

**A Review on Reading Strategies Among EFL Students:
Academic Impacts, Level of Awareness, Gender and Frequently
Used Reading Strategy**

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Abstract

Language acquisition has consistently been linked to reading proficiency and academic performance. Authentic texts are useless when students are not capable of reading printed English text more so if comprehension fails as well. A lot has been developed in many parts of the world to enhance students' reading ability and comprehension, specifically among speakers of other languages (EFL) yet less importance has been given to employing reading strategies to help students better understand the text.

OECD PISA has reported 10 countries with students' reading ability described as deteriorating while 22 countries showed no improvement of the 64 countries tested (2012). Guria, Angel OECD General Secretary emphasized that "Children who struggle with reading and comprehension often have deficits in spoken language, more so, students with reading difficulties are much less likely to be academically engaged." Hence, this study aims to review the students' level of awareness of the effectiveness of employing reading strategies and their impact on academic performance, the relationship between gender and reading strategies, and the most popular reading strategies among student respondents.

The analysis showed that employing reading strategies can synchronously improve reading proficiency and comprehension and eventually enhance academic performance. Both tertiary and secondary students indeed popularly use reading strategies as their autonomous learning effort to better understand English printed texts as per the

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review of related literature utilized in the study, however, the level of awareness varies from low, to moderate to high in each country. Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea have high levels of awareness while Thailand manifests low awareness. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and China showed moderate awareness. The findings also demonstrated that female students employ more reading strategies than their male counterparts. Furthermore, Problem-solving reading strategies were the most popular reading strategies among respondents followed by global strategies and support strategies. More importantly, employing reading strategies is more popular with secondary and tertiary students.

Keywords: Reading Strategies, EFL Students, Level of awareness, Reading Proficiency

Introduction

Reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning. It is a means of language acquisition communication, and sharing information and ideas. Reading is also one of the most inevitable media for independent learning.

(Cruz,2023) mentioned that Reading strategies help readers read and comprehend efficiently. Furthermore, they are tools readers use to understand what's written on a page. It can definitely be taught directly to the students and is critical for literacy development. In 2018, Thailand ranked 68th in reading out of the 79 countries PISA participating countries. Students in Thailand scored lower than the OECD average in reading.

According to the 2020 index drafted by global education company Education First, the report showed that Thailand's ranking dropped from 74 out of 100 countries last year to 89 out of 100 countries. Thailand's English Language proficiency scored 419 out of 800 under the company's new point scale which is considered very low.

Let's take a look at how Reading ability in Asia is viewed. Reading Experts around Asia view reading ability as an essential skill for students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in their learning of English, (Zare and Mobarakeh, 2011). On the other hand, reading strategies have been defined as the mental operations involved when readers approach text effectively and make sense of what they read.

Similarly, readers who are consciously aware of the various reading strategies are able to employ and learn to choose the appropriate strategies to construct meanings from the texts they are engaged in reading (Amer et.al.,2010).

In Thailand in particular, researchers have shown that though the English language is now widely taught as a foreign language in the national Thai curriculum, still most Thai students' English proficiency is low compared with their counterparts in other ASEAN countries as per TOEFL and TOEIC are concerned (TOEIC Test Taker Report 2013).

Several studies conducted with Thai students at high school levels revealed that Thai students were considered at the low levels of English proficiency and had difficulties in reading English (Chawwang, 2008).

A lot of research around the globe specifically in countries whose English is a foreign language has shown that indeed reading strategies can help students a lot in several aspects. Thus, this review of the literature was conducted to re-emphasize the effectiveness of employing reading strategies in our students' study of any subject using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI). Therefore, apart from promoting comprehension, reading strategies may then become a key factor that will increase students' motivation to read extensively based on their knowledge of strategies (Ciaran and Chamot,2005).

Background of the Study

A strengthened understanding of the kinds of reading strategies that are most associated with successful reading will enable educators to more effectively instruct less proficient readers in the process to use the strategies that will positively affect reading comprehension. (Cantrell and Carter, 2009). Extensive research has been conducted to examine the effects of reading strategy instruction on reading improvement. Zhang (2008) confirmed that reading strategies can be taught, and once students' metacognitive knowledge about reading strategies and strategies used are developed, students will become better.

According to the study by Kenny et al. (2006), studying Math is not just about numbers. Students need to figure out the problem in order to come up with the correct solution. However, how can a teacher expect students to do perfectly in Math tests when they do not even understand what they are reading? The worst is, they aren't capable of reading at all.

The same problem holds true with learning Science, Social Studies, and other subjects using English as a medium of instruction.

Research studies using metacognitive reading questionnaires revealed that there is a relationship between the student's reading proficiency and the reading strategy used (Barnett, Carell, Monteiro,1992).

Reading is an important tool in getting access to information which provides a base to the learning process. Comprehension is a basic pre requisite to make reading meaningful. Varied reading strategies has been associated to better reading comprehension.(Shakoor et.al.(2019). Teaching reading strategies have a positive impact on the reading comprehension of the students at the higher secondary level,

This review would like to strengthen educators' and students' knowledge about reading strategies specifically on their academic impact on the students; reading proficiency, comprehension, and academic performance. This study sought answers to the following questions.

1. What are the academic impacts of employing reading strategies on the students?
2. What is the student's level of awareness on employing reading strategies?
3. Which gender popularly uses reading strategies when reading English texts?
4. What are the most popular used reading strategies by students?
5. Which level of students employed a lot of reading strategies?

Reading Strategies (Compare and Contrast)

On Improved Reading Comprehension and Proficiency

Several researchers around the globe have shared similar results on the relationship between reading strategies and enhanced reading comprehension and proficiency.

Obidin and Riswanto (2012) asserted that successful readers adopt various reading strategies in order to comprehend texts.

Moreover, Raftari et al. (2013) demonstrated that successful readers employ reading strategies more actively and make use of a greater variety of strategies to assist their comprehension.

Alemi and Ebadi's (2010) quasi-experimentation result showed that the experimental group demonstrated enhanced abilities in comprehension as compared to the control group.

A similar study on improving reading proficiency was conducted in China by Huang et al. (2009) investigating EFL learners' online reading strategies and their effects on reading comprehension. On the whole, the use of global strategies significantly contributed to better comprehension, specifically for low-proficient students.

Yoosabai (2009) emphasized reading as one of the most important skills of language learners. In order to comprehend a text either in the native or non-native

language readers must employ reading strategies. Students use reading strategies in order to achieve maximum comprehension of the text.

Park and Kim (2011) stated that reading strategies are tools for improving reading comprehension of printed English texts. His study showed that students' improved reading comprehension ability was related to their reading strategies used to some degree.

Similarly, Huang, et.al. (2009) tried to identify online reading strategies used by EFL learners and they investigated the effects of the use of strategies on comprehension. Results from data analysis showed that students used support strategies such as translating, using a dictionary, or highlighting much more often than any other strategy. Moreover, the use of global strategy significantly contributed to better comprehension for low-proficient students.

In Iran, readers of English texts greatly employed reading strategies. Zare (2013) explored the use of reading strategies in relation to the success of reading comprehension among EFL learners and found that their achievement of reading comprehension is related to the use of reading strategies.

A study was conducted in Singapore on Chinese senior high school students which showed that the use of reading strategies has the main effect on students' proficiency.

In 2009 Akkason and Setobol carried out a study to investigate Thai EFL students' utilization of reading strategies in a variety of reading tasks at King Mongkote's University of Technology, Northern Bangkok. The study found that both the high proficient and low proficient students employed reading strategies in a similar manner. Furthermore, the results showed that the Thai EFL readers' reading proficiency was positively affected by strategies-based – instruction.

These strategies positively affect reading comprehension (Cantrell and Carter, 2009) and substantially contribute to the better reading ability of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. It is of equal or of greater importance to foster awareness of reading comprehension strategies by learning what strategies to use, when, why, and how to engage alternate strategies appropriately and effectively.

According to Choosri (2020) Reading strategies help students understand the reading text better as evident in the results of her study.

Likewise, Shahoor in 2019 claimed that teaching reading strategies has a positive impact on the students' reading comprehension.

Reading strategies help improve reading comprehension among students. (Mohamadreza 2021).

In Yapp's study in 2021 on the Effects of Reading Strategy Instruction in English as Second Language on Students' Academic Reading Comprehension showed a high-evident improvement in the student's comprehension of the text.

On Improved Academic Performance

Another advocate of employing pre-reading strategies is Magsoudi. In 2012 he conducted an experimental study with undergraduate Iranian EFL students. Results showed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. The experimental group has been trained through previewing, pictorial text, and the pre-teaching of vocabulary.

Instruction of strategies may aim to enhance students' active involvement in reading activities instead of the dependence on their teacher. Therefore, apart from promoting reading comprehension, reading strategies may then become a key factor that will increase students' motivation to read extensively based on their knowledge of Strategies. Once students' motivation to read is increased, vocabulary and knowledge are also enhanced, hence students perform better academically in class. (Ciaran and Chamot,2005).

Likewise, Anderson (2004) stated that reading is the most important skill to master in order to ensure success in learning and strengthen skill facilities, making progress in other areas of learning. Reading strategies can enhance students' reading comprehension with other subjects like Science and Math. Enhanced reading comprehension in other subject areas resulted in improved academic performance of the students.

Extensive research has been conducted to examine the effects of reading strategies instruction on improved comprehension and academic performance. Results confirmed that reading strategies can be taught, and one's students' metacognitive knowledge is developed, students perform better in the tests (Macaro et al., 2012).

In Iran, readers of English texts greatly employed reading strategies. Evidently, Zare (2013) explored the use of reading strategies in relation to success in academic achievement among EFL learners. The study showed that student's achievement is related to the use of reading strategies.

Another study conducted in Iran by Songhra et.al. (2015) showed that after the implementation of the reading strategies, the students performed better in the post-test.

A similar study was conducted in India by Madhumathi and Arijit (2012). Results showed that the students employed problem-solving strategies the most. The overall

result showed that the academic achievement of students moderately correlated with the use of reading strategies.

A study conducted by Ala Hussien Oda (2018) revealed that females performed better than males in the critical reading skill test yet no significant differences was found on the three levels of comprehension; literal, inferential and appreciative.

Bećirović et al. (2018) conducted a study on the effects of nationality, gender and GPA on the use of reading strategies among EFL university students. Results revealed that the students most frequently used strategies were problem solving strategy.

On the Level of Awareness

Park and Kim (2011) conducted his research on Korean EFL students' reading strategies Used to comprehend Authentic Expository / Technical English Text. Results showed that Korean students have a high level of awareness of the usefulness of employing reading strategies when reading English texts.

Li in her study conducted in Chongqing, China revealed a moderate level of awareness among students on the effectiveness of employing reading strategies to better understand the English texts.

Chen and Chen (2015) in their study on the use of EFL reading strategies among high school students in Taiwan revealed a high level of awareness among students on the use of reading strategies.

The study of Semtin and Manian (2015) which investigated the students' employment of cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies showed a low level of awareness among students.

Likewise, Ebrahimi (2012)'s study also showed a moderate awareness of the use of reading strategies.

A study conducted in Singapore on Chinese students by Zhang in 2009 revealed a high-level frequency of reading strategies employment.

Similarly, a study by Oranpattanchai in 2010 which investigated the employment of reading strategies among pre-engineering students revealed a low level of awareness.

Fig.1 Shows the consolidated result on the level of awareness of the students according to the review of literature that are included in this report.

High	Moderate	Low
South Korea	Iran	Thailand
Taiwan	China	Malaysia
Singapore		

Similarly, a study conducted among Thai EFL college non-proficient readers in 2021 showed that the students viewed reading as a decoding process and that they are aware of the different reading strategies, they could not regulate the strategies to construct meaning of the texts effectively and solve reading problems.

Leonardus (2020) conducted a study among EFL students in Indonesia where the results showed that the students are indeed active reading strategy users, furthermore, the students prefer to use problem-solving reading strategies over global strategies and supporting strategies.

The study by Bećirović et al. (2018) revealed that Bosnian and Herzegovinian students have a moderately high awareness of the employment of reading strategies.

On Gender

The difference in reading comprehension between males and females has been studied for a long time. Generally, according to International Reading Studies like PIRLS and PISA, females are better readers than males.

Chen and Chen (2015) conducted their study on “The use of EFL Reading Strategies Among High School Students in Taiwan” indicated that female students used EFL reading strategies significantly, more frequently than male students.

Ratchanok’s study in 2014 revealed that female students employed problem solving strategies significantly than male students.

Li, Fenfang found out in his study that females show higher use of strategies than males.

A study in India on Awareness of Reading Strategies showed a significant difference on the use of reading strategies by gender, in which, female students was reportedly using more strategies than that of male students.

A study on “The Relationship Between Saudi EFL College Students’ Use of Reading Strategies and their EFL Reading Comprehension conducted in India by Alsamadani (2011) proved that Gender showed a significant difference on the overall use of strategy.

In the study of Bećirović et al. (2018) on Bosnian and Herzegovinian students showed that gender had a significant main effect on both problem-solving reading strategies and global reading strategies.

Basher 2021 investigated the use of reading strategies and gender differences among undergraduate EFL and ESL students at the University of Dhaka. Results indicated

that no significant difference between use of reading strategies among the two groups, however, females scored higher than males in the overall reading strategy use.

Females outperformed the male respondents as evident in the result of Oda (2017)'s study of Education University students at the university of Basrah in 2018.

Significant gender differences were evident from the results of Rianto's research in 2021 with Indonesian EFL students on metacognitive strategy use and gender differences with females scoring better on average than male students.

Overall studies taken into consideration have shown that gender matters in the employment of reading strategies among students when reading English texts. A lot of studies from Asia with EFL students both High school and college students revealed that females employed more reading strategies than their male counterparts.

Most Popularly employed Reading strategies

A Think-aloud protocol was used in the study "The metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies in Thai EFL Learners" by Kitipat Chutichaiwirath and Pragasit Sithitikul. The findings revealed that the participants' use of metacognitive awareness of reading strategies; problem-solving and support reading strategies were the most frequently used reading strategies.

Ratchanok in her study in 2014 revealed that problem-solving strategies were the most frequently used strategies among the student respondents.

A study in Thailand with Vocational College Students showed that retrieval strategies were employed by the student respondents more frequently than the other strategies.

A study conducted by Madhumathi, P. and Arijit, J. in 2012 in India showed that problem-solving strategies were the most popular while less preferred use were global strategies.

The use of global strategies significantly contributed to better comprehension, specifically for low-proficient students as shown from the study of Li to Chinese students.

Leonardus (2020) conducted a study among EFL students in Indonesia where the results showed that the students prefer to use problem-solving reading strategies over global strategies and supporting strategies.

Rianto in 2021 explored gender differences in metacognitive strategy used among EFL Indonesian students. Results indicated that significant gender differences were discovered in overall problem-solving and support reading strategy.

Level of Students

Both tertiary and secondary students employed reading strategies when they read English texts as evident from the different studies conducted in Thailand and its neighboring countries.

Instrumentation:

The research included in this literature review employed both the quasi –quasi-experimentation method to test the effectiveness of pre-reading strategies on improving reading proficiency and academic performance. The descriptive method was employed to determine the student’s level of awareness on the use of reading strategies. Similarly, the majority of them employed SORS (Survey of Reading Strategies) which was originally from Shoerey and Mokhtari.

Findings and Discussions

Employing Reading Strategies has the following impact on students:

1. Improved reading comprehension.

Research has shown that students' reading comprehension has been enhanced after reading strategies were introduced to them.

2. Improved academic performance.

Once reading comprehension and proficiency have been improved students slowly transformed into independent learners causing them to have improved academic performance.

Level of Awareness

The students vary their level of awareness on the use of reading strategies from low, to moderate to high levels of awareness as per study results per country. Specifically, the review showed that Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore showed a high level of awareness, while China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia showed moderate awareness on the other hand, Thailand and Malaysia showed a low level of awareness. These results were based on the studies being considered in this Literature Review.

Gender

Females popularly use reading strategies to better understand the reading text they are reading as compared to their male counterparts.

Popularly employed reading strategy

The majority of the students included in this Literature review showed problem-solving strategies as being popularly used strategies followed by global strategy and lastly support strategy.

Grade Level of the Students Who Employed Reading Strategies

The review of Literature has shown both secondary and tertiary students popularly use reading strategies in their effort to make meaningful reading texts. Hence, duplication of this work with primary students is highly recommended.

Therefore, the research result based on the different studies taken into consideration, strongly supports that the employment of reading strategies indeed helps enhance students' overall academic performance. As such, it is highly recommended to introduce reading strategies to the students.

Conclusion:

The employment of reading strategies can indeed enhance students' Reading comprehension and proficiency and ultimately improve students' academic performance.

As to the student's level of awareness on employing reading strategies, it was found that student's level of awareness varies from one country to another. Korean, Taiwanese, and Singaporean students showed a high level of awareness while Chinese, Iranian, and Arabian were moderately aware. And lastly, Thailand and Malaysian students showed a low level of awareness.

With regards to gender, females popularly use reading strategies than males.

Problem-solving strategies were the reading strategies students popularly used.

Lastly, for the grade level, secondary and tertiary students were found to be popularly employing reading strategies. It is highly recommended to introduce reading strategies to the primary students as well.

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