The Investigation in Reading Problems and Reading Strategies of Undergraduate Students

Thanyapatra Soisuwan

Department of Western, Faculty of Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thanyaburi, Pathumthani, THAILAND

Tel: 086-656-4551   E-mail: thanyapatra_s@rmutt.ac.th

Thitapa Sinturat (Corresponding author)

[1]Department of Western, Faculty of Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thanyaburi, Pathumthani, THAILAND

Tel: 086-100-4495   E-mail: thitapa_s@rmutt.ac.th

Prapaporn Lekdamrongsak (Corresponding author)

[2]Department of Western, Faculty of Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thanyaburi, Pathumthani, THAILAND

Tel: 081-343-4147   E-mail: prapaporn_lek@hotmail.com

Abstract

This study aimed to (1) investigate reading problems and (2) explore reading strategies of the fourth-year EFL students majoring in English for communication in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand. The quantitative approach was employed to find out the answers using questionnaires. The questionnaires consisted of reading problems and reading strategies were verified by three experts. The population of this study included 153 students studying in the first semester of academic year 2020. The findings revealed that four main reading problems of the students were the limited knowledge of technical words, the re-reading problems, the lack of background knowledge about the topic, and the length of sentences, respectively. It was also indicated that three main reading strategies that students used to overcome their problems consisted of guessing words

from the clues, using the title to predict the content, and linking the content to their prior knowledge, respectively. As the research population was limited, it was suggested that the further studies should be conducted with students from other fields and years.

Keywords: undergraduate students, EFL, reading, reading problems, reading strategies

1. Introduction

During the pandemic era, most people need to use English language as a medium to gather the information from textbooks, newspapers, journals, and internet websites. According to Paris (2005), reading was "the foundation for learning and academic achievement" (p.184). Reading was an essential tool to acquire knowledge, update situation and access modern technology. In academic field, reading was a very important skill which gives students exposure to different knowledge, viewpoints and ideas. Reading comprehension test was also significant to students' grades. Moreover, learners were always required to interpret or analyze the texts. However, not every student acquired reading skill at the same rate. This might cause reading problems that could affect their performances across the school curriculum and had negative impacts on their motivation to learn and self-esteem.

Generally, reading problems referred to difficulties in reading, from letter and word recognition to understanding meaning at the phrase, sentence, and paragraph level. Chawwang (2008) pointed out that students had reading problems in three areas including sentence structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. There were a number of causes of reading problems including the lack of background knowledge (Nurjanah, 2018; Dara, 2019), lack of motivation (Dara, 2019; Pangsapa, 2012), lack of linguistic competency (Dara, 2019), length of sentence, poor reading skill, and lack of memorizing ability (Nurjanah, 2018). Kasim and Raisha (2017) also mentioned some common problems in the EFL reading classroom consisted of "insufficient vocabulary, problems understanding linguistic complexity including lexical and syntactic knowledge, language inaccessibility, poor reading skills and lack of schemata" (p.311). Furthermore, in Thai context, Pangsapa (2012) revealed that complex sentences, spending time to find meaning of word from the dictionary, reading text with limited time, moving eyes back to words or phrases that had already read, and lacking of ability to guess meaning from the context were the causes of students' reading problems.

As many students have reading problems, they try to find the ways to achieve their reading and reading strategies were the ways to overcome reading problems. They try different strategies and skills to achieve their reading tasks. According to Pani (2004), reading strategies are defined as the process which the reader used to absorb the information they read. Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) pointed out some reading strategies which included overviewing before reading, looking for important information and paying greater attention to it, relating important points, activating and using prior knowledge, changing strategies, and correcting inaccuracies in comprehension. According to Hoang's study (2013), the reading strategies which frequently used by Vietnamese students for their academic study in the UK were figuring out the main idea of each paragraph, dividing a sentence grammatically, using the title to predict contents, linking the content to prior knowledge, and guessing words from

the clues. Other reading strategies were re-reading (Janzen, 2002; Jusoh & Abdullah, 2015; Bedle, 2018), guessing the meaning of unknown words from context (Janzen, 2002; Bedle, 2018), summarizing and relating to the reader's background knowledge (Janzen, 2002), underlining or circling prior knowledge, adjusting reading speed, and paying closer attention and taking notes (Bedle, 2018).

In this study, the researchers focused on reading problems and strategies of the fourth-year English majored students at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand. The results could be useful for teachers and researchers who would like to solve students' reading problems in class.

2. Method

2.1 Research Objectives

This research aimed to investigate reading problems of the fourth-year EFL students majoring in English for communication in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand and to explore the reading strategies they used.

2.2 Research Methodology

The researchers employed the characteristics of a quantitative approach on collecting data and the questionnaires were applied as the primary tool for collecting data.

The population of this study consisted of 153 fourth-year English for communication major students studying in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi in the first semester of academic year 2020.

The questionnaires which created in Thai language consisted of three sections: (A) students' background information requiring genders and class sections, (B) students' reading problems demanding the level of encountering, and (C) students' reading strategies involving the frequency of using. The reading problem questionnaires were designed based on the studies of Pangsapa (2012) and Nurjanah (2018), and reading strategy questionnairs were designed based on Bedle's study (2017).

The Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) was used to find the content validity of the questionnaires. The questionnaires were then corrected and adjusted in accordance with comments and recommendations made by three experts. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined to ensure that the responses collected through the instrument were reliable and consistent.

The questionnaires were piloted with 30 students from other majors of Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi which were not in the population. The reliability value was calculated by using Cronbach's alpha to ensure the internal consistency within the items. According to George & Mallery (2019), the value of Coefficient Cronbach's Alpha was as follows: ≥ 0.9= Excellent, ≥ 0.8= Good, ≥ 0.7= Acceptable, ≥ 0.6= Questionable, ≥ 0.5= Poor, and ≤ 0.5=Unacceptable. As in the pilot study, the Cronbach's Alpha was at 0.905, the questionnaires were highly reliable.

The data collection was conducted online using Google Form in September 2021. Firstly, the researchers contacted the participants in each section through online messaging to make an appointment. On the scheduled date and time, the researchers explained the objectives of the study to participants. Then the participants were asked to response to the online questionnaires. Finally, the responses were quantitatively analyzed using frequency distribution and percentage.

3. Results

The quantitative data were derived from the questionnaires consisting of three sections. The first section aimed at gathering the background information of the fourth-year English majored students who participated in the study. The second section aimed at reflecting students' level of encountering reading problems. The last section aimed at perceiving the students' reading strategies.

3.1 Background Information

The students' general background information was presented as follows:

Table 1. Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	30	23.08
Female	85	65.38
LGBTQ	15	11.54
Total	130	100.00

Table 1 showed that there were 130 participants (84.97%) answered the questionnaires. The participants included 30 (23.08%) males, 85 (65.38%) females, and 15 (11.54%) LGBTQ.

Table 2. Class section

Section	Number	Percentage
A	29	22.31
B	35	26.92
C	32	24.62
E	34	26.15
Total	130	100.00

Table 2 indicated that the participants were from 4 sections: 29 (22.31%) of the participants were in section A, 35 (26.92%) were in section B, 32 (24.62) were in section C, and 35 (26.15%) were in section E.

3.2 Reading Problems

This section presented the reading difficulties faced by the students while reading. There were twelve items shown:

Table 3. Reading problems

Reading Problems	Level									
	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
1. Lack of background knowledge or not familiar with the topic	12	9.23	49	37.69	54	41.54	10	7.69	5	3.85
2. Length of sentence	12	9.23	49	37.69	43	33.08	22	16.92	4	3.08
3. Poor knowledge on grammar	23	17.69	34	26.15	43	33.08	24	18.46	6	4.62
4. Limited knowledge of words	16	12.31	43	33.08	43	33.08	23	17.69	5	3.85
5. Paraphrase confusion	16	12.31	36	27.69	53	40.77	21	16.15	4	3.08
6. Lack of concentration in reading	15	11.54	32	24.62	37	28.46	34	26.15	12	9.23
7. Paying too much attention	19	14.62	31	23.85	44	33.85	27	20.77	9	6.92
8. Poor ability on memorizing	18	13.85	32	24.62	43	33.08	29	22.31	8	6.15
9. Re- Reading	21	16.15	48	36.92	29	22.31	26	20.00	6	4.62
10. Limited time to attend	8	6.15	47	36.15	46	35.38	22	16.92	7	5.38
11. Limited knowledge of technical words	37	28.46	42	32.31	36	27.69	14	10.77	1	0.77
12. Difficulty to connect the ideas	11	8.46	34	26.15	46	35.38	32	24.62	7	5.38

Considering the reading problem that the students always encountered, it could be noted from Table 3 that 37 (28.46%) of the participants mostly had the problem of limited knowledge of technical words. While 42 (32.31%) highly faced the problem, 36 (27.69%) moderately had the problem, 14 (10.77%) slightly encountered it, and 7 (5.38%) had it at the smallest level.

3.3 Reading Strategies

This section showed the strategies that students used to overcome reading problems:

Table 4. Reading strategies

Reading Strategies	Frequency									
	5	%	4	%	3	%	2	%	1	%
1. Using the title to predict the contents	39	30.00	51	39.23	33	25.38	5	3.85	2	1.54
2. Taking notes while reading	16	12.31	27	20.77	38	29.23	35	26.92	14	10.77
3. Highlighting important sentences	26	20.00	50	38.46	41	31.54	11	8.46	2	1.54
4. Guessing words from the clues	36	27.69	61	46.92	28	21.54	5	3.85	0	0.00
5. Adjusting reading speed	17	13.08	46	35.38	56	43.08	9	6.92	2	1.54
6. Linking the content to prior knowledge	27	20.77	57	43.85	36	27.69	9	6.92	1	0.77
7. Dividing a sentence grammatically	22	16.92	51	39.23	48	36.92	9	6.92	0	0.00
8. Figuring out the main idea of each paragraph	20	15.38	54	41.54	42	32.31	10	7.69	4	3.08

9. Reading aloud	25	19.23	46	35.38	30	23.08	17	13.08	12	9.23
10. Discussing with others	21	16.15	35	26.92	42	32.31	26	20.00	6	4.62
11. Asking oneself questions	17	13.08	41	31.54	46	35.38	22	16.92	4	3.08
12. Using reference materials	28	21.54	36	27.69	49	37.69	13	10.00	4	3.08
13. Determining what to read and skipping irrelevant details	18	13.85	54	41.54	40	30.77	14	10.77	4	3.08

Considering the strategy which the students always employed, Table 4 indicated that using the title to predict the contents was used the most frequently as 39 (30%) of the students always used this strategy. While 51 (39.23%) frequently employed it, 33 (25.38%) sometimes used this strategy, 5 (3.85%) rarely used it, and 2 (1.54%) never employed it.

4. Discussion

4.1 Conclusion of the Study

The quantitative results of the study analyzed from the reading problems and reading strategies questionnaires to answer the research questions: (1) what reading difficulties of the fourth-year English majored students in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi are and (2) which strategies the fourth-year English majored students in the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi use for reading.

4.1.1 Reading Problems

The reading problems that students mostly and highly faced were comprised together and the results were sorted descending as follows:

1) Limited knowledge of technical words (60.77%)

2) Re - Reading (53.07%)

3) Lack of background knowledge or not familiar with the topic (46.92%)

4) Length of sentence (46.92%)

5) Limited knowledge of words (45.39%)

6) Poor knowledge on grammar (43.84%)

7) Limited time to attend (42.3%)

8) Paraphrase confusion (40%)

9) Paying too much attention (38.47%)

10) Poor ability on memorizing (38.47%)

11) Lack of concentration in reading (36.16%)

12) Difficulty to connect the ideas (34.61%)

In conclusion, the researchers would like to emphasize only four main problems students faced while reading. They included limited knowledge of technical words, re – reading, lack of background knowledge or not familiar with the topic, and length of sentence, respectively.

4.1.2 Reading Strategies

The strategies which students always used and frequently used were combined. The findings were sort descending as follows:

1) Guessing words from the clues (74.61%)

2) Using the title to predict the contents (69.23%)

3) Linking the content to prior knowledge (64.62%)

4) Highlighting important sentences (58.46%)

5) Figuring out the main idea of each paragraph (56.92%)

6) Dividing a sentence grammatically (56.15%)

7) Determining what to read and skipping irrelevant details (55.39%)

8) Reading aloud (54.61%)

9) Using reference materials (49.23%)

10) Adjusting reading speed (48.46%)

11) Asking oneself questions (44.62%)

12) Discussing with others (43.07%)

13) Taking notes while reading (33.08%)

To summarize, this study focused on three main points of strategies that most students – more than 60% of them - used to overcome reading problems. They consisted of guessing words from the clues, using the title to predict the contents, and linking the content to prior knowledge, respectively.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Reading Problems

According to the study, it was found that the limited knowledge of technical words, re – reading, lack of background knowledge or not familiar with the topic, and length of sentence were the main problems that students faced the most while reading. The results agreed with Nurjanah (2018) and Dara (2019) that lacking of background knowledge was the main problem on reading comprehension. Similarly, Pangsapa's study (2012) revealed that limited knowledge of technical words was the main difficulty in reading. Moreover, the findings approved the study of Kasim & Raisha (2017) which stated that the most frequent problem interfering the students was unfamiliar vocabulary.

In contrast, the findings did not agree with the study of Karbalaei (2010) that the most difficulty the readers faced was paying too much attention to the texts.

4.2.2 Reading Strategies

There were many strategies that students could use to overcome reading problems. The results showed that three main strategies which the students frequently used consisted of guessing words from the clues, using the title to predict the contents, and linking the content to prior knowledge, respectively. This revealed the similar result as the studies of Janzen (2002) and Bedle (2018) that mentioned guessing the meaning of unknown words from context was the most frequently used strategy. Moreover, the result supported Janzen's study (1996) that relating to the reader's background knowledge was one of the most frequently used strategies. However, the result did not agree with the studies of Karbalaei (2010) as it was stated that top five strategies were adjusting reading speed, deciding what to ignore, underlining or circling information, asking oneself questions, and taking notes. In addition, the study showed some differences from Hoang's study (2013) that pointed out some strategies including figuring out the main idea of each paragraph, and dividing a sentence grammatically.

It is important that the students who have reading difficulties need some instructions of reading strategies and how to effectively use the strategies in order to enhance the students' potential (Farrell, 2001; Zurek Cadena, 2012).

5. Limitations

There are several study limitations.

1) The study did not include a sample of non-respondents.

2) As the time to conduct the study was limited, an in-depth study was not conducted.

3) The participants in this study were drawn from a single faculty and university.

6. Suggestion

1) The further studies should be conducted with students from different fields and years or from other universities.

2) The further studies may focus on the reasons of selecting each reading strategies.

supported and encouraged us to overcome all the difficulties.

References

Bedle, S. (2018). *Reading strategies in an EFL context: A mixed methods research synthesis*.https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/university_of_glasgow_diss ertation.pdf

Chawwang, N. (2008). *An investigation of English reading problems of Thai 12th-grade students in Nakhonratchasima educational regions 1, 2, 3, and 7* (Unpublished master's thesis). Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand.

Dara, D. (2019). *Investigating English reading comprehension problems of Cambodian high school students*. https://doi.org/10.30845/aijss.v8n3p8

Farrell, T. S. (2001). Teaching reading strategies: 'It takes time!'. *Reading in a foreign language*, *13*(2), 631-646.

George, D., & Mallery, P. (2019). *IBM SPSS statistics 26 step by step: A simple guide and reference*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429056765

Hoang, N. (2013). *The relationship between reading strategy use and reading proficiency of Vietnamese students in the UK*. Retrieved from https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/sites/teacheng/files/dissertation_design_for_publication_ 2016_northumbria_university.pdf

Kasim, U., & Raisha, S. (2017). EFL students' Janzen, J. (2002). Teaching strategic reading. In Richards, J. C., Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (Eds.). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*, (pp. 287-294). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667190.040

Juuso, Z., & Abdullah, L. (2015). Online survey of reading strategies (OSORS): Students' online reading in academic context. *Malaysian Journal of Distance Education*, *17*(2), 67-81. https://doi.org/10.21315/mjde2015.17.2.5

Karbalaei, A. (2010). A comparison of the metacognitive reading strategies used by EFL and ESL readers. *The Reading Matrix, 10(2)*, 165-180.

Nurjanah, R. (2018). *The analysis on students' difficulties in doing reading comprehension final test*. Retrieved from https://jurnal.untidar.ac.id/index.php/metathesis/article/view/958

Pangsapa, N. (2012). *A study of English reading problems and strategies of Thai editorial staff*. Retrieved from https://thesis.swu.ac.th/swuthesis/Eng(M.A.)/Namida_P.pdf

Pain, S. (2004). *Reading strategy instruction through mental modelling*. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.4.355

Paris, S. G. (2005). Reinterpreting the development of reading skills. *Reading research quarterly, 40(2)*, 184-202. https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.40.2.3

Pressley, M., & Afflerbach, P. (2012). *Verbal protocols of reading: The nature of*

constructively responsive reading. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203052938

Zurek Cadena, C. M. (2012). *Effectiveness of reading strategies and improving reading comprehension in young ESL readers* (Master's thesis, Maestría en Educación).

Copyright Disclaimer