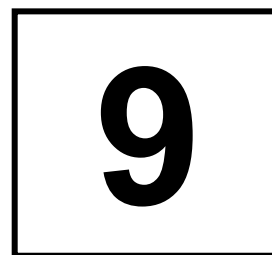


COGNITIVE READING STRATEGIES AND EFL UNDERGRADUATE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study was to investigate the cognitive reading strategies used by EFL undergraduate students majoring in English of Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University. The participants of the study were 135 English major students in the Faculty of Education, Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University in academic Year 2014. None of them have been in English speaking country. They learn English only in schools and the university. The survey of reading strategies (SORS), reading comprehension test, and interview were designed as triangulation to be employed as the research instruments. All of the participants were asked to respond the questionnaire and were taken the reading comprehension test for collecting quantitative data. Moreover, nine students were randomly selected to participate in the reading comprehension test and interview for qualitative data. This group of students were categorized according to their raw scores from the previous reading course as high, middle, and low proficiency and three of them were selected. The results revealed that among all participants, the reading strategies which were mostly employed in reading comprehension were pre-reading strategies: read the first line of every paragraph to understand what the text is about and read the title and imagine what the text might be about ($\bar{x} = 4.11$). Additionally, cognitive reading strategies employed by students among first year to third year students were different with the statistical significant at level of .05.

Keywords: cognitive reading strategy, EFL undergraduate learners

INTRODUCTION

At present, reading is considered as the significant skill for learners to acquire knowledge from English written texts (Grabe, 1991). In the countries where English is instructed as a foreign language, reading English texts seems to be difficult. English in Thailand is used only in some specific circumstances, such as classroom or professional events. Thai learners lack of the opportunity to read outside classroom (Kitjaroonchai and Kitjaroonchai, 2012). Therefore, reading comprehension becomes a major problem of Thai learners because they lack of English reading skills, books, and materials to support their readings.

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In order to assist EFL learners in reading comprehension, researchers proposed various solutions to read effectively, for instance, learning motivation, social circumstances, background knowledge, or reading practice. Additionally, one of the most important factors to enhance learners' reading comprehension is reading strategies (Akyel and Ercetin, 2009; Mokhtari and Reichard, 2004; Ozek and Civelek, 2006; Peng, Siriyothin, and Lian, 2014; Shokrpour, 2012; Yousefian, 2014). Good readers employed more reading strategies to enhance their levels of comprehension than the poor students.

Thai learners, unfortunately, are unfamiliar with employing reading strategies. They do not read and practice reading adequate to lead to actual comprehension of English text naturally (Munsakorn, 2012). Also, students are not instructed how to practice some strategies to improve their reading. Before reading session starts in Thai classroom, teachers explain and translate to students, ask them to read passages and answer comprehension questions, and write summaries to express their comprehensions (Dorchandra, 2012). From the English proficiency test result in the past two years, low scores in reading part belonged to for students from the Faculty of Education. Reading strategies become the main focus to improve students' reading comprehension.

Research Questions

1. What cognitive reading strategies do the undergraduate students at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University are mostly employed in reading comprehension?
2. Do cognitive reading strategies employed by undergraduate students at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University change over time?

METHODOLOGY

The participant of the present study were 135 English major students were randomly selected by using Yamane's formula (Yamane, 1967) from total population of 139 English major students studied the Faculty of Education, Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University in Academic Year 2014. The participants were first year to third year students and volunteered to participate in the present study. Consequently, after the participants responded the questionnaires for quantitative data. Nine of them were randomly selected to participate in the reading comprehension test and interview part of the research. The participants were categorized into three groups, including high, middle, and low proficiency according to the raw scores from the previous English reading course.

The survey of reading strategies (SORS) which was a Likert rating scales questionnaire, reading comprehension test, and interview were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The SPSS computer program was employed to analyze the quantitative data and content analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data.

RESULTS

In this section, the findings according to the questionnaire and interview are presented together with the reading test results.

The results from the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS)

The responses of the students on the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) investigate the reading strategies used by students before, during, and after reading. Table: 1 revealed the cognitive reading strategies used by students.

Table 1: The Cognitive Reading Strategies Used by Students

No.	Strategies	\bar{X}	S.D.
Pre-reading strategies			
1	I read the first line of every paragraph to understand what the text is about.	4.11	0.56
2	I read the title and imagine what the text might be about.	4.11	1.10
3	I look the pictures and try to guess how they are related to the text.	4.08	0.89
4	I skim the text quickly to get the gist.	3.99	0.67
5	I think about previous knowledge on the topic of the text.	3.88	0.56
During-reading strategies			
6	I take notes on the important points of the text.	4.00	0.94
7	I guess the meaning of a word from the context.	4.00	1.15
8	I read without looking up every unknown words in the dictionary.	3.88	0.73
9	I make guess about what will come next based on the information already given in the text.	3.88	0.73
10	I pay attention to words or phrases that show how the text is organized.	3.77	0.91
11	I use a dictionary for the important words.	3.77	1.03
12	I guess the meaning of a word from the grammatical category.	3.77	1.03
13	I have a picture of the events in the text in mind.	3.66	0.81
14	I read without translating word-for-word.	3.44	0.95
15	I think aloud during the reading.	3.44	0.95
16	I remember a new word by thinking of a situation in which the word might be used.	3.33	0.81
17	I skip some of the unknown words.	3.33	1.05
18	I read a sentence.	3.33	1.33
19	I consider the other sentences in the paragraph to figure out the meaning of a sentence.	2.88	1.10
20	I classify the words according to their meanings.	4.00	0.94

Table 1: (continue)

No.	Strategies	\bar{X}	S.D.
20	I classify the words according to their meanings.	4.00	0.94
Post-reading strategies			
21	I relate the text to background knowledge about the topic to remember important information.	3.77	1.03
22	I read the text to remember the important points.	3.66	0.66
23	I summarize the main idea.	3.66	0.94
24	I read the text to remedy comprehension failure.	3.66	0.94
25	I classify the words according to their grammatical categories.	3.00	0.94

The strategies which were the most employed by students were pre-reading strategies: read the first line of every paragraph to understand what the text is about and read the title and imagine what the text might be about ($\bar{x} = 4.11$) and look the pictures and try to guess how they are related to the text ($\bar{x} = 4.08$) respectively. However, the strategies which the students were the least employed were during-reading strategies: classify the words according to their grammatical categories ($\bar{x} = 3.00$).

The results of the interview session revealed that students in the high proficiency group preferred to employ reading strategies more than the other groups. The participants of the high proficiency groups reported that they used pre-reading strategies: read the title and imagine what the text might be about and read the first line of every paragraph to understand what the text is about, during-reading strategies: take notes on the important points of the text, make guess about what will come next based on the information already given in the text, and post-reading strategies: summarize the main idea, read the text to remedy comprehension failure every time they read. For the middle proficiency groups, they reported that reading title and think about the topic and guess about the text as the pre-reading stage was the most preferable for them, and some of the during-reading stage, such as make guess about what will come next based on the information already given in the text was also employed. Differently, the low proficiency group of student reported that they only read title assisted them in reading and finding the right answer. Also, they paid less attention on considering the meaning of the sentence because it wasted their times.

Table 2: The Cognitive Reading Strategies Used by Students in Different Year

Strategies	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		P value
	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	\bar{X}	S.D.	
Pre-reading	4.12	0.59	4.00	0.62	4.03	0.64	0.63
During reading	3.58	0.23	3.63	0.24	3.62	0.25	0.62
Post-reading	3.67	0.65	3.63	0.63	3.58	0.56	0.83

From Table 2, to compare the cognitive reading strategies used by the first, second, and third year students. The results from ANOVA revealed that the strategies used by different years of students were different with statistical significance at level of .05. Therefore, it can be said that the cognitive reading strategies employed by students were changed over time.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the cognitive reading strategies used by the students were concluded and discussed according to the research questions

What cognitive reading strategies do the undergraduate students at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University are mostly employed in reading comprehension?

The results of the cognitive reading strategies used by students were supported by Ozek and Civelek's (2006) study. In the previous study, pre-reading and during-reading strategies used by students were similar to the present study. However, the previous study showed that students employed none of post-reading strategies. Different from previous research, the present study revealed the strategies used in the post-reading stage.

Most of the students, in the present study, employed the reading topic and guessing about the content strategy in the pre-reading stage in the survey analysis. The similar result also presented in the interviews as some examples were presented below.

Nay 1: I read the topic and think of what have been heard related to the topic for I won't waste too much time reading.

Gift 2: The topic helps saving my time in reading. I have a picture of the story in my mind for guessing the possible answers.

Dew 3: I read to topic and skim the whole passage. I, at least, get some idea of the passage.

Additionally the most cognitive reading strategy in the during-reading stage was consulting a dictionary. The strategy was mostly employed by high and low proficiency levels, while the intermediate level students employed rereading and relating the content to their prior knowledge. According to consulting a dictionary, there were some differences in terms of the necessity of finding the word meaning. High proficiency level students used a dictionary when they think the words were important, so they were unable to understand further content. For the low proficiency level students, they consulted almost every new word in order to make sure that they would not skip some idea.

Kwang : I used a dictionary only to find some important words which consider as key words. I could not understand the passage if I left the words unknown.

Oat: Every word seemed to be difficult for me, even some words I had seen before. I could not understand the passage if I did not know the meaning of them.

The cognitive reading strategy in post-reading stage used by students was different. The high proficiency level students mostly related the content from their understanding to the topic, the fair level students tended to reread some parts which may contained the possible answers, and rereading the whole passage and think of the relate stories was mostly employed by less proficiency level students.

May: To make sure of the passage, I tried to link the topic and the information I gained the passage. I had more confidence when I found that I could rapidly identify the paragraphs of the answers for each question.

Tong: I reread only the paragraph which contained the answers of the questions. I did not want to waste my time reading the passage again because I'd already known where the answers would be.

Kitty: After reading, I read through the passage again and think about something might related to the story. Just to make sure that I could answer the questions.

Do cognitive reading strategies employed by undergraduate students at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University change over time?

The results from ANOVA demonstrated that the cognitive reading strategies used among the first to the third year students not different. The students who employed cognitive reading strategies tended to gain more scores from the reading comprehension test. As presented in Table: 3,

Table 3: The Raw Scores from Reading Comprehension Test

No	Students	Raw scores (30)	Group of Proficiency
1	Nay	27	High
2	Kwang	26	High
3	May	26	High
4	Gift	20	Middle
5	Oat	18	Middle
6	Tong	17	Middle
7	Dew	13	Low
8	Joan	12	Low
9	Kitty	9	Low

students from Year 1 to Year 3 employed pre-reading strategies the most. However, the Year 2 and Year 3 employed more during reading strategies. Also, the Year 3 student were least employed post-reading strategies. This might be

from the experiences of reading influences the students to focus more on during-reading strategies, which are able to help students to understand most of the texts after finish reading.

Additionally, the results supported the advantages of cognitive reading strategy application previously proposed. According to Grabe (1991) and Salataci (2000), the combination between bottom-up and top-down strategies are benefit for reading comprehension. The students in the present study applied both strategies in their reading. Moreover, high-proficiency level students tended to employ reading strategies in all stage of reading.

Kwang: Before reading, I always read the topic and try to guess about the

texts. It help me to form the idea of the text. And when I read, I take note to make sure that won't miss any important information, link to my prior knowledge, and guess about the coming information. After I finish reading, I summarize the text and check my understanding with my note again.

Tong: I read the topic and guess about the passage before I read. I feel

really good when I found that the content of the texts are exactly what I have guessed. So, when I read, I always think about what will happen next. After I finish reading, I start to answer the questions immediately.

Dew: Before I read I look for picture first. If there is no picture provided, I

read the topic and try to guess about the text. I try so hard to understand the texts and if I'm allowed to use a dictionary, I use it as much as possible. However, when I use dictionary, I cannot finish reading on time. Sometimes I just find or guess for the answers of the comprehension questions right after I finish reading because I think I spent a lot of time reading the passage.

The findings of the present study presented the cognitive reading strategies used by the undergraduate students at Sakon Nakhon Rajabhat University. The results revealed the beneficial results of cognitive reading strategies among the students from the first year to third year students. Also, the most employed strategies used by the students of each proficiency level were demonstrated. Although the results of the studies were completely shown, the limitation of the study were important to be discussed. The participants of this study were English major students. As English is the most widely used and compulsory for higher education in Thailand, students of other fields of study should be include in order to investigate the cognitive reading strategies and prepare explicit cognitive reading strategy instructions. Reading comprehension play the key role in English learning. Students require the advantage strategies to help them enhance reading skills, which is considered as the basic skill of leaning.

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