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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE ENGLISH READING STRATEGY SKILLS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS MAJORING IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

EFL learners must master reading comprehension in order to comprehend English literature and to read many academic texts and journals. Reading assessment is essential for supporting effective reading instruction because such assessment provides teachers valuable insight into the reading demands and difficulties of their students.

There are various reading strategies that are needed: (1) Understanding sentence structure can assist one in untangling complex sentences. (2) Context clues aid the reader in understanding the material and by broadening their vocabulary. (3) The main idea is the point or message the writer wants the reader to take from the text. (4) Reading for supporting details will give the reader a deeper comprehension of precise facts and opinions on a topic.

This study assessed the English reading skills of graduate Students majoring in Educational Administration at a Thai university. The participants were 43 first-semester graduate students. The instrument was a 75-item English reading strategy test validated through expert review. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results revealed: (1) The average level of skill of the graduate students was 54.64%. (2) The students' weakest strategy was identifying types of sentences.

The results revealed that the graduate students' average level of English reading strategy skills was moderate, with identifying types of sentences being the weakest strategy. These findings highlight areas that may require further instructional support.

Keywords: EFL learners, reading comprehension, reading strategies, sentence structure, context clues, graduate students, Thailand

Introduction

Proficiency in reading comprehension is crucial when studying English as a foreign language. Reading can assist students become more proficient in the target language by enhancing their vocabulary, fluency, speaking, and writing abilities (Hung & Ngan, 2015; Azizifar, Roshani, Gowhary, & Jamalinesari, 2015; Ghanbaria & Marzban, 2014). According to Habók and Magyar (2018), reading

comprehension can help students become more fluent in English and increase their knowledge of the material they are reading. As a result, students with strong reading comprehension skills will be more proficient in language.

One of the most important abilities that a majority of Thai students struggle with in Thai national English proficiency assessments is reading English (Kongcharoenkitkul, 2022). Thai EFL students understand reading is crucial, but many of them view reading in English as a challenging endeavor (Rungswang and Kosashunhanan, 2021). Numerous reading issues affect Thai university students, which has an impact on their ability to learn and comprehend English. One of the main problems noted is the lack of familiarity with technical terms, which makes it difficult to comprehend reading materials (Soisuan, Sinturat, and Lekdamrongsak, 2022). Additionally, students struggle with the lexicon and structure of the English language, which makes it harder for them to infer the meaning of words they are unfamiliar with in context (Wiriyakarun, 2018).

EFL learners must master reading comprehension in order to understand English literature and to read academic texts and journals. Reading assessment provides valuable insight into the reading abilities and difficulties of students. According to Setianingsih (2020) in the *Journal of English Language Teaching*, "Educators generally agree that assessment is fundamental to the effective teaching of reading"

Reading strategies are crucial for improving students' reading comprehension since they give them the tools to manage their reading proficiently. Studies show that proficient readers are actively engaging with the content and are conscious of the methods they employ to comprehend what they read. Instructors can aid students in developing their comprehension of what they read by using reading strategies (Banditvilai, 2020). Different strategies for reading are understood by readers, who know when, how, and why to apply them to improve their reading comprehension. Su (2001) looked into how reading strategies affect students' reading ability. The results showed that reading strategies have a significant impact on students' reading comprehension abilities and are one of the most effective ways to improve reading comprehension skills.

Various reading strategies are needed to improve the students' reading ability: (1) Understanding sentence structures can assist in untangling complex sentences. (2) Context clues aid in understanding the material and in learning vocabulary. (3) The main idea is the point the writer wants the reader to take from the text, while reading for supporting details provides a deeper comprehension of facts and opinions on a topic (Thành, 2023, Snelling, 2022, Norhayati, 2022, Roell, 2020, Boudah, 2013, and Shelton, Lemons, and Wexler, 2020 Inharjanto et.al., 2023).

1. Sentence structures

Mastery of sentence structure accounts for effective reading ability (Atmojo, Asib, and Asrori, 2017). To grasp what they are reading, students must be able to identify, comprehend, and apply each sentence's component parts. Sentence structure is obviously important while learning to write, but it's also a part of learning to read. Understanding what they read improves as students develop their capacity to construct increasingly complex sentences in both written and spoken language. Good comprehension is based on linguistic expertise, and studies have demonstrated a direct correlation

between reading comprehension and grammatical sophistication (Thành, 2023). For reading comprehension, sentence structure needs to be explicitly taught. Sentence structure and length serve as indicators of a text's level of difficulty. Therefore, it is obvious that teachers should clearly link reading and writing instruction with the teaching of sentence structures as reading comprehension becomes dependent on receiving specific instruction in sentence structure (Snelling, 2022). Understanding sentence structure can assist in untangling complex sentences. When it comes to potentially difficult sentence structures, teachers should think about previewing written text and actively monitoring for particularly challenging sentences while students are reading. In addition, instead of presuming that students will have an implicit mastery of sentence structures, teachers should search for opportunities to evaluate students' knowledge at the sentence level (Zipoli, 2016)

2. Context clues

Using context clues is one of the many methods teachers frequently employ to help their students become better readers. According to Roell (2020), context clues are merely cues or extra details the author includes to assist one in comprehending the meaning of a specific word or phrase. These clues can be found in the same sentence as the vocabulary word or elsewhere in the passage. Additionally, context clues might help students who are having trouble deducing meaning from unfamiliar terms or figuring out the primary topic of a book. They can fill in the blanks in incredibly useful ways. According to studies on the application of context clues in reading practice, reading and vocabulary are recognized to be related to one another making context clues related to vocabulary. Students in higher education can benefit from using context clues to practice their reading skills (Norhayati, 2022). Learners benefit from contextualization when it comes to comprehending and using the target language. If a context clue is given, it will be easier to understand the many nuances of meaning that words have when used in specific situations. As vocabulary acquisition becomes more useful, this method of testing second language learners (SLL) at the tertiary level appears to be effective. The SLL may pick up a lot of words from the text by using context clues as even the dictionary definitions of some words in reading texts can change depending on the situation. Contextual cues assist students in determining the meaning of the unknown word or words in such circumstances. Contextual cues are helpful in many situations (Innaci and Sam D, 2017).

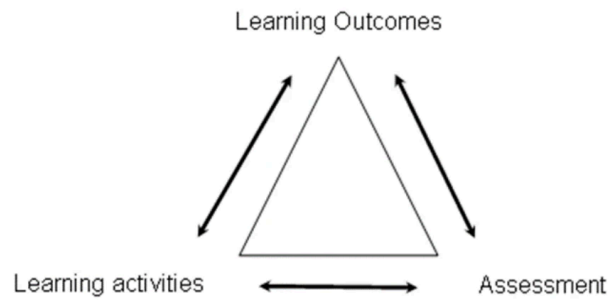
3. Main idea and Supporting details

One of the fundamental aspects of reading comprehension is identifying the main idea of a text. It takes extensive reading skills to comprehend the main idea, or the wider conceptual framework of a textbook chapter, article, paragraph, sentence, or section. Comprehending articles or chapters, coming to conclusions, and interpreting them critically are all crucial for overall comprehension when reading in college (Elashhab, 2013). Every passage, paragraph, phrase, and chapter in a textbook has a central theme. The "key concept" that is being conveyed is the major idea. Major and small details that explain how, what, when, where, why, how much, or how many provide context for the main notion. Understanding the point(s) the writer is trying to make is made easier by locating the main idea and supporting details. Determining the main idea facilitates readers' retention of crucial details and aids the reader in understanding the ideas the writer is trying to convey (Shelton, Lemons, and Wexler, 2020).

Main idea production has been found by experts to be a beneficial teaching strategy for raising students' reading levels because it aids in the reader's retention of crucial details and the development of a comprehensive grasp of the text. Identifying the main idea is an active, meaning-making process that promotes comprehension (Stevens, Park, and Vaughn, 2019)

It's critical that one comprehend the text's structure when reading. It facilitates their ability to focus on what matters most. Part of that involves separating out supporting details from main ideas. Supporting details help the reader understand the main idea of a paragraph by providing well-researched facts and claims, thorough explanations, examples, and particular details. Supporting details clarify the main idea of the text for the reader by elaborating, describing, and illuminating it. Locating the topic, main idea, and supporting details helps one understand the point(s) the writer is attempting to express. Identifying the relationships among these elements will increase one's comprehension. Teachers can explicitly teach students how to recognize the main idea and the details that support it. One may usually ascertain the answer to the main idea inquiry by examining the opening sentence of each paragraph. This is due to the fact that the first line frequently conveyed the paragraph's core point, with the next sentences offering information to support it. Students may often, but not always, rapidly determine the passage's main idea by concentrating on the first phrase of each paragraph. They can then use the supporting details to further their comprehension of the subject (Inharjanto et. al., 2023, Shelton, Lemons, and Wexler, 2020).

An integral part of curriculum practice is assessment. The outcomes of learning—the proficiencies students display after taking a class in school—are one of the most important factors that administrators, teachers, and students take into account when designing an educational system. The process of assessment involves gathering data about curriculum operations to inform judgments about student learning, curricula and programs, and issues related to educational policy. As a result, educators strongly advise that curriculum and assessment be combined into an ongoing cycle of developing, implementing, and evaluating curricula (Yambi and Yambi, 2020, Dziob, Kwiatkowski, and Sokolowska, 2018). In other words, assessment provides indispensable information about student achievement and assists educators to establish the effectiveness of their instruction as illustrated in the diagram below:



Triangle of Effective Learning

(Adapted from Professional Reflection Tools, by Queen's University Belfast, n.d., Professional reflection tools. <https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/AcademicStudentAffairs/CentreforEducationalDevelopment/LearningTeachingandAssessment/LearningandTeaching/ReflectivePracticeforStaff/ProfessionalReflectionTools/>)

Although prior research has examined reading difficulties among secondary and undergraduate EFL students, limited research has focused specifically on graduate students in Educational Administration programs. Graduate students are expected to engage extensively with academic texts and research literature; however, their specific reading strategy strengths and weaknesses remain underexamined in this context. Therefore, assessing their reading strategy skills is necessary to inform instructional planning and academic support.

Teachers need to determine students' current status in order to identify areas that require improvement. Knowing students' areas of weaknesses in English reading strategies enables one to better prepare lessons and activities to serve students' needs.

Research Questions

1. At what level is the English reading strategy skills of the students?
2. What is the students' area of greatest weakness in English reading strategy skills?

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. The purpose was to assess the English reading strategy skills of a defined group of graduate students within a specific academic context.

Population and Sample Selection

The population of this study was 43 graduate students majoring in educational administration in a Thai university during the first semester of the 2024 academic year. The purposes of this study were to assess the level of English reading strategy skills and the area of greatest weakness in English reading strategy skills of the students.

Data Collection Tools

To achieve the objectives of the research, the instrument used in the study was a 75-item English reading strategy skill test. The 75-item instrument consisted of multiple-choice questions administered electronically via Google Forms. The test included 15 items on sentence structures, 25 items on context clues, and 35 items on main ideas and supporting details. Each item contained four response options.

The instrument was developed based on established theoretical frameworks in reading strategy research. The instrument was developed based on established theoretical frameworks in reading comprehension and reading strategy research. The test assessed English reading strategy skills by measuring the ability of students to identify sentence structures, guess the meaning of unknown words using context clues, and identify main ideas and supporting details. These objectives were chosen because of their fit with the learning objectives of the class. To ensure content validity, the test items were reviewed by experts in English language teaching and educational measurement. Revisions were made based on their feedback prior to administration.

Prior to administration with the graduate students, the instrument was piloted with undergraduate students majoring in English. The pilot results indicated that higher-performing students achieved higher scores than lower-performing students, suggesting that the instrument was capable of differentiating performance levels. The pilot also allowed for refinement of item clarity before implementation with the target group. The test was administered during regular class hours under standardized conditions. Students were informed of the purpose of the assessment and were given 90 minutes to complete the instrument. All responses were collected and scored using the same scoring criteria.

Data Analysis

This study assessed the English reading strategy skills of graduate students majoring in Educational Administration at a Thai university. The instrument used was a 75-item English reading strategy test. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics were selected because the purpose of the study was to determine the overall level of English reading strategy skills and to identify areas of relative strength and weakness within a defined group. Since the study did not aim to examine relationships between variables or test hypotheses, inferential statistics were not required.

1. The answer sheets were scored with one point for each correct answer and no points for each incorrect answer.

2. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics for percentages, means, and standard deviations.

The levels were interpreted using the following criteria: 0–49% = low, 50–69% = moderate, and 70–100% = high.

Results

The purpose of this section is to report the results of the assessment of the English reading strategy skills of graduate students majoring in educational administration and the area of students' greatest weakness is also reported. The two research questions investigated were:

1. At what level is the English reading strategy skills of the students?
2. What is the students' area of greatest weakness in English reading strategy skills?

The results revealed:

- 1) The average skill level of the students was 54.64% (see table 1).
- 2) The students' weakest strategy was identifying types of sentences (see table 2).

Results for Research Questions 1

English reading strategy skills (n = 43)

Subject being Measured	\bar{X}	SD	percentage
English reading strategy skills	40.98	9.31	54.64

Table 1: The arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and percentage of English reading strategy skills of the students (n = 43)

Results for Research Question 2

area	\bar{X}	percentage
1. Sentence Structures (15 items)	6.84	45.58
2. Context Clues (25)	19.05	76.19
3. Main Ideas, and Supporting Details (35)	16	45.71

Table 2: The means and the percentages of correct answers for each area

Discussion

1. The level of English reading strategy skills of the students was at 54.64%, which falls within the moderate level according to the established criteria. The minimum score was 17, and the maximum score was 60.

2. The areas of students' greatest weakness in English reading strategy skills were understanding sentence structures and identifying main ideas and supporting details.

The area of students' greatest weakness in English reading strategy skills was understanding sentence structures. This result is in agreement with Chawwang's study on English Reading Problems of Thai Students (Chawwang, 2008) which found that the majority of the students were unable to identify sentence structures. Ahmed and Amed's study on difficulties encountered by Saudi EFL learners in English reading also yields similar results; that is, sentence structures hinder students' comprehension (Amed and Amed, 2023).

The other area of students' weakness in English reading strategy skills was identifying main ideas and supporting details. A study on an analysis of students' difficulties in reading comprehension of descriptive texts also found that more than 70% of the students were not able to locate main ideas (Fitri et. al., 2022). EFL students in East Java, Indonesia, also face difficulty in determining main ideas (Fuqaha and Wartim, 2023). Al-Ghazo and Al-Sobh's study (2021) on reading comprehension problems also found that EFL students at a university in Jordan had a problem in distinguishing main ideas from supporting details. Finding explicitly stated main ideas is not a difficult reading task for many people because the main points of text can be searched at specific locations of paragraphs. On the other hand, determining implied main idea requires different cognitive capabilities. There is a lot more challenging and troublesome for the EFL readers with their limited linguistic and discourse understanding compared to L1 readers. This ability is challenging for EFL students since it calls for them to think at concurrently about multiple pieces of information, and it's frequently impossible to determine what the true main idea is (Wilawan, 2012). A study of English reading difficulties of Thai high school students reported that they had difficulties with reading despite being aware of reading strategies, especially main idea and supporting details (Kongcharoenkitkul¹, Nakum, and Chatpunnarangsee, 2022).

The results of this study yield different findings from other studies; that is, the level of using context clues of the graduate students in this study was 76.19% while other studies found that vocabulary is one of the biggest problems (Hezam et. al., 2022, Seyabi and Tuzlukova, 2015). This might be because the subject of this study was graduate students while other studies' subjects were undergrad students. Graduate students generally have a larger vocabulary than undergrad students (Wilson et. al., 2016).

Students often face challenges because of the influence of their first language on their second language acquisition. Being unable to distinguish and understand sentence structures in English may result from differences in their native language which is Thai in this case. Other causes maybe a lack of enthusiasm for reading, a poor grasp of vocabulary, sentences that were longer than what they were used to reading or creating, a poor reading technique, and confusion over the text's grammatical structure (Ekorini, 2021)

The low level of English reading strategy skills demonstrates the lack of a systematic strategy for figuring out unknown words and the inability to identify types of sentences leaving students unable to comprehend what they were reading. It is important that we improve the English reading skills of our students as it will significantly increase their chances for both academic and career success.

Teachers can individualize instruction in the classroom and prepare interventions by using assessments to determine the patterns of reading difficulties that each struggling reader possesses. One aspect to consider is that which tests are utilized at your school to assess students' reading comprehension? Are these tests able to help you recognize various reading difficulty patterns? If not, what other tests might you employ to assist yourself in helping struggling readers (Spear-Swerling, 2024)?

It's important that ESL students recognize word order and sentence structure as soon as possible. As students progress in their English studies, it becomes more difficult to correct syntax

problems. Students frequently translate directly from Thai into English without taking into account how word order varies between languages. Early reinforcement of proper structure will make it easier for EFL students to apply or understand proper syntax naturally (Lupin, 2024). Demonstrating to students the connection between grammar and writing and reading is one of the most crucial parts of teaching grammar. It is important for students to put their understanding of sentence forms to use (Kruse, 2024).

Based on current theories of reading, the main idea instructional technique for EFL learners must include three essential processing components: global comprehension – understanding of the general meaning of a text, local comprehension of sentences, and self-monitoring. Global comprehension refers to the understanding of the general meaning of a text. It emphasizes connected sentences, especially the discourse as a whole. Local comprehension involves linguistic knowledge (e.g. morphological, syntactic, and lexical structures of sentences). Self-monitoring refers to a person's ability to adjust his or her reading behavior to deal with various situations (Wilawan, 2012).

Other recommendations on how to effectively teach reading comprehension include gathering background information from students on the subject matter of the stories in order to aid with vocabulary recall and comprehension, teaching word meanings with relation to the subject matter and context in which they are or will be used, recognizing rich and evocative vocabulary to increase student difficulty and word engagement, promoting class discussion and offering thorough explanations of vocabulary, usage, and structure, promoting class discussion and offering thorough explanations of vocabulary, usage, and structure, and utilizing texts that are pertinent to the cultural background and life experiences of the students in order to build on their past knowledge to enhance understanding and help them remember new vocabulary (Adler, 2024).

This study did not examine additional variables such as students' prior English proficiency levels or educational background. Future research may consider incorporating these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of influences on English reading strategy performance.

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