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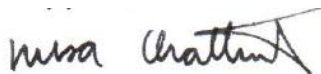
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Preface

The proceedings on education and relevant areas were compiled for the International Conference on Education (ICE 2013) "Excellent Innovations for Educational Research and IT Learning in the 21st Century." They include presentations on studies conducted by educational experts, lecturers, graduate students from both private and state universities as well as Thai and foreign researchers. The conference was held on 8-9 August 2013 at Sampran Riverside Hotel, Sampran, Nakorn Pathom, Thailand. Its objectives were to establish an academic platform for lecturers, students and researchers, to publicize research studies or dissertations and to exchange experiences in conducting research concerning learning innovations and information technology. Another objective was to innovate of a new body of knowledge and the development of quality in education in the 21st century.

The content of the proceedings includes research reports by educational experts, lecturers, graduate students from both private and state universities, as well as research institutions, and researchers from local and foreign countries.

The compilation of these proceedings became successful due to cooperation from many parties. The committee of the conference hopes that the proceedings will yield useful guidelines for promoting and developing teaching and learning as well as research on education.



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THAILAND.

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The Effectiveness of Reading Strategy Instruction in Improving Reading Comprehension
A Case Study of University Students, Faculty of Education, Silpakorn University

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Abstract

This case study seeks to identify the reading strategies utilized by Thai university students and the extent to which said strategies are used. It also demonstrates the effectiveness of a survey course on reading strategies in improving reading comprehension among both high- and low-proficiency learners. The research sample is twenty second-year undergraduate Teaching Thai majors at Silpakorn University, divided into a group of high-proficiency EFL learners and a group of low-proficiency EFL learners based on pre-test scores. The research utilizes pre- and post-tests, student self-assessment checklists, field notes taken during thinking aloud exercises and one-on-one interviews. The results of the study indicate that there were nine reading strategies that both the high and low proficiency learners used: 1) survey the text, 2) skimming the text, 3) scanning the text, 4) connecting text to background knowledge, 5) using L1 in directing yourself while reading, 6) identifying difficulties, 7) rereading, 8) translation into Thai (L1) and 9) adjusting reading speed. On the other hand, there were two reading strategies that none of the students used: paying attention to text structure and critiquing the author. As evidenced by comparing the pre- and post-test scores, it is evident that both groups significantly improved their reading comprehension as a result of this study.

Key Words: Reading Strategies/ Thinking Aloud/ EFL/ Reading Comprehension

Introduction

Researchers of second and foreign language reading have long recognized the importance of reading strategies (Brantmeier, 2002; Carrell, 1985; Slataci&Akyel, 2002; Song, 1998; Gilani et al., 2012, concluded that reading strategies are a kind of reading instruction that facilitates the teaching of English reading comprehension. Carrell (1989) and later Janzen (2007) contend that reading strategy use is different in more and less proficient readers who use the strategies in different ways. The study of Ozek and Civelek (2006) reveals the difference in reading strategy use among different levels of students. Moreover, it has been acknowledged that reading strategies can be taught and that reading strategy instruction can benefit all students (Carol, 2002; Carrell, 1989; Janzen, 2007).

Su (2001) examined the influence of learning reading strategies on the English reading proficiency of students, concluding that readers felt that the reading strategies they learned were helpful to improve their reading abilities. Brookbank et al. (1999) have indicated that the use of learning different reading strategies enhanced learners' reading comprehension proficiency. Ahmadi and Pourhossein (2012), claimed that reading strategy education has a positive impact on the English reading comprehension proficiency. Reading strategies improve the reading abilities of both the high proficient and low proficient readers. Song (1998), in a reading strategy training investigation in an EFL reading comprehension course, concluded that learning reading strategies is one of the effective ways to improve EFL reading comprehension proficiency. He also suggested that foreign language reading pedagogy, especially for adult students in academic settings, should include explicit and direct strategy training.

This study utilizes thinking aloud protocols to assess reading strategies used by university students. Thinking aloud protocols, explaining and elaborating what people are reading to themselves and having a flexible approach to solving comprehension problems, provide an accurate picture of processing. This is especially true when the text being read is not easy enough that reading activities are automatic and is inaccessible to verbalization (Chi et al., 1994). Thinking aloud protocols also allow researchers to analyze a reader's process in real time. First developed by Newell and Simon (1972, cited in Block, 1986), it is a way to help teachers identify what reading strategies students use. Oster (2001) refers to thinking-aloud as a technique in which students verbalize their thoughts while they are reading

and thus outline the strategies they use to comprehend the text. Collins and Smith (1982) suggested the teacher models comprehension monitoring while reading a text aloud to engage students in the processes. Loxterman et al. (1994) suggested that the effectiveness of simply requesting students to think aloud after reading one part of text, might have been related to its emphasis on dealing directly with text content rather than on specific strategies for dealing with the content. In this way thinking aloud can help make learners aware of how they make meaning.

The Faculty of Education at Silpakorn University requires all students to complete four semesters of university-level English courses. The first two courses focus on grammar, vocabulary and idioms, as well as a mix of the four skills. The second two courses focus on reading and writing more heavily, with a strong emphasis on reading comprehension. While the classes do introduce some reading strategies, there are many that can't be covered within the scope of the courses. Reading strategies can also get relegated to a less prominent role. As a result, the four semesters of English education can have a lack of instruction with regards to reading strategies. The lack of familiarity with reading strategies is readily apparent in the students. This case study outlines a possible method to address this shortcoming within the curriculum and demonstrates the improvements in reading comprehension in both high- and low-proficiency English students through the use of reading strategy instruction.

Research Questions

1. What are strategies that students use while reading and comprehending academic texts?
2. Are there any differences between the high-proficiency EFL learners and low-proficiency EFL learners in the use of strategies while reading an academic text?
3. What effect does a survey course on reading strategies have on reading comprehension in university students?

Materials and Methods

The tools used in this study are as follows:

- Pre-test (cloze- total of 10 points)
- Post-test (cloze- total of 10 points)

- List of 31 reading strategies compiled from Ediger (2006) and Sheorey&Mokhtari (2001)
- Reading passages from “Academic Encounters” (Brown & Hood, 2002)
- Self-assessment checklist
- Field notes concerning “thinking aloud” comments
- Transcripts from post-study interviews

A list of 31 reading strategies was compiled by drawing on the works of Ediger (2006) and Sheorey&Mokhtari (2001). This list provided a broad spectrum of reading strategies to introduce to the sample, and served as the foundation of the study.

This study was conducted in an English for Academic Purposes I (EAP I) classroom at Silpakorn University, Sanam Chandra Campus in Nakornpathom, Thailand, during the first semester of the 2012 academic year from the first week of July to the end of August. The class consisted of second-year undergraduate students from the Faculty of Education, all of whom were majoring in Teaching Thai. The sample included students from western, central and southern Thailand. From the 32 students in the class, twenty students were selected for the study based on their performance on a pre-test assessing reading comprehension. The top ten scores and the lowest ten scores of the class were chosen. The sample was divided into 2 groups: group 1 included high-proficiency EFL learners (N = 10) and group 2 included low-proficiency EFL learners (N = 10).

Over the course of a five-week period, the sample (both groups) was given five additional hours worth of instruction on reading strategies. The content of the additional instruction provided a survey of the 31 reading strategies selected for this study and was intended to give the students a basic understanding of their use. Instruction was modeling based and supplemented with brief explanations about the mechanics and benefits of each strategy. While reading aloud, the teacher elicited student participation following the stages for teaching comprehension strategies of Collins and Smith (1982). Instruction was initially in English (L2), switching to Thai (L1) to facilitate understanding. Students were encouraged to take notes and ask questions as needed. Between five to seven strategies were presented during each one-hour session.

In an attempt to determine which strategies the students were using while reading academic texts, the sample was asked to individually read "Academic Encounters" (Brown & Hood, 2002). This text was chosen because it was not used by any of the courses at the University and was new for the students. While reading, the students were asked to think aloud and explain which reading strategies they were employing. Field notes were taken, focusing on reading strategies mentioned or described.

Then, the sample was asked to complete a self-assessment of which reading strategies they used. The two sets of data were corroborated to give an idea of which strategies were being employed by the students.

A post-test was given, again in the form of a cloze reading comprehension test, in order to measure the change() in their reading comprehension at the completion of the five-week class. Scores were then organized according to student and group.

Each student in the sample was interviewed at the end of the study about their experiences learning reading strategies. Questions focused on the benefits they perceived from the course and their intention to utilize reading strategies in the future. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Interviews were conducted in Thai and the transcripts were later translated into English.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study can be broken into two sets: 1) the observations made during the student reading and upon analysis of their self-assessment checklists, and 2) the data from the pre- and post- tests coupled with the final interviews. These two sets address different objectives of the study.

The first set of data focuses on which reading strategies the students were using. Based on the literature about thinking aloud, the researchers expected this method to produce a reliable account of the students' process. From the beginning, this method of data collection experienced problems.

The students in the sample were very hesitant to speak, both in English and in Thai. The newness of the vocabulary coupled with the Thai cultural implications on the teacher-student relationship created an environment in which the students were cripplingly afraid to read aloud, let alone talk about reading strategies or their thought processes. Students were

clearly afraid to admit their own limitations in dealing with the text and of making some kind of error in employing reading strategies. Even the most talkative students in the sample hesitated to discuss their processes while reading, opting instead to make light of their inabilities and speak about unrelated topics.

As a result, the teacher often had to encourage the students to say even the slightest things while reading. Great efforts were taken to compensate for the cultural and personal influences limiting the conversation. These efforts included attempts to create a supportive and informal environment and repeated assurances that there were no “wrong answers”. In order to supplement the data, the teacher had to ask questions about the student’s reading processes. At many times these questions became leading questions that may have skewed the data.

A similar phenomenon occurred with the self-assessment checklists. The data collected reflects an unreasonable number of reading strategies being utilized but the students within a relatively short reading exercise. The numbers are untenable, and reflect the students’ desires to meet perceived goals. The data reflects a common sentiment among university students that more is better.

The table below combines the two sources of data within this set. It clearly shows inflated numbers from both the thinking aloud and self-assessment checklists.

Table 1: Frequency of strategies use reported by the students via self-assessment and by the teacher through thinking aloud

Reading Strategy Used	Self-assessment	Thinking aloud	Both types	Percentage of Usage	Ordering
1. Specifying a purpose for reading	12	9	12	60	(7)
2. Judging how well objectives are met	11	10	11	55	(8)
3. Survey the text *	20	20	20	100	(1)
4. Skimming the text*	20	20	20	100	(1)
5. Scanning the text*	20	20	20	100	(1)
6. Predicting the contents of the text	14	10	14	70	(5)
7. Checking predictions	12	7	12	60	(7)
8. Guessing the meaning of words from	15	17	17	85	(2)
9. Connecting one part of the text to	8	7	8	40	(10)
10. Connecting text to background	18	20	20	100	(1)
11. Using discourse markers to see	13	6	13	65	(6)
12. Using L1 in directing yourself while	20	20	20	100	(1)
13. Making inferences	14	8	14	70	(5)
14. Analyzing words (part of speech)	17	15	17	85	(2)
15. Analyzing sentence structure	16	15	16	80	(3)
16. Paying attention to text structure**	0	0	0	0	(14)
17. Identifying difficulties*	18	20	20	100	(1)
18. Posing questions about the text	15	10	15	75	(4)
19. Finding answers to posed questions	14	9	14	70	(5)
20. Rereading*	20	20	20	100	(1)
21. Checking comprehension	14	11	14	70	(5)
22. Taking steps to repair faulty	12	4	12	60	(7)
23. Planning what to do / what steps to	13	6	13	65	(6)
24. Summarizing information	10	5	10	50	(9)
25. Reflecting on what have learnt from	6	0	6	30	(12)
26. Critiquing the text	7	2	7	35	(11)
27. Critiquing the author**	0	0	0	0	(14)
28. Translation into Thai*	20	20	20	100	(1)
29. Adjusting reading speed *	20	20	20	100	(1)
30. Taking notes	10	8	10	50	(9)
31. Underlining or high-lighting the text	15	13	15	75	(4)
32. Others ...	0	3	3	15	(13)
(S.D.)	13.28 (5.87)	11.09	13.56	67.81	

*The strategies were being used by all participants used the strategies

**None of the students

As noted in the table above, nine of the strategies used in the study were reportedly used by the entire sample. These were: 1) surveying the text, 2) skimming the text, 3) scanning the text, 4) connecting text to background knowledge, 5) using L1 in directing yourself while reading, 6) identifying difficulties, 7) rereading, 8) translation into Thai (L1) and 9) adjusting reading speed. These strategies are commonly taught and used in other classes, including the English I and II classes the students took in the previous year. They also involve use of L1 to assist in reading in L2. Consequently, the fact that they were used by the entire sample is not surprising.

The sheer number of strategies reportedly used highlights the unreliability of the data. The self-assessment checklist tended to show higher numbers of usage by the students, which can be explained by the unreliability of the method of collection. While the data collected from the thinking aloud exercise is still a bit unrealistic, the students would have at least been trying to use those strategies at the time that they reported to be doing so. Neither set of numbers seem sustainable over a significant period of time.

Interestingly, there are two strategies that none of the sample reported using: paying attention to text structure and critiquing the author. Considering the excessive number of strategies the sample reported using, the fact that none of the students claimed to use these two is significant.

Paying attention to text structure involves a more advanced understanding of organization of ideas and writing techniques. The reader must be able to identify the function of a passage within the structure of the larger work. That none of the sample attempted this method implies that they were unfamiliar with this level of organization. Considering that the sample consisted of second-year undergraduate students, they could be reasonably expected to possess the skills necessary for this strategy. In the English I and II courses the students had completed, writing assignments require the use of introductory and concluding paragraphs, as well as body paragraphs that support a stated thesis. These organizational elements should have been identifiable by the students, thus allowing them to utilize this reading strategy. The fact that they didn't seems to highlight a possible deficiency within the University program, or within the English education that the sample had received to that point.

The refusal to engage in critiquing the author may reflect the Thai cultural influences on their behavior. It is inappropriate for Thai people to be critical of others, especially those seen to be in a place of higher authority or social class. Thus, it would be inappropriate for undergraduate students to criticize the published work of accomplished and respected academics, especially foreign academics. This reading strategy seems incompatible with Thai culture, regardless of its potential benefits.

The scores were also organized according to group. The results show a predictable difference in the number of strategies used by high-proficiency and low-proficiency learners. The average (mean) number of strategies used by the high-proficiency group is 28.4, while the average for the low-proficiency group is 15.0. The results are similar to the findings of Golinkoff (1975) which indicate that poor readers examine texts in the same manner and utilize very few reading strategies in their reading process. While Cziko (1980) and Gu (1994) claimed that good and poor students were different in strategy use in reading comprehension.

The following table shows the differences in reading strategies used according to groups.

Table 2: Comparisons of reading strategies use between high-proficiency EFL learners and low-proficiency EFL learners

Reading Strategy Used	High-proficiency EFL learners	Low-proficiency EFL learners	Difference
1. Specifying a purpose for reading	10	2	8
2. Judging how well objectives are met	10	1	9
3. Survey the text *	10	10	0
4. Skimming the text*	10	10	0
5. Scanning the text*	10	10	0
6. Predicting the contents of the text	10	5	5
7. Checking predictions	10	2	8
8. Guessing the meaning of words from context	10	7	3
9. Connecting one part of the text to another	8	0	8
10. Connecting text to background knowledge*	10	10	0
11. Using discourse markers to see relationships	10	3	7
12. Using L1 in directing yourself while reading*	10	10	0
13. Making inferences	10	4	6
14. Analyzing words (part of speech)	10	7	3
15. Analyzing sentence structure – (subject, verb)	10	6	4
16. Paying attention to text structure**	0	0	0
17. Identifying difficulties*	10	10	0
18. Posing questions about the text	10	5	5
19. Finding answers to posed questions	10	4	6
20. Rereading*	10	10	0
21. Checking comprehension	10	4	6
22. Taking steps to repair faulty comprehension	10	2	8
23. Planning what to do / what steps to take	10	3	7
24. Summarizing information	10	0	10
25. Reflecting on what you have learnt from the	6	0	6
26. Critiquing the text	7	0	7
27. Critiquing the author**	0	0	0
28. Translation into Thai*	10	10	0
29. Adjusting reading speed *	10	10	0
30. Taking notes	10	0	10
31. Underlining or high-lighting the text	10	5	5
32. Others ...	3	0	3
Total	284	150	134

The second set of data collected in the study focuses on the improvement of the reading comprehension of the sample and the benefits perceived by the students. The results of the pre- and post-test were compared to show the change in scores. The scores were organized according to group and student. The results can be seen in the tables below.

Table 3: The pre-test and post-test scores of the high-proficiency EFL learners

High-proficiency EFL learners	Pre-test	Post-test	Percentage of Difference
1	7	8	10
2	7	8	10
3	7	9	20
4	7	9	20
5	8	9	10
6	8	9	10
7	8	10	20
8	8	10	20
9	9	10	10
10	9	10	10
	7.8 (S.D.=0.79)	9.2 (S.D.=0.79)	14.00 (S.D.=5.16)

Table 4: The pre-test and post-test scores of the low-proficiency EFL learners

Low-proficiency EFL learners	Pre-test	Post-test	Percentage of Difference
1	1	3	20
2	2	3	10
3	2	4	20
4	2	5	30
5	2	5	30
6	3	5	20
7	3	6	30

Low-proficiency EFL learners	Pre-test	Post-test	Percentage of Difference
8	3	7	40
9	4	7	30
10	4	7	30
	2.6 (S.D.=0.97)	5.2 (S.D.=1.55)	26.00 (S.D.=8.43)

As shown in the tables above, both groups of high-proficiency and low-proficiency learners saw an increase in reading comprehension scores at the end of study. The 14.0% increase of the high-proficiency group is significant, considering the brevity of the study and the high scores they received on the pre-test. The 26.0% increase of the low-proficiency group demonstrates a considerable improvement.

This data demonstrates the viability and usefulness of such a survey course. Improvements were seen throughout the entire sample and were achieved with only a basic level of instruction for each strategy presented. This confirms the study by Bereiter and Bird (1985) which outlined the positive effects of teaching reading strategies through teacher modeling and student verbalization. It also confirms the emphasis by Paris et al. (1983) and Paris & Oka (1986) on the importance of teachers providing direct explanations about reading strategies.

The interviews conducted with the sample also reveal the perceived benefits of such a course by the students. All twenty students agree that reading strategies are important and useful. Complaints registered by the students focused on their difficulty with the think aloud exercise, and not on the reading strategies themselves. Some students also admitted to checking some strategies on the self-assessment checklist without understanding or using said strategies. Excerpts of the interviews are as follows:

- I love English and now I know how to be good in reading. I need to learn as many reading strategies as I can because they help me comprehend the text a lot more than before. Next time I will try to use more strategies. (student A)

- Some of the reading strategies are so helpful for reading academic text, such as, guessing the meaning of words from context, making inferences, summarizing information. (student B)
- I've never learned strategies before. Some strategies are not so complicated than I thought. They make me enjoy reading a lot more. (student C)
- I read slightly different from before. Reading strategies help me become a critical reader. I can apply the strategies to the real-life reading. (student D)
- Using reading strategies help me save time to seek answers for the test.(student E)
- Some of the strategies are difficult to acquire, for example, connecting one part of the text to another, summarizing information, reflecting on what you have learnt from the text and even analyzing words, or analyzing sentence structure. (student F)
- I have never paid attention to some of the strategies before. Also, some of the strategies I have never known that I already used them until the teacher told me so. (student G)
- I have never realized how much benefit I can get from using reading strategies while reading. (student H)

A common sentiment among the sample was that the broad spectrum of reading strategies provided them with the flexibility to find strategies that suited their individual needs and abilities. Many students were not aware that so many strategies existed, or that the strategies they had already been putting in to practice were previously established and researched in the field. These findings are in line with the work of Su (2001).

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it is clear that a survey course on reading strategies can benefit university students in the Faculty of Education, especially low-proficiency students. Significant improvements to reading comprehension can be achieved with a short, modeling-based course. This type of course can serve as a supplement to the Faculty of Education program, as well as others.

The unfamiliarity of the sample with the reading strategies demonstrated in the study implies that the students in the sample had not received extensive education with regards to said strategies. Additional focus should be paid on reading education not only at the university level, but in the levels preceding it.

The study found two reading strategies, paying attention to text structure and critiquing the author, that were not utilized by the sample. Researchers can point to the difficulty of the strategies and their possible conflict with Thai culture as reasons why they were not attempted. Teachers and/or researchers should consider the cultural implications of using these reading strategies in the Thai classroom.

This study is limited by its scope and length. Further research should be conducted to confirm the benefits of a reading strategies course on a larger scale and with a more diverse sample. The study was unsuccessful in ascertaining which reading strategies the students used and the extent to which they were used. The unreliability of the data collection methods was compounded by the brevity of the study. More reliable means of assessing student reading processes should be utilized in any further study.

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