AN INVESTIGATION INTO READING STRATEGIES USED BY VIETNAMESE NON-ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS: THE CASE OF A UNIVERSITY IN VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Reading comprehension is a critical feature in English language acquisition for all students since it serves as the foundation for teaching in all aspects of language learning (Mikulecky, 2008). Comprehension improves when the reader actively employs suitable reading methods (Brown, 1980). Furthermore, reading is a skill that receives the most focus in the typical English language school (Susser & Rob, 1990). Reading strategies should be used by students to plan how they will read and to improve their reading comprehension (Poole, 2010). The goal of this study was to look into how university students employ English as a Foreign Language (EFL) reading methods. There were 84 students from a university in the Mekong Delta that took part. Mokhtari and Reichard's (2002) Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) was utilized as the instrument to collect data on the participants' use of reading strategies. The findings revealed that EFL high school students were well aware of the usage of reading strategies. Global reading strategies were preferred by students, followed by support strategies and problem-solving strategies. The implications of employing EFL reading skills were also highlighted.

Keywords: ESL reading strategies, strategy preference, reading ability

1. Introduction

Reading, as a receptive ability, has long been considered a necessity for foreign language acquisition (Aebersold & Field, 1997) since it serves as an important source of input for other abilities (listening, speaking, and writing) to build language competency. Reading comprehension, as the essence of reading (Durkin, 1993), is one of the most essential components in English language acquisition for all students since it lays the foundation for a significant amount of learning in education (Alvermann & Earle, 2003). As a result, reading is important in academic growth, especially when students must engage with a

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large number of foreign language resources for their own specific topics (McDonough & Shaw, 2013).

Reading, on the other hand, is a complicated, interactive cognitive process of obtaining meaning from text. The reader is an active participant in the reading process, building meaning from hints in the reading text. Reading is also an individual activity, which explains why various readers have varied perceptions (Maarof & Yaacob, 2011). According to Cogmen and Saracaloglu (2009), basic approaches such as underlining, taking notes, or highlighting the text can assist readers in understanding and remembering the information.

Students, moreover, today must not only learn knowledge and theories through English reading materials, but also read a large number of English books, journals, or magazines in order to absorb fresh knowledge and information. Students will need to improve their English reading skills in order to increase individual abilities in competition. Despite the fact that students have to read a considerable amount of academic publications in English, many of them attend university unprepared for the reading expectations put on them (Dreyer & Nel, 2003). Many elements influence students' English reading ability, including text kinds, university and social contexts, students' intellect, learning motivation, and instructional techniques (Hsu, 2008), with students' usage of reading strategies being one of the most essential.

However, most students are inexperienced with the use of English reading methods in the real world of English teaching and learning. They demonstrate an incapacity to read selectively or to separate what is vital for the purpose of reading and reject what is irrelevant.

This study, therefore, aimed to investigate the perceived use of ESL reading strategies by Vietnamese non-English majored students from a university in the central region of Vietnam. Specifically, the study answered the following research question:

- What are Vietnamese non-English majored university students' preferences for reading strategies when reading in English?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Definitions of Reading

Reading is undoubtedly an important ability in academic settings, but what is the correct definition of the term "reading"? Since the late 1970s, foreign language reading research has received special attention (Eskey, 1973; Clarke and Silberstein, 1977; Widdowson, 1978).

Prior to that time, foreign language reading was typically associated with oral skills and seen as a somewhat passive, bottom-up process that relied heavily on readers' decoding abilities. Readers' decoding abilities were typically defined in hierarchical terms, beginning with letter recognition and progressing to understanding of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and paragraphs. In other words, the meaning is gradually built up from tiny units to bigger pieces of text. The prevailing idea among reading

theorists about foreign language reading was that the greater a reader's foreign language fluency, the better their reading skills. Foreign readers' ability to deduce the intended meaning of texts was also aided by knowledge of the foreign culture (Fries, 1972; Lado, 1964; Rivers, 1968). According to Lunzer and Dolan, reading requires two fundamental stages.

Reading strategies, according to Garner (1987), are conscious procedures that engaged learners use often to compensate for comprehension failure. Similarly, Pani (2004) defines reading strategies as the conscious mental effort undertaken by readers in order to comprehend what they have read. Afflerbach, Pearson, and Paris (2008) define the reading strategy by distinguishing between "reading strategies" and "reading skills," which are frequently used interchangeably to depict the same activity. While the former relates to purposeful and intentional acts or plans used to decode texts, interpret words, and create meaning, the latter occurs automatically and without the reader's conscious control. Finally, he believes that reading strategies are actions or behaviors that readers may actively regulate.

Reading strategies, according to Cohen (1990), are the mental operations that readers like to use to monitor and complete a reading job. The use of reading strategies reveals how readers comprehend a reading assignment, what they believe they can do to reach their reading objective, and what they decide to do to overcome comprehension obstacles. Researchers distinguish two sorts of strategies based on a metacognitive framework: cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies (Garner, 1987). Cognitive techniques are used to generate meaning from text, whereas metacognitive methods are used to check comprehension and address issues that may develop when reading.

Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) divide reading strategies into three categories while developing the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) to assess strategy use in L2 reading. These include global (metacognitive), problem-solving (cognitive), and support strategies. Global strategies, such as having a reading goal, are "*intentionally, carefully planned techniques by which learners monitor or manage their reading*" (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002, p.4). When the material becomes difficult to read, problem-solving skills are "localized" and deployed, such as re-reading. Support tactics, such as the use of outside reference resources (e.g., dictionaries) and note-taking, are instruments to improve comprehension.

2.2 The Comprehension Process

Reading comprehension is a mental activity that occurs in the mind. The mental process is imperceptible. The researcher's obscurity makes it impossible to establish a specific and unambiguous description. According to Kintsch (1998), comprehension occurs "*when and if the elements that enter into the process achieve a stable state in which the majority of elements are meaningfully related to one another and other elements that do not fit the pattern of the majority are suppressed*" (p.4).

Readers' prior knowledge, concepts, pictures, or emotions are examples of mental aspects. Reading comprehension may be characterized as follows using Johnston's (1983) schematic processing perspective:

Reading comprehension is seen to be a complicated action involving the conscious and unconscious application of numerous tactics, including problem-solving skills, to construct a model of the meaning intended by the writer. The model is built utilizing schematic knowledge structures and the many cue systems provided by the author (e.g., words, syntax macrostructures, social information) to create hypotheses that are evaluated using a variety of logical and pragmatic methodologies. Because text can never be totally explicit, and in general, very little of it is plain, even the right intentional and extensional meanings of words must be inferred from their context (p. 17), the majority of this model must be inferred.

Reading comprehension, according to Johnston (1983), can refer to the reader's comprehension of the text as a result of adopting multiple tactics, both consciously and subconsciously, and is elicited by diverse information sources. Johnston (1983) outlines employing ways to grasp the material, emphasizing the need to assess the comprehension process. For the current study, another perspective on reading comprehension that focuses on the outcome rather than the process can be incorporated. Reading comprehension results may reveal what the reader understands from a text, what he or she does not grasp from a text, and how he or she interacts with the material. Gunderson (1995) classifies understanding into three levels: "*literal or detail, inferential, and critical and evaluative, sometimes called applicative*" (p.27). Gunderson (1995) explains the three stages of understanding as follows: Literal comprehension entails "*readers thinking about what they've read and coming to conclusions that go beyond the information given in the text*" (p.31). Inferential comprehension entails "*readers thinking about what they've read and coming to conclusions that go beyond the information given in the text*"; readers may "*evaluate whether a text is valid and expresses opinion rather than fact, as well as apply the knowledge gained from the text in other situations*" at the critical and evaluative levels of comprehension (p.28). Following Gunderson's (1995) suggestion, this study will avoid focusing on literal-level comprehension as the study's end goal, instead aiming to establish an EFL reading program that will "*excite students and nurture their ability to use language in creative and meaningful ways*" (Gunderson, 1995, p.43).

2.3. Related Studies

There is a rising interest in researching the reading strategies used by Vietnamese ESL students at the postsecondary level. Some of these researches (Do Hieu Manh & Phan Le Thu Huong, 2021; Nguyen Hong Chi & Phung Trieu Vy, 2021; Pham Thi Kim Oanh, 2017) were focused on students enrolling in English-specialized degrees' strategic awareness. Do and Le (2021), for example, used the SORS (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002) to assess the reading strategy used by Vietnamese students majoring in English Teaching in connection to their reading competency. They discovered that participants employed reading strategies at a moderate level overall, with problem-solving methods being the

most commonly utilized, followed by support and global reading strategies, which were used at a medium level.

Additionally, Phakiti (2003) evaluated Thai university EFL students and discovered that those who used metacognitive methods often performed much better on reading tests. Later, Mokhtari and Sheorey (2008) indicated that proficient readers of FL and SL were considered internationally aware. They were able to think about the reading process, use planning, monitoring, goal-setting, and evaluation procedures, and nurture global skills in addition to reading comprehension. Students with high English proficiency appear to employ more and a wider range of methods while reading English literature. According to Kummin and Rahman (2010), ESL University students from Kebangsaan, Malaysia, who were good in English, employed a range of methods, but those who were less skilled had limited awareness of metacognition. They were not able to use appropriate strategies to evaluate their own reading comprehension or performance.

Other research has looked at the reading strategies employed by Vietnamese non-English majors (Nguyen Thi Bich Thuy, 2018, 2020; Nguyen Thi Minh Ngoc & Nguyen Thuy Nga, 2020). Nguyen Thi Ngoc Minh and Nguyen Thuy Nga (2020) employed the SORS to evaluate the reading strategies used by non-English majors at a university in Southern Vietnam. The findings from 120 sophomores revealed that the participants were generally medium strategy users who favoured strategies for solving problems over global and support strategies.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The research consisted of 120 sophomores randomly selected from two academic majors including Finance and Banking and Accounting at Nam Can Tho University. The ages of the sample ranged from 19 to 21. All of the participants were native speakers of Vietnamese and reported having studied English for seven years in secondary and high schools plus at least one year in the university. At the time of this research, the participants had just finished English 3, and their English proficiency level was regarded as intermediate.

3.2 Research Instrument

The Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) was employed in this study. The Metacognitive Knowledge of Reading Strategies Inventory (MARSI) was created by Mokhtari and Reichard (2002) as a tool to assess native English language learners' knowledge of reading strategy usage. The SORS, on the other hand, focuses on the kind and frequency with which ESL teenage and adult students utilize reading strategies when reading English academic resources such as textbooks and journal articles. The SORS is made up of 30 items that assess three types of English reading strategies: problem-solving strategies, global reading strategies, and support strategies.

It was translated into Vietnamese, the participants' native language, for this study. The questionnaire items were graded on a five-point Likert scale, with the following options: strongly agree (5), agree (4), uncertain (3), disagree (2), and severely disagree (1). It took about 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The questionnaire score reflected the frequency with which respondents used SORS in general and in each SORS category.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Use of Reading Strategies by University Students
The study's aim was to find the most common reading strategies employed by Vietnamese non-English major students at Nam Can Tho University. Mean scores were computed to answer this question.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for three types of Reading Strategies

Types of reading strategies	Mean	SD
Global strategies	3.62	.37
Problem solving strategies	3.46	.43
Support strategies	3.52	.34

According to Oxford (1990), means between 1.0 and 2.4 are considered low, 2.5 to 3.4 are regarded medium, and 3.5 or more are labeled high. Table 1 shows that employment in each individual category was also ranked medium. Global reading strategies obtained the highest mean score of 3.62, slightly higher than issue solving reading strategies, which received M = 3.46. Support reading strategies, on the other hand, had the lowest mean score of 3.52.

4.2 Discussion
By analyzing their usage of EFL reading strategies when reading English text, this study gives an overall picture of the use of EFL reading strategies among university students. The findings indicated that learners typically adopted EFL reading skills. Students utilized global reading strategies the most of the three strategy subcategories, followed by support strategies and finally problem-solving reading strategies. It should be highlighted that global reading strategies were the ones that the entire group reported using the most frequently.

The study findings can assist university EFL teachers better understand their students' present use of EFL reading strategies and steps they can take to help their students improve their reading abilities. The findings of this study may assist instructors in determining which reading methods to integrate into English reading comprehension education. However, in order to succeed in English reading comprehension, students must understand which methods to employ and how to employ them. Universities EFL students must learn to utilize these tactics successfully in addition to utilizing them often.

5. Conclusion

The descriptive data demonstrated that students used reading strategies considerably when completing a reading test indicating that they understood the importance of reading strategies in enhancing their reading ability. Students used global strategies the most out of the three kinds of strategies, followed by support strategies and problem-solving ones.

According to the findings, teachers should encourage students to employ reading methods more frequently in order to enhance their strategic knowledge. To help students become more strategic readers, teachers should thoroughly explain how and when to utilize reading strategies, as well as provide more opportunities for students to practice different methods in diverse situations. Furthermore, instructors should examine global methods and support reading strategies since they appear to function best for students in a testing situation.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author
Lam Ky Nhan earned his M.A. in English Education from Can Tho University in 2021. He is a lecturer of general English and English for specific purposes at Nam Can Tho University, Vietnam, currently pursuing his Ph.D's, with anticipated graduation in 2026. His teaching interests include teaching grammar and academic writing, teacher and learner motivation, testing, and assessment.

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