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The Relationship between Reading Difficulties and Reading Strategies among ESL Learners in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study is done to explore the perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. It is aimed at answering the following questions; a) what do learners perceive as their reading difficulties?, b) what global strategies do learners use when reading texts in English; c) what problem-solving strategies do learners use to overcome difficulties when reading texts in English? d) what support strategies do learners use to overcome difficulties when reading texts in English?; e) is there a relationship between perception of reading difficulties and online reading strategies? Data was elicited via an online survey questionnaire from 225 ESL undergraduates in a public university who have completed an academic reading course. The instrument used is rooted from Abeleh and Al-Sobh (2021) on reading comprehension problems and also Amer et al (2010) on readers' perceived use of online reading strategies. The findings indicate a significant relationship between students' reading difficulties and reading strategies. The data strongly suggest that students feel stressed and have high levels of anxiety when it comes to reading texts in English. The data also revealed that ESL students may be active learners, making efforts to comprehend what they are reading and doing their best to apply problem-solving and support strategies to increase their comprehension. Unfortunately, they struggle to apply the appropriate support strategies to help with their understanding. Clearly, ESL learners still lack an awareness of the effective use of reading strategies to overcome their reading difficulties. The pedagogical implications would suggest an enhancement of reading strategies and a practical use of reading support strategies in ESL reading classrooms to motivate and increase comprehension levels.

Keywords: Reading Difficulties, Reading Strategies, Global Strategies, Support Strategies, ESL Learners

Introduction

Background of Study

With the rapid advancement of the World Wide Web as a source of knowledge, information and communication, reading has become a crucial and the most frequently used language skill. Abeeleh & Al-Sobh (2021) define reading as a dynamic process in which the reader actively participates in the creation of meaning, and manipulates reading strategies in order to construct meaning from a printed text or message. One of the most evident challenges educators in Malaysia face today, according to Edward et al (2021) is a lack of reading comprehension among students in higher education institutions. Reading deficiency in reading English texts or materials among ESL undergraduate students has been one of the most significant problems in Malaysia. As a result of this impairment, their academic performance may suffer.

Reading is an interactive process which requires students' active participation in the creation of meaning and in many situations, a manipulation or application of reading strategies to solve comprehension challenges. The purpose of reading is not just to get the superficial meaning of a text, but to analyze, synthesize and use metacognitive thinking to make a connection between the author's message and the already known concepts and principles (Abeeleh and Al-Sobh, 2021). Cogmen and Saracaloglu (2009) believe that using and applying appropriate reading strategies can increase students' comprehension levels and enhance academic success. Par (2020) also concurs that learners need to employ reading strategies that can effectively enhance their understanding of a text when they encounter difficulties in their reading. effectively enhance their understanding of a text when they encounter difficulties in their reading. Thus, if students have employed the appropriate reading strategies, they will be motivated to learn as there is a relationship between self-regulated learning strategies and motivational beliefs (Bai & Wang, 2023). In other words, self-regulated learning strategies used could be driven by students' motivational beliefs and help them achieve their goals. Students' motivational beliefs can influence and hence, they need to be aware of the use of different reading strategies for successful comprehension of reading texts.

Researchers have also rightly tried to differentiate between reading skills and reading strategies. Brevik (2019 cited in Aisha et al., 2020) argues that reading skill means the readers' automatic response to a text while reading strategies refer to readers' awareness of comprehension problems and selecting appropriate tools to solve them. In short, students must empower themselves with reading strategies to help them comprehend the English language in order to overcome their reading difficulties. According to Nooreiny & Rohayu (2011), Malaysian students who are proficient in English may not necessarily be good readers. In their study, it was found that there was an overlap of the types of reading strategies used for both L1 and L2 reading across proficiency levels. This has pedagogical implications on the teaching and learning of reading skills.

A study by Par (2020) revealed that EFL students are active reading strategy users. This suggests that the teachers should create a situation where the students can apply the strategies in reading; it is because the students are already independently aware of using the strategies in reading academic texts and able to apply the strategy in reading. Moreover, the study also shows a moderate correlation between the overall use of reading strategy and students' reading achievement. This means to say the more the students apply appropriate reading strategies, the better their understanding of the text. More specifically, among the three reading categories (global, problem solving, and support strategies), the problem-

solving categories are the most frequently used by the EFL students, and it is a predictive factor of increasing the students' reading achievement in the reading comprehension test (CRT). Thus, if students apply problem-solving strategies in reading academic texts, their achievement in reading comprehension will be better.

In retrospect, numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the use of reading strategies, cognitive reading strategies or metacognitive reading strategies (Aisha et al., 2020; Par, 2020; Chen & Chen, 2015) employed by the learners during reading academic texts. These include the association with the student's reading achievement or reading comprehension, reading proficiency, grade level and gender. Most of these studies discover that the students employ certain reading strategy in their reading activities to construct the meaning of the text, and their use of reading strategy has a relationship with their reading achievement and reading proficiency. For instance, In a study conducted by Ozek and Civelek (2006, cited in Par, 2020), first year and fourth year students in ELT department reveal that high-proficient learners are better in using pictures/illustrations and in skimming compared to the low-proficient readers. Meanwhile, high-proficient learners perform better than low-proficient students in guessing the meaning of a word, skipping words, not translating word for word, visualizing events, and guessing them assimilating the text. Last but not least, it is found that the more proficient subjects were better than the poor ones in summarizing the main ideas of the texts.

However, Aisha et al (2020) reported that Malaysian readers may not be applying useful strategies to help them read SL/FL texts as they construct meaning. They argue that for readers to apply the appropriate strategy, they should be aware of the type of reading difficulties or challenges that they face. It is obvious that ESL students have a range of reading difficulties when reading English texts. In their recent study, Edward, Kamsilawati, Wardatul & Pudir (2021), found that Malaysian undergraduates have a host of reading difficulties. The quantitative component of this study shows that grasping the main idea when they are reading, having poor vocabulary, lack of reading habit and interest in reading English texts and pressure with the lack of time when reading are the key challenges experienced by Malaysian ESL students. Being aware of the types of reading difficulties that they face will help learners not only to understand general information in the reading text at very fast rates but also to apply the various reading strategies to improve their reading comprehension and cognition. This was also highlighted in another earlier study by Semry & Maniam (2015) where Malaysian ESL students were found to lack awareness of the different types of strategies and as such strongly suggest that teachers play a vital role in training students on the reading strategy use in order to help them overcome reading difficulties.

The purpose of the study is to discover the relationship between students' reading difficulties and reading strategies among Malaysian ESL students. It is hoped that the findings will broaden educators' awareness of students' strategy use in overcoming reading difficulties, and it enables them to enjoy reading and gain a better understanding if they employ the proper technique.

Statement of Problem

In reading, students need to use various reading strategies which are important for students to handle their reading effectively. As seen from the literature, past studies show that the reading strategies used by learners has a correlation with their reading proficiency, reading achievement or simply put, success in reading (Abeeleh and Al-Sobh, 2021; Edward et al., 2021; Banditvilai, 2020; Par, 2020; Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002). However, most of the

studies only investigated the reading strategies employed or reading difficulties or reading problems of the learners. Very few studies have examined the relationship between the reading difficulties and reading strategies of the ESL learners. Another gap in the study is most of the past studies relate to EFL learners in the foreign context. Very few studies have been conducted on reading strategies and reading difficulties in the local context among ESL tertiary level students. Thus, the investigation of ESL students' reading difficulties and its relationship with the strategies employed is needed. If students have reading difficulties, they need to use the appropriate reading strategies to help them in understanding various texts. They need to be aware of such strategies to overcome their reading difficulties. Every student has different personalities, learning styles, proficiency level and as such the category of reading strategies used may differ. In order to overcome challenges or difficulties in reading, students need to employ the correct reading strategies to be successful in their reading. Due to the scarcity of a study on the correlation of reading difficulties and reading strategies in the local context among ESL tertiary learners, this study is deemed necessary.

Objective of the Study and Research Questions

This study is done to explore perception of learners on their use of learning strategies. Specifically, this study is done to answer the following questions:

- What do learners perceive as their reading difficulties?
- What global strategies do learners use when reading texts in English?
- What problem solving strategies do learners use to overcome difficulties when reading texts in English?
- What support strategies do learners use to overcome difficulties when reading texts in English?
- Is there a relationship between perception of reading difficulties and online reading strategies?

Literature Review

Reading Difficulties

Reading is a mental process where learners actively and interactively communicate with the reading materials (Chen & Chen, 2015) to construct meaning and devise strategies to understand the context (Par, 2020). Reading is one skill that is important and prominently used by a student. Since their source of knowledge and information is mostly published in English, reading proficiently and effectively in English is imperative for successful learning (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). However, Tobing (2013) maintains that non-English readers may encounter problems comprehending an English text. Based on past literature, reading difficulties are problems that students (excluding learners with disabilities) face when reading materials published in English. Jayanti (2016) summarizes some of the reading problems faced by ESL/EFL learners as their lack of interest, structural complexity, inadequate vocabulary, lexical inefficiency, poor reading skills, and lack of schemata (Rahman, 2007); and phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and poor working memory (Sandford, 2015), among others. Thus, Par (2020) believes that learners need to employ reading strategies that can effectively enhance their understanding of a text when they encounter difficulties in their reading.

Reading Strategies

Reading strategies is linked closely to learners' reading skills as it can cultivate effective reading skills when used overtime. Studies have shown that teaching reading strategies is a key element in developing reading comprehension. It is often said that successful readers usually apply certain reading strategies which help them to comprehend and construct meaning of a text. According to Afflerbach et al (2008) cited in Par (2020), reading strategies are defined as strategies which are deliberately used by readers to construct meanings of a text and assist them in understanding reading contexts. Dole et al (1991) also concurred that strategies are conscious or intentional approaches taken by readers to understand reading materials. These definitions imply the presence of metacognitive awareness among readers on how they approach and handle their reading activities deliberately and consciously. Numerous studies have pointed out that having an awareness of the use of reading strategies is pivotal to making learners as successful readers. There are many reading strategies which can be employed by learners such as skimming and scanning of the text, predicting the content, guessing meaning of unknown words using contextual clues, seeking help from peers or teachers and many others. Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002) has named three reading strategies which are namely the global reading strategies, problem solving strategies and support strategies. The global reading strategies refer to ways in which learners monitor their reading which involves having a preview of the reading text in terms of its length and organization, understanding the purpose of the reading activity, and paying attention to the layout of the content of the text. Meanwhile, problem-solving strategies refer to the coping strategies which the learners take when they face difficulties while reading. These are techniques or approaches used by learners when they have difficulties comprehending texts. For example, learners may choose to reread the text or read a difficult text in a slow-paced manner to increase their understanding of a text. The last strategy is the support strategy which simply means basic support mechanisms utilized by the learners to help them to understand a text. Using dictionaries, highlighting important parts of a text or taking notes are all support strategies used by learners to construct and comprehend meaning of the text. For the purpose of this study, the Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002) categories of reading strategies will used.

Past Studies on Reading Difficulties

Past study has shown that learner face difficulties with knowledge and comprehension proficiency. According to Azeroual (2013), students do face difficulties came from their knowledge. The knowledge can be from grammar and vocabulary with instruments of questionnaire and test, and 20 respondents. The finding revealed that students' difficulties are mainly in grammar and vocabulary. Similarly, according to Sardor, Oyshajon and Rushana (2020), learner also face the same difficulties. The research analyzed the main problems of teaching reading in English at the initial stage of education with instruments of three-tier response to intervention (RTI) model to the early intervention for at risk of failing readers. The finding revealed difficulties are from phonics and vocabulary. Reading comprehension is a type of reading difficulties. According to the Azeroual (2013), students do face difficulties came from their comprehension proficiency. While Sardor, Oyshajon and Rushana (2020) revealed that reading comprehension not only is the part of reading difficulties but also is the part of reading strategies.

Past Studies on the use Reading Strategies

There have been many past studies on reading strategies and how these strategies can impact comprehension of reading texts. Studies on reading strategies have been conducted to investigate the learning of English Language at both the local and foreign context. A study by Banditvilai (2020) to investigate the effectiveness of reading strategies on reading comprehension showed that these strategies are beneficial to students. In her study comprising 59 respondents of the Second Year English major students from the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science, four reading strategies were examined to determine their effectiveness for successful comprehension that is skimming, scanning, making predictions, and questioning. The instruments used were questionnaire, readings tasks and semi-structured interviews. Findings of the questionnaire and reading task scores revealed that the reading strategies taught by the instructors benefitted the students a lot. The implication of the study is students need to be guided or trained to use reading strategies to comprehend their reading materials.

There have been many studies on reading strategies in relation to reading achievement of learners. Par (2020) examined the correlation between reading strategies and reading achievement of 56 EFL university students majoring in English. The research instruments used include a questionnaire on Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) adopted from Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), and reading comprehension test (RCT). The results of the study showed that the EFL students are active strategies users as they appeared to prefer problem solving strategies over global and supporting strategies. As a matter of fact, the problem solving strategies were the predictive factors of the success of students' reading achievement. To conclude, the more problem-solving strategies are employed, the higher possibility of success in comprehending the text. Similar studies were conducted by other researchers (Huang and Nisbet, 2014; Saeedeh, 2013) that problem-solving strategies were most preferred and used by the learners. Likewise, these studies show the strong link between reading strategies and reading achievement.

Next, another study by Izyani et al (2009) investigated ESL students' online and offline reading strategies to determine if different reading strategies were utilised. The respondents were 109 ESL undergraduates from a TESL programme. The instrument used in their study was Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) by Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) and Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS) by (Anderson, 2003). The findings noted a marked difference between the online and offline reading strategies. Online reading strategies used by readers were higher level global and problem-solving strategies while offline readers utilised more support strategies. These are considered bottom-up strategies such as taking note while reading, and underlining information to help readers comprehend the text. Similarly, Zailani and Liza (2015) investigated reading strategies utilised by 102 undergraduates from two different disciplines namely, the Faculty of Languages and Communication and Faculty of Information Technology from a university in Malaysia. OSORS contains a variety of strategies that readers normally use when reading online. The study has indicated that students, regardless of their field of studies, are all frequent users of strategies. It is consistent with other studies (Anderson, 2003; Fazlin et al., 2011) which indicated that all second language learners use strategies in aiding them with reading comprehension. However, an interesting finding of the most popular group of strategies was problem solving. Fazlin et al (2011) in their study found that students used global strategies at the most and support strategies at the least. However, their study only focused on students in two different semesters rather

than across academic disciplines. However, significant difference was found for support strategies.

Conceptual Framework

This study is rooted (refer to figure 1) from the study by Abeeleh and Al-Sobh (2021) on reading comprehension problems and also the study by Amer et al (2010) on readers' perceived use of online reading strategies. Reading comprehension problems can stem for the readers' anxiety. According to Rahmat et al (2020), undergraduates have -top-down reading anxiety and this anxiety is caused by reader's background knowledge and also general reading ability. Of the readers who do not use the appropriate strategies in their reading, the anxiety may hinder understanding and may cause the readers to face difficulties. According to Abeeleh and Al-Sobh (2021), readers may face difficulties with the content of the text if they do not have background knowledge of the text. They may also face problems understanding the text because they lack the language and vocabulary skills.

Nevertheless, successful use of reading strategies can help readers make sense of the text. According to Amer et al (2010), there are three reading strategies that readers can use and the strategies are (a) global strategies, (b) problem -solving strategies, and (c) support strategies. When learners use global strategies, they read with a purpose in mind. They use their background knowledge to understand the text. Next, problem-solving strategies help readers read the text accurately and with understanding. They use information from the text and beyond the text to make sense of what they are reading. Finally, some readers resort to use other strategies to understand the text such as translating into their mother tongue/or to a language they know. Some depend on the diagrams and pictures. Some even depend on other texts to understand the text they are reading.

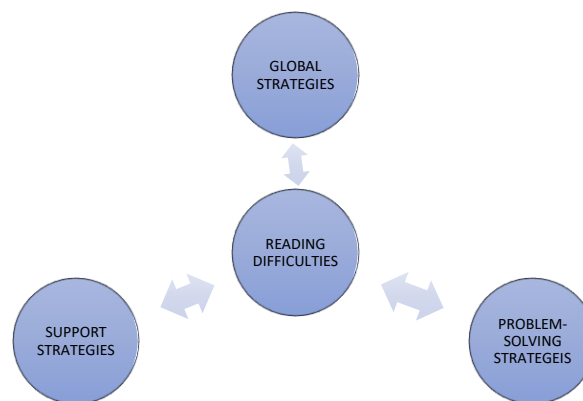


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study

Is there a relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies?

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore motivation factors for learning among undergraduates. A purposive sample of 225 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey and is rooted from Abeeleh and Al-Sobh (2021) on reading comprehension problems and also Amer, AL Barwani, & Ibrahim (2010) on readers on perceived use of online reading strategies to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 4 sections. Section A has items on demographic profile. Section B has 14 items on reading difficulties. Section C has 17 items on global strategies. Section D has 8 items on problem-solving strategies and section E has 9 items on support strategies.

Table 1

Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	STRATEGY	
B	Reading Difficulties	14
C	Global	17
D	Problem-Solving	8
E	Support	10
		49

Table 2

Reliability of Survey

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.927	49

Table 2 shows the reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .927, thus, revealing a good reliability of the instrument chosen/used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Q1 Gender

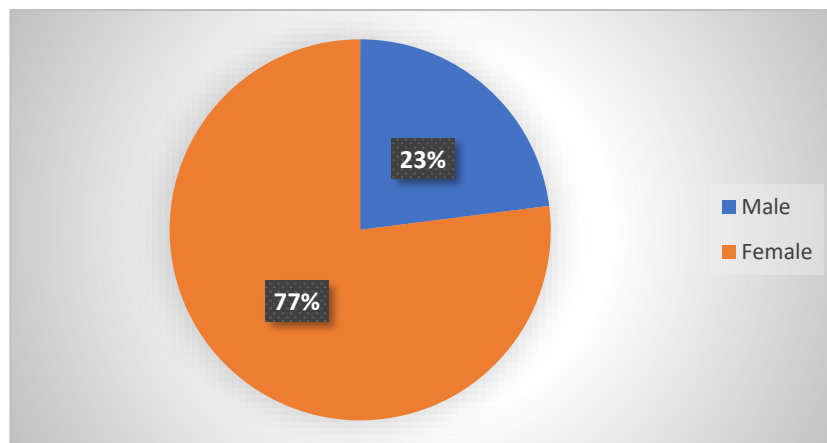


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

A total of 225 respondents participated in the online survey. Based on Figure 2, the demographic profile of the respondents shows that 23% of the respondents are male. Meanwhile, the female respondents constitute 77% of the total respondents.

Q2 Faculty

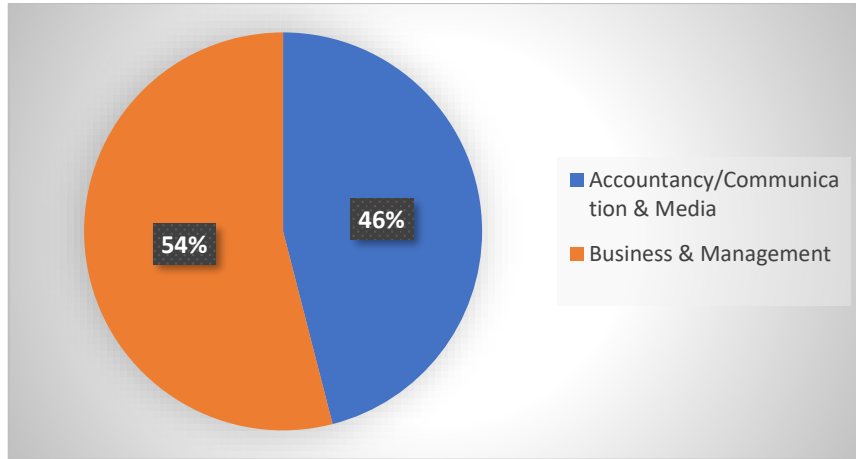


Figure 3- Percentage for Faculty

Open closer analysis of the data (see Figure 3), 46% of the respondents are from the Faculty Accountancy/Communication & Media comprise while 54% of the respondents are studying Business & Management.

Q3 Semester

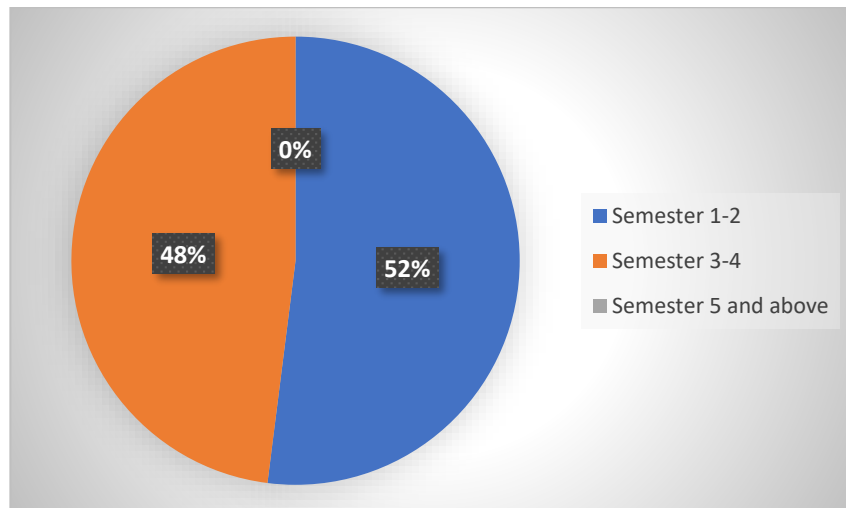


Figure 4- Percentage for Semester

The respondents come from different semester (see Figure 4). Students from Semester 1-2 make up 52% of the respondents. 48% are students from Semester 3-4 while there is no representative from Semester 5 and above.

Q4 Self-Rating of Reading in English Proficiency

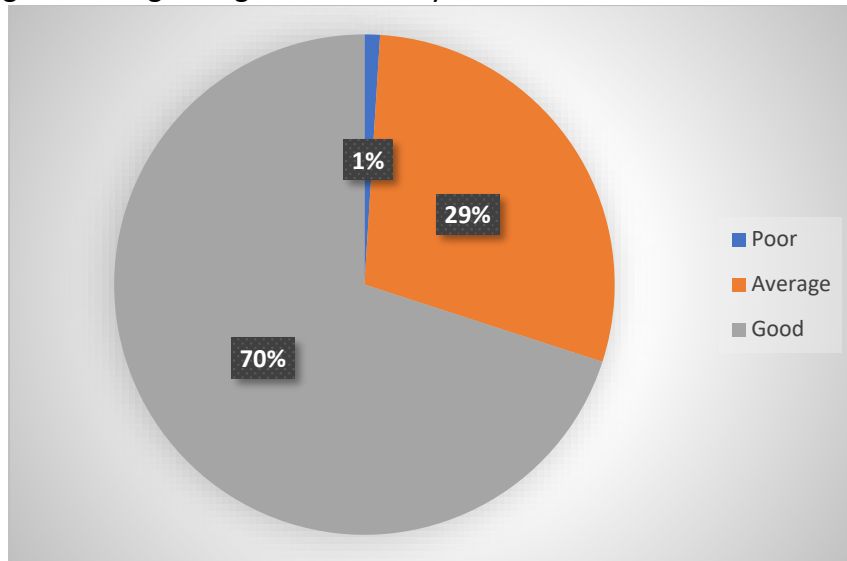


Figure 5- Percentage for English proficiency

Respondents were given three (3) choices to self-rate their reading proficiency in English (see Figure 5). Only 1% of the respondents say that their proficiency is poor. Meanwhile, 29% believe that their reading proficiency is average and 70% of the respondents claim that they have good reading proficiency.

Q5 How often do you read books?

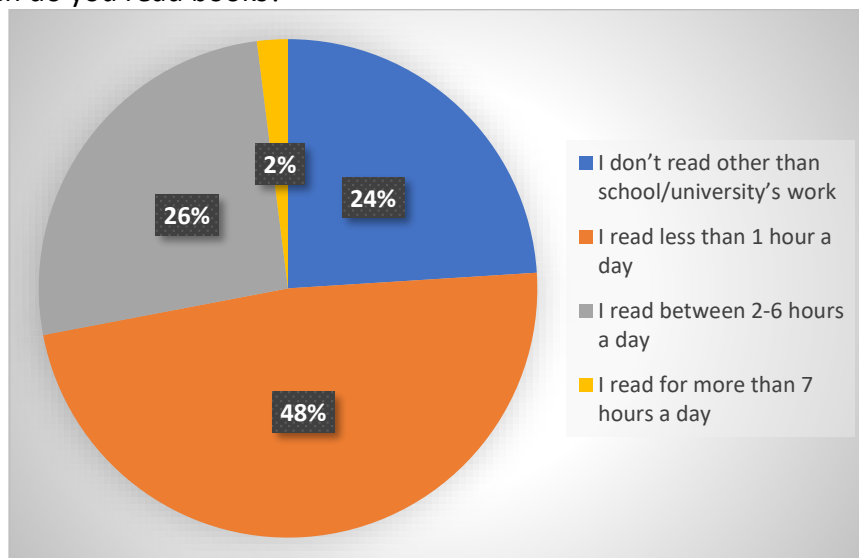


Figure 6- Percentage for Reading Frequency

For this question, respondents can choose from four (4) options (see Figure 6). 24% of them say that they only read school/university's work. Another 48% read books for less than an hour a day while 26% read between 2-6 hours a day. Only 2% of the respondents read for more than 7 hours a day.

Q6 When I read, I prefer

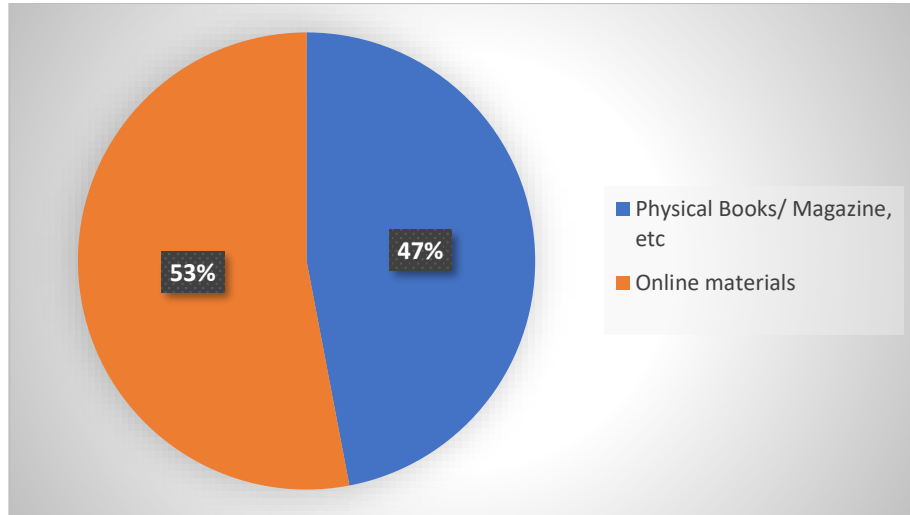


Figure 7- Percentage for Reading Preference

Respondents were also asked for their reading preference. Out of the total respondents, 47% prefer to read physical books/magazines or others while 53% of them like to read online materials (see Figure 7).

Q7 When I read,

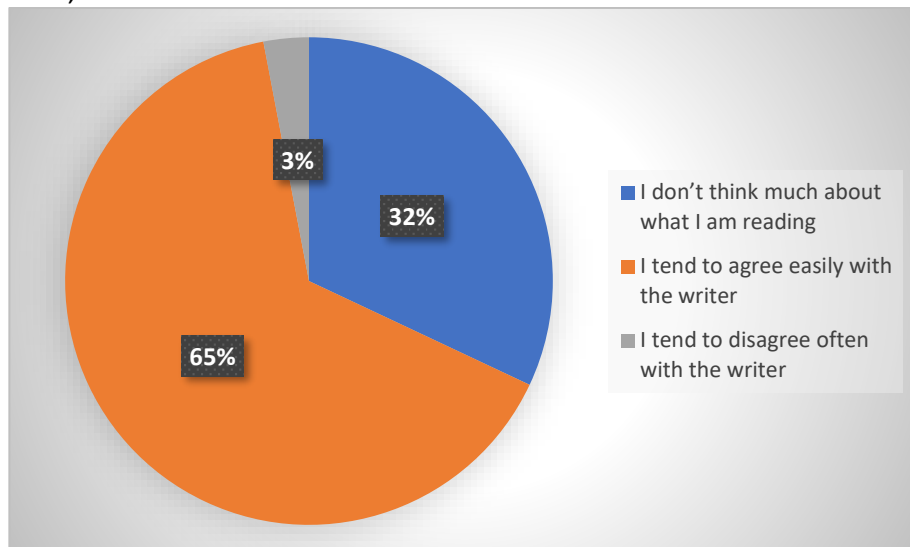


Figure 8- Percentage for When they read

Data from Figure 8 shows that 32% of the respondents do not think much about what they are reading when they read. Another 65% think that they tend to agree easily with the writer when they read. Only 3% of the respondents claim that they tend to disagree with the writer when they read.

Findings for Reading Difficulties

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive their reading difficulties?

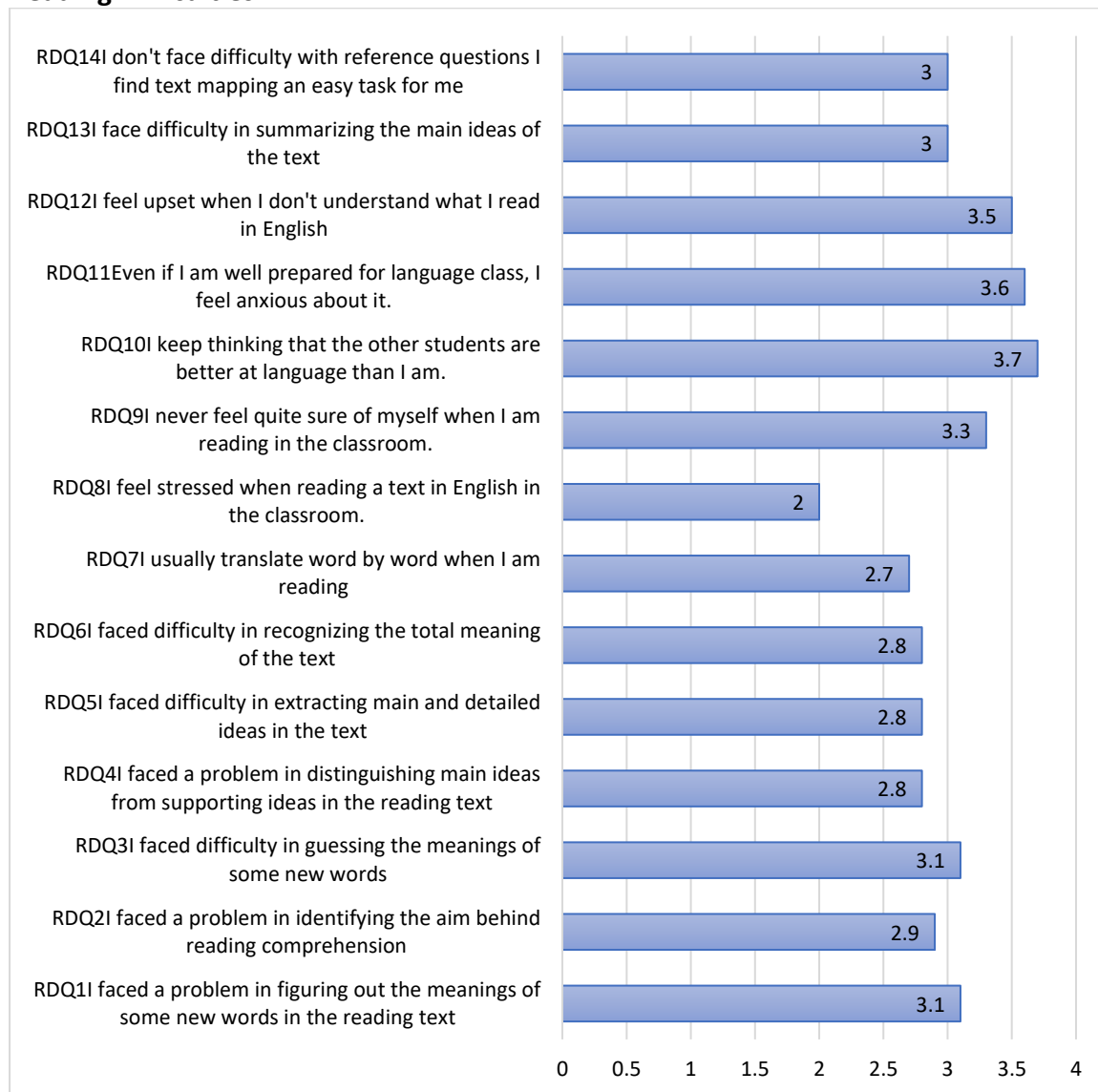
Reading Difficulties

Figure 9- Mean for Reading Difficulties

When respondents were asked on how they perceived their reading difficulties (refer to figure 9) , most respondents, with a mean score of 3.7, revealed that they kept thinking of other students being better at language than they are. The second most frequent response with a mean score of 3.6 is even if they were well prepared for language class, they felt anxious about it. This is followed closely respondents who stated that they felt upset when they did not understand what they read in English (mean score of 3.5). The least frequent response with a mean score of 2.0 is respondents were stressed when reading a text in English in the classroom.

Findings for Global Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 2-How do learners perceive the use global strategies for online reading?

Global Strategies

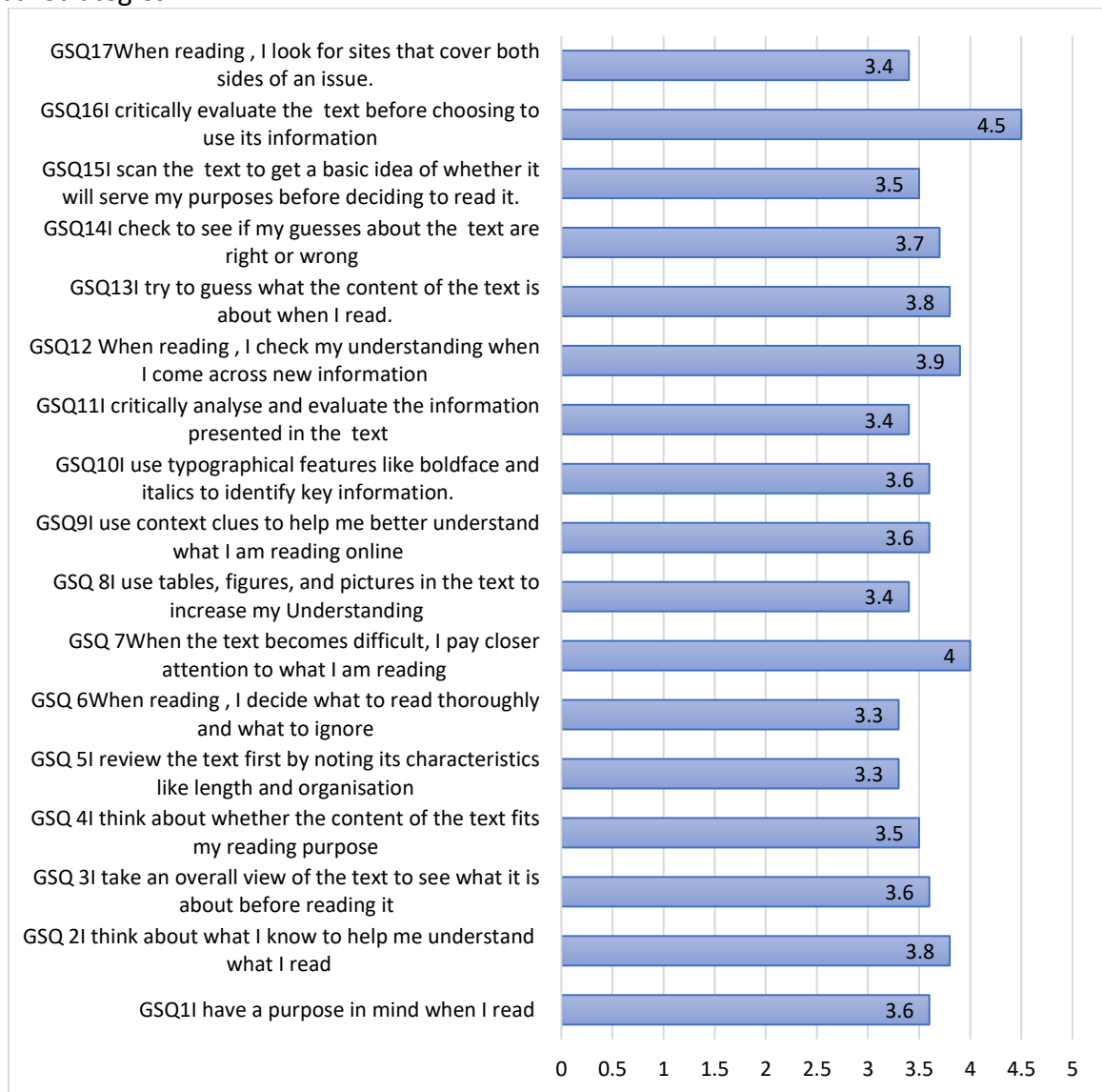


Figure 10- Mean for Global Strategies

Based on the data above, in figure 10 the global strategy that registered the highest mean score of 4.5 was SQ16I where the respondents stated they critically evaluate the text before choosing to use its information. This is followed by GSQ 7 with a mean score of 4.0 where the respondents said that when the text becomes difficult, they pay closer attention to what they are reading. Finally, the least popular of global strategy among the respondents is GSQ 5I and GSQ 6 with a mean score of 3.3 where they reviewed the text first by noting its characteristics like length and organisation and they decided what to read thoroughly and what to ignore.

Findings for Problem-Solving Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 3-What do learners perceive as their use of problem-solving strategies for online reading?

Problem--Solving Strategies

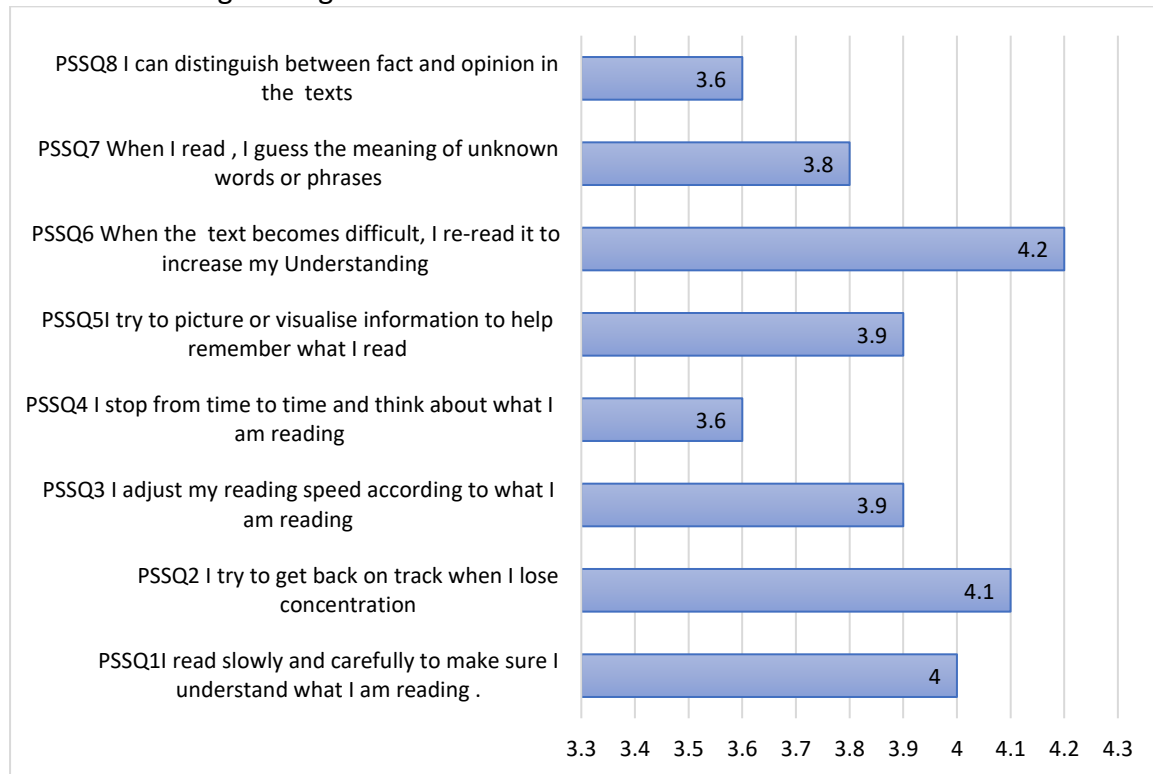


Figure 11- Mean for Problem-Solving Strategies

Based on the data in figure 11, the problem-solving strategy that registered the highest mean score was PSSQ6 where the respondents stated that when the text becomes difficult, they re-read it to increase their understanding. This is followed closely by PSSQ2 with a mean score of 4.1 whereby the respondents said they try to get back on track when they lose concentration. Finally, of all the problem--solving strategies applied, the least popular among the respondents is PSSQ4 and PSSQ8 where they stop from time to time and think about what they are reading and distinguish between fact and opinion in the texts respectively.

Findings for Support Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 4-How do learners perceive the use of support strategies for online reading?

Support Strategies

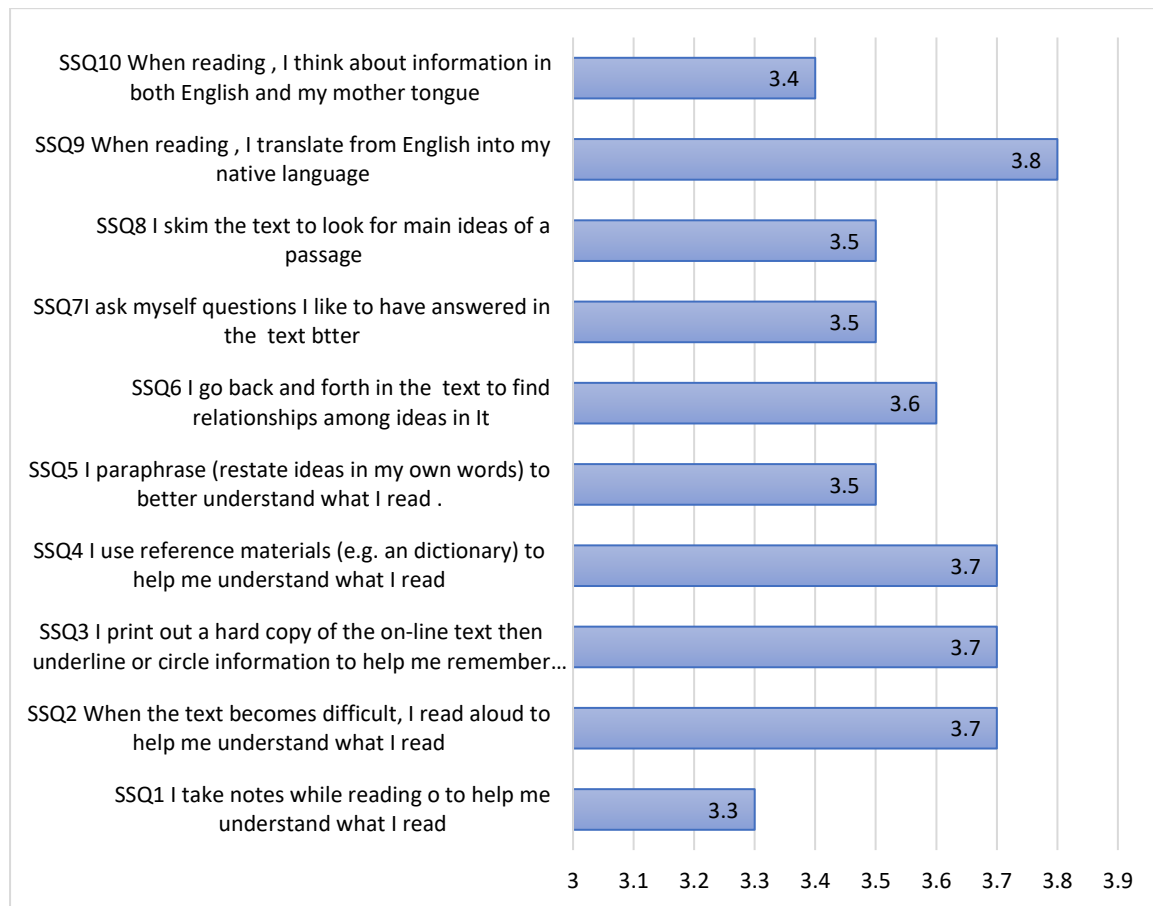


Figure 12- Mean for Support Strategies

Based on the figure 12 above, there are ten support strategies that students prefer to use for reading. The figure presents the mean scores for support strategies for reading. As shown in the figure, the highest mean value of 3.8 for support strategies was for translating from English to native language when reading texts. The higher rating indicates that this support strategy is used more frequently by the ESL learners. Three other support strategies with a mean value of 3.7 each were reading aloud when text is difficult (SSQ2), printing a hard copy of the online text and underlining the important information (SSQ3) as well as using reference materials such as a dictionary to comprehend better (SSQ4). The least preferred support strategy is taking notes while reading (SSQ1) with a mean value of 3.3

Findings for Relationship between Reading Difficulties and Online Reading Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 5-Is there a relationship between perception of reading difficulties and online reading strategies? To determine if there is a significant association in the mean scores between metacognitive, effort regulation, cognitive, social and affective strategies data is analysed using SPSS for correlations. Results are presented separately in table 7, 8, and 9 below.

Table 3
 Correlation between Reading Difficulties and Reading Strategies

		TOTALDIFF	TOTALALLstrategies
TOTALDIFF	Pearson Correlation	1	.058
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.385
	N	225	225
TOTALALLstrategies	Pearson Correlation	.058	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.385	
	N	225	225

Table 3 shows there is an association between reading difficulties and reading strategies. Correlation analysis shows that there is no relationship between reading difficulties and the use of reading strategies.

Table 4
 Correlation between Global reading strategies and Problem -solving reading strategies

		TOTAglobal	TOTAprob
TOTAglobal	Pearson Correlation	1	.615**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	225	225
TOTAprob	Pearson Correlation	.615**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	225	225

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows there is an association between global reading strategies and problem-solving reading strategies. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between global reading strategies and problem-solving reading strategies. ($r=.615^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship between global reading strategies and problem-solving reading strategies.

Table 5
 Correlation between Global Reading Strategies and Support Reading Strategies

Correlations

		TOTAglobal	TOTALsupport
TOTAglobal	Pearson Correlation	1	.639**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	225	225
TOTALsupport	Pearson Correlation	.639**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	225	225

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows there is an association between global reading strategies and support reading strategies. Correlation analysis shows that there is a high significant association between global reading strategies and support reading strategies. ($r=.639^{**}$) and ($p=.000$). According to Jackson (2015), coefficient is significant at the .05 level and positive correlation is measured on a 0.1 to 1.0 scale. Weak positive correlation would be in the range of 0.1 to 0.3, moderate positive correlation from 0.3 to 0.5, and strong positive correlation from 0.5 to 1.0. This means that there is also a strong positive relationship global reading strategies and support reading strategies.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussions

Overall, the data analysis reveals that there is a relationship between students' perception of their reading difficulties and reading strategies. The discussion that follows will summarise the findings and results based on the research questions.

What do learners perceive as their reading difficulties?

Interestingly, although 70% of the respondents perceived their English proficiency as "good", majority of these ESL learners stated they face reading difficulties when reading texts in English. In fact, the data noted that students feel anxious and lack self-confidence when reading. They also feel upset and unhappy when they struggle with their reading texts. This in line with Edward, Kamsilawati, Wardatul & Pudir (2021)'s findings where ESL Malaysian undergraduates have a wide range of reading difficulties. As such, when learners are struggling during a reading activity, it can cause mental blocks and anxiety since reading according to Chen & Chen (2015) is a mental process where learners actively and interactively communicate with the reading materials while Par (2020) concurs that reading difficulties are key challenges that learners must overcome in order to improve their reading comprehension and cognition.

What global strategies do learners use when reading tests in English?

The use of global methods by students to keep track of their reading includes having a purpose in mind, previewing the text, determining whether the text's content meets that purpose,

noting text qualities like length and organisation, and forecasting or speculating on the text's meaning. In accordance to Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) study, the data reveal that ESL learners are also active reading strategies users. Despite facing reading difficulties in comprehending texts in English, majority of the respondents stated that they consciously make efforts to read purposefully, paying great attention to avoid losing concentration. This means to say, these ESL learners are applying global reading strategies to a certain extent in order to make sense of what they are reading. Contrary to Jayanti's (2016) assumption that when faced with reading difficulties, learners are bound to lose interest in what they are reading. Instead, in this study the data shows that ESL learners have a positive attitude towards reading. This implies that ESL learners have the capacity and the potential to improve their reading skills if they have to learn and apply the various reading strategies.

What problem-solving strategies do learners use to overcome difficulties when reading texts in English?

In support of the data on global strategies, the findings reveal that these learners do apply problem-solving strategies to enhance their comprehension. For instance, majority of the respondents mentioned they adjust their reading speed and if the text is really difficult, they would re-read the texts to increase their understanding. They even try guess the meanings of unfamiliar words to overcome their reading difficulties. This shows that ESL learners are active readers with a strong sense of awareness of using problem-solving strategies. Chen & Chen (2015) also support these findings in her study where EFL high school students have a high level of awareness of reading technique use. Students had a preference for global reading strategies, followed by problem-solving and support strategies. However, in the present study, data from support strategies reveal students' weaknesses in apply these strategies as discussed in the next section.

What support strategies do learners use to overcome difficulties when reading texts in English?

Despite being active readers with a strong sense of awareness of global and problem-solving reading strategies, the data show that students show a lack of awareness on the types of effective strategies to apply. Past studies Edward et al (2021); Abeeleh and Al-Sobh (2021); Banditvilai (2020); Par (2020); Mokhtari & Sheorey (2002) show that ESL learners still face key challenges in overcoming their reading difficulties irrespective of whether they are proficient or less proficient in English. They concur that the problem may lie in the learners' lack of awareness in using the support strategies effectively. Data from Support Strategies reveal that students were still relying on the use of translation from English to their native language, printing out online texts, reading out loud and referring to the dictionary. The least preferred support strategy was making notes or going back and forth to reflect and connect ideas in the text. This suggest that students are still applying reading strategies at the surface level. This was also highlighted in Semry & Maniam's (2015) study where Malaysian ESL students were not applying reading strategies to read critically and as such strongly suggest that teachers play a vital role in training students on the various types of reading strategies in order to use them to analyse and read a text critically to increase their comprehension. This means to say if students apply problem-solving strategies and effective support strategies in reading academic texts, their achievement in reading comprehension will be better.

Is there a relationship between perception of reading difficulties and reading strategies?

Results from the findings suggest there is a significant relationship between students' perceived reading difficulties and reading strategies. As postulated by Par (2020) students who are active readers can be taught to use and apply various reading strategies to enhance their understanding. Aisha et al (2020) reported that Malaysian readers may not be applying useful strategies to help them read SL/FL texts and construct meaning. This indicates that the reading strategies used by learners have a correlation with their reading proficiency, reading achievement or simply put, success in reading (Abeeleh and Al-Sobh, 2021; Edward et al., 2021; Banditvilai, 2020; Par, 2020; Mokhtari et al., 2002). Par (2020) believes that learners need to use reading strategies that can effectively enhance their understanding of a text when they encounter difficulties in their reading.

Overall, this study contributes to the body of knowledge on self-regulated reading strategies. It shows that there is a relationship between reading difficulties and reading strategies for ESL learners in the local context. Hence, it can give guidance and information for instructors to enhance their classroom strategies in the teaching and learning of this important skill and adapt their lesson plans accordingly.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

The study's findings can assist ESL instructors to understand how their students are currently using reading strategies and what they can do to support their students in developing their reading skills. The findings of this study may be used by instructors to choose the best reading techniques to include in their reading classes. However, to ensure success in English reading comprehension, students need to know which strategies to use and how to use them effectively.

The findings of this study cannot be generalised to the entire population of ESL learners as the subjects comprise of a homogeneous group of learners in a local university. Thus, suggestions for future research would include widening the population sample to include various ethnic groups. Future researchers could also investigate if there is any difference between high and low proficiency ESL learners when using reading strategies to overcome their reading difficulties.

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