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INVESTIGATING THE USE OF READING STRATEGIES AND
ITS IMPACT ON READING COMPREHENSION AMONG
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN PUBLIC
UNIVERSITY

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to determine the extent to which reading strategies and English language proficiency influence reading comprehension among Chinese undergraduates studying abroad. In addition, the study also aims to determine the reading difficulties encountered by these students and to identify the effective reading strategies they employed to improve their reading comprehension. The quantitative information gathered via a questionnaire and a reading test. The SPSS (descriptive analysis) results indicate that reading strategies and language proficiency jointly account for the variance in the students' test scores. In addition to informing scholarly practises of academic reading, this research contributes to the development and teaching of ESL curricula by highlighting the essential components of an effective ESL academic reading module.

Keywords:

Reading Strategies, Reading Comprehension, Reading Difficulties, Academic Performance



Introduction

Among English as a Second Language (ESL) students pursuing tertiary education, the inability to comprehend academic texts can harm their academic performance. First and foremost, they won't have the necessary background information to advance their understanding of a specific idea, theory, or fundamental principle. If you are unable to understand the message or viewpoint of the author, you may end up with only a partial understanding, which can lead to the incorrect application of knowledge. Misreading the author's point of view is a common reading difficulty, according to the findings of a study that was carried out by Allison and Ip (1991) on reading difficulties experienced by ESL students attending tertiary schools in Hong Kong. As a direct result of this, students of English as a Second Language do poorly on tests. Reading academic texts on a regular basis is the second step toward producing high-quality writing for academic purposes. Students who are unable to read adequately will not be capable of writing academic essays or papers that make use of appropriate grammar and vocabulary, whether it be formal language or technical terms.

Problem Statement

ESL learners with varying levels of English language proficiency make up the majority of Chinese international students attending university. Most of them can be classified as low to low-intermediate in difficulty. This group of students appears to struggle when reading academic texts because they are unable to comprehend the formal language that is utilised in these texts, specifically journal articles and academic books. For example, they are incapable of explaining, summarising, or paraphrasing what they have read. As a result of their subpar reading abilities, they fall behind in their coursework and are unable to achieve the required level of proficiency to pass the class. Because of their desperation, they may resort to unethical behaviours such as plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty, particularly during examinations. Clearly, these students could benefit from having reading comprehension instruction tailored specifically to their needs. Research should be conducted in this area to determine the reading difficulties experienced by these students and to determine the reading strategies that these students found to be successful when they put them into practise.

Research Question(s)

The study is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the reading difficulties faced by the international students?
2. How does the use of reading strategies by these students affect their reading test performance?
3. How does their language ability affect their reading comprehension?
4. What effective reading strategies do they employ?

Literature Review

Unlike skills, which are unintentional methods of processing information, strategies are intentional courses of action designed to accomplish a particular objective (Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991, p.611). Research conducted in the early 1980s and 1990s on reading in a second language (Brown, 1981; Baker & Brown, 1984; Hosenfeld, 1997) revealed that proficient readers utilise a wide variety of methods to assist in comprehension. These can be broken down

into strategies that rely on "bottom up" processing, also known as processing based on text, and those that are associated with "top down" processing, also known as processing based on prior knowledge. Bottom-up strategies include activities such as analysing the text, skimming, scanning, and looking up words in a dictionary. Top-down strategies include activities such as asking questions, evaluating, checking, making predictions, summarising, and paraphrasing. Bottom-up strategies can be used in conjunction with top-down strategies (Bartlett, 1932). In addition, the readers' knowledge of their own cognitive processes is extremely important for the successful deployment of the strategy (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Knowledge that "regulates any aspect of cognitive behaviour" was identified by Flavell (1978) as the role of metacognition in language learning. Flavell defined metacognition as "knowledge that regulates any aspect of cognitive behaviour" (p.8). Knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition are two aspects of metacognitive ability that Flavell identified. Knowledge of cognition deals with declarative knowledge (knowing what), procedural knowledge (knowing how), and conditional knowledge (knowing why and when), while regulation of cognition deals with planning, monitoring, testing, and evaluating (1978). It is impossible to place enough emphasis on the significance of utilising metacognitive skills when reading because the inability to monitor comprehension is a defining characteristic of less capable readers. Carrell (1998) came to the conclusion that relying solely on cognition-based methods was less likely to be successful than reading strategy training that was based around metacognitive components (declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge awareness).

Although the nature of the interaction between declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge is not yet completely understood, there is clear evidence of a positive relationship between the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategy and reading comprehension, as has been stated previously. This relationship is evidently positive. The issue of students employing various strategies during examinations has captured the attention of educators for some time now. Before taking a test of their language skills, the participants in Purpura's (1999) study were given a lengthy questionnaire to fill out regarding their cognitive and metacognitive abilities. He came to the conclusion that a successful performance on the exam could be directly attributed to the utilisation of cognitive strategies, whereas the utilisation of metacognitive strategies had a less direct bearing on the outcome. It was found that test takers who were successful used different strategies than those who were not as successful. For example, successful test takers used metacognition to assist with comprehension, whereas unsuccessful test takers tended to use it for information retrieval. Phakiti (2003) found a positive relationship between cognitive and metacognitive strategies and reading performance, which he used to account for variations in language test performance. Phakiti also found that reading performance was positively correlated with cognitive and metacognitive strategies. In their research on Iranian students learning English as a foreign language at the intermediate level, Nacini and Rezaei (2015) concluded that successful test takers not only use more strategies than those who are less successful, but they also use a greater proportion of metacognitive strategies (p.191).

One of the many academic considerations that go into selecting a strategy is the area of study one chooses to focus on. Several research studies (Mochizuki, 1999; Peacock & Ho, 2003; Psaltou-Joycey & Kantaridou, 2011) have highlighted substantial differences in strategy use across undergraduate majors such as the humanities and the sciences. A study that was carried out in 1998 by Oxford, Nyikos, and Ehrman went one step further and demonstrated that students of engineering tend to use more analytical strategies than students of the humanities.

Dabaghi and Akvan (2014) conducted research to investigate the effect of field of study as a factor that determines the reading strategy that a person will use. Students majoring in the humanities and the sciences were given instruction on eight different reading comprehension strategies, after which they were given a reading comprehension test and asked to fill out a cognitive and metacognitive strategy questionnaire. The findings showed that the students majoring in science performed better than the students majoring in humanities, and the science students also used a higher number of reading strategies. The researchers speculated that this disparity could be due to aptitude, the type of intelligence (logical or mathematical), and motivation.

According to the findings of Zare and Othman (2013), ESL students in Malaysia are considered to be "high strategy users." They found a significant correlation between the use of reading strategies and successful completion of reading comprehension tasks. The issue with this study, as well as with others that are very similar, is that its conclusions are solely based on multiple choice questionnaires, and in some cases, the strategies that the students claim to have used differ from those that were used (Al Melhi, 2000). To put it another way, the dependability of the students' own self-reports has been called into question. Because of this, various methods, including interviews, open questionnaires, 'think aloud' protocols, and others, are required in order to validate the sincerity of the responses provided by the students.

Methodology

Description of Methodology

For this study, a quantitative method approach was chosen. A reading test, a reading difficulty and strategy use questionnaire, and an English language knowledge test were used to evaluate each student's English language knowledge, reading difficulties, strategy use, and reading test performance, respectively. After the students had finished the reading test, their knowledge of the English language as well as how effectively they used strategies were evaluated. Then, using SPSS, a correlation analysis was performed to determine whether there was a link between students' English language knowledge, the reading strategies they utilised, and how well they performed on a multiple-choice reading comprehension test (descriptive analysis).

Respondents

Participants in this study consisted of one hundred Chinese undergraduates studying at the Faculty of Business, Economics and Accountancy at the University of Malaysia Sabah (UMS). The respondents were selected using a purposeful sampling method. They range from students in their first year to those in their third year of study. At the time that the research was conducted, they had completed at least one year of classes teaching English to speakers of other languages.

Instruments

An English language knowledge test that was very similar to the MUET reading paper, a reading difficulty and strategy use questionnaire, and a multiple-choice reading comprehension test were all given to the participants. This questionnaire is based on the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning, which has been adapted for use here (Version 5.1). It was comprised of a total of 13 reading difficulties as well as six distinct categories of reading strategies. The contents of these instruments were evaluated in a pilot study, and the results indicated that they met the criteria for acceptance.

Result and Discussion

Table 1 presents a descriptive overview of the reading difficulties experienced by undergraduate Chinese international students enrolled in UMS. 5% of the students in the group of 13 rated their reading difficulties as "always," 9% indicated that they experienced difficulties "usually," and 22% rated that they experienced difficulties "sometimes." In addition to this, nearly 40% of those who participated in the survey selected "rarely," while 25% of those who participated in the survey selected "never." On the other hand, more than half of the undergraduate Chinese international students in UMS who participated in the research reported to experience reading difficulties of level 1'sometimes.' 23% of those students reported 'rarely.' 17% of those students conveyed 'usually.' Four percent of those students said 'never.' And 3% of those students indicated 'always.'

Table 1: Descriptive of Students' Reading Difficulties

Reading Difficulties	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1	4	23	53	17	3
2	17	43	27	9	4
3	6	22	43	24	5
4	13	39	37	7	4
5	10	44	35	8	3
6	13	43	29	8	7
7	7	37	38	11	7
8	15	40	32	9	4
9	16	42	32	7	3
10	18	34	37	10	1
11	13	34	34	16	3
12	14	41	29	13	3
13	25	39	22	9	5

"Compensating for Missing Knowledge" (CMK), "Organising and Evaluating Your Reading" (OEYR), "Using Your Mental Processes" (UYMP), "Remembering More Effectively" (RME), "Managing Your Emotions" (MYE), and "Learning With Others" (LWO) are the acronyms that are used to describe the six categories of reading strategies (LO).

The students' utilisation of different reading strategies is shown to have an effect on their overall reading test performance in Table 2. Specifically, descriptive statistics have shown that students' use of reading strategies such as CMK strongly affects their reading test performance

across the board ($M=3.380$). These reading strategies include RME, UYMP, CMK, OEYR, MYE, and LO. Respondents also cited OEYR ($M=3.250$) as the second most influential factor that affects students' performance on reading tests. The next one on the list is UYMP, which has a mean score of 3.120. On the other hand, reading strategies such as MYE, LO, and RME are less likely to have an effect on the students' performance on reading tests.

Table 2: Differences between Reading Strategies and Students' Reading Test

Reading Test		RME	UYMP	CMK	OEYL	MYE	LO
5	Mean	3.750	3.250	3.250	3.250	3.500	3.250
	Std. Deviation	0.500	0.957	0.500	0.957	1.000	0.957
	N	4	4	4	40	4	4
6	Mean	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.000
	Std. Deviation	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	2	2	2	2	2	2
7	Mean	2.750	3.000	3.250	3.000	3.000	3.000
	Std. Deviation	0.500	0.816	0.500	0.816	0.816	0.816
	N	4	4	4	4	4	4
8	Mean	3.250	3.250	3.500	3.500	4.000	3.500
	Std. Deviation	0.500	0.500	0.577	0.577	1.155	1.291
	N	4	4	4	4	4	4
9	Mean	2.750	2.917	3.333	3.167	2.917	2.583
	Std. Deviation	0.622	0.515	0.492	0.577	0.669	0.793
	N	12	12	12	12	12	12
10	Mean	2.867	3.200	3.400	3.200	3.000	3.067
	Std. Deviation	0.834	0.676	0.737	0.941	0.845	0.884
	N	15	15	15	15	15	15
11	Mean	2.667	3.111	3.444	3.444	3.111	3.556
	Std. Deviation	0.500	0.601	0.527	0.726	0.601	0.726
	N	9	9	9	9	9	9
12	Mean	2.750	3.125	3.000	3.125	2.875	2.750
	Std. Deviation	0.707	0.641	0.756	0.641	0.354	0.886
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8
13	Mean	3.000	3.250	3.625	3.500	3.125	3.125
	Std. Deviation	0.000	0.707	0.744	0.535	0.641	0.991
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8

14	Mean	3.333	3.333	4.000	3.667	2.667	2.667
	Std. Deviation	0.577	1.528	1.000	1.155	0.577	0.577
	N	3	3	3	3	3	3
15	Mean	2.667	2.667	3.250	3.000	2.750	3.083
	Std. Deviation	0.492	0.492	0.622	0.739	0.452	0.900
	N	12	12	12	12	12.000	12
16	Mean	3.000	3.364	3.636	3.455	3.091	2.909
	Std. Deviation	0.632	0.505	0.505	0.820	0.944	1.044
	N	11	11	11	11	11	11
17	Mean	2.800	3.400	3.200	3.200	2.400	2.800
	Std. Deviation	0.447	0.548	0.837	0.837	0.548	0.837
	N	5	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000
20	Mean	3.500	3.500	3.500	3.000	2.500	2.000
	Std. Deviation	0.707	0.707	0.707	1.414	0.707	1.414
	N	2.000	2.000	2.000	2.000	2.000	2.000
21	Mean	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.000	2.000
	Std. Deviation						
	N	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000
Total	Mean	2.900	3.120	3.380	3.250	2.990	2.980
	Std. Deviation	0.611	0.640	0.632	0.744	0.732	0.899
	N	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
		0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 3 illustrates the disparities that exist between the reading strategies (i.e. RME, UYMP, CMK, OEYR, MYE, and LO) and the students' MUET Band. CMK was discovered to be the most important and successful reading strategies experienced by all students, with means 3.380, according to descriptive statistics which showed that CMK was found to be one of the six factors. To be more specific, MUET Band 3 students have the highest prevalence of practise with this type of reading strategy (M=3.560), followed by MUET Band 1 students (M=3.387). The next important factor that was positively upheld among all respondents was OEYR, which had mean values of 3.250. Indeed, the MUET Band 4 students said that they had spent a lot of time practising on this aspect, and their average score was 3.500. Students in MUET Band 2 placed a significant amount of importance on reading strategies such as CMK (mean score: 3.308), which was followed by additional aspects such as UYMP (mean score: 3.205) and OEYR (mean score: 3.205). The MYE reading strategy came in second place among the students' perceptions of important reading strategies, with a mean score of 3.026. On the other hand, this MUET Band 2 student population did not show much of an emphasis on the RME factor (means = 2.949).

Table 3: Differences among Students' MUET Results

MUET Band		RME	UYMP	CMK	OEYL	MYE	LO
1	Mean	2.871	3.065	3.387	3.226	3.097	2.871
	Std. Deviation	0.718	0.772	0.667	0.805	0.944	1.088
	N	31	31	31	31	31	31
2	Mean	2.949	3.205	3.308	3.205	3.026	3.000
	Std. Deviation	0.560	0.469	0.614	0.695	0.628	0.858
	N	39	39	39	39	39	39
3	Mean	2.840	3.080	3.560	3.320	2.840	3.160
	Std. Deviation	0.554	0.702	0.651	0.748	0.554	0.746
	N	25	25	25	25	25	25
4	Mean	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.500	2.750	2.750
	Std. Deviation	0.816	0.816	0.000	1.000	0.957	0.500
	N	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	Mean	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.000	2.000
	Std. Deviation	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	Mean	2.900	3.120	3.380	3.250	2.990	2.980
	Std. Deviation	0.611	0.640	0.632	0.744	0.732	0.899
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this study is to determine the reading difficulties that one hundred Chinese international students are experiencing while attending a public university in Sabah, Malaysia. Reading difficulties that have been identified include an inability to concentrate on the task at hand, as well as difficulty comprehending essential topic-related vocabulary and the meaning of phrases, sentences, and paragraphs. The technique known as "Compensating for Missing Knowledge" is the one that students use the most frequently, followed by "Organising and Evaluating Your Reading" and "Using Your Mental Processes." Students who have a high level of proficiency engage in "Remembering More Effectively" and "Learning from Others" practises on a more regular basis than students who have a low level of proficiency. The opposite is true for the strategy known as "Managing Your Emotions," which appears to be the preferred method of the students with lower levels of competency. The findings of this research suggest that teachers of English as a second language (ESL) should assist their students in becoming active and focused readers by providing specific purposes for the various reading activities. They could also highlight effective reading strategies and come up with practises for students to practise using those strategies in an efficient manner.

The use of idioms and figurative language in English texts, the density of unfamiliar vocabulary, the use of homonyms and synonyms, grammar usage, word order, syntax, and difficult text structure are among the many challenges that ESL students face when reading materials written in English. Other challenges include: the use of homonyms and synonyms. Students of English as a Second Language (ESL) who are attempting to process written information need to be provided with a variety of reading strategies so that they can be assisted in overcoming these challenges and compensated for their lack of knowledge of lexical and grammatical structures. In a similar vein, language teachers first need to gain an understanding of the various approaches to reading before they can provide the appropriate instruction that will help their students become more proficient readers. The instruction of reading strategies has been shown in previous research to have positive effects (English, 2011).

Finding effective reading strategies could be the first step toward enhancing reading abilities among students learning English as a second language (ESL). Students can get practise employing these strategies if their teachers give them that opportunity. The identification of a correlation between knowledge of the target language and reading strategies and performance in reading will be able to shed some light on how language instructors can assist students in reading academic texts. The findings will provide instructors with insight into how to best guide students through the process of comprehending academic texts. The findings will provide language teachers with new insights into the best ways to instruct ESL students in reading skills. Students who have done their reading will be in a better position to achieve successful test results because they will have more knowledge at their disposal. They will contribute to the development of the country as a workforce that is more knowledgeable and skilled. There will be an increase in the number of international students choosing to study in Sabah, Malaysia. As a result, the key performance index for the intake of international students can be accomplished, which will result in the university generating the revenue it so desperately needs.

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