



Effects of Narrow Reading on the Reading Comprehension, Vocabulary Acquisition, and Perceptions of L2 Students in an ESP Classroom

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Received 04/02/2025	ABSTRACT This mixed-methods study examined how narrow reading affects L2 undergraduate students of forestry and agriculture in terms of their reading comprehension, vocabulary growth, and perceptions of their language knowledge and skills. To collect the data, three instruments were employed, namely pre- and post-tests, online questionnaires, and journal reflections of 37 undergraduate students. The test scores were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and paired samples <i>t</i> -test, while the qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings showed enhancement in reading comprehension and increased lexical knowledge. All the participants perceived narrow reading as a beneficial activity for their studies and future careers, and they found the texts interesting and meaningful. They were also aware of their improvement in language skills and vocabulary knowledge. Qualitative data from journal reflections also indicated that students gained more discipline-related contextual knowledge and improved
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	<p>their analytical and learning skills. The results provide various suggestions for language teachers and students, especially in ESP classes.</p> <p>Keywords: narrow reading, reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, perceptions, ESP classroom</p>
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Introduction

English reading is regarded as one of the most essential skills for L2 students. Through reading, they can acquire and accumulate new knowledge from various sources and learn the rhetorical features used in context. Hirvela (2013) noted that students in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes require understanding authentic texts related to their academic disciplines, enabling them to extract relevant information and write academic papers. Therefore, reading has become a key skill taught in English courses at university and is one of the required language skills that should be mastered by ESP students.

Despite the necessity of English reading mastery, some L2 students still have difficulty comprehending English passages and cannot perform well on English tests and examinations (Maipoka & Soontornwipast, 2021). Some of them have also been observed to rely on translation applications while reading English texts in class, even if they are taught and trained to use reading strategies. One possible reason might be their limited lexical knowledge (Agustina et al., 2023). According to Nurmukhamedov and Webb (2019), L2 readers need at least 95% lexical coverage to adequately understand a text in another language. It is also undeniable that vocabulary plays a crucial role in L2 reading success (Grabe & Stoller, 2018), especially in ESP courses where both academic and specialized vocabulary are presented.

Another cause for students' lower reading ability might be their limited exposure to English reading. Many English reading classes tend to employ intensive reading (IR)—students are assigned to read passages in class and do reading comprehension exercises. As a result, the opportunity to practice reading outside the classroom is quite limited (Maipoka & Soonthornwipast, 2021; Thongsan & Waring, 2024). To develop students' reading ability and promote the acquisition of new vocabulary, a pedagogical approach that encourages them to read substantial, authentic English texts might be more effective and should be incorporated into language courses.

In recent decades, empirical studies on L2 reading have shown that narrow reading (NR) can lead to the development of L2 reading ability and the expansion of vocabulary size. As a subset of extensive reading (Agustina

et al., 2023), narrow reading encourages students to read a large number of texts in the target language on a single theme, genre, or title. Consequently, readers will become more familiar with the topic and be able to use the knowledge gained from previous readings to understand new texts (Ballance, 2020; Changpueng, 2014; Schmitt & Carter, 2000). Thematically related texts are more likely to use fewer word choices and recycle certain terms, decreasing vocabulary load and facilitating incidental learning of new words (Ballance, 2020; Redmer, 2019; Schmitt & Carter, 2000). These benefits make narrow reading an appropriate activity for ESP classes, where students are expected to understand academic passages relevant to their areas of study as well as acquire both academic and technical terminology.

Despite the aforementioned, narrow reading has not received significant attention from L2 researchers (Abdollahi & Farvardin, 2016; Balance, 2020; Chang & Renandya, 2021; Yuan & Tang, 2023). Previous studies on narrow reading have been conducted on L2 students in general English classes with a greater focus on vocabulary growth, and they used reading materials such as news stories, graded readers, and expository texts selected by the researchers (e.g., Chang & Millett, 2017; Chang & Renandya, 2021; Cho et al., 2005; Kang, 2019). Little research has been conducted in ESP classes to examine the impact of ESP on reading comprehension and students' perceptions. In ESP settings, students mainly read research articles and other academic texts in specific areas, which may influence how narrow reading affects their learning. Therefore, more empirical data on narrow reading remains needed to examine the effectiveness of this approach in ESP classes.

Literature Review

Narrow reading (NR) refers to the practice of reading a large number of thematically related texts in the target language for an extended period, such as texts written by the same author, in one genre, or about a similar theme or topic (Chang & Millett, 2017; Chang & Renandya, 2021; Kang, 2019). Narrow reading is based on Krashen's theory of the Input Hypothesis (Bryan, 2011; Changpueng, 2014). According to Krashen (1984), substantial exposure to comprehensible input is critical for language acquisition. In this respect, texts written by the same author or about one theme can contribute to content repetition and facilitate repeated use of vocabulary and other language elements. This enables students to notice the use of words and other linguistic features in different contexts and eventually acquire them during reading. Meanwhile, narrow readers obtain more contextual knowledge as they continue reading more texts, which, in turn, enhances their text comprehension and reading speed (Kang, 2019).

With these advantages, existing studies on narrow reading reveal that it is one of the most practical methods to improve L2 reading ability and promote vocabulary growth. For example, Chang and Millett (2017) found that narrow reading helped Taiwanese high school students read graded readers faster and comprehend related texts more effectively, suggesting that the knowledge gained from reading previous texts of the same genre and title plays a crucial role in reading comprehension and reading speed. These results were confirmed by Kang's (2019) study. In her research, female high school students in Korea were asked to read a series of newspaper articles written by native speakers of English. The results indicated that the participants who read narrowly obtained higher scores on reading comprehension tests and spent less time reading the news articles.

A comparative study on the incidental learning of new vocabulary through narrow reading indicated that students who read thematically related news articles acquired more vocabulary than those who read unrelated texts. Further, they developed a greater awareness of proper word use when encountering them frequently (Kang, 2015). Abdollahi and Farvardin (2016) also found similar results. Their research showed that narrow readers in high school had higher receptive recall and retention of vocabulary after reading expository passages on the same theme. The investigation of the impact of narrow reading on vocabulary acquisition was the main focus of more recent studies, with a change to more mature participants. For instance, Chang and Renandya (2019) compared the effect of narrow reading on lexical acquisition by college EFL students. Their findings showed that participants who read texts narrowly learned a considerable number of words, regardless of differences in the organization of graded readers. However, they learned better through texts written by the same author and randomly selected by the researchers. Yuan and Tang (2023) also reported that narrow reading enhanced the vocabulary development of intermediate-level undergraduate students, especially if combined with training in morphological sensitivity. Their study highlighted the relationship between the frequency of word encounters and improved lexical learning and retention. In other words, students tend to acquire vocabulary more easily from thematically connected texts rather than from a variety of texts because it helps build up context and enhances the likelihood of remembering new words.

This explanation is also supported by more recent research conducted by Outamgharte et al. (2024) and Ilahi et al. (2024). Both of these quantitative studies examined the impact of narrow reading on L2 vocabulary gain. Based on the vocabulary test scores, Outamgharte et al.'s (2024) research indicated that the receptive lexical knowledge of Moroccan high school students improved after reading texts narrowly for seven weeks, and those who read the texts written by the same author and on the same theme outperformed

those who read different texts and those who read only the texts on the same theme. Unlike Outamgharte et al. (2024), Ilahi et al. (2024) included only one group of 25 undergraduate students with higher English proficiency. Their study revealed similar results, indicating that narrow reading was an effective strategy for them, as the vocabulary test scores were significantly higher, especially for the test items whose target words appeared multiple times in the texts.

Apart from L2 reading and vocabulary development, previous studies have also reported that students generally perceived narrow reading as a beneficial activity. The survey results from Cho et al. (2005) indicated that EFL children developed greater interest and confidence after reading a series of Clifford books and had greater awareness of the advantages of narrow reading. Likewise, based on questionnaire responses, Chang and Millet (2017) found that EFL students noticed an improvement in their reading speed. However, only those who read graded readers of the same title could recognize recurring vocabulary and observe the progress of their reading comprehension. To obtain more in-depth information on students' perceptions, Chang and Renandya (2019) compared the perceptions of high-beginning to intermediate students reading four sets of narrow reading materials: graded readers written by the same author, in the same genre, of the same title, and randomly selected graded readers. Their findings revealed that the organization of texts and language proficiency influenced their perceptions of narrow reading. Specifically, texts of the same title were found to be less interesting, and higher-proficiency students perceived narrow reading more positively than those with lower proficiency. More recent research on students' perceptions of narrow reading was conducted by Ilahi et al. (2024). In their study, a questionnaire was employed to explore how 30 Indonesian undergraduate students perceived narrow reading, with 85% of the participants insisting that narrow reading was an advantageous approach and supporting its continued use in the future. According to Rakhmat (2000) and Rubyansyah et al. (2022), a person's perception can be affected by attention, hope, motivation, and memory.

To summarize, earlier research suggested that narrow reading could contribute to L2 students' development of English reading ability and vocabulary knowledge and that they typically had favorable perceptions of this approach. However, previous studies were mostly conducted in general English classes and employed reading materials selected by the researchers. According to Bakkaloğlu and Pilten (2023), motivation can enhance reading comprehension and is one of the crucial factors affecting reading success. Similarly, readers' lack of interest in the passage could lead to reading failure (Agustina et al., 2023), so it would be of interest to have choices for the

narrow reading materials and allow the participants to select which text to read.

Nevertheless, whether or not narrow reading is effective in ESP classes and how commonly it is perceived when participants can make their own choice of reading remains relatively underdeveloped. Additionally, previous investigations, especially those concerning the effects on reading skills, were mostly done with younger participants. Thus, more evidence is needed to confirm whether narrow reading is a practical approach for adult learners. In light of these gaps, the present study aims to address the following questions:

1. Does narrow reading help improve undergraduate L2 students' comprehension of English texts in the areas of forestry and agriculture?
2. Does narrow reading affect undergraduate L2 students' acquisition of academic and specialized English vocabulary in the areas of forestry and agriculture?
3. What are their perceptions of English narrow reading after joining the narrow reading activity in an ESP classroom?

Methodology

Participants and Setting

The research participants included 37 undergraduate L2 students studying forestry and agriculture at a public university during the second semester of the academic year 2024. All participants were enrolled in the Academic English course for Forestry and Agriculture, which focuses on developing students' reading comprehension skills and enhancing their knowledge of academic vocabulary and technical terms. Based on the grades they received from a previous fundamental English course (D, D+, and C), they represented a homogenous group of students whose English proficiency levels ranged from elementary (A2) to pre-intermediate (B1). Journal reflection results further indicated that they had limited experience reading English texts outside of class.

Materials and Instruments

Reading Materials

The reading materials in this study consisted of 35 English academic texts on forestry and agriculture. The length of each text ranged from 500 to 900 words and was selected based on three main criteria: disciplinary relevance, students' interests, and academic and specialized word coverage.

To ensure the disciplinary relevance of the reading materials, all passages were selected by forestry and agriculture students who had previously enrolled in the course. Subsequently, three experts were invited to review, rate, and validate the texts during the selection process. Two of the experts were forestry and agriculture lecturers, while the other was a teacher with extensive experience in teaching English to forestry and agriculture students. Only the passages approved by all three experts were included in the final reading list for this research. Regarding students' interest, as mentioned above, former forestry and agriculture students were involved in the selection process, and the participants in this study were allowed to make their own reading choices from a collection of narrow reading materials.

In terms of academic and specialized word coverage, all chosen passages were analyzed using the AntWordProfiler 2.2.1 Program (Anthony, 2024). The reference lists employed for text analysis were Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List (AWL) and Bunparit and Kongchareon's (in press) Agriculture and Forestry Word List (AFWL). These word lists were adopted because the AWL is widely recognized and used as a main reference source in education and research (Therova, 2020), while the AFWL contains specialized vocabulary in the fields of agriculture and forestry, aligning with the goals of the present study. The coverage of both academic and specialized words in the selected reading materials ranged from 3.3% to 15.6%. A higher lexical coverage percentage indicates that they were more academic, so these passages were found to be suitable for this study because they include general and academic texts.

Pre- and Post-tests

The tests were developed by the researchers to measure the participants' receptive knowledge of both academic and specialized vocabulary, as well as their reading comprehension skills, and consisted of two main parts: vocabulary and reading comprehension. The vocabulary part included 40 matching and multiple-choice items. The assessed words were extracted from the reading materials and categorized into academic words (Coxhead, 2000) or forestry and agriculture words (Bunparit & Kongchareon, in press) using the AntWordProfiler 2.2.1 Software (Anthony, 2024). To evaluate students' vocabulary learning, target words were selected based on two criteria. First, they appeared in the reading materials more than five times, and second, they were reported as unknown or unfamiliar by twenty forestry and agriculture students in an academic English class. The pre- and post-tests were the same but were administered 15 weeks apart.

The reading comprehension part consisted of three academic English passages in forestry and agriculture, as well as 30 multiple-choice items. The

length of each passage ranged from 350 to 500 words. Based on the Flesch Reading Ease formula, the readability scores of the passages ranged from 26 to 39, indicating that the passages were appropriate for undergraduate students (Zamanian & Heydari, 2012).

To ensure validity, the test was verified by three experts and piloted with 55 forestry and agriculture students after revision. Moreover, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to evaluate the internal consistency of the test. The reliability coefficients for the vocabulary part, the reading comprehension part, and the entire test were 0.75, 0.92, and 0.84, respectively, indicating that the test was sufficiently reliable for actual use.

Online Questionnaire

An online questionnaire was developed to examine the participants' perceptions after participating in the narrow reading activity. It comprised three parts, namely participants' background information, their opinions on the cognitive and affective benefits of the narrow reading activity, and the changes in their reading behaviors. The questionnaire was adapted from previous research on narrow reading (Chang & Millett, 2017; Chang & Renandya, 2020, 2021; Cho et al., 2005). Like the pre- and post-tests, the questionnaire was validated by experts and tested on a group of forestry and agriculture students. The reliability coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.81, which was acceptable for data collection.

Journal Reflection

To obtain in-depth data on students' perceptions of narrow reading, the participants were asked to write a journal reflection on their experiences with the narrow reading activity in Thai or English, according to their preference. This instrument allowed them to think deeply and express their opinions and feelings about the activity. Suggested topics for reflection included their feelings about the activity, problems encountered, and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the activity.

Procedures

The narrow reading activity was incorporated as an outside-of-class activity for 13 weeks (one passage per week), excluding the midterm exam week and the last week of the semester. In the first class, the researchers provided an overview of the current study and the narrow reading activity, including the objectives, the reading materials, and the post-reading activity, after which the pre-test was administered to the participants. During the

semester, the participants independently selected passages from the provided lists to read outside of class every week. These lists were classified into four levels based on text readability, which was measured using the Flesch Reading Ease formula. The Flesch Reading Ease is one of the most valid and reliable readability formulas for the English language (Gerstle, 2010) and is suitable for educational materials (Scott, 2024). In this formula, readability is divided into seven levels with scores ranging from 0 to 100, comprising very easy (90-100), easy (80-90), fairly easy (70-80), standard (60-70), fairly difficult (50-60), difficult (30-40), and very difficult (0-30). The lowest readability of the selected passages is at a standard level, as this is the readability level for most standard passages (Zamanian & Heydari, 2012). The highest readability is at a very difficult level with a Flesch Reading Ease score of 15 – 29. In the reading list, the first three readability levels (standard, fairly difficult, and difficult) consist of 30 passages (10 passages each), but the very difficult level comprises only five research papers in forestry and agriculture. After reading, the participants were required to write a report giving reasons for choosing the selected passage, summarize the main idea and important details, express their opinion on the selected passage, and describe any reading problems encountered as well as the solutions to those problems. This post-reading report was not only used to reinforce content understanding but also served as a reflective tool, encouraging students to monitor their reading process, become aware of the strategies they employed, and identify areas of difficulty, such as sentence structure or vocabulary issues. It allowed students to share their opinions and feelings about the text they read, which could be a motivating experience for them (Renandya & Jacobs, 2016). At the end of the semester, all the participants were expected to read 13 out of 35 passages at various readability levels and write 13 post-reading reports. In the final week of the semester, the participants were asked to take the post-tests, write a journal reflection on the narrow reading activity, and complete the online questionnaire.

Data Analysis

To accomplish the objectives of this research, the researchers initially scored the pre- and post-tests, assigning one point for each correct answer. The test scores and survey responses were then analyzed using the SPSS software to calculate the mean and standard deviation (SD). Subsequently, the average scores were compared to examine the difference between participants' reading comprehension ability and vocabulary knowledge before and after participating in the narrow reading activity using a paired samples *t*-test, and the SD values were also further calculated using Cohen's *d* formula to measure the effect size of the quantitative test results.

Afterward, students' reflections were analyzed and systematically categorized into themes using inductive coding. To avoid bias or subjectivity, an English lecturer with qualitative research experience was invited to serve as another rater. The inter-rater agreement was 95%, indicating an acceptable level of consistency. Finally, these qualitative results were triangulated with the statistical results from the questionnaire.

Results

Impact of Narrow Reading on Undergraduate L2 Students' Comprehension of English Texts in Forestry and Agriculture

The major focus of the first research question was the effect of narrow reading on L2 students' understanding of English academic texts in forestry and agriculture disciplines. Table 1 presents the results of the pre- and post-tests. The results reveal that the students' English reading comprehension improved significantly after participating in the narrow reading activity, as shown by a .01 score ($t = -3.223$, $p = .003$) with a medium effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.55$). The findings from a paired-samples t -test provide strong empirical support for the effectiveness of narrow reading in enhancing L2 students' comprehension of English academic texts in forestry and agriculture.

Table 1

Results of the paired samples t-test for reading comprehension

Reading test scores	Mean	SD	S.E. Mean	t-test	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size
Pre-test	9.65	3.07	.504	-3.223	36	.003	0.55
Post-test	11.68	4.17	.686				

Notes: $N = 37$; $p < 0.01$

Effect of Narrow Reading on Undergraduate L2 Students' Acquisition of Academic and Specialized English Vocabulary in Forestry and Agriculture

The second research question investigated whether or not L2 students made progress in their lexical knowledge through narrow reading. As illustrated in Table 2, a significant difference was found in the vocabulary test scores ($t = -4.72$, $p < 0.001$) with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.95$), indicating that L2 students acquired both new academic and technical vocabulary related to their subject areas after reading agriculture and forestry English texts for

13 weeks. However, the type of vocabulary gained when doing the narrow reading activity was different in terms of the effect size. The statistical results showed that the participants' knowledge of technical vocabulary increased significantly after reading specialized texts for an extended period ($t = -6.649$, $p < 0.001$) with a larger effect ($\eta^2 = 1.24$) than their acquisition of academic vocabulary ($t = -1.00$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.17$).

Table 2

Results of the paired samples t-test for vocabulary knowledge

Vocabulary test scores	Mean	SD	S.E. Mean	t-test	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size
Vocabulary							
Pre-test	12.68	6.14	.366	-4.72	36	.000***	0.95
Post-test	20.32	9.55	.388				
Academic Vocabulary							
Pre-test	3.38	2.23	.763	-1.00	36	.040***	0.17
Post-test	4.38	2.36	1.287				
Technical Vocabulary							
Pre-test	9.30	4.64	1.010	-6.649	36	.000***	1.24
Post-test	15.95	7.83	1.569				

Notes: N = 37; Significant Codes: $p < 0.001 = ***$, $p < 0.01 = **$, $p < 0.05 = *$

Undergraduate L2 Students' Perceptions of English Narrow Reading after Participation in an ESP Classroom Activity

The final research question concerned L2 students' perceptions of narrow reading. The findings from the questionnaire responses and students' journal reflections showed a strong agreement between the quantitative data (questionnaire results and test scores) and the qualitative data (students' reflections), supporting the benefits of narrow reading for improving reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, learner engagement, etc. Moreover, the students' reflections provided more in-depth information on aspects not asked in the questionnaire, specifically technical vocabulary, topical knowledge, critical thinking, and awareness of the learning process.

The qualitative data from the questionnaire and students' reflections indicated that the students in this study benefited from the narrow reading activity and developed an increased preference for English reading. The content analysis identified four major themes, including (1) changes in attitudes toward English and English reading, (2) reading skill development,

(3) benefits related to learning skills, and (4) problems encountered during narrow reading, as detailed below.

Changes in Attitudes toward English and English Reading

The questionnaire results indicated a positive change in students' attitudes, with 97% reporting that reading had broadened their perspective on English, and 100% expressing a desire to continue improving their reading skills in the future. This was also reflected in the journal reflections, where students initially found English reading difficult. In subsequent sessions, however, they were more confident in handling texts. Some students expressed interest in continuing to read even after the classroom assignments.

Personally, I like (the narrow reading activity) because it is reading comprehension practice ... At the beginning, I could not understand English when listening, but after doing this activity, I feel that reading in English is much easier. (S4)

This reflection by S4 highlights a shift in language confidence, with reading acting as a bridge to greater overall English comprehension.

Initially, I was uncomfortable reading English texts and would translate word-by-word. Over time, I became more confident and started reading faster. Now, I even look for English articles related to my field of study to read independently. (S26)

This experience by S26 reflects a deep transformation, from struggle to autonomy, showing how narrow reading can encourage independent engagement with English texts beyond the classroom.

Reading Skill Development

Development of the reading process and the use of reading strategies: After narrow reading practice, students reported significant improvements in processing texts, using context to infer word meanings, and identifying main ideas without over-relying on translation tools.

At first, I spent quite a lot of time reading because I had to go through the text multiple times to grasp the main ideas and translate unfamiliar words. Initially, I relied solely on Google Translate, sometimes resulting in inaccurate translations that did not fit the context. However, over time, I became more accustomed to the process and started using a dictionary for certain words, especially technical terms. I also improved in guessing word meanings from the context, which helped me

understand that some words change meaning depending on the context. This made it easier to comprehend the text and allowed me to read faster. (S14)

This detailed reflection captures a clear progression from dependency on translation tools to autonomous, context-driven reading. This account by S14 illustrates how students can internalize reading strategies, especially through repeated, topic-focused practice.

After practicing reading through this activity for quite some time, I am now able to find the main idea of a passage and guess word meanings from the context. In the beginning, I could not guess word meanings and had to use Google Translate to translate some content. However, after reading more through this activity, I found that I could guess the meanings of words, understand the content better, and apply these strategies when taking tests and doing research. (S26)

S26's entry confirms how narrow reading builds confidence in extracting key ideas and applying strategies beyond the classroom, such as in examinations and research tasks. It underscores the link between repeated exposure and strategic independence.

The acquisition of new topical knowledge: A significant finding of this study, which has not been comprehensively explored in previous studies, is the role of narrow reading in deepening students' understanding of topical knowledge. Several students reported that reading multiple texts on the same topic improved their understanding of key concepts in their fields, including sustainable farming, biodiversity conservation, and carbon sequestration.

One of the benefits of this activity was learning new things from the readings. I found that reading multiple articles on the same topic helped me understand the subject better, especially in areas related to forestry and the environment. (S7)

This example by S7 emphasizes the dual value of narrow reading: language development and content knowledge enhancement. This aligns with the growing recognition of content-based language instruction as a powerful tool for integrated learning.

[I] gained a lot of knowledge from [this] reading activity, including various topical knowledge such as an article about wildfire, ... It is like gaining world knowledge, and some of this topical knowledge can be applied to daily life or further study. (S18)

The reflection by S18 emphasizes that narrow reading is not only beneficial for language acquisition but also serves as a gateway to broader world knowledge. The student specifically mentioned gaining information from reading about wildfires, suggesting that the reading material extended beyond surface-level vocabulary or grammar and contributed to his/her understanding of real-world issues.

The acquisition of new grammatical knowledge: It is not obvious that reading and gaining grammatical knowledge are correlated, but a few students in this study reflected on the benefits of narrow reading for grammatical development.

Observing sentence structures in the reading articles helped [me] understand sentence structures and the use of correct [English] grammar. (S24)

This observation suggests that narrow reading can support implicit grammar acquisition, likely due to recurring patterns across similar topics, reinforcing form-meaning associations.

The improvement of reading habits: Some students suggested that, as they read more, their reading habits changed from translating word-by-word to reading for the main ideas.

[I] improved [my] reading behavior. In the beginning, when I read and found unfamiliar words, I did not waste my time guessing their meanings, which prevented me from learning new vocabulary. I used Google Translate for all unknown words. Now, I think it is not necessary to translate every word since we can guess the meanings from the context. We understand [texts] by identifying modifiers, and this method helps us practice and develop our reading skills. (S15)

S15 reflects a positive shift in reading behavior—from relying entirely on Google Translate to using context clues and identifying modifiers to infer meaning. This change not only improved vocabulary learning but also promoted more strategic and independent reading.

Benefits Related to Learning Skills

Besides improving their reading skills, the students also reflected on the development of their learning skills. Two main areas of learning skills — analytical skills and evaluation skills (raising awareness of areas for improvement) — were identified in their journal entries as shown in the following examples.

Analytical skills: This study further reveals that narrow reading enhances analytical thinking, an area that has not been well explored in the previous literature. Some students mentioned that reading about the same topics from different sources helped them make comparisons, analyze arguments, and detect bias.

Reading multiple articles on the same topic taught me to compare different viewpoints and analyze the arguments presented. This helped me understand how perspectives on environmental policies differ between industry representatives and environmentalists. (S14)

This example shows how exposure to various sources can nurture critical thinking and discourse awareness skills, often overlooked in traditional language instruction but vital for academic literacy.

[I] like this activity because it helps improve my reading comprehension. [It] also opens my world to new and interesting topics and helps me practice analytical skills more effectively. (S16)

This reflection by S16 highlights that narrow reading not only improved reading comprehension but also sparked intellectual curiosity and encouraged deeper thinking.

Awareness of areas for improvement: A particularly valuable outcome of narrow reading was its role in helping students identify their strengths and weaknesses in reading and language proficiency. Many students commented that writing a reading report helped them pay more attention to the reading strategies they used. Some found that summarizing each paragraph enhanced their understanding, while others discovered that they required more time to deal with complex sentences. This is important for independent learning strategies and has been largely unexplored in earlier studies.

The most important thing is that it (narrow reading activity) helps us recognize our weaknesses, such as having a limited vocabulary and spending too much time reading. ...Based on this understanding, I want to improve my reading skills. (S3)

This reflection by S3 shows that the activity fostered self-awareness, helping the student identify specific areas for improvement. This awareness reflects the development of metacognitive skills, which are essential for becoming an independent and self-directed learner.

At first, I struggled with complex sentence structures and had to reread passages multiple times. However, after writing a reading report, I became more aware of this issue and started using strategies like breaking down long sentences to understand them better. (S14)

S14 highlights how writing a reading report supported reflective learning. By tracking difficulties and actively adjusting strategies, the student demonstrated growth in both awareness and the application of problem-solving techniques, which are key components of strategic reading.

Problems Encountered during Narrow Reading

Although narrow reading was found to be beneficial, students also encountered several problems, especially in vocabulary, grammar, time management, comprehension, and summarization.

Many students reported difficulties with technical terms, context-bound words, and direct translations that required interpretation beyond a literal meaning.

For reading each article, I faced some problems, such as difficult technical terms. [I] had to guess the meanings of those words, but sometimes it was difficult to guess their meanings from the context. I sometimes didn't understand the text even after guessing those words. Another major problem is that I was not able to remember those words. (S1, S22, S23)

The experiences of these students highlight the difficulty of dealing with domain-specific vocabulary that may not yield easily to contextual speculation. It also highlights the issue of retention, particularly when exposure is insufficiently supported by active practice.

Some students found it difficult to decode complex sentence structures and grammatical patterns, especially those different from Thai, which led to incorrect interpretations at times.

As a Thai, Thai grammar and English grammar are different. When reading [in English], it sometimes makes me confused when translating due to different grammatical rules.” (S7)

“My problem is due to vocabulary, particularly word forms and their derivatives. This results in wasting too much time reading and misunderstanding those words. (S9)

S7 and S9 highlight key linguistic challenges faced during narrow reading. S7 struggles with differences between Thai and English grammar,

which can cause confusion when translating, while S9 finds that unfamiliar word forms and derivatives slow comprehension and lead to misunderstandings. Together, their reflections underscore how both grammatical structure and vocabulary complexity can hinder reading fluency for Thai EFL students.

Time management was another challenge students faced because they sometimes did not know how to balance their time between reading assignments and other coursework. They also spent too much time rereading complex passages. However, over time, they improved their reading productivity and speed through continued practice.

Some problems that I found related to time management. Sometimes, [I] had too many assignments, and it affected my time management for this reading activity. Sometimes, the reading texts were so complicated that I had to spend a lot of time trying to understand them. (S33)

This reflection by S33 shows how text difficulty interacts with workload to affect reading engagement. It signals the need for support not just in language strategies but in managing learning tasks effectively.

A common challenge students faced during narrow reading was identifying the main ideas and summarizing information effectively. These challenges often stemmed from feeling overwhelmed by details or being unable to distinguish between the main ideas and supporting information. Although such texts were difficult to read, continuous exposure to thematically related texts helped students enhance their comprehension and summarization skills over time, thus reinforcing the value of narrow reading.

A frequent problem I found was not understanding vocabulary in the passages. I faced this problem when reading every passage. ... This problem led to reading less smoothly and being unable to identify the main idea, which resulted in misunderstanding the passage. (S4)

The problem with vocabulary and its derivatives led to wasting time on reading and understanding the content. This also hindered my ability to grasp the main ideas and affected my reading comprehension. (S9)

S4 and S9 both highlight vocabulary-related problems as major obstacles to reading comprehension. They struggled not only with unfamiliar words but also with understanding word forms and derivatives, which slowed down their reading and made it difficult to identify the main ideas. As a result, their overall comprehension was negatively affected, showing how vocabulary gaps can significantly hinder reading fluency and understanding.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study confirms that narrow reading effectively develops L2 students' reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge and that students have a positive perception of this activity in ESP classes. First, the reading test scores indicated that reading thematically related reading materials for an extended period helped participants improve their ability to understand academic information more efficiently. One possible explanation for this improvement is that increased background knowledge of discipline-related topics made students more familiar with vocabulary and specialized contexts, enabling them to process texts more easily. These results align with previous studies conducted by Chang and Millett (2017) and Kang (2019), highlighting the advantages of narrow reading in terms of enhancing text comprehension (Chang & Renandya, 2021).

Second, the findings indicate that narrow reading effectively expands receptive knowledge of both academic and specialized vocabulary, mainly through repeated exposure to related terms in thematically connected texts. The vocabulary gains observed in this study align with previous research, demonstrating that reading materials on the same topic enhances vocabulary retention and application (Abdollahi & Farvardin, 2016; Chang & Renandya, 2019; Yuan & Tang, 2023). Therefore, it can be concluded that narrow reading helps build field-specific vocabulary because readers are constantly exposed to the same technical terms in meaningful contexts. In addition, the results support the incidental learning hypothesis, which states that vocabulary is learned more productively through natural encounters in context than through direct instruction (Chang & Millett, 2017; Cho et al., 2005). These results are also consistent with studies asserting that themed texts offer a better way of introducing domain-specific vocabulary than general academic vocabulary (Agustina et al., 2023; Yuan & Tang, 2023). However, the relatively small effect size for academic vocabulary learning suggests that narrow reading may be less effective for acquiring general academic vocabulary, which requires the reader to encounter a wide variety of texts and language structures in daily reading.

The participants also reported that they were more motivated, paid more attention to the reading materials, and were better at identifying and using reading strategies, consistent with previous research on the benefits of guided reading activities (e.g., Chang and Millett, 2017; Cho et al., 2005). One possible explanation for this positive perception is that the participants were able to choose the reading materials based on their preferences, despite the limited choices of reading materials. Reading texts they find interesting might enhance their intrinsic motivation, leading to a favorable perception of the activity (Rakhmat, 2000; Rubyansyah et al., 2022). In addition to the linguistic

benefits, this study reveals new insights that have not been fully explored in previous research, particularly regarding the role of narrow reading in enhancing analytical skills, topical knowledge, and metacognitive awareness in reading. The ability to switch between views, identify biases, and assess the credibility of sources suggests that narrow reading fosters the higher-order cognitive skills necessary for academic success. Moreover, students' feedback indicated that they were able to identify their strengths and weaknesses through narrow reading, which is an important component of independent learning for academic growth.

Despite these advantages, several limitations of narrow reading emerged. Some students reported difficulty with technical vocabulary, grammatical structures, and summarizing key information, particularly in the early stages. Others noted that reading thematically similar texts for an extended period sometimes led to reduced engagement or boredom. These issues suggest that while narrow reading supports depth of learning, it may benefit from being supplemented with broader text variety or integrated with additional scaffolding strategies.

One effective strategy used in this study was the integration of reading reports as a post-reading activity. These reports encouraged students to reflect on their reading process, identify difficulties, and apply strategies for improvement. As shown in participants' reflections, this task enhanced their awareness of issues such as vocabulary and sentence structure. This aligns with the view of Renandya and Jacobs (2016) that post-reading activities can foster motivation and deeper engagement with texts. Thus, combining narrow reading with reflective writing reinforces comprehension and supports metacognitive development.

Pedagogical Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations

The findings of this study have several practical applications. First, ESP instructors should incorporate narrow reading in their teaching because it promotes both language proficiency and subject-specific knowledge. By exposing students to thematically related reading materials, narrow reading helps enhance reading comprehension as well as knowledge related to academic and specialized vocabulary. However, it should be noted that the number of participants in this study was relatively small. Future research could be conducted using larger sample sizes to confirm the effectiveness of narrow reading in ESP classes. Moreover, in the absence of a comparison group, this study could only confirm the positive effects of narrow reading, without determining whether or not it may be more effective than other instructional methods. Therefore, comparative studies could be conducted

in the future to gain more insights into the role and effectiveness of narrow reading in ESP classes.

This study confirms that incorporating corpus analysis into the methodological process and involving experts in specialized fields when selecting materials can lead to more meaningful results in understanding L2 reading and establishing a systematic process for recruiting vocabulary for effective reading materials. Mixed methods also provide insight into students' reading processes, their engagement in reading activities, and what they gain from these reading activities. Therefore, future studies on reading and reading activities should employ mixed methods to gain more insightful data.

Finally, future studies could incorporate stimulated recall interviews to gain a deeper and more personal understanding of how students experience narrow reading. This approach gives students a chance to pause and genuinely reflect on what was happening in their minds as they read—what confused them and what strategies they used at that time. By guiding students to revisit specific parts of their reading tasks, researchers can gather richer, more meaningful insights than what might be revealed by general surveys or journal entries. Stimulated recall can complement written reflections by capturing the thoughts and decisions that often go unnoticed, thereby helping us better understand how students engage with texts in real-time.

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