



Strategies used in Learning English Reading Comprehension among Students at Vocational College

Nguyen Ngoc Dang

Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (HUTECH) – Vietnam

Received: 18 Apr 2023; Received in revised form: 13 May 2023; Accepted: 21 May 2023; Available online: 29 May 2023

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Abstract— English has long been recognized as a worldwide language. English is also regarded as one of the most essential educational goals at colleges and universities in Vietnam. It is vital to teach students how to enhance their English reading comprehension skills as well as how to deal with potential problems that may arise throughout their EFL learning process in the future. As a result, the purpose of this study was to investigate non-English majored students' perceptions of strategies in learning English reading comprehension at a vocational college in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The study included 123 non-English-majoring students who were studying English at the vocational college. Two instruments, a questionnaire, and an interview, were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Descriptive statistics and content analysis were used to analyze the acquired data. The study's findings revealed that most students employ metacognitive reading strategies more frequently when studying English reading comprehension, and more than half of students use cognitive reading strategies very often. The study also presented many recommendations for both teachers, with the goal of making a little contribution to the teaching of English at the vocational college. This research will offer information on the execution of teaching English reading comprehension skills in the vocational college's environment and other similar contexts.

Keywords— EFL, reading comprehension, non-majored English students, strategies, Vietnamese context.

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the essential English skills that students must master. Reading comprehension is required for students to acquire new knowledge and information. Reading, according to Brown (2003), is the most important skill in the educational context because it can be used to assess students' general language ability. One of the determinants of learning reading comprehension will be the use of appropriate strategies. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), both cognitive reading strategies were essential methods to improve students' English comprehension skills. These cognitive reading strategies, such as resourcing, note-taking, summarizing, skimming and scanning, inferring, imagery, and guessing the meaning, enable students to thoroughly understand the comprehension texts. Moreover, according to Oxford (2006) and Brown (2003), metacognitive techniques are actions taken by students to direct and evaluate their own

reading process. Strategies such as figuring out what's most crucial about a text, understanding and keeping on reading, and evaluation were employed. Both cognitive and meta-cognitive reading strategies support and enhance students' ability to achieve the best results in their English reading comprehension. Nevertheless, based on the author's experience in teaching practice, the reality in the field is still not as expected. The teacher's strategy or method is still conventional, and the teacher simply teaches conventionally. Some students struggle to answer the question based on the text's contents. Students are still struggling to find the main idea in the texts. Aside from that, students have a low vocabulary, which causes them to be confused about the texts.

The purpose of this study is to improve students' reading comprehension skills at Long An Vocational College, where the author teaches English, because when students graduate from high school, they have to reach the A2 level.

This thesis seeks to investigate difficulties in reading English and the reading strategies used by non-English major college students at the vocational college in order to help students become better students in the future.

II. A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Brown (2003), reading is a process that helps one comprehend and retain the reading's information. They further state that reading is the process of comprehending written material, which entails quickly and effectively collecting the necessary information from it. Depending on the student's intent, there are many forms of reading. Brown (2003) emphasized the importance of three different forms of reading: academic, professional, and personal. Textbooks, themes, essays, papers, reference materials, editorials, and other types of reading fall under the category of academic reading. Memos, applications, timetables, letters or emails, reports, and other documents are examples of the kinds of reading that are linked to your employment. Newspapers, magazines, invitations, novels, short tales, and other types of reading are among the genres that fall under the heading of personal reading. In order to comprehend and complete academic assignments, students need reading comprehension skills. However, students cannot complete all of that work without reading comprehension abilities (Clarke, Truelove, Hulme, & Snowling, 2010). This means that applying appropriate strategies for learning English reading comprehension is essential and useful to enable students to achieve the best results.

Students employ a variety of reading strategies to ensure they understand what they read. Brown (2003) categorizes these methods of language acquisition as follows: cognitive and metacognitive. Students can employ variations on each of these types of strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) defined that both cognitive reading strategies were necessary to advance students' English comprehension. Students can gain a deep understanding of comprehension texts through the use of cognitive reading strategies such as resourcing, note-taking, summarizing, skimming and scanning, inferring, visualizing, and predicting the meaning. In addition, students use metacognitive strategies when they guide and assess their own reading, as described by Oxford (2006) and Brown (2003). Evaluation, summarizing key points from a text, and maintaining interest in the reading process were among the methods used. English language learners can greatly benefit from the use of both cognitive and meta-cognitive reading skills.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research site and participants

The study was conducted at a vocational college in Long An Province, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The institution was established in 2007 with 12 disciplines, including mechanical, electrical, and automobile repair, among others. Approximately one thousand students attend the school, and there are four English instructors. Per semester, each instructor has 700 hours of English instruction. Despite its limited resources and rural location, the school consistently places students at the center of a dynamic educational environment. This study's sample consisted of 123 students from three courses at the vocational college who did not major in English. Due to their eight to twelve years of EFL study, all the students are mature enough to comprehend and independently complete the questionnaire. 79 (64.2%) of them are male, while 44 (35.8%) are female. Their ages range between 16 (8.9%) and greater than 16 (91.1%). 33 of them (21.7%) have studied English for three to five years, 55 of them (36.2%) have studied English for six to eight years, and 64 of them (42.1%) have studied English for nine to eleven years. All of them devote 12 hours per week to English study at school.

3.2. Research instrument

Two research instruments, a questionnaire, and an interview, were utilized in the current study. The questionnaire has two primary parts: Part A contains five questions regarding participant demographics. Students were required to provide their personal information, including their gender, age, grade, number of years spent learning EFL to date, and number of classroom hours spent learning English each week. Part B consists of eleven questions that delve deeper into students' English-learning and comprehension strategies. This section employs a five-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (not at all true for me) to 5 (always true for me). Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire was .773, indicating its high reliability. Finally, the interview responses used as qualitative data revealed students' enhanced comprehension of reading comprehension strategies in English.

3.3. Procedures for data collection and analysis

Students were not involved in the study. It is necessary to ensure that students understand all questions and feel comfortable answering them. As a result, changes were made to make it more appropriate for and consistent with research criteria, as well as easier to understand for students. Second, 123 students participated in the study and 10 students volunteered to join the semi-structured interview. It took the students around 15 minutes to complete the final version of the questionnaire and 10 minutes to answer the final interview questions. For

questionnaire data analysis, "descriptive statistics" with the calculation of mean scores and standard deviation through the use of SPSS Statistics version 20.0 were employed. The mean scores for the students' level (extent) of using strategies for LA development were interpreted as follows: $M = 1.00-1.80$ (very low); $M = 1.81-2.60$ (low); $M = 2.61-3.40$ (moderate); $M = 3.41-4.20$ (high); $M = 4.21-5.00$ (very high). For interview data analysis, "content analysis" was employed. The students' responses were coded as S1, S2, S3, etc. to S10, and the interview questions were coded into IQ1, IQ2, IQ3, IQ12, etc.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

In this section, both qualitative and quantitative data collected to address the research question are presented. Quantitative data are presented first and are followed by qualitative data to obtain triangulation. It can be seen in Table 1 below that revealed the fact that the extent of using meta-cognitive strategies was highest ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .540$) and is followed by the extent of using cognitive strategies with ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .448$). Students were able to use both cognitive and metacognitive strategies to proceed their English reading comprehension processes.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies

No	Items	N = 123	
		Mean	SD
1	Cognitive strategies	3.72	.448
2	Metacognitive strategies	3.92	.540

For more details, in terms of the category of "cognitive strategies" in learning English reading comprehension, they usually used many strategies such as skimming, scanning, summarizing, taking notes, guessing meaning, repeating main ideas, and using many resources to support their reading processes. More specifically, the majority of students agreed that three strategies that were applied the most were "using many resources such as online dictionaries, books, etc. to support my reading comprehension" (item 5), "skimming the text to catch the general meaning of the text" (item 1), and "taking notes of general ideas of each paragraph and new words in the whole text" (item 4), with $M = 3.84$, $SD = .717$, $M = 3.78$, $SD = .608$, $M = 3.77$, $SD = .755$, respectively. Furthermore, the following strategy was also frequently employed in the reading processes by these students, which was "repeating the main ideas or new words in the text to memorize them" (item 6), with a little bit lower mean score ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .857$). In addition, there are three reading strategies that hold the same mean score, which means that they were used by all students at the same frequency level $M = 3.67$: "scanning each paragraph to understand specific information needed in the text" (item 2) ($SD = .709$), "trying to guess the meaning of new words by finding out other clues in the text (words, grammar, etc.) to understand them" (item 7) ($SD = .754$), and "having an image of facts in mind based on what I read in the text, so that they could use my knowledge to understand the text meaning" (item 8) ($SD = .765$). Last but not least, the only strategy that came with the lowest mean score ($M = 3.61$, $SD = .743$) was "summarizing the general idea after I finish reading the text"

($M = 3.74$, $SD = .857$). In addition, there are three reading strategies that hold the same mean score, which means that they were used by all students at the same frequency level $M = 3.67$: "scanning each paragraph to understand specific information needed in the text" (item 2) ($SD = .709$), "trying to guess the meaning of new words by finding out other clues in the text (words, grammar, etc.) to understand them" (item 7) ($SD = .754$), and "having an image of facts in mind based on what I read in the text, so that they could use my knowledge to understand the text meaning" (item 8) ($SD = .765$). Last but not least, the only strategy that came with the lowest mean score ($M = 3.61$, $SD = .743$) was "summarizing the general idea after I finish reading the text"

(item 3). However, it was also a strategy that was often carried out by students to study English reading comprehension.

In terms of the data collected from the interview, it was found that students all agreed that eight cognitive strategies were often used among non-English-majoring students. For example, "using many resources such as online dictionaries, books, etc. to support my reading comprehension", "skimming the text to catch the general meaning of the text," and "taking notes of general ideas of each paragraph and new words in the whole text" were reported to be used frequently as below:

"When I start a reading comprehension text, I know that I have to read it many times. First, I skim the text to catch general ideas and note out new words. Secondly, I have to use a dictionary to look up new words, or I often trace their meanings from previous and after sentences. I think background knowledge can also help a lot in my understanding a reading comprehension text" (S6), "I skimmed the text once or twice. Then I read each paragraph thoroughly. I carefully take notes of the general meaning of the whole text and of each paragraph through the opening sentences. I also write down new words to learn by heart later" (S9).

The other frequently used strategies such as "repeating the main ideas", "scanning each paragraph", "having an image of facts in my mind based on what is read in the text," and "trying to guess the meaning of new words by finding out other clues in the text (words, grammar, etc.)" were also reported to be employed often by students during interviews:

"I read each paragraph more carefully and scan new words of difficult ideas or sentences in order to find the deep meaning of them and the author's will in the reading comprehension" (S1). "In fact, it takes me a lot of time to complete a long reading comprehension text because of my limited vocabulary." However, I try to take note of new words, look them up in the dictionary, and repeat the new words and main ideas to memorize them better" (S7); "I try to guess the meaning of a new word by reading the previous and later sentences" (S3); "I also create a chain of information, images, or facts in my mind when reading texts so that I can get its true and deep meaning" (S4).

Last but not least, the last strategy, which is "summarizing the general idea after I finish reading the text," was also recorded by students in the interview as below:

"I often summarize the whole text's meaning so that I can deeply understand and memorize it for a longer time" (S10).

From questionnaires and interviews, it can be concluded that the extent of using cognitive strategies was quite high, especially the strategies such as "using many resources such as online dictionaries, books, etc. to support my reading comprehension", "skimming the text to catch the general meaning of the text" and "taking notes of general ideas of each paragraph and new words in the whole text". The other strategies of "repeating the main ideas", "scanning each paragraph", "having an image of facts in my mind based on what is read in the text," and "trying to guess the meaning of new words by finding out other clues in the text (words, grammar, etc.)" were also reported to be employed frequently during students' English reading comprehension processes.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of cognitive strategies

No	Items	N = 123	
		Mean	SD
1	I skim the text to catch the general meaning of the text	3.78	.608
2	I scan each paragraph to understand specific information needed in the text	3.67	.709
3	I summarize the general idea after I finish reading the text	3.61	.743
4	I take notes of general ideas of each paragraph and new words in the whole text	3.77	.755
5	I use many resources such as online dictionaries, books, etc. to support my reading comprehension.	3.84	.717
6	I repeat the main ideas or new words in the text to memorize them.	3.74	.857
7	I try to guess the meaning of new words by finding out other clues in the text (words, grammar, etc.) to understand them.	3.67	.754
8	I have an image of facts in my mind based on what I read in the text, so that I could use my knowledge to understand the text meaning	3.67	.765

Table 4.2 showed that all students admitted that they all used meta-cognitive strategies such as "trying to figure out what is the most important meaning of the text" (item 9), "keeping on reading the process and trying to understand it until completion of the text" (item 10), and "trying to make a self-evaluation of how much they understand the text" (item 11) at a high level of frequency. More specifically, the highest $M = 4.46$ and $SD = .750$ belong to the strategy of "trying to make a self-evaluation of how much they understand the text" (item 11). This means students always evaluate themselves to see how well they understand the reading text. The next strategy, "keeping on reading and trying to understand it until completion of the text" (item 10), follows with the second highest mean score ($M = 3.99$, $SD = .621$). Finally, yet importantly, the last meta-cognitive strategy with $M = 3.59$ and $SD = .712$ was reported to be often used among students. That means it was agreed to be a frequent strategy in students' processes of learning English reading comprehension.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of Metacognitive strategies

No	Items	N = 123	
		Mean	SD
9	I try to figure out what is the most important meaning of the text	3.59	.712
10	I keep on my reading process and try to understand it until I complete the text	3.99	.621
11	I try to evaluate myself of how much I understand the text	4.46	.750

In conclusion, data displayed in table 4.3 revealed the fact that the extent of using meta-cognitive strategies was highest ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .540$) and is followed by the extent of using cognitive strategies with ($M = 3.72$, $SD =$

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies

No	Items	N = 123	
		Mean	SD
1	Cognitive strategies	3.72	.448
2	Metacognitive strategies	3.92	.540

4.2. Discussion

This study aims to discover difficulties that non-English majored students face in English reading comprehension at a vocational college and to explore strategies used by the non-English majored students in learning English reading comprehension at a vocational college through the use of questionnaires and interviews as the main research instruments. The study's findings using the questionnaire found that the majority of students who learned English as a second language agreed that they had numerous difficulties learning English reading

The responses of students in the interviews revealed the same opinions about using meta-cognitive strategies in learning English reading comprehension as below:

"I can evaluate my reading skill. In fact, it is still slow, and it often takes me 30 minutes to read a text with at least 500 words" (S3); "In fact, my reading skill is not at an advanced level as I still face many new words and need more social background knowledge to be able to understand more reading comprehension texts" (S6); "Although it still takes me time to complete a reading text, I try to finish text reading and understand the meaning" (S7); and "I try to guess the author's will for the reading as I think it is the most important meaning of the text" (S2).

To conclude, the frequency level of using meta-cognitive strategies was quite high among students. The data's results showed that students are good readers as they know what to do and are controllers of English reading comprehension processes.

.448). Students were able to use both cognitive and metacognitive strategies to proceed their English reading comprehension processes

comprehension abilities, including challenges connected to the students themselves and the curriculum. However, students used a variety of cognitive and metacognitive strategies when learning English and reading comprehension texts.

4.2.1. Students' strategies used to learn English reading comprehension:

This quantitative and qualitative study aims to explore strategies used by the non-English majored students in learning English reading comprehension at the vocational college. The findings from questionnaires and semi-

structured interviews revealed that students used both cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies during the process of learning English reading comprehension. These findings are consistent with the theoretical foundation related to strategies in the research of O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Williams & Burden (2000), as those researchers found that both good readers were those that controlled their reading processes through meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies.

For more details, in terms of cognitive strategies, it was explored that those strategies were employed at a high level by students. The findings are compatible with those of Asmara (2017). Students are good readers when they acknowledge and use many cognitive strategies in their reading comprehension process, such as skimming, scanning, summarizing, taking notes, using resources such as dictionaries, books, etc. to support their reading, or repeating main ideas, making in-mind images of facts based on the reading, and guessing meaning. These strategies could be employed frequently because they are college students and have spent at least 8 years learning EFL. However, the strategy of "summarizing the general idea after finishing reading the text" should be applied as much as the others to maximize the efficacy of students' English reading comprehension skills.

With the concern of meta-cognitive strategies, the findings revealed that meta-cognitive strategies had higher mean scores than cognitive strategies. The three metacognitive strategies, including "trying to figure out what is the most important meaning of the text", "keeping on their own learning process and trying to understand it until text reading completion," and "trying to evaluate themselves of how much they understand the text," were used at the high level. This means that students were good controllers of their own reading comprehension process thanks to the instruction and support from teachers. The study's results are consistent with those of a study by Nabilah (2021). This means that students are mature enough individuals to know what they do and try to achieve what they want in their learning of EFL, especially the English reading comprehension skill.

In conclusion, although both cognitive and meta-cognitive reading strategies were applied at a high level by students, they should always be employed in their learning English reading comprehension processes, and there should be more reading strategies to be trained for students in order to achieve better results.

V. CONCLUSION

The study aims to explore strategies used by the non-English majored students in learning English reading

comprehension at the vocational college. The following is a synopsis of the findings, followed by suggestions for moving forward and directions for future research. The findings revealed that most students agreed on using 11 strategies, including 8 cognitive strategies and 3 meta-cognitive strategies, at a high level in their learning of English reading comprehension, particularly the strategies of skimming, scanning, using extra resources, guessing meaning, and evaluating. This is a positive finding because it shows that students can be autonomous learners who can proceed and control their English reading comprehension learning as well as the learning process of other skills. Improving reading comprehension in English requires an understanding of the difficulties and strategies involved. Students should be more engaged in their learning in the classroom, communicate difficulties directly with teachers and classmates, and investigate appropriate reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension in class and outside of class. Teachers can only assist students who are motivated and have a genuine desire to learn. It is suggested that students be responsible for their own reading development.

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