



An exploration of explicit teaching of reading with Thai students of low EFL proficiency: Factors affecting reading comprehension

Atipat Boonmoh^a, Anupong Tuaynak^{b,*}

^a School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, Bangkok 10140, Thailand

^b Faculty of Education, Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University under the Royal Patronage, Pathum Thani 13180, Thailand

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Abstract

Much of the global workforce is increasingly expected or required to possess English reading skills. It is vital that working adult learners who seek a degree and develop themselves professionally in a company have a good command of English, especially in reading comprehension. This study explored the effect of the explicit teaching of reading on low-proficiency Thai EFL students' reading comprehension and the factors affecting their reading comprehension. A total of 58 participants completed a reading quiz that asked them to write a summary and respond to both comprehension and vocabulary questions. The mean reading scores were used to analyse the effect on reading comprehension. Moreover, 12 individuals voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews to reflect on the factors affecting their task-specific reading comprehension. The results demonstrated extremely low scores on both the comprehension and vocabulary questions. The investigation also revealed emerging factors, such as time, text difficulty, inability to apply cognitive strategies in reading and a dependency on Google Translate. Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insight into teaching reading to students with low-proficiency EFL reading comprehension.

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Introduction

Reading in English is important for Thai students in every field of study, especially at the tertiary level. These students are supposed to be able to communicate and use the four skills in English (listening, speaking, reading and writing), so they can help push Thailand forward towards a better working society. Furthermore, the ability to deal

with English texts is regarded by students as it influences their career options and continuing education. The RAND Reading Study Group (2002) stated that comprehension is “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (p. 11). According to Lau and Chan (2007), ESL learners are unable to develop awareness of and make use of appropriate reading strategies in academic reading tasks when they are not given clear instructions. Good readers employ strategies to support their understanding of a text.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Anupong.tuay@vru.ac.th (A. Tuaynak).

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Previous studies have suggested a number of ways in which teachers can help second language (L2) learners become better readers. They can teach students how to use the strategies of monitoring, predicting, inferring, questioning, connecting, summarising, visualising and organising (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997; Miller 2002; Pardo 2002). They can be explicit and direct in explaining what these strategies are and why good readers use them (Duffy, 2002; Pressley & McCormick 1995).

A survey conducted by Wutthisingchai and Stopps (2018) investigated the views of 1,827 Thai students on factors affecting reading ability; the results showed three internal factors of learning preferences, motivation and attitude and three external factors of teaching techniques, texts and environment. In addition, all the respondents believed that the nature of the text being read was the most important factor. However, in the English language, Thai students may first encounter complicated grammatical rules and tenses, which are seen as a huge burden for Thai learners and demotivate them at first glance, so most of them have negative attitudes towards EFL learning (Porkaew & Fongpaiboon, 2018). Hence, with no ambition or motivation in EFL learning, students put most of their effort into the presentation of grammar rules, the study and memory of vocabulary lists, and the translation of reading passages to answer test questions in order to pass the exams they will encounter in the future. In particular, technical/vocational education, which includes a large number of marginalised and underprivileged students, potentially has the most to gain in a change in teaching methods because the English language is not adequately emphasised in those curriculums.

Valaya Alongkorn Rajabhat University (VRU) is a public university that aims to develop local wisdom and creativity and incorporate technology to better the local community. It provides educational and professional opportunities for students, including those who are marginalised and underprivileged in society. As the majority of them possess relatively low English proficiency, the language centre of VRU was created to foster a more accessible language learning experience. This includes the course VLE 310, “Reading and Writing Strategies for Learners of English as a Foreign Language”. One of the researchers taught this course during the time this study was conducted. As a new teacher in this context, the researcher noticed that a large majority of students in every group presented extremely low reading proficiency. Later, the researcher tried to employ an explicit teaching approach in reading instruction to support more comprehensible learning lessons.

The reading content emphasised the ability to find specific details, the main idea, recognise a familiar word, identify an inference, find a pronoun reference, identify the purpose of a text and use of a dictionary as well.

Over 1–3 weeks, the researcher noticed very weak linguistic knowledge, text difficulty, and different levels of learning motivation. It provoked the researcher’s thinking about how to improve these areas and facilitate learning with these groups of students, who were obviously lower in English proficiency than the high school students the researcher had previously encountered. The researcher imagined that focusing on grammatical rules and vocabulary knowledge with these students may not be the most suitable teaching method. Instead, the researcher tried an explicit approach to language instruction and looked forward to seeing an improvement in the students’ reading comprehension, especially during the online learning context amidst the COVID-19 pandemic context.

Explicit teaching in this study refers to teacher conveying the new information through elaborate guidance, demonstration and interaction of students’ learning. In this study, the researcher used teaching techniques to ensure that the students learned reading skills, cognitive strategies, and comprehension. To illustrate, the steps were inspired by several reading elements of effective instruction and schema theory, such as connecting new information to prior learning, explaining to students why the new skill or cognitive strategy is important and useful, eliciting student interest, providing step-by-step explanations, modelling, engaging in guided practice, and practicing the ability independently in a variety of reading texts and groups.

For example, students were expected to identify the main idea of a paragraph about the food of Southeast Asia. The researcher began the lesson by asking questions to stimulate prior knowledge and interest, and then demonstrated how to identify the paragraph’s main idea. Before allowing students to engage in both free and controlled practices, the researcher demonstrated how to identify the main idea and provided feedback and an opportunity for students to check their comprehension by asking questions in class.

The effects of explicit teaching of reading among these groups of learners particularly in Thai context have been explored in very few empirical studies. Most studies paid attention to explicit reading strategies teaching which occurred in various contexts including at the primary level (Brevik 2019; Iwai 2016; Pilonieta et al., 2019), secondary level (Fajriah, 2020), for students with special needs (Braun et al., 2017; Salehomoum, 2018),

and tertiary level (Ajideh et al., 2017; Zafarghandi et al., 2016). However, little research has been conducted on students with low English proficiency particularly in Thai tertiary context. The pervasiveness of research studies on reading comprehension factors present reading ability over a long period of learning; however, not as many studies have described the factors that affect the reading comprehension of specific tasks in the short term. Therefore, the objectives of this study were to evaluate both the effects of explicit teaching and the factors that affect reading comprehension in this context.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 58 university students from three of nine sections who had taken VLE310: Reading and Writing Strategies for Learners of English as a Foreign Language during the second semester of the 2020 academic year (November 2020–March 2021). Of these nine sections of VLE310, six sections were for students in regular programs, and three sections were for students in weekend programs. Owing to the unprecedented circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the university instituted safety regulations in response to the spread of the virus. Classes could implement both online and on-site alternatives. As a convenience in collecting data for the study, onsite participants were selected to complete a paper-based reading comprehension task, which accounted for 20 per cent of the course score. The total number of participants from each section was 22 from Friday, 35 from Sunday morning, and 46 from Sunday afternoon. A total of 58 participants completed the on-site reading task. All of the participants were non-English major students with a range of 10 to 12 years of experience in learning English. Their ages ranged from 20 to 35 years old. The students were from all the faculties at the university (agricultural technology, industrial technology and management sciences). One week after the quiz, of the 58 who completed the reading task, 12 participants volunteered to participate in the interviews.

The Reading Quiz

As part of the course requirement, the students needed to complete a reading comprehension quiz in which they had to thoroughly read a news article in English and answer questions about it. This quiz, which

was worth 20 points, consisted of three parts: a summary task, comprehension check questions and vocabulary questions. The students were given 90 minutes to finish the quiz. They were allowed to use Thai to write in the summary part to better reflect their comprehension and utilise their mobile devices during the quiz. A news article from the BBC website (“Climate change: Power companies ‘hindering’ move to green energy”) was used as the reading passage. This passage was chosen because the topic was readable in terms of length (247 words) and its relevance to most of the students’ other course content.

Students’ Scores

The scores can reflect the students’ understanding of the reading passage and also provide indirect feedback to the teachers/researchers in terms of learning achievement. The summary of the first three sentences, 10 comprehension check questions, and six vocabulary questions counted for scores of 13, 10 and 6 points, respectively. For the summary writing portion, each sentence was worth four points for the use of content words that represented the main idea and one point for the overall meaning. The comprehension questions required the students to utilise the strategies learned in the class, such as skimming, scanning, finding pronoun references, identifying the author’s opinion, indicating the causes and effects from the paragraph, guessing the words from context, and inferential meanings. Six vocabulary words were presented for the students to identify their meaning in their native language, as well as to choose the correct parts of speech according to the context.

Table 1 Points for Each Part of the Reading Assessment

	Part	Points
I	Writing summary of the first three sentences	13
II	Ten comprehension check questions	10
III	Six vocabulary words	6
Total		29

Semi-Structured Interview

From the 58 individuals who completed the assessment, 12 participants volunteered to be interviewed to provide the researcher with their retrospective views on how well they performed in the class as well as on the reading tasks. Semi-structured interview questions were used to explore the factors affecting their performance on the tasks. Moreover, the intention of the interviews was for the students to reflect on how and what they learned from the class, their perceptions on the length and

readability of the text chosen and also the supports that they felt helped them learn better, especially in online sessions. The interview questions were based on the research questions of the study; they were open-ended so that we could ask follow-up questions to further explore the details of the answers provided. Consent forms were provided to the participants before the interviews began. The individuals were informed that they were free to participate in this study or to withdraw at any time. To provide a clear understanding of the data collection process, the questions used to guide the semi-structured interviews were as follows:

1. Can you describe for us how it went on during the reading quiz?
2. How well did you do on the quiz?
3. Were there any reasons you did or did not do well in the quiz?

Data Analysis

After the semi-structured interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed. The researchers paid close attention to what supported and hindered the students' reading comprehension, as described in the interviews. After the responses were marked according to a set rubric, demographic information was collected. The data from the semi-structured interviews were grouped and categorised into themes, representing factors affecting reading comprehension for further presentation and discussion.

Results and Discussion

Data Presentation

Overall, the participants scored an average of 13.4 out of 29 on the three combined sections of the reading task, which was less than half the total score. The first part, writing a summary, produced the highest average score among the three parts. This might be due to the fact that

the second and third parts required more details and a deeper understanding of the passage in order to obtain correct answers. Among the three class groups, Section 3 obtained higher scores than the other sections.

As seen in [Table 2](#), Part 1, the summary writing, was worth 13 points. The overall mean score was 8.5, which was above half of 13. Considering the mean scores from each section, they were all above the halfway mark. Looking closely at the individuals' scores of those who did not perform well, the researchers found that they did not complete the task and the summary written was misinterpreted with no trace of dictionary consultation. This shows that their vocabulary schema and their searching ability, as well as willingness, were probably relatively limited.

In addition, Part 2 in [Table 2](#) presents the scores from answering the comprehension questions. As seen from the table, out of a total of 10 points, the mean score was only 3.1, which was particularly low (below half of the available points). The researchers also looked closely into the quiz scores of each student and believed that the students could have done better in the questions related to remembering and understanding levels of thinking, as in Questions 1, 2 and 4 (as seen in [Table 3](#)). These included asking directly to provide examples of the relevant topics and asking about the meaning of a familiar word. The aforementioned three questions required the students to utilise skills such as scanning and meaning as context. Nevertheless, when it came to answering more complicated questions that required a higher level of thinking, most of the students could not complete the quiz successfully, often writing wildly guessed answers or no answers at all. The analysis level of the thinking questions, as in Questions 3, 7 and 8, was associated with idiom and pronoun referencing skills. Interestingly, only 5.2 percent and 8.6 percent of the students could correctly answer Questions 9 and 10, respectively. The questions (as seen in [Table 3](#)) required the students to use an evaluate level of thinking and were linked to causes and effects and author's opinion identification skills.

Table 2 Reading Scores of the Participants

Scores	Part 1: 13 pts Mean (SD)	Part 2: 10 pts Mean (SD)	Part 3: 6 pts Mean (SD)	Total: 29 pts Mean (SD)
Section 1 (<i>N</i> = 17)	7.6 (2.47)	2.8 (1.62)	1.3 (1.18)	11.7 (3.76)
Section 2 (<i>N</i> = 16)	8.4 (1.44)	3.5 (1.90)	1.5 (1.46)	13.4 (2.96)
Section 3 (<i>N</i> = 25)	9.1 (1.71)	3.2 (1.57)	2.4 (1.66)	14.6 (2.90)
Overall (<i>N</i> = 58)	8.5 (1.91)	3.1 (1.69)	1.8 (1.54)	13.4 (3.42)

Table 3 Number of Correct Answers for Each Question ($N = 58$)

No.	Questions	Answers
1	According to the passage, please give examples of clean energy.	53 (91.4%)
2	Please give examples of less clean energy.	38 (65.5%)
3	What is the meaning of ‘dragging their feet’ from Sentence No. 1?	11 (18.9%)
4	From this passage, what is the meaning of ‘study’ from Sentence No. 2?	33 (56.9%)
5	Can you give some example of ‘independent producers’? (from Sentence No. 6)	9 (15.5%)
6	In this sentence, “The study found that only 10% of the companies had expanded their renewable-based power generation more quickly than their gas or coal fired capacity”. About how many companies are there?	9 (15.5%)
7	What is the meaning of “have just sat on the fence” from Sentence No. 11?	10 (17.2%)
8	What does the word “their” in the 8th sentence refer to?	11 (18.9%)
9	According to the 4th sentence, what can be considered a cause and effect?	3 (5.2%)
10	From the 7th sentence, what is the author’s opinion toward solving global warming?	5 (8.6%)

The last part of the reading task given to the students was to write one definition of the vocabulary words listed and identify their parts of speech as used in the context of the reading passage. The vocabulary words that were chosen for this task each had more than one distinctive meaning. Most answers did not fit into the actual context used and caused relatively low scores. The scores suggest an extremely low ability to recognise the meaning from the context even when they were allowed to consult an online dictionary and search engines. The researchers examined the online tools used to perform this task; the first translation provided by Google Translate of change and enterprise were fortunately aligned with the meaning from the text, regardless of the part of speech. From Table 4, however, the meaning the students wrote in their native language seemed to be obtained from the first shown translation in Google Translate, which was obviously incompatible with the context of other words; for example, lead was

misinterpreted as “metal”, share was misinterpreted as to “use something at the same time as someone else” and state was misinterpreted as “condition”. Unfortunately, the word uptake, which none of the students answered correctly, was the most challenging in terms of meaning because the only misinterpretation the students wrote was absorption, which seemed to have also been prompted by the first translation provided by Google Translate.

Table 5 presents the students’ use of online tools to help them complete the reading tasks. All of the participants possessed a smartphone with internet access and used online tools for the tasks. A surprise to the researchers was that 96.6 percent of the participants used the Google Translate application as the main search tool for the meaning of the word. The other applications they used were Longdo Dict and the LINE Dictionary. It was obvious that no participants used monolingual or learner’s dictionaries at all.

Table 4 Vocabulary and Meaning in Context

Word	Meaning in Context	Number
Lead (adj.)	Main	21 (36.2%)
Uptake (n)	The act of accepting something	0 (0.0%)
Change (n)	The act of becoming different	35 (60.3%)
Share (n)	One of the equal parts that the ownership of a company is divided into, and that can be bought by members of the public	9 (15.5%)
State (n)	A part of a country	12 (20.7%)
Enterprise (n)	An organisation	28 (48.3%)

Table 5 Vocabulary and Meaning in Context

Categories		$N = 58$
Smartphone ownership		58
Use of online tools in this task		58
Tools used	Google Translate application	56 (96.6%)
	Longdo Dict (https://dict.longdo.com/)	12 (20.7%)
	LINE Dictionary	1 (1.7%)
	Other dictionaries	13 (22.4%)
	Learner’s dictionary (English-English dictionary)	-

Factors Affecting the Students' Comprehension

After interviewing the 12 participants, the researcher obtained a variety of interesting information as potential factors affecting reading comprehension. In this study, the factors were related to the conditions of the task performance that the participants experienced during the quiz. The factors included time, text difficulty, an inability to apply cognitive strategies in reading and a dependency on Google Translate.

Time was mentioned by all 12 participants as one of the most influential factors in task completion. All claimed that the 90 minutes they spent reading, searching for the meaning of the vocabulary words, interpreting and deciding whether the meaning provided by the dictionary suited the context, writing the answers and rechecking what they wrote was inadequate. The following statements from the interviews support the idea that inadequate time for the quiz hindered the ability to do the task:

"I wanted to complete the quiz. I did not care if it was correct or not. The time given for the quiz was not enough. It pushed me to complete all items regardless of the accuracy."

(Participant 1).

"I couldn't manage to do it properly within 90 minutes. It was very tight for this quiz."

(Participant 5).

Text difficulty is another major factor that most participants (10 of 12) claimed affected their performance; some reported being reluctant to make an effort to read because the text provided was too difficult for them. This is intriguing, as the researcher reviewed the different texts in the course book and retrieved a text for the quiz at approximately the same level of difficulty in order for the students to be able to understand it. However, in the interviews, the students felt that this was not the case:

"I think I can pronounce each word in the text, but I did not know what many of them meant. There were only pronouns and some helping verbs that made sense to me. It seemed impossible for me to pick up the gist of the paragraphs."

(Participant 2).

Some participants mentioned that the text had an unfamiliar topic and genre:

"I am not familiar with scientific matters and energy, so asking questions about green energy was pretty hard for me."

(Participant 8)

An inability to apply cognitive strategies during the reading was seen as preventing the participants from comprehending the text, according to the interviews. Most of them reported reflecting on the cognitive reading strategies they learned from the class, such as skimming and scanning, pronoun referencing, identifying the author's opinion, synonyms and guessing the word from context. Although they were taught all the strategies, they did not know how to manage or select them for a particular purpose:

"In class, I remembered that I got to practice reading a lot of different academic texts, but I don't know when and how to apply them in a quiz."

(Participant 9).

"I don't know how to tell what the writer thinks. I am not sure how I can come up with an answer. I cannot make use of the words to guess the meaning from context, so I also had to consult the dictionary all the time."

(Participant 7).

"I wrote down random answers for the question on pronoun reference because I didn't know how to do it. Sometimes, I did not understand what the questions wanted me to do."

(Participant 11).

The students' dependency on Google Translate was remarkably vivid as a factor in their ability to perform on the quiz because, as shown in Table 5, almost all the participants used the translating program. Some participants revealed that they used it for a word-by-word translation, while the rest used it to type an entire sentence and paragraph in order to obtain a translation. In contrast, some participants reported that they relied on its feature in which they could simply take a picture and the app would automatically present a translation in the target language (the participants' L1). In addition, all the participants were familiar with the Google Translate application. In particular, they depended on apps such as it as they liked its convenience, accessibility and user-friendliness without considering the app's limitations, such as its use as a dictionary reference requires human judgement and meaning within a context:

“Google Translate is so helpful. I used it to quickly translate the whole sentence. I liked the translation from such an app because it is concise.”

(Participant 8).

“I typed and sometimes took pictures of almost all the questions and vocabulary in each section in Google Translate and copied the translations as the answers without knowing what they meant. It saves me time and is not complicated.”

(Participant 1).

I did not remember why I wrote specific answers. I know the translation made no sense in the context, but I just wanted to get it done. I'd select the first result of the translation from Google Translation.

(Participant 3).

Interestingly, from the interviews, the participants also mentioned different conditions that also affected the participants' past learning experience, which also influenced their language ability, motivation and attitude. These included learning platforms, motivations and attitudes towards learning the language and opportunities to practice outside the classroom, which all hindered English reading comprehension.

Learning platforms refer to where the students learn, whether it is a virtual or physical classroom. A total of 10 of 12 participants mentioned that they struggled with the online reading class. They reported that the delayed communication in virtual learning barred them from interacting in the class and gradually exhausted them as the class period progressed:

“I felt less motivated and focused when I studied in an online class. I sometimes wanted to avoid asking and answering questions due to a slightly delayed communication. Via Zoom, I needed much more time to listen to the teacher, read the instructions, process and organize the ideas and press the unmute button to answer.”

(Participant 12).

“Often, in the online class, I was so slow that my classmates had already given the teacher the correct answers. It made me not want to answer.”

(Participant 2).

Distractions when learning virtually at home were often unavoidable due to the fact that some of the students had to take care of their family, help with chores and sell

goods in case of a home-based business. Furthermore, better devices and internet access, which can make a considerable difference in online learning, were not affordable to many of the students. As far as the researcher was able to establish, the majority of the students utilize their mobile phones to join virtual meetings, search for the meaning of vocabulary words and enter answers during both synchronous and asynchronous sessions, which seems to explain some of the extreme struggles the researcher imagines are happening with the students:

“At home, I don't have a laptop or a PC, so I had to use my mobile phone with a limited data plan and speed. I don't think I can really learn well when surrounded by my family, as I have to look after my young daughter at the same time. I always turned off the camera and eventually lost focus on the lesson.”

(Participant 11).

Learning motivation and opportunities to develop themselves or even use the English language outside the class also influenced the student's language learning experience. Most of them had not done well in school, especially in studying the English language, so they did not have a strong fundamental knowledge of English. To encounter the reading strategies class at the tertiary level without being capable of basic vocabulary and grammar tasks leaves many of these students with little hope of improving their language development further:

“Back in high school, I was not good at English. I always ended up confused and was not able to construct a sentence after class. I barely remember any useful vocabulary, and my score sucks.”

(Participant 4).

A majority of the students work full time during weekdays and have to manage their time to make a living for their family, so they do not have enough time and energy to review the lessons. They also paid very little attention to the lessons during weekends due to fatigue from both full-time and part-time work:

“I felt pressured to balance work on weekdays and study on the weekends. I wanted my English ability to be useful for the company team, but it is too exhausting to spend more time practicing reading. Also, I wanted to devote my time outside of work to being with my family.”

(Participant 3).

Discussion

The first question in this study sought to investigate the effect of explicit teaching on students' reading comprehension. The total mean scores from all the given tasks were below half of the possible scores, which indicated the students' overall low reading proficiency. The writing a summary task showed the highest scores when compared to the other tasks. One of the reasons might be the fact that the summary was able to be written in their native language, Thai. Moreover, the students believed it was convenient to use Google Translate, as its features allowed them to type entire sentences and rapidly receive translations. However, in the first sentence, the idiom "dragging their feet" seemed to be the most problematic for the application because it did not fit the context when directly translated. Most of them still seemed to do well on some questions, especially, "Only one in 10 energy suppliers globally has prioritized renewables over fossil fuels, the study finds" and "Even those that are spending on greener energy are continuing to invest in carbon heavy coal and natural gas" (the second and third sentences, respectively), partly because the sentences were quite straightforward in terms of word meaning and grammatical structures. A possible explanation might be the fact that they relied heavily on Google Translate, perhaps because they were low-proficiency learners. This finding is consistent with that of Kumnoed (2018), who suggested the use of Google Translate to support students with low reading ability in order to help them read more efficiently.

Surprisingly, the scores in answering the comprehension questions were unsatisfactory, although the students were actually taught and practiced different reading strategies in the class as the main objectives of the course. Moreover, the 10 questions reflected the variety of levels of thinking, ranging from remember to evaluate according to Anderson et al. (2001). While more students correctly answered questions related to the remember and understand levels of thinking, it seemed a far reach for most of the students to score well on the apply, analyze and evaluate questions. Regarding the skill required to incorporate the remember questions, it can be inferred that scanning for specific pieces of information was the easiest type of question for the low-proficiency students. Furthermore, one of the most challenging questions referred to the meaning of an idiom in the passage. In addition, asking the students to identify the causes and effects and the author's opinion of the topic was nearly impossible for the students, as indicated by the

scores shown in Table 3. The fact that they were not successful in specific reading comprehension skills was likely related to the insufficiency of effective reading practice in the class. This is consistent with Ness (2016), who suggests that teachers should adopt an explicit teaching style in reading comprehension during reading activities. Rastergar et al. (2017) have also suggested that metacognitive reading strategies help students engage in effective reading comprehension. With respect to the last task, answering vocabulary questions, it was unanticipated that the students would obtain extremely low scores. The observed scores for this task could be attributed to the fact that the students were excessively dependent on using Google Translate as a tool for understanding; they were likely to consider the first translation provided too quickly without verifying whether or not the meaning fit the context. This suggests that the learners may not have been trained on the effective use of an online dictionary; therefore, they could not selectively utilize suitable reference tools for specific vocabulary tasks or to improve their reading ability. In accordance with the present results, previous studies by Karnal and Vera (2013) have suggested that each student should be independent of any translator while they are reading; however, electronic tools can be helpful in making students linguistically aware while they are in the process of learning.

This study also explored factors affecting reading comprehension. The researchers found that the obviously low scores achieved by the students were affected by a variety of factors. Time, text difficulty, an inability to apply cognitive strategies in reading and a dependency on Google Translate were perceived by the students as directly affecting their reading comprehension. They all hindered the students' learning and ability to complete the reading tasks. It was shown that the low-proficiency students needed much more time and practice to improve their reading comprehension.

The text difficulty level for the tasks was carefully considered by the researchers, and the readability, length and vocabulary level were not observably different from the coursebook that the students had been using. Therefore, this study potentially resonates with the inappropriate level of the coursebook in that it may not suit the students' ability levels very well. The participants reported that they could use their schema from lived experiences and their familiarity with text genres to help them read, but they could not make use of the learned cognitive strategies in the reading while attempting to complete the tasks. This was echoed in their reading comprehension skills appearing to be deficient and requiring more background knowledge elicitation from

teachers, text genre analysis and additional reading practice. This finding aligns with the review of Alowalid et al. (2018), which mentioned that successful readers tend to emphasize global meaning and background knowledge rather than grammatical aspects. Also, Butcher and Kintsch (2003) and Schallert and Martin (2003) have suggested that the more background knowledge readers have connecting them with the text being read, the more likely they will be able to make sense of what is being read.

Moreover, their choice to use a single bilingual dictionary and translating tool directly deterred them from gaining better comprehension. As long as the students are not aware of the suitability of dictionary use as a learning reference, they seem to depend solely on the most convenient translating tool they can find at hand, which seems to eventually disbenefit learning.

Language learning cannot be seen as a one-time performance task, but rather as a whole process that is affected by considerable factors from inside and outside the classroom: learning platforms, motivation, attitude and opportunity to practice can all be factors that influence reading development. Learning via both synchronous and asynchronous online classrooms could hardly be described as preferred by these students; hence, they were unable to achieve the best learning in the online context. Many students experienced excruciating reading lessons from delayed interaction in the online learning. Reading comprehension skills are demanding in that they require careful attention and thought processing; if learners are distracted and not familiar with the teaching approaches via online tools, they are less likely to succeed. As Taladngoan et al. (2020) revealed, a teacher's introduction of reading content that will be applicable in the future can have the most impact on the participants' reading comprehension ability. This becomes even more challenging when working adult learners attempt to learn a language. In weekend programs, not only do these learners have to work and study, but they also tend to depend on extrinsic and instrumental motivation to improve their English skills. This is clearly demotivating to them when they cannot improve their reading skills, as they will be useful in their work. In addition, it can be seen from their pressures that they need more time during weekdays after work to review their language lessons.

Conclusion

This study set out to probe the effect of explicit teaching on reading comprehension tasks and the factors

affecting reading comprehension during those tasks. Overall, the results revealed that the effect was unsatisfactory under the current conditions and that the students needed serious improvement in their reading comprehension. Based on the findings, the factors affecting reading comprehension emerged and shed light on pedagogical implications. Suitable text difficulty and adequate time for both the reading quiz and in-class practice should be carefully and fairly appraised by the teacher. Not only would a more appropriate time and level of difficulty increase the reading scores, but they would also increase the students' confidence in language learning.

Incorporating explicit training on the idiomatic meanings of a word or sentence and familiarizing students with the effective use of online learner dictionaries, as well as an analysis of translating tools on their purposes and limitations, would greatly assist students in their reading comprehension. They should be shown how being able to use dictionaries effectively would benefit their learning and therefore their scores.

Teachers may consider providing reflective sessions after task execution for those students who need explanation of why certain reading strategies should be utilized on certain tasks. By reflecting on the difficulties and confusion the students may have when applying the strategies, the students will be more conscious and aware of their reading. This, along with the teacher's explanations, will eventually help them improve their reading skills.

Teachers should also note that virtual classrooms could be a hindrance to reading comprehension among students who need extra time to practice and more interactive instruction. Because this study was conducted in a context of marginalized groups of students, conversing with the students, especially those who needed to work and study, allowed the teacher to be able to identify and help tackle the challenges they were encountering and the support and goals they needed from the course, which should be impactful on their learning motivation.

The insights gained from this study should be of assistance to English language teaching and learning, especially with low-proficiency working adult learners. The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, the number of students was not high. In addition, the course was aimed at teaching reading in the first part and writing as a later part; it would be important for future research to explore these concepts with a larger group of participants in a fully reading-oriented course. As the situation of COVID-19 was

unprecedented, the course instructors had to comply with safety regulations and rely on online learning. In order to gain deeper insight into virtual task performance, future data collection could include data from those who did not perform the tasks digitally, so comparisons could be made.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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