

English Reading Comprehension Skills among Second-Year English Major Students

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Abstract

Reading comprehension, in particular, plays an important role in students' learning, especially for Thai learners of English as a foreign language. This study aimed to assess students' English reading comprehension skills and to examine their self-assessment of those skills. This survey study focused on the English reading comprehension skills of second-year English major students at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus. The participants were 148 students (69 regular program students and 79 special program students).

The research instruments included an English reading comprehension test and a questionnaire. Participants were required to complete a reading comprehension test covering seven skills, consisting of two passages with 25 items. After that, they completed a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire assessing the same seven skills. The data obtained from both instruments were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including percentage, mean, and standard deviation.

The results showed that among seven reading comprehension skills assessed, the three highest-ranked English reading skills among the students were interpreting information skill (92.13%), identifying supporting details (90.30%), summarizing information (89.81%) whereas predicting information (75.09%) was lowest. In addition, based on students' self-assessment, the top three English reading skills were identifying the main idea ($M = 3.81$), identifying supporting details ($M = 3.77$), understanding vocabulary ($M = 3.75$), but summarizing information is the lowest ($M = 3.67$). This research is beneficial in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of students' reading comprehension skills.

Keywords: Reading skills, Reading comprehension, Self-assessment

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1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of Problem

Even though English is not the most widely used language in the world, it is a global language that connects people around the world. According to Swales (1987), over half of the millions of academic papers published annually were produced in English, and this proportion was steadily increasing each year. This global status has also increased the importance of English among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). EFL refers to the study of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is not normally used as a language of communication. English language skills play an important role in the modern world. They can help people communicate widely and collaborate effectively. However, EFL learners often face several challenges, such as limited opportunities to access English (Nunan, 2003) and language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), which may hinder communicative competence.

English language has become the worldwide language that strongly influences non-native speakers of English such as Thailand that English is taught as a foreign language in primary schools. In 1913, public schools and a formal education system were established, with English officially included in the curriculum. English became an important tool for the royal court and government agencies to deal with foreigners. There are 4 skills of English language such speaking, listening, writing, and reading. One of taught skills of English is reading skills. These are the main skills that learners should study potentially.

Reading skills are essential for understanding academic texts, completing assignments, and accessing information across subject areas. Reading also contributes to the development of academic writing skills, expands vocabulary knowledge, and enhances overall comprehension ability (Duffy & Roehler, 1987). However, many learners experience difficulties in reading comprehension because of unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures, even though reading remains essential for language development. Therefore, the importance of reading skills deserves continued attention.

In study of Chawwang (2008), The participants were Thai 12 grade students in Nakhonratchasima province, Thailand. They took a reading test to evaluate English reading ability that was divided into three parts: (a) sentence structure, (b) vocabulary knowledge, and (c) reading comprehension. It showed that the reading ability of the participants was at a low level due to sentence structure, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension.

Moreover, Shehu (2015) found the evidence from the unsatisfactory results of students in English Language Matura Exam in Albanian high school prove that students have difficulties in reading comprehension such as vocabulary, students should properly comprehend new word to decode the message, working memory that student often complain because they could not remember the information they just read, Absence of extensive

reading, when they read text shortly or nothing, they will struggle to decode a text, and type of text is also important some texts are called easy, some others are not.

Furthermore, Al-Ghazo (2016) investigated the problem of reading comprehension among Jordanian university students is meta cognitive strategies. From experimental group and control group, with appropriate adjustments to the teaching methods of each group. It shows control group were considered as low proficiency in English language from not receiving strategies-based treatment, after doing a multiple-choice reading comprehension test analyze that the post-test score of the experimental group was significantly higher than the control group. These results prove that teaching using metacognitive strategies is successful in developing students' vocabulary learning skills.

The research focuses on English reading comprehension skills of thai students who learn English as foreign language. It emphasizes on the reading comprehension skills that found in Thai students that most of them could read English, but not to understand or interpret English meaning due to problems of vocabulary and structure.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate English reading comprehension skills of English major second-year students, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus. The study had two main objectives:

1. To examine the students' English reading comprehension skills across seven aspects of English reading comprehension using a reading comprehension test
2. To investigate the students' self-assessment on English reading comprehension skills in the seven aspects.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the students' levels of English reading comprehension skills, as measured by the test, across the seven aspects?
2. How do students assess their own English reading comprehension skills across the seven aspects?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The research shows English reading comprehension skills in the second-year English major students. It will be beneficial for:

1.4.1 Students

The findings may help students become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in reading comprehension, including understanding vocabulary, identifying the main idea, identifying supporting details, interpreting information, making inferences, summarizing information, and predicting information. Such awareness may support further improvement in reading ability.

1.4.2 Teachers

The findings may help teachers better understand students' reading comprehension levels and identify areas requiring additional instruction, learning activities, or instructional materials. This may contribute to more effective teaching practices.

1.4.3 The Curriculum

The findings may provide useful information for curriculum development and revision, particularly in relation to course descriptions, learning outcomes, and reading-related instruction within the English major program.

2. Literature review

2.1 Related Concepts and Theories

2.1.1 English Skills

English has become the international language around the globe due to several influential factors including literary, social, political, and economic considerations (Rasheed, 2011). As a result of its global dominance, people worldwide are increasingly motivated to study English because it grants access to a broader range of information, enhances employment opportunities, and enables effective communication across international borders. Given this reality, it is essential that students develop proficiency in the four main English language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These skills are divided into two groups: productive skills, which include speaking and writing, and receptive skills, which include reading and listening. Each skill complements the others and plays a vital role in fostering comprehensive language competence (Mumtaz, 2006).

2.1.2 Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension refers to the ability to understand words and phrases that combine to form meaningful expressions. When readers are able to recognize words, pronounce them, and understand their meanings, they can process written language more effectively. However, reading comprehension involves more than understanding individual words in isolation. It also requires readers to understand how words, sentences, and paragraphs work together to construct meaning (Thorndike, 1971). Additionally, reading comprehension encompasses more than the mere identification of explicit information at the literal level. It requires higher-order cognitive processes such as interpretation, inference-making, and critical analysis, which involve the integration and transformation of textual data into meaningful understanding (Yussof et al., 2013).

2.1.2.1 Levels of Reading Comprehension

According to Callahan and Clark Callahan and Clark (1988), there are three levels of reading comprehension: (1) reading the lines, (2) reading between the lines, and (3) reading beyond the lines.

The first and most basic level, reading the lines, refers to understanding the literal meaning of the text, what the author actually says on the surface, without interpreting or evaluating it. Reading the lines is usually evaluated by questions such as: What is the author telling us? What evidence is he giving for his statements? What does the sentence, paragraph, selection, chapter, or book mean?

The second level, reading between the lines, involves understanding what the author really means. At this stage, the reader identifies the author's intentions and purpose, interprets ideas, and evaluates what the author says. The reader looks for clues in the text, tells the difference between facts and opinions, and keeps their own ideas separate from those of the author. In addition, the reader assesses the quality and reliability of the author's evidence or sources. This is obviously a mature level of reading, requiring thinking and experience.

The third level, reading beyond the lines, requires readers to go beyond what the author explicitly states. It means finding out what the author is suggesting, guessing what might happen next, and making general ideas that the author didn't say directly. Through this process of analysis, readers are able to connect and combine ideas in new ways, leading to deeper insights and a better understanding of the meaning and value of the ideas presented in the text. This represents the highest and most demanding level of reading comprehension, as it requires both critical thinking and experience. However, some aspects of this level can still be developed by readers who are more advanced or mature in their reading skills (Callahan & Clark, 1988, p. 281).

2.1.2.2 Components of Reading Comprehension Skills

Callahan and Clark (1988) stated that developmental reading programs are designed to reinforce previously acquired reading skills and to develop new comprehension abilities that help students understand more advanced written materials. The components include:

1. Getting the central idea
2. Selecting the significant details
3. Understanding words in context
4. Following directions
5. Answering specific questions
6. Determining relationships
7. Drawing conclusions
8. Predicting outcomes
9. Outlining and summarizing
10. Determining the author's purpose and mood
11. Understanding figurative language
12. Evaluating ideas

13. Understanding graphic material
14. Increasing speed
15. Adjusting speed to purpose and content
16. Using reference material.

(Callahan & Clark 1988, p.277)

These components reflect the multidimensional nature of reading comprehension and highlight the range of subskills required for effective reading.

2.2 Related Research

2.2.1 Problems in Reading Comprehension

Several studies have examined the challenges Thai students face in English reading comprehension across various educational levels. Wonglao (2022) conducted research on Grade 6 students at Anuban Singburi School, involving approximately 150 participants. The study identified several significant issues that young learners encountered, particularly difficulties with complex sentence structures, unfamiliar vocabulary, and poor reading habits. The research employed both questionnaires and interviews, providing a combination of quantitative and qualitative data for a deeper understanding of students' struggles with English texts.

In a broader context, Chawwang (2006) investigated similar problems among Grade 12 students in Nakhon Ratchasima's Educational Regions 1, 2, 3, and 7. The sample consisted of 840 students, equally divided between science and arts programs. The study utilized a reading test comprising 50 multiple-choice questions based on three passages that targeted sentence structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Findings revealed that students from both academic tracks experienced comparable difficulties in all three areas, with no statistically significant difference between the groups in terms of reading ability.

Beyond the Thai context, international research has also provided valuable insights into reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners. Shehu (2015) investigated this issue among Albanian high school students and identified several key barriers, including limited vocabulary knowledge, weak working memory, insufficient reading practice, and the inherent complexity of English texts. The study emphasized that students often struggle to decode and comprehend passages effectively due to inconsistent reading habits and inadequate vocabulary acquisition, both of which hinder their ability to interpret meaning accurately.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The population in this study consisted of 183 students from the regular program and special program, who were studying in the second year of the English major at the Faculty of

Liberal Arts and Science, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus. All participants had taken a course related to reading, namely Introduction to Reading and Writing Skills. The reason for choosing second-year students was that they had completed the reading course in the previous semester and were also enrolled in the course English Reading in the current semester, the first semester of the 2025 academic year.

According to the Krejcie and Morgan table (1970, Vol. 30, pp. 607–610), the sample in this study consisted of 148 students. Of these, 69 students were from the regular program, and 79 students were from the special program. The participants in this study were 148 students from a population of 183 students.

3.2 Research Instrument

Instruments used in this study were a test and a questionnaire that aimed to investigate the participants' reading comprehension skills.

3.2.1 Test

The test comprised two passages concerning understanding vocabulary, identifying the main idea, identifying supporting details, interpreting information, making inferences, summarizing information, and predicting information.

The English test was a B2-level test developed by the British Council British Council and was used to investigate second-year English major students' reading comprehension skills. The test was administered to the students in the first semester of the 2025 academic year. The reading passages and test items are presented in Appendix 1.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to investigate the English reading comprehension skills of second-year English major students in the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science, Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen Campus. The details of the questionnaire are presented below. The complete questionnaire is provided in Appendix 2.

Part 1: The General Information

The participants' background information included their study program. In this part, the students were required to answer the questions that best corresponded to their information.

Part 2: Five-likert Scale Questionnaire

In this section, a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was used to investigate the students' opinions toward reading comprehension skills. The characteristics of the measurement format are based on a five-level rating scale, with the following score levels:

5 means Strongly agree

4 means Agree

3 means Neutral (Neither Agree nor Disagree)

2 means Disagree

1 means Strong disagree

3.3 Procedure

The data were collected from a sample of 148 second-year English major students selected based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) from a total population of 183 students. A questionnaire and a test were used as instruments for data collection. The data were gathered during the first semester of the 2025 academic year, after obtaining informed consent from all participants.

Prior to data collection, the researcher explained the objectives of the study and assured the participants that all information would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. After that, the questionnaire was distributed, and the test was administered. The instruments were distributed to the participants, who were given 30 minutes to complete them.

3.4 Data Analysis

Researchers analyzed the reading comprehension skills of second-year English major students. The data were analyzed using quantitative data analysis. The analysis was based on seven reading comprehension skills.

In terms of questionnaire data analysis, the findings from the five-point Likert-scale questionnaire of each skill were processed using percentage, mean ($\bar{X}$), and standard deviation (S.D.). The collected data were analyzed with the Microsoft Office Excel program. Results from the reading comprehension test were interpreted into frequencies and percentages. Researchers used statistics to analyze the data as follows:

$$P = f/N \times 100$$

P represents percentage

f represents scores

N represents total score

4. Results

4.1 Results of the Test

The percentages of English reading comprehension performance across seven skills among second-year students are presented below. The highest percentage of correct answers was interpreting information (92.13%), followed by identifying supporting details (90.30%), summarizing information (89.80%), identifying the main idea (85.39%), understanding vocabulary (83.40%), making inferences (81.63%), and predicting information (75.09%), respectively.

Table 1 students' percentage on English reading comprehension skills test English reading comprehension skills percentage of correct answer

English Reading Comprehension Skills	Percentage of Correct Answer
1. Interpreting information	92.13%
2. Identifying supporting details	90.30%
3. Summarizing Information	89.81%
4. Identifying the main idea	85.39%
5. Understanding vocabulary	83.42%
6. Making inferences	81.63%
7. Predicting Information	75.09%

4.2 Results of the Questionnaire

As seen in Table 2, it can be assumed that most of the participants rated themselves at a high level, as the total average score of the questionnaire in both studying programs was 3.73 (S.D. = 0.87). Moreover, most of the students perceived that they were able to identify the main idea ($\bar{X} = 3.81$, S.D. = 0.05) at a high level. This was followed by identifying supporting details ($\bar{X} = 3.77$, S.D. = 0.04), understanding vocabulary ($\bar{X} = 3.75$, S.D. = 0.06), and making inferences ($\bar{X} = 3.73$, S.D. = 0.01).

Participants rated predicting information and interpreting information slightly lower than other skills, with both skills receiving a mean score of 3.69 (S.D. = 0.07), they also rated summarizing a passage as the lowest ($\bar{X} = 3.67$, S.D. = 0.03).

Table 2 results of regular and special students' self- assessment on English reading comprehension skills

Reading Comprehension Skills	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
1. Identifying the Main Idea	3.81	0.05
2. Identifying Supporting Details	3.77	0.04
3. Understanding Vocabulary	3.75	0.06
4. Making Inferences	3.73	0.01
5. Predicting Information	3.69	0.07
6. Interpreting Information	3.69	0.07
7. Summarizing Information	3.67	0.03
Total	3.73	0.87

4. Discussion

The results indicated that the lowest score in the test was the predicting information skill, consistent with the findings of Chawwang (2008), who found that students had the most difficulty in the prediction part of English reading comprehension. According to Abiyyu (2024), determining main idea questions were the hardest for non-English major students to answer. However, identifying the main idea skill in the present study showed a high

percentage of scores. It can be assumed that participants in this study effectively used skimming, a key strategy for identifying main ideas without detailed reading (Callahan & Clark, 1988).

Additionally, the highest result of the questionnaire was the identifying main idea skill, which was consistent with the test results. Even though Callahan and Clark stated that understanding the explicit or stated meaning, or what the text actually says, is a basic level of summarizing information skill, the questionnaire result for summarizing information showed a relatively low mean score (3.67). On the other hand, 89.81% of the test results in summarizing information were correct, which was a high percentage. It showed that the participants were able to understand the text exactly as it is written.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that second-year English major students had different levels of English reading comprehension skills. Based on the test results, the students performed best in interpreting information, identifying supporting details, and summarizing information, while predicting information was the most difficult skill. Based on the questionnaire results, the students rated identifying the main idea as their strongest skill, whereas summarizing information received the lowest rating.

These findings suggest that the students had strengths in some areas of reading comprehension, but they still needed improvement in higher-level skills, especially predicting information and summarizing ideas confidently. Therefore, this study may be useful for teachers in planning suitable classroom activities and reading instruction. It may also provide useful information for curriculum development to further improve students' English reading comprehension skills.

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