

# Reading Strategy Use of English Majors at Tay Do University

Wa Thái Như Phương

*Foreign Language Faculty, Tay Do University, Vietnam*

## ABSTRACT

*Reading is one of the four most important skills of language learning, it helps us understand and grasp a variety of knowledge. This study aims to investigate the reading strategies of English majors at Tay Do University. Ten English majors from Tay Do University were randomly selected to participate in the study. Five open-ended questions were used as a tool for this survey to investigate the frequency with which students used reading strategies. The results of the study showed that reading strategies were important and offered many advantages to students' reading proficiency. Overall, they used all the strategies. However, the frequency as well as the number of strategies used by the students were quite different. Context-based word guessing and scanning were more widely used and understood by students than skimming strategies. This showed that the use of strategies in reading comprehension by the students of Tay Do University was very frequent. However, there were still some difficulties when using strategies, but it was not significant. From the findings of this study, some suggestions were made by the researcher to help teachers and students in teaching and learning reading comprehension in English for better results.*

**Keyword:** *Reading strategies, Use of reading strategies, Strategies used in reading comprehension*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English language is the most widely spoken language in the world and a global language, knowing English is opening up endless knowledge horizons. In our lives today, the influence of English is huge. It is like a connection door to help you find good jobs, bring higher income. As Federico Fellini once said: "A different language is a different vision of life." Learning English means learning more about a new culture. Knowing English will help you chat and make friends with foreign friends, colleagues and teachers making your relationship better and wider.

Among four skills in language, reading has a key role which is a basics means to improve other skills. Reading helps to open up the mind and absorb the knowledge of mankind. Reading comprehension helps a lot in everyone's study and work. Many people have very positive thoughts and lifestyles. The fact that you read and understand a lot in English also helps to increase vocabulary, understand how to operate documents as well as use sentence structure, etc., thereby helping other skills such as writing and listening are also greatly improved. This means that when students are engaged in reading, their knowledge will be expanded through a variety of topics in reading process.

In the past, more and more research has been conducted on English reading comprehension skills through different reading strategies (Chen, Lisa Wen Chun 2015; Chi Hong Nguyen, Vy Trieu Phung 2021). However, very little research has been written on the frequency, as well as the choice of using reading strategies in reading comprehension by students.

It is not surprise to know that learning a foreign language is not easy at all. And English obviously has no exception. Currently, many students at universities have difficulty in reading comprehension, they consider reading comprehension something extremely difficult. And students majoring in English at Tay Do University are also among them. They are not confident when reading, they often suffer from general problems such as lack of vocabulary, psychology and lack of strategy. The study "*Reading Strategy Use of English Majors at Tay Do University*" was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of reading strategies in English and help students of Tay Do University understand more about reading strategies and improve their reading skills.

### Research question

This study was conducted in order to answer the following research question:

What reading strategies do the English majors at Tay Do University regularly use for reading comprehension ?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Definitions of reading

Reading comprehension is one of the important skills of students majoring in English. There are numbers of definitions presented by different scholars and researchers, following are some of the definitions by the most famous researchers. According to Swan (1975) states that "A person with good reading ability is one who can grasp the maximum information of a text with minimal understanding". Meanwhile, Grellet (1981) points out that "Reading or understanding a text means extracting the necessary information from it in the most efficient way".

In another aspect, reading is best described as "An understanding between the author and the reader. On the other hand, reading is more than just pronouncing words correctly or simply knowing what the author intends, it is the process whereby the printed page estimates ideas, experiences and responses that are unique to an individual" (Richards & Thomas, 1987,p.9). Moreover, Alderson (2000) argues that "Reading as an enjoyable, intense, private activity, from which much pleasure can be derived, and in which one can become totally absorbed".

Beside, Van den Brock & Espin (2012) said that "Reading comprehension is a complex interaction among automatic and strategic cognitive processes that enables the reading to create a mental representation of the text".

### 2.2 Definitions of reading strategies

Garner (1987) defines reading strategies "As an action or series of actions employed in order to construct meaning". Reading strategies refer "the mental operations involved when readers purposefully approach a text and make sense of what they read" (Barnett, 1988).

In the con text of reading, reading strategies indicate how readers conceive a task, what textual cues they attend to, how they make sense of what they read and what they do, when they do not understand (Block, 1986).

In short, "Reading strategies are deliberate, conscious techniques that refers employ to enhance their comprehension or retention of the textual information" (Carrell, 1989).

### 2.3 Some reading comprehension strategies

#### *Guessing meaning from the context*

Guessing meaning from the context is one of the important strategies in reading skill. Students can guess the meaning of many new words through context. Gray and Holmes (1938) said that "We know from experience that practically all students acquire many meanings from the context with little or no help from teachers".

Scott Thornbury (2002) also argues that "Guessing from context is probably one of the most useful skills students can acquire and apply both inside and outside the classroom. It seems to be one that can be taught and implemented relatively easily. It is also one that they all already use-perhaps unconsciously-when reading and listening in our mother tongue".

It helps students guess meaning from the context a word in the text without looking up the dictionary and interrupting the reading process. However, to make the best use of the context-based word guessing strategy, students must not only master the contextual details of the reading passage, but also have a good background knowledge. To continue reading and understanding text content quickly and effectively, guessing the meaning of words in context is one of the very useful skills.

#### *Skimming*

When students want to find the main ideas of a passage without having to read the entire text, skimming reading passages is one of their best options. Skimming is a strategic, selective reading method in which you focus on the main ideas of a text. When skimming, deliberately skip text that provides details, stories, data, or other elaboration. Instead of closely reading every word, focus on the introduction, chapter summaries, first and last sentences of paragraphs, bold words, and text features.

There is one opinion that "By skimming, we mean glancing rapidly through a text to determine whether a research paper is relevant to our own work or in order to keep ourselves superficially informed about matters that are not of great importance to us" (Nuttall, 1982).

Sometimes you do not have enough time to do the test, skimming will help you make the most of your time in detail and help you get the main points. However, students majoring in English make mistakes in reading comprehension. Students often read everything without paying attention to the title or paying attention to the strategies of the exercise types to apply so that they have serious difficulty reading embrace.

#### *Scanning*

Unlike skimming, when scanning, students only find some necessary information without reading the entire content. This is a quick and effective strategy for students to read.

According to Greenwood (1981) "The reader goes through particular passage such as newspaper article merely to get the gist". Moreover, Nuttall (1982) explained "By skimming, we mean glancing rapidly through a text to determine whether a research paper is relevant to our own work or to order to keep ourselves superficially informed about matters that are not of great importance to us".

Scanning also allows students to quickly find detailed information in the reading passage and shorten the time to do the test. Scanning before reading can be very helpful for students to find the main points of a text without having to read all of the text and help students understand the main points before diving into the text.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Participants

In this study, the participants consisted of 10 English majors from Tay Do University. They were chosen randomly. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22. Besides, they all spoke Vietnamese as their first language and English as their foreign language. Most of them had been studying English from 8 years to 12 years.

#### 3.2 Instrument

Interview was used as an instrument in this study. The researcher interviewed 10 English majors at Tay Do University with 5 open-ended questions. The main purpose of the interview was to enumerate the number of students using reading strategies in reading comprehension as well as the advantages and disadvantages of using those strategies. The interviews were conducted through Google Meeting platform and each lasted about 30 minutes.

### 4. RESULTS

#### 4.1 Students' attitudes about reading and using reading strategies

In the first question, when asked "*Do you find reading comprehension difficult?*", seven out of ten students thought that reading comprehension may be difficult. Two other students thought that reading comprehension was very difficult and one female student thought that reading comprehension was easy. After receiving responses about students' attitudes towards reading comprehension, the results showed that most of the students thought that reading comprehension was difficult.

In addition, nine students said that they regularly used reading strategies to apply to their reading comprehension exercises. They thought that using strategies in reading was really helpful and effective in understanding the reading texts. Some students even said that they could use reading strategies and skills to read books and stories in English. Only one student admitted he did not use strategies when reading.

*"I often read each word and then put the sentences together"* (a male student, course 16)

#### 4.2 Students' use of the strategy of guessing meaning from the context

Most students stated that they used context-based guessing strategy to do their homework and practiced it very often. This strategy helped them guess the meaning of a word when they did not know.

*"I try to guess the meaning of the new word by reading the familiar words around it. Sometimes it works, but sometimes it doesn't"* (a female student, course 14).

*"I always use this strategy. For example, I try to guess which words are related to each other and some signs in the context that can help me find the meaning of the words. I also try to guess the situation of the context"* (a male student, course 13).

*"Many reading exercises given by my teacher include questions with this type of guessing strategy. I think this strategy is necessary for students to develop their reading skill."* (a female student, course 16).

However, one female third-year student thought that using the guessing strategy of words consumes a lot of time. She mentioned:

*"I don't use this strategy often because it takes time for me to guess the meaning of the words."* (a female student, course 14).

It was clear that most of the students applied this strategy in reading and felt that they needed to use this strategy in reading.

#### 4.3 Students' use of skimming strategy

All ten students thought that finding the main key words in the reading text was very necessary. They shared their experience as follows.

*"I try to find the main idea of the paragraph, especially when I found the reading is so long and full of strange words or anything I've never seen or heard before. In my view point, it's the best strategy to deal with a long-complicated reading."* (a male student, course 14).

*“Whenever I do a reading test I use that method because it can help me save more time.”* (a female student, course 16).

*“I always read the first sentence in the paragraph carefully to find the main ideas and read the rest of the paragraph more quickly.”* (a male student, course 14).

In general, the students’ responses showed that most of the students applied the strategy of finding the main keyword to do the reading passage and realized its value.

#### 4.4 Students’ use of scanning strategy

The results showed that fifty percent of the students used scanning strategy in reading. Half of them rarely or did not use it. However, all of them thought that this strategy was necessary in reading comprehension.

*“Generally, I use the scanning strategy when reading to find particular information, details, or specific words. I often underline the key words in the reading and I think it is helpful for increasing reading speed”* (a female student, K12)

*“Before proceeding to answer the question I usually scan through each paragraph 3-4 minutes. This makes me feel more comfortable about time. Besides, this method helps me capture important information quickly and efficiently”* (a female student, K14)

Some students were still vague about using the scanning strategy in reading the passage.

*“No, I rarely read for details. I just read for general ideas and I brain storm every idea in my mind”* (a male student, K16)

It can be seen that the scanning strategy was still used by the English-majored students, but the frequency was not very high.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the interview data showed that the English majors at Tay Do University often used reading strategies in their reading process including the strategy of guessing meaning from the context, skimming and scanning. While the strategy of guessing the meaning of words were mostly applied by the participants, the strategy of scanning was used less frequently. Through this result, the researcher would like to suggest some implications for both teachers and students at Tay Do University in using reading strategies. For teaching, teachers need to help their students focus on reading strategies and find out how important those strategies are. They can support students in applying reading strategies and help students practice using reading strategies regularly in classroom and through homework assignments. For learning, students can read books related to reading comprehension in general and reading strategies in particular. In addition, students should look for videos related to teaching using reading strategies on Youtube so that they can learn the strategies and apply these strategies to practice and do better. The most important thing is to regularly do the test and apply the right strategies, practice every day to help remember it for a long time and it will become easy to apply to reading passages.

## 6. REFERENCES

- [1]. Alderson, J. C. (2000). *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge, Cambridge University.
- [2]. Carrell, P. L. (1989). Metacognitive awareness and second language reading. *The Modern Language Journal*, 73 (2), 121–134. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1989.tb02534>.
- [3]. Grellet, F. (1981) *Developing reading skills: A practical guide to reading comprehension exercises*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.22144/ctu.jen.2017.059>.
- [4]. Nguyen, Thi Bich Thuy (2016). A modified survey of reading strategies (SORS) - A good instrument to assess students' reading strategy use. *Journal of Foreign Studies- Science Journal of Vietnam National University, Hanoi*, 32(4), 52-63. <https://js.vnu.edu.vn/FS/article/view/4050>.
- [5]. Nuttall, C (1996). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. London: Heinemann Educational Books. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/52.2.169>.
- [6]. Richards, J.C & Thomas (1982). Method: Approach, design, and procedure. *TESOL Quarterly*, 16, 153-168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1989.tb02534>.
- [7]. Thuy, N. (2018). Reading strategies used by Vietnamese Efl And Esl University Students. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 34(2). <http://doi.org/10.25073/2525-2445/vnufs.4250>.