Thai EFL Students’ Use of Strategies in Reading English Texts

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Abstract

This study aims at promoting reading strategy use among tertiary level EFL students of science and technology in reading English texts. In the study, five issues were investigated: 1) the reading strategy use of Thai EFL scientific and technological students of three reading proficiency levels—high, intermediate, and low, 2) the effects of strategies-based instruction on learners’ use of reading strategies to deal with English texts, 3) the extent to which the instructors help raise learners’ awareness of using strategies in their reading, 4) the learners’ attitudes towards using reading strategies,
and 5) the problems of using strategies in learners’ reading. Empirical data were collected from 207 undergraduate students by means of pre- and post-reading comprehension tests, an achievement test as well as a questionnaire. The findings reveal positive effects of strategies-based instruction on learners’ reading proficiency. Pedagogical implications were made for teaching EFL reading by encouraging reading strategy use among learners in order to improve their reading comprehension skills.

**Keywords:** Cognitive Strategies, Metacognitive Strategies, Reading Strategies

1. Introduction

Reading in English is important for Thai students of science and technology. These students are supposed to be highly qualified scientific and technological personnel who help push Thailand forward to the society of scientific and technological independence [1]. Furthermore, the ability to deal with English texts is regarded by students as an influence on career options and educational continuation. Yet, according to Ward [1], it is not unusual to find scientific and technological students who are unable to read in a comprehensive and autonomous way in this important foreign language. Thus, it is the teachers’ tasks to help students to develop independent reading ability, and enhancing this should be considered the major goal of teaching reading [2].

2. The Study
2.1 Research Background

Theories of reading have undergone changes and transformations over periods of time. According to Vaezi [3], reading principles originated as the traditional view or “a bottom-up, language-based process” [4], which emphasised the printed text, shifted to the cognitive view or “a top-down, knowledge-based process” [4], which focused on the interaction between the reader’s prior knowledge and expectations as well as the text, and are now moved to the metacognitive view. The latter view, which is currently having a great vogue, is based on metacognitive knowledge or the control and manipulation that readers use to understand a text. The benefits of metacognitive awareness are evident in proficient readers who are more strategic and use reading strategies including prior knowledge when they read.

Promoting metacognitive awareness among readers of different reading abilities have been conducted in quite a number of studies. The results of these studies suggest that if both teachers and students are aware of reading strategies specific to the requirements of particular reading tasks, this combined awareness will result in more meaningful instruction and will improve student performances in comprehension. Rasekh and Ranjbary [5] investigated the effect of metacognitive strategy training through the use of explicit strategy instruction on the development of lexical knowledge of EFL students and the result of the study showed that explicit metacognitive strategy training has a significant positive effect on the vocabulary learning of EFL students. Song [6] studied a reading strategy training in an ongoing university foreign language reading classroom and found that strategy training is effective in enhancing EFL reading and that the effectiveness of the training varies with L2 reading proficiency. Smanpan [7] compared high school
students’ English reading comprehension by the method based on the metacognitive learning strategy and the method based on the teacher’s manual and reported that their comprehension was significantly higher than before the experiment. La-ongthong [8] assessed an English reading comprehension instructional model using metacognitive strategies for undergraduate students and reported that the students’ achievement in the use of metacognitive strategies and their English reading comprehension were higher than the standard criteria.

2.2 Rationale and Objectives

It is admitted by most teachers of English in Thailand that Thai students seem not to be able to comprehend English texts [9]. The difficulties the students find in their English reading comprehension are due to various factors. According to Chandavimol [9], the textbooks used in Thai schools are abstract and uninteresting and often have little or no concern with what the students do in their everyday lives. English reading comprehension has mainly relied on translating each sentence word for word into Thai instead of understanding it as an English sentence, figuring out its meaning, and evaluating its relationship to other sentences. After having labouriously spent much time on translation with heavy resort to English/Thai dictionaries, students get bored and tired, thus developing a dislike of English. Thai teachers of English usually use Thai throughout a lesson rather than using English, resulting in the students thinking in Thai. Many teachers just ask their students to read a passage and translate it word for word, after which the students are required to do comprehension-testing exercises. Thai teachers of English often explain everything by translating it into Thai and tell the students the answers of the comprehension questions and what to write for each question. The classroom is entirely teacher-directed whilst the students are just learning the lessons passively.

The researchers similarly experienced the scenarios above. They found that most Thai EFL readers lack confidence in their own reading ability. They often read slowly, proceeding word for word, looking up words frequently and relying excessively on translation. This brings a high degree of frustration and lack of comprehension. The method of teaching reading itself is solely based on the bottom-up model as it seems to be commonsensible that comprehension hierarchically processes from the alphabets to the words and on to decoding sentences and paragraphs [9]. Only bottom-up or local strategies which focus on word-for-word understanding are implicitly taught in class.

Given the above-mentioned situations, the researchers contended that to teach EFL reading in the Thai context, students need to receive more effective instructional practice so as to enhance their reading achievement. The need is also evident for thorough grasp of students’ reading problems to help teachers of English to devise more effective training. It would also be important to persuade such student readers to leave the word-for-word translation for reading and to move towards the idea of using their background knowledge to consciously interact with the text by using both bottom-up and top-down processes through gradual practice and feedback [9]. At the same time, students’ metacognitive awareness should be activated so that they will be able to plan, monitor and evaluate their own reading [10].
To attain this aim, the present study was conducted to determine whether the strategies-based instruction contributes to the level of comprehension, motivation and autonomy in scientific and technological readers of English texts. In comprehensive review, 44 strategies were gathered from the fundamental premises of traditional, cognitive, and metacognitive theories and models of reading. These strategies covered 9 strategies for pre-reading activities, 18 strategies for during-reading activities, 3 strategies for post-reading activities, and 14 strategies for understanding vocabularies. This reading instruction interwove traditional, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies in the weekly intervention, which was hoped to facilitate students’ better understanding of any text in English. It was also expected that the results obtained could generate implications for practical use of strategies in reading classes as well as provide information needed for teacher training in the area of reading strategies.

Five specific research objectives were:
1. to survey the pre- and post-instructional use of reading strategies of Thai EFL scientific and technological students of three reading proficiency levels - high, intermediate, and low,
2. to investigate the effects of strategies-based instruction on the learners’ use of strategies and their English reading comprehension,
3. to explore the extent to which the instructors help to raise the learners’ awareness of strategy use in their reading,
4. to explore the learners’ attitudes towards using strategies in their reading, and
5. to explore the learners’ problems of using strategies in their reading.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 Instrument

This study was carried out as a classroom action research. The employed instruments included: tests of English reading skills and comprehension (pre-test and post-test), an achievement test (final exam), and pre- and post-instructional strategy use questionnaire.

The same test was used as a parallel test for pre- and post-testing phases. It comprises two parts: Part I: Reading Skills and Strategies and Part II: Unseen Passages. The achievement test was constructed according to the same test specification as those of the pre- and post-tests. Both types of test were examined by two teachers of English from the Faculty of Applied Arts to assume language accuracy and content validity. The results of the test administration demonstrated KR20 reliability coefficients of 0.82, which was above the acceptable criteria of 0.75 [11]. The questionnaire is a 44-item Likert-type response scale survey which is composed of two parts: (1) the respondents’ personal data and their English learning experience, (2) the respondents’ frequency of actual use of reading strategies (5-point rating scales). Additional open-ended questions on opinions and problems that the respondents may find when using these strategies were also attached to the post-instructional strategy use questionnaire. The questionnaire was examined by three teachers of English and later revised for clarity of the questions asked.

2.3.2 Subjects

The subjects were 207 Thai EFL undergraduate students of King Mongkut’s University of Technology North Bangkok (61 from the engineering domain
and 146 from the science domain) who took the Reading I course in the second term of the academic year 2006. This reading course is one of the EAP elective subjects provided by the Department of Languages, Faculty of Applied Arts. Since all the enrolled students are required to complete two prerequisite courses (English I and English II), their knowledge of English is considered up to par for this reading course. The different sources of subjects were thus considered not an influencing factor in this study.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

This empirical study was carried out in six intact classes where the two researchers were the teachers themselves (3 classes each). The instruction was strategies-based orientation, using a prescribed course book, titled ReadSmart I [12]. The course lasted 17 weeks and the data collection was done in three phases: pre-instructional period (Week 1), interventional period (Weeks 2-15), and post-instructional period (Week 16).

Pre-instructional period: All subjects were pre-tested to determine their pre-instructional level of English reading comprehension ability. A pre-instructional questionnaire was administered to explore strategy use of all subjects before the intervention. The scores gained from the pre-test were used to divide the subjects into three groups using the 33% technique [11], namely high-, intermediate- and low-reading proficiency groups.

Interventional period: A 3-hour lesson was taught weekly for 15 weeks. Forty four strategies were introduced proportionally in each learning session. Students were taught explicitly what each individual strategy is (declarative knowledge), the context or situation in which the strategy should be used or applied (situational knowledge), and how to employ the strategy (procedural knowledge). Each session comprised a pre-reading phase, a during-reading phase, and a post-reading phase. In each of the instructional phases, traditional strategies (e.g., resourcing, breaking lexical items into parts, scanning for explicit information), cognitive strategies (e.g., visualising information read, questioning the text, using graphic organisers), and metacognitive strategies (e.g., advance organization, problem identification, goal setting or selective attention) were directly and explicitly taught in order for the students to strategically use any of them to deal with various texts in English. In order to practise using the strategies taught, the students were asked to do two intensive reading exercises from the textbook with the teacher in each class period and do another two narrow reading exercises on their own as homework assignments for their further practice. The difficulties that the teacher found from the submitted assignments were reviewed and discussed for clarification in later classes.

Post-instructional period: The intervention was followed by the post-test. The obtained scores were compared to reveal changes in performance of reading comprehension between the pre- and post-tests. A follow-up strategy use questionnaire was once again administered. In addition, two weeks after the course ended, the students took a final exam which was administered parallel to the post-test. The obtained scores were correlated to unveil alterations in performance of reading comprehension between the post-test and the final exam.
The data obtained from the tests and the questionnaire were analysed quantitatively. The qualitative analysis was done through comparing and contrasting descriptions of the subjects’ strategy use, opinions, and problems concerned. The results were described and discussed for pedagogical implications.

3. Results

This part reports and discusses results according to the research objectives.

1. The pre- and post-instructional use of reading strategies of Thai EFL scientific and technological students of three reading proficiency levels- high, intermediate, and low

The pre- and post-instructional strategy use questionnaire asked the students to report the extent to which they use the described strategies on 5-point rating scales, namely (5) always, (4) usually, (3) sometimes, (2) rarely, (1) never. Mean scores were calculated to indicate the degree to which each group of students perceive themselves to be using a particular strategy: a mean score of 1-1.80 indicates no awareness of using a strategy, 1.81-2.60 using a strategy occasionally, 2.61-3.40 using a strategy sometimes, 3.41-4.20 using a strategy usually, whereas a mean score of 4.21-5.00 indicates using a strategy all the time when reading.

At both times of the strategy use survey, the mean scores obtained from the three proficiency groups were compared using One-way ANOVA. The results show that the reported patterns of strategy use of the three groups were not significantly different at the 0.05 level at both times (Time 1 = sig. 0.052, Time 2 = sig. 0.055, see Tables 1 and 2). This means that the students of the three groups did not report different levels of strategy use.

### Table 1  The mean scores of reported strategy use from pre-instructional strategy use questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.483</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>3.033</td>
<td>0.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>31.548</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0.245</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33.032</td>
<td>131</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2  The mean scores of reported strategy use from post-instructional strategy use questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.133</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.566</td>
<td>2.968</td>
<td>0.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>24.621</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>0.191</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25.754</td>
<td>131</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean scores of individual strategies were also set in rank order. The mean scores of the top five popular strategies at both times of the survey fell into the same categories of using a strategy all the time (4.21-5.00) and using a strategy usually (3.41-4.20), which means that the students reported a high utilisation of these most popular strategies when they read English texts (see Tables 3 and 4). In terms of individual strategies, the high-reading proficiency group reported at both times a wider variety of strategies. This suggests that the subjects in this group tended to use these five reading strategies in their own style. On the other hand, the same five favourite strategies were reported by the intermediate- and low-reading proficiency groups at both times of the survey. This indicates that the subjects in these lower-reading proficiency groups used reading strategies in a more similar style than their higher-reading proficiency peers. However, no difference was found among high-, intermediate-
Table 3  The rank order of top five reported reading strategies before the instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>High Group</th>
<th>Intermediate Group</th>
<th>Low Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adjusting reading rate according to the text’s difficulty</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>4.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Going back to read unknown words or incomprehensible parts</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>4.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Using local context clues to interpret meaning</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>4.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Comprehension monitoring</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Going back to read the understandable parts to help interpret the unclear parts</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total types found: TS (Traditional Strategies) = 5, CS (Cognitive Strategies) = 0, MS (Metacognitive Strategies) = 2

Table 4  The rank order of top five reported reading strategies after instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>High Group</th>
<th>Intermediate Group</th>
<th>Low Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adjusting reading rate according to the text’s difficulty</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Problem monitoring and evaluation</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>4.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Comprehension monitoring</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>4.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Going back to correct what was misunderstood</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Going back to read unknown words or incomprehensible parts</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>4.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total types found: TS (Traditional Strategies) = 5, CS (Cognitive Strategies) = 0, MS (Metacognitive Strategies) = 2

and low-reading proficiency groups regarding the choice of strategy type at both pre- and post-instructional surveys. All groups preferred to use similar types of strategies, including traditional strategies (bottom-up processing mode) and metacognitive strategies (monitoring and evaluating processing mode).

2. The effects of strategies-based instruction on
the learners’ use of strategies and their English reading comprehension

After the pre-test, all 207 students in three different reading proficiency groups were taught through the strategies-based instruction for the same 15-week period and they were post-tested in the 16th week. To find out whether the learners improve significantly in their English reading ability, the pre- and post-test mean scores were compared by using a paired samples t-test. The results indicate that the post-test mean scores of the three groups are obviously higher than those obtained from the pre-test (see Table 5). The differences of the mean scores of the high-, intermediate-, and low-reading proficiency groups are 4.26, 7.50, and 10.06 respectively. The t-test results also suggest a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores (sig. = 0.000). This indicates that all three groups made good progress in English reading ability after they were taught through strategies-based method for 15 weeks.

3. To what extent the instructors help to raise the learners’ awareness of strategy use in their reading

In order to see whether the teachers can help to raise the learners’ awareness of strategy use when they read English texts on their own accord, the scores obtained from the achievement test (or final exam which was constructed under the same specifications as the post-test and administered after a 2-week interval) were correlated with those of the post-test. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationships between the scores of these two tests. A moderate positive correlation was found, and this correlation was statistically significant at the level of 0.01 (r = 0.561, R^2 = 0.31, p = 0.000). This can be interpreted that the three reading proficiency groups of students gained greater awareness of strategy use from the teachers through their directly teaching strategies during the course period.

The students finally obtained higher mean scores in the achievement test than in the post-test (High = 48.62 : 56.39, Intermediate = 41.09 : 47.32, Low = 34.74 : 42.62, see Table 6). The differences of the mean scores of the high-, intermediate-, and low-reading proficiency groups are 7.77, 6.23, and 7.88 respectively. The t-test results also suggest a statistically significant difference between the achievement test and post-test scores (sig. = 0.000). This indicates that the three groups made a significant gain in reading achievement after they were taught to become aware of their reading strategy use and were able to apply the strategies taught in class to other similar reading situations.

Table 5  The mean scores obtained from pre-test and post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Scores</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Group</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>44.36</td>
<td>-4.465</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>48.62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Group</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>33.59</td>
<td>-7.759</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>41.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Group</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>24.68</td>
<td>-10.432</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-test</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>34.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difference</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P < 0.05
4. The learners’ attitudes towards using strategies in their reading

The opinions compiled from the open-ended questions after the intervention revealed that most subjects found reading strategies beneficial in facilitating comprehension when reading English texts. Most students thought that these strategies helped them to reasonably work out the meaning of the unknown words from the context without relying solely on the dictionary [High Group: 36/148 opinions, 24.32%; Intermediate Group: 39/148 opinions, 26.35%; Low Group: 41/126 opinions, 32.54%]. After practising using reading strategies throughout the course period, the students also found their thinking process more systematic (High Group: 26/148 opinions, 17.57%; Intermediate Group: 17/148 opinions, 11.49%; Low Group: 5/126 opinions, 3.97%). Moreover, they could understand the contents of the texts much better (High Group: 22/148 opinions, 14.86%; Intermediate Group: 25/148 opinions, 16.89%; Low Group: 23/126 opinions, 18.25%) whilst their reading speed was improved faster as well (High Group: 15/148 opinions, 10.14%; Intermediate Group: 6/148 opinions, 4.05%; Low Group: 11/126, 8.73%)

5. The learners’ problems of using strategies in their reading

The difficulties the students in the three groups had when using the strategies were identified through item analysis process. The correct responses of the post-test (80 question items) were analysed to assess the degree of difficulty of individual test items. The criteria include item type 1 with the range above 0.81, meaning an easy test item; item type 2 with the range from 0.20-0.80, meaning a moderate degree of difficulty; and item type 3 with the range below 0.19, meaning a difficult or too difficult test item. The results showed that 15 test items fell into item type 3 covering nine strategies which were difficult for the students to employ, namely 1) understanding supporting details, 2) using signal words to predict, 3) scanning facts from the texts, 4) making inferences, 5) following ideas through personal pronouns, 6) using world knowledge to work out the meaning of unknown words, 7) using word form to work out the meaning of a word, 8) predicting the topic before beginning to read, and 9) predicting the purpose of the text.

The open-ended questions were also attached to the post-instructional strategy use questionnaire with an objective to draw feedback from the students of the three reading proficiency groups on their utilisation of strategies taught when reading English texts. The answers compiled from these questions also revealed some problems the participating students themselves freely reported having when
using strategies to read English texts. Many students accepted that they could not employ certain strategies effectively (High Group: 29/98 responses, 29.59%; Intermediate Group: 35/107 responses, 32.71%; Low Group: 29/100 responses, 29%). A lot of students had a limited lexical repertoire (High Group: 27/98 responses, 27.55%; Intermediate Group: 40/107 responses, 37.38%; Low Group: 49/100 responses, 49.00%), whereas some had difficulties interpreting the meaning of words, sentences or paragraphs (High Group: 26/98 responses, 26.53%; Intermediate Group: 9/107 responses, 8.41%; Low Group: 13/100 responses, 13.00%).

4. Discussions

This study was carried out to determine whether the strategies-based instruction is a better approach to teaching reading English texts in Thailand. In spite of some limitations of the study, this approach is truly a more efficient way to increase English reading competence. The findings are discussed according to the research objectives as follows.

First, there was no change in the sample subjects’ behaviours of using strategies to facilitate their reading English texts. This finding was contradictory to the teachers’ assumption as they expected an increase of strategy-use frequency among the three different groups after their explicit explanations of declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, and situational knowledge in class. This falling short may be particularly due to some limitations. Such explicit explanations of the teachers may not have been sufficient to draw the students’ strategy-use awareness. In addition, although the subjects reported use of some strategies, it is difficult to know whether they are actually using these strategies. The responses obtained are indicative of the subjects’ reported frequency of the utilisation of strategies. However, that the high-reading proficiency students in this study were found using a wider range of strategies in their own style is consistent with the finding of Zhang and Wu [13] who found that good student readers are different from their lower-proficiency peers in strategic knowledge.

It is also interesting to note here that traditional strategies were the most frequently used by the students in this study as shown in the rank orders of the top five popular strategies at both times of the survey although the awareness of using cognitive and metacognitive strategies was raised in class. The reason for this may be because the students are still familiar with the bottom-up model of teaching reading which has generally been used in Thailand [9]. They might have also obtained these strategies through their frequent practice of the bottom-up strategies embedded in the comprehension exercises of their past English coursebooks even though the strategies were not obviously taught [14],[15]. According to this, Thai students apparently seem to think that reading is word recognition and that meaning is generated from the alphabets, forming a word to the words and on to the sentences in the text which needs decoding. As a result, they are prone to word-for-word translation. Therefore, to eradicate this behaviour, global comprehension of the text as a whole, how strategic readers read, and skill in regulating the reader’s own reading process should be promoted much more among student readers.

Second, the data obtained from the subjects provided sufficient support for the main research
objective of developing the reading ability of EFL learners by using strategies from traditional perspective to deal with the printed form of a text, cognitive strategies to manipulate a text from the readers’ prior knowledge and expectations, and metacognitive strategies to help the readers to become more successful in planning, monitoring as well as evaluating their reading comprehension. These effective results were evidenced by the obviously higher mean scores obtained from the pre- to post-tests of the three different reading proficiency groups (i.e., High = 44.36 : 48.62, Intermediate = 33.59 : 41.09, Low = 24.68 : 34.74). Even though no increase in level of strategy use frequency was found after the instruction as discussed earlier, the strategy instruction described in this study still appeared to be not only practical but also efficient. Such findings generally lend support to the published research in the field of EFL reading conducted in other contexts [5], [16], [17].

Third, further evidence that supports the students’ abilities to apply strategy use to their reading was a statistically significant correlation between the mean scores of the post-test and the 2-week interval achievement test. The higher mean scores obtained from the latter proved that the students were developed to become more strategic readers (i.e., High = 48.62 : 56.39, Intermediate = 41.09 : 47.32, Low = 34.74 : 42.62). This positively indicates that the teachers can help to raise the students’ awareness of strategy use when they read texts in English out of the classroom.

Fourth, after the intervention, positive opinions towards reading strategies and utilising them were given by the subjects. Most of the students viewed that the strategies taught helped them to reasonably guess the meaning of the unknown words from the context clues. They also thought that using strategies helped to systemise their thinking process, to better make meaning of the texts, and to increase their reading speed. In short, the students found reading strategies activated in class beneficial in facilitating their comprehension of English texts. This is consistent with the findings reported by Dadour and Robbins [18] who found that 46 Japanese EFL college students reacted positively to the cognitive strategy instruction for speaking and listening.

Finally, the study set out to investigate the participating students’ points of view regarding the problems of strategy use in reading from two sources.

Firstly, the findings from the test item analysis conducted with the post-test data revealed that nine strategies are difficult for these sample subjects. Thus, these problematic strategies, as already described in item 5 of the Results section, should also be taken into much consideration by the teachers when teaching reading.

Secondly, the majority of the subjects personally expressed in the written survey that they had: 1) difficulties employing some strategies efficiently, 2) a limited vocabulary, and 3) problems in interpreting the meaning of words, sentences or paragraphs. It can be noticed that the high-reading proficiency students expressed a higher percentage of difficulties in item 1 (29.59%) and item 3 (26.53%) than did their low-reading proficiency peers (item 1, 29%; item 3, 13.00%) even if they successfully gained higher average scores on the post-test and the final test. These contradictory statements may be due to a number of different
factors. The more proficient students may consciously feel that they have not yet fully understood how to employ the strategies taught (procedural knowledge). But in fact, they may unconsciously manipulate the reading strategies in a skillful way to some extent. Another factor is ascribable to the reliability of the questionnaire responses that the lower-reading proficiency groups gave. It is somewhat difficult to know whether they actually have lesser strategy-use difficulties and lesser difficulties of lexical and syntactic interpretation. Since the open-ended questions are for gathering the respondents’ opinions, the results are indicative of the problems reflected by diverse reading proficiency groups.

5. Recommendations

The study has some pedagogical implications for EFL reading instruction in the present research setting and others that share similar characteristics. The teachers of English should set the main goal of an English reading comprehension instruction using strategies to help them to be able to successfully facilitate comprehension. Reading strategies from the three theoretical sources should be interwoven for an EFL reading class. An over-reliance should not be solely put on using knowledge of linguistic feature with the printed form of a text (traditional strategies) as it has generally been practised in Thai EFL reading classes. EFL reading needs the interplay of the interactive nature of reading and the constructive nature of comprehension together with prior knowledge or a usable schema as well as the control readers execute on their ability to comprehend a text.

The teachers should strongly emphasise and explicitly explain more when and how to use difficult strategies, especially those that were identified by the test item analysis in this study (i.e., understanding supporting details, using signal words to predict, scanning facts from the texts, making inferences, following ideas through personal pronouns, using world knowledge to work out the meaning of unknown words, using word form to work out the meaning of a word, predicting the topic before beginning to read, and predicting the purpose of the text). What is more, the reading problems the students themselves have reflected should not be overlooked (i.e., being unable to use certain strategies, having a limited vocabulary, and having difficulties of lexical and syntactic interpretation).

In the light of this study, the researchers suggest a simple instructional model that incorporates the above-mentioned features to make the course more effective for students. The suggested model places priority on the use of traditional, cognitive and metacognitive strategies to activate the process of text comprehension. This model comprises four main steps with reading strategies interwoven throughout:

   Step 1 Prepare (metacognitive strategies)
   Step 2 Read/Read Again (traditional, cognitive and metacognitive strategies)
   Step 3 Remember (cognitive strategies)
   Step 4 Vocabulary strategies (traditional strategies)

Apart from the most important goal of the above teaching model, which is to help students develop as strategic and independent readers, the researchers agree with what Song [6] suggested to be important factors for the teachers of English to take into consideration. Firstly, strategies should be
taught through direct explanation with explicit teacher modelling, and extensive feedback. Moreover, students should be made to understand what the strategies are, where and when they can be used, and how they are used. Essentially, students should be well aware of the value and benefit of using strategies in EFL reading. Secondly, EFL readers—less capable EFL readers in particular, should be given long-term intensive and direct strategy training. Without direct explanation and explicit teacher modelling for a long period of time to effectively help students to develop as strategic readers, no long-term effect would happen on students [19]. It is also time for the teacher of English to step away from teaching students the notion of comprehending an English text word-for-word, but move towards the idea of understanding a text through the interaction of bottom-up and top-down processing modes [9]. Apart from that, the researchers suggest that the knowledge of metacognition be included so that our student readers can become more strategic readers. If so, they will have an awareness of their own mental processes, self-monitoring, and self-regulation.

In order to confirm the effects of the strategies-based instruction on the student readers in a clearer picture than what has been presented in this study, further research is recommended to be conducted as a true or quasi experimental study which aims to compare the better outcomes of strategies-based instruction and traditional method of teaching reading which is still generally used in the Thai classroom context. In doing so, the relationship between strategy use and reading proficiency may be clarified in a broader view. Moreover, it is also interesting to study the impact of strategies-based instruction on other language skills (i.e., listening-speaking and writing) in this same research setting as not much of the research relates particularly to these skills. Lastly, learners’ perspective of the style preference is necessary to be considered when teaching language learning strategies, that is to say how specific tasks might work for particular learning style preferences and require certain language strategies. This area of research is worth investigating as well.

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