perceived metacognitive listening strategy use and language proficiency. They found a statistically significant but practically weak relationship, indicating that differences in language proficiency were not associated with substantial differences in reported listening strategy use. Although listening and reading strategies are distinct, this finding is considered relevant because it shows that the relationship between language proficiency and metacognitive strategy use may be statistically significant even when it is not strong.

Learners' existing language knowledge may influence how they regulate subsequent language tasks. Those with stronger prior language performance may be better able to recognise task demands, select appropriate strategies, identify comprehension difficulties, and assess whether they have achieved their goals. However, more frequent reported strategy use does not necessarily reflect more effective regulation. Less proficient learners may report frequent monitoring because they encounter greater comprehension difficulties, whereas some regulatory processes may become relatively automatic among more proficient learners. Therefore, the frequency of reported strategy use should be interpreted in relation to learners' proficiency, task demands, and the reasons for employing particular strategies.

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Although evidence suggests a relationship between language proficiency and metacognitive strategy use, several aspects remain insufficiently examined. Much of the existing research has focused on proficiency and strategy use within the same educational level or language-learning context. Furthermore, earlier studies have often used broad measures of language-learning strategies or explored strategy awareness in relation to a specific language skill. As a result, it remains unclear whether English language performance at an earlier educational stage is associated with learners' later reported use of specific metacognitive reading strategies during their undergraduate studies. This distinction is important because earlier academic performance and later strategy use represent different points in learners' educational development.

This study addresses this gap by examining the relationship between Malaysian undergraduates' self-reported SPM English grades and their reported use of planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies. Rather than assuming that prior English performance determines subsequent strategy use, the study investigates the strength and direction of the association and whether the relationship differs across the three metacognitive components.

Methodology

Research Design and Participants

This study employed a correlational research design to examine the association between Malaysian undergraduates' prior English language performance and their reported use of metacognitive reading strategies, i.e. planning, monitoring, and evaluating. A correlational design is appropriate for examining relationships between variables without researcher intervention or manipulation (Salkind, 2017). In the present study, prior English language performance was operationalised using participants' SPM English results, while metacognitive reading strategy use was measured in terms of three dimensions: planning, monitoring, and evaluating. As the SPM English results were obtained before the participants' university enrolment, the study examined whether prior English language performance was associated with their reported use of metacognitive reading strategies.

The population comprised 5883 undergraduates who enrolled in English courses across their academic programmes at one public university on the east coast of Malaysia. The minimum sample size was calculated using Raosoft's sample size calculator, with a 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, and 50% response distribution (Raosoft, 2004). Based on this calculation, a minimum of 361 students was required. Participants were selected using convenience sampling. The questionnaire was distributed to students enrolled in English courses who were available to the researchers. Participation was voluntary, and students were invited to complete the questionnaire. A total of 397 students were invited to participate, of whom 361 completed the questionnaire, resulting in a response rate of 90.9%. The final sample comprised 272 female students (75.3%) and 89 male students (24.7%). In terms of programme level, 304 participants (84.2%) were enrolled in diploma programmes, while 57 participants (15.8%) were enrolled in bachelor's degree programmes.

Research Instrument

Primary data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from Phakiti (2006). The questionnaire, which consisted of 35 items, was organised into four sections: demographic information, cognitive strategies, and three dimensions of metacognitive reading strategies. The demographic component comprised seven items, while 11 items measured cognitive reading

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strategies. The remaining 17 items measured metacognitive reading strategy use, comprising six planning items, six monitoring items, and five evaluating items.

The current study focused on the 17 metacognitive items as its outcome variable, so the cognitive-strategy items were not included in the analysis. The metacognitive strategy items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). Thus, higher scores on the Likert scale indicated more frequent self-reported use of the respective metacognitive reading strategies. The three dimensions represent the processes through which learners regulate their reading. Planning refers to the strategies learners use to prepare for a reading task and formulate an appropriate approach. Monitoring refers to the strategies used to assess comprehension during reading, while evaluating refers to the strategies used to determine the extent of understanding and the effectiveness of the reading process. This categorisation is based on the metacognitive framework developed by Phakiti (2006).

Measurement of Prior English Language Performance

To gain information about participants' prior language performance, their SPM English results were requested. The English SPM result was selected since it provides a measure of their English performance before evaluating the participants' metacognitive strategies. The participants' grades were coded numerically from 1 to 10, with 1 representing A+ and 10 representing G. The lower numerical values therefore represented higher levels of English language achievement.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from 23 January to 10 June 2025 using an online questionnaire administered through Google Forms. The questionnaire link was shared with the recruited students, who completed it independently at their convenience rather than during scheduled classroom sessions.

The Google Forms settings were configured to restrict each respondent to one submission. All 361 submitted responses were complete, and no duplicate submissions were identified. Therefore, none of the responses were excluded due to incomplete or duplicate submissions, and all 361 responses were retained for statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise participants' demographic and academic characteristics and to describe the distribution of SPM English grades. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated to assess the internal consistency of the three metacognitive reading strategy dimensions.

Spearman's rank-order correlation was employed to examine the associations between prior English language performance and the three metacognitive reading strategy use. Spearman's correlation was appropriate because the SPM English results were represented using an ordinal grade coding system. The analysis examined the relationships between SPM English performance and planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level. Since the study employed correlational analysis, the findings were interpreted as associations between variables rather than evidence of causal effects.

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Findings and Discussion

Participant Profile and Prior English Language Performance

The descriptive analysis of this study includes participants' gender distribution, study programme and SPM English results. Table 1 displays the frequency and percentages for these demographic characteristics. A total of 361 undergraduate students participated in the study. Of these, 272 (75.3%) were female, and 89 (24.7%) were male. In terms of study programmes, 304 participants (84.2%) were enrolled in diploma programmes, while 57 (15.8%) were enrolled in bachelor's degree programmes. The participants' SPM English results were used as an indicator of prior English language performance. The most frequently reported grade was B+, obtained by 92 participants (25.5%), followed by A, obtained by 85 participants (23.5%). 56 participants (15.5%) obtained A-, while 49 (13.6%) obtained a B. The remaining participants obtained C+ (39, 10.8%), C (20, 5.5%), D (10, 2.8%), A+ (9, 2.5%), and E (1, 0.3%). No participants reported grades of F or G.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	89	24.7
	Female	272	75.3
Study Programme	Diploma	304	84.2
	Bachelor's Degree	57	15.8
SPM English Result	A+	9	2.5
	A	85	23.5
	A-	56	15.5
	B+	92	25.5
	B	49	13.6
	C+	39	10.8
	C	20	5.5
	D	10	2.8
	E	1	0.3
	F	0	0.0
	G	0	0.0

Reliability of the Metacognitive Reading Strategy Measure

The 17 metacognitive reading strategy items demonstrated high internal consistency across the three strategy types. As shown in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained were .883 for planning, .910 for monitoring and .879 for evaluating. Thus, these results indicate that the items within each of the three sections consistently measured their respective metacognitive reading strategy types.

Table 2: Internal Consistency of the Metacognitive Reading Strategy Types

Metacognitive Strategy Type	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Planning	6	.883
Monitoring	6	.910
Evaluating	5	.879

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Relationship between Prior English Language Performance and Metacognitive Reading Strategy Use

Spearman's rank-order correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between participants' prior English language performance, as indicated by their SPM English results, and their reported use of metacognitive strategies. The analysis considered the three strategy types of planning, monitoring, and evaluating. As presented in Table 3, SPM English results were significantly correlated with all three metacognitive reading strategy types.

A significant negative correlation was found between SPM English results and planning (r_s = -.168, p = .001). The negative direction should be interpreted in relation to the coding of the SPM results, where 1 represented A+, and 10 represented G; hence, lower numerical values represented better English achievement. Therefore, the negative correlation coefficient indicates that participants with better prior English language performance tended to report greater use of planning strategy. However, the strength of the relationship was very weak.

The same finding was also found in monitoring and evaluating strategies. The participants' SPM English results were significantly negatively correlated with monitoring (r_s = -0.255, p = .001) and evaluating (r_s = -.265, p = .001). However, both relationships were weak. These therefore indicate that participants with stronger prior English language performance tended to report greater use of monitoring and evaluating strategies, even though the strength of these associations was limited.

Table 3: Spearman's Rank-Order Correlations between SPM English Results and Metacognitive Reading Strategy Use

Variables	SPM English Result Correlation	Significance	Level
Planning	-.168	.001	Very Weak
Monitoring	-.255	.001	Weak
Evaluating	-.265	.001	Weak

Note. SPM English grades were coded from 1 (A+) to 10 (G); therefore, lower numerical values represent higher English achievement

The consistent direction of the three correlations suggests that learners with stronger prior English language performance tended to report greater engagement in metacognitive reading strategies. This finding is pertinent to Kan et al. (2024) and Pahrizal et al. (2025) who revealed that metacognitive strategy use is associated with reading comprehension. While ESL learners' earlier language performance was given little attention in the existing literature, the present findings extend this line of research by examining the relationship from a different perspective. The study considers whether prior English language performance is associated with learners' reported use of metacognitive reading strategies, namely planning, monitoring, and evaluating, rather than treating the strategy use as a factor associated with reading performance.

As shown in Table 3, the very weak association between prior English performance and planning (r_s = -.168) suggests that stronger English language performance was associated with planning only to a limited extent. Planning involves preparing for a task and selecting suitable approaches when responding to reading tasks. While the learners with stronger English backgrounds may be better at anticipating the demands of the tasks, the present finding shows that language performance alone provided limited information about their reported planning behaviour. Other factors beyond the learners' language ability, including their previous

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experience with reading tasks, familiarity with strategy use, motivation and metacognitive awareness, could influence their use of planning strategy (Lin, 2019).

Next, it was observed that the relationship between prior English language performance and monitoring was stronger than planning, although it remained weak (r_s = -.255). Monitoring involves checking comprehension and performance while the task is being completed. The association found in the present study may indicate that the learners with stronger English backgrounds tend to report greater engagement in monitoring their comprehension. Since the association was weak in strength, it suggests that the differences in monitoring cannot be explained by prior English performance alone. This interpretation echoes Lin's (2019) observation that reading strategy relationships may vary due to factors such as reading task type, gender, and prior literacy experience. Thus, monitoring appears to involve a wider range of learners and contextual influences beyond language performance.

Despite its weak association, the strongest relationship was observed between prior English language performance and evaluating (r_s = -.265). Evaluating involves judging the effectiveness of the strategies used and the resulting performance. The finding indicates that learners with stronger English performance tended to report greater use of evaluative strategies. However, the weak strength of the relationship demonstrates that stronger English language performance does not necessarily translate into substantially greater use of evaluation strategies. This echoes Razkane et al. (2025), who reported a weak association between metacognitive reading strategies and the pre-service teachers' reading comprehension. In addition to this, their findings suggest that awareness of metacognitive strategies does not necessarily guarantee their effective use. Likewise, the present study indicates that prior English language performance may be associated with the learners' evaluative strategy use, but other factors could possibly influence whether they actively evaluate their comprehension when dealing with reading tasks.

Overall, the findings indicate that the learners' prior English language performance was significantly associated with all three metacognitive reading strategy types examined in the study, namely planning, monitoring, and evaluating. Nevertheless, the weak magnitude of these relationships is equally important to highlight. It suggests that learners' linguistic knowledge and metacognitive regulation may be related, but they are distinct components of effective reading. While the former provides learners with resources for processing and understanding meaning, the latter enables them to regulate that process. Therefore, developing learners' linguistic foundations and metacognitive awareness should be treated as complementary rather than competing priorities. Focusing on just linguistic performance will not automate the greater use of metacognitive reading strategies. Hence, English language instruction should benefit from simultaneously strengthening learners' vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension while explicitly developing their ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading.

Conclusion

The present study found significant relationships between prior English language performance, as indicated by SPM English results, and their reported use of three metacognitive reading strategy types: planning, monitoring, and evaluating. The correlations are statistically significant, with correlation coefficients of -.168 for planning, -.255 for monitoring, and -.265 for evaluating. Since the SPM English grades were coded in ascending order, with lower values representing higher English language achievement, the negative correlations indicate that learners with stronger prior English language performance tended to report greater use of metacognitive reading strategies. However, the strength of all three associations was weak,

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indicating that prior English language performance was only modestly associated with learners' reported use of these strategies.

These findings suggest that prior English language performance and metacognitive reading strategy use are related but distinct aspects of ESL reading comprehension. The weak associations further indicate that stronger prior English language performance alone does not sufficiently explain differences in learners' reported use of planning, monitoring, and evaluating strategies. The influence of other learner-and context-related factors on metacognitive strategy use, including reading task characteristics, prior literacy experience, and instructional context, could possibly contribute to this finding (Lin, 2019; Ghimire & Mokhtari, 2025). Therefore, the findings support the importance of addressing both learners' linguistic foundations and their metacognitive awareness when developing ESL reading instruction.

Implications of the Study

The findings offer implications for language instructors seeking to support ESL learners' reading development. Since prior English language performance was significantly but weakly associated with all three metacognitive strategy types, it is deemed important for language instructors to strengthen learners' linguistic foundations through explicit instruction and opportunities to practise metacognitive reading strategies. The instructors can deliberately support learners in developing the ability to plan before reading, monitor comprehension during reading, and evaluate their understanding after reading rather than assuming that stronger English performance will automatically result in greater strategy use.

One approach that can be implemented into ESL classrooms is the think-aloud protocol. Through this approach, teachers can model how proficient readers plan their approach to a text, monitor their comprehension, identify difficulties, and evaluate their understanding in real time. Learners can subsequently practise similar processes through individual, pair, or group activities. Over time, such guided practice is useful to help learners become more conscious of their reading processes and develop greater awareness of when and how to apply appropriate strategies. This approach is particularly relevant to the present findings because the weak correlations suggest that metacognitive strategy use cannot be assumed to develop solely from learners' existing level of English performance.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present study relied on a self-reported questionnaire to assess ESL learners' metacognitive reading strategy use, so their actual behaviour during authentic reading tasks may not fully reflect the learners' perceptions of their strategy use. Participants may either overestimate or underestimate how frequently they engage in planning, monitoring, or evaluating. Consequently, the reported use of metacognitive strategies should be interpreted as learners' self-reported perceptions rather than direct evidence of their actual strategic behaviour during reading.

Another limitation concerns the weak strength of the observed relationships. Although the significant associations were observed between SPM English results and all three metacognitive strategy types, their weak strength indicates that prior English language performance contributes to only a limited part of the variation in reported strategy use. The findings should therefore not be interpreted as suggesting that prior English performance is the primary factor underlying learners' metacognitive reading strategy use. Other factors, such as motivation,

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language exposure, instructional practices, prior literacy experience, reading task characteristics, and learner background, may also affect their metacognitive strategy use.

Future research should use more direct measures of learners' reading and strategic behaviour in addition to self-reported strategy questionnaires. Methods such as reading comprehension tests, think-aloud protocols, classroom observations, and retrospective interviews could help determine whether learners' reported strategy use reflects their actual strategic behaviour while reading. It is also recommended that future studies could also examine whether factors such as proficiency level, type of reading task, instructional approach, or learner characteristics influence the relationship between prior English language performance and metacognitive strategy use. Longitudinal research would also be useful for understanding how learners' language performance and metacognitive strategy use develop over time, as well as whether changes in one are related to changes in the other.

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