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Abstract
Reading is the key component for academic success for ESL students because they are required to read various materials in English. However, reading difficulties may become an obstacle for them to gain knowledge from online sources especially for ESL readers. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate reading difficulties of low proficiency ESL students in reading online academic texts and how they solve the problems as teachers should be aware of reading difficulties the students encounter during online reading so that they can address the problems accordingly. A quantitative research design is used to collect data from a group of 122 respondents from two public universities in Malaysia using 5 Likert-scale questionnaire consists of 16 items. The results showed that the students have difficulties with the sounds of the individual words (M=3.68), getting the overall meaning of the text (M=3.62) and recognizing the words (M=6.61). The students used several strategies to overcome reading difficulties when reading online academic texts, for example by using online dictionaries and re-reading the texts. Some recommendations towards minimizing reading difficulties among ESL students in reading online academic texts will also be presented.
Keyword: Online Reading, ESL Students, Academic Text, Reading Difficulties, University Students

Introduction
The rapid progress in information and computing technology has influenced the forms of paper-based print as many printed documents now appear in electronic format of digital libraries. Besides, students and teachers nowadays turn to the Internet for classroom assignments, teaching and learning purposes, and information acquisition. Due to this, the teachers may falsely assume that since the students know how to use and navigate on the Internet such as knowing how to point, click, and type, then they are also able to comprehend and analyse the information

(Kymes, 2007). This is probably the most common misconception among students and teachers. However, to be able to comprehend and analyse information, reading research and reading theories indicate that students must be able to strategically process information they read from the Internet and with the increasing use of the internet, online reading has become a major source of input for English as Second Language (ESL) readers because it provides them with authentic language input (Aly Amer, Thuwayba & Mahmoud, 2010). According to Levine and Reves (2000), the ability to read academic texts is considered one of the most important skills that university students of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) need to acquire.

This research is useful to ESL educators because in order to help students with their reading comprehension when reading online texts, educators need to first identify difficulties encountered by the students and try to find solution to help them to overcome those problems. So the student will be able to read online texts effectively and with comprehension. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate any problems encountered by the students in reading academic texts online as teachers should be aware of the many types of difficulties their students encounter during online reading so that they can eventually address the problems accordingly.

The Importance of ESL Reading
Reading is a process that involves more than just seeing letters or words on a page; it also involves the comprehension of meaning. The process of how we read may be thought to be cyclical in which readers usually use their schema to predict and interpret meanings of text. Reading purposely involves the use of meaning making strategies, where the reader interacts with the text to elaborate, recall, and evaluate the information (Kymes, 2007).

Leu et al. described reading as "a meaning-construction process that enables us to create carefully reasoned as well as imaginary worlds filled with new concepts, creatures, and characters" (2004: 1570). As for reading comprehension, it is interpreted as a process of constructing meaning from the written language and involves the reader, the text and the context (Iwai, 2011). Reading comprehension is essential for learning across subjects, as students are required to construct meaning in texts for better academic performance (Koda & Zehler, 2008). Learners have difficulty achieving success academically without comprehending much of what is written in the reading materials as academic texts differ from other kinds of writing such as personal, journalistic or business writing. Its differences can be explained by its special audience, tone and purpose (Oshima & Hogue, 1991) and also a common purpose of an academic text is to present an author's ideas or arguments about a particular issue.

The importance of English as a Second Language (ESL) reading in the Malaysian context is related to the Malaysian government policy to uphold Bahasa Melayu as the native language and English are no longer used as medium of instruction in Malaysia schools. The governments' efforts to inculcate reading habits among students at the school level also do not lead to students with better literacy skills at tertiary level. As a result, the students will be unable to read and understand well all the reading materials in English and this will affect their academic performance since majority of the textbooks used for most academic disciplines are written in

English (Harison, 2010). Hence, it is important to master ESL reading in order to digest information in knowledge sources written in English and to produce lifelong readers who master outstanding literacy skills in English. Besides, the learners' inability to read materials in English may hinder the academic and professional development of those whose require accessing and obtaining information in the target language.

First Language (L1) reading versus Second Language (L2) reading
When reading in English, L2 readers experience more challenges than the L1 readers. According to Carrell and Grabe (2002), L2 readers use different reading processes than L1 readers because L2 readers is limited in their linguistic knowledge and they do not have cultural and social knowledge that is common in the English context. Besides, they do not necessarily retain prior knowledge, which is the basis of understanding English materials. L2 readers are also English learners that study English for a variety of reasons, including residing in English speaking countries and pursuing degrees in these countries and they use both L1 and L2 in various contexts. Chumpavan (2000) in his study with Thai students also found the students have difficulties with unfamiliar words in sentences and paragraphs, and grammatical structure problems when reading English materials.

Carrell and Grabe (2002) raised the issue about the process involved in L2 reading as it is does not require the same process as L1 reading. They claimed that L2 readers, especially those who are not advanced and in their introductory stage, translate the unfamiliar words into their first language while reading in English. It happened because they feel that if they are unable to get the meaning of an unfamiliar word, they will not understand what the text is about. Because of that, they will stop at a point when they encounter unknown vocabulary and look up the word in a dictionary to confirm its meaning before continue reading. However, by the time they translate all unfamiliar words into their first language, they may not retain information from the text because they fail to understand the contexts of words that they have translated earlier.

Grabe and Stoller (2002) also pointed out three major types of differences that exist between L1 and L2 reading contexts and readers. Three major types of differences are linguistic and processing differences, individual and experiential differences, and socio-cultural and institutional differences. The linguistic and processing differences between L1 and L2 readers highlighted issues on differing amounts of lexical, grammatical and discourse knowledge at initial stages of L1 and L2 reading, greater metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness in L2 settings, and varying linguistic differences across any two languages. Meanwhile, the individual and experiential discussed the differences of L1 and L2 readers from the aspects of the students' proficiency levels in L1 literacy skills, their prior L2 reading experiences, their differing personal experiences with and motivations for L1 and L2 reading, their attitudes toward authentic texts and their training in the use of various supporting resources. As for the socio-cultural and institutional differences, each culture and society have their own beliefs and interpretations of literacy. Some social groups see texts as unchanging while others consider texts as serving utilitarian purposes but not to be highly valued, besides there are other people view texts as sources of truth to be studied and yet others value texts as alternative interpretations of realities and facts that can be disputed.

Furthermore, among the main issues of second language reading is the limited vocabulary possessed by L2 readers as it is was considered very crucial for the readers' comprehension. According to Hudson (2007), having rich vocabulary knowledge is another key element to improve reading comprehension and L2 readers need to develop their English vocabulary capacity in depth and width. Certain words in the English language can have more than one meaning and this will make L2 readers misinterpret the meaning because they do not consider the meaning of the word in the contexts. Therefore, this study is intended to fill the gap by reporting on difficulties encountered by less proficient L2 readers when reading academic texts online and how they overcome those problems.

Methodology
The participants involved in this study were selected using the multistage clustering sampling method. First, the researcher selected two research universities in Peninsular Malaysia, and then the researcher selected faculties or centers (second-level cluster) at these two universities followed by selection of classrooms (third-level cluster) and finally selection of students. The 122 students who were involved in this study are from the Social Science program and this group of ESL students is selected because they are required to write a thesis as their final project where they need to be actively engaged in research activity and thus require much reading of the literature on the Internet.

This research used the respondents' Malaysian University English Language Test (MUET) results as an indicator of their level of English proficiency. In Arshad et al.'s (2008) and Rethinasamy and Chuah's (2011), it was found that the MUET is a valid predictor of undergraduates' performance in language courses. This test was taken by the students prior to admission to any Malaysian public university and college. The scores attained in the MUET are represented by the bands 1 to 6. In this study, the students with Band 1 and Band 2 were categorized as students with a low level of proficiency in English

The instrument used for data collection is an instrument of Survey on Online Reading Strategies by Anderson (2003). The questionnaire used was validated by two content experts and the Cronbach Alpha reliability test obtained was 0.912, which is above the 0.75 benchmark (Perry et al. 2007) and thus is reliable for further analysis. The five-point Likert scale questionnaire consists of 8 items related to aspects of reading which make the reading difficult and another 8 items related to repair strategies a reader uses when comprehension fails or strategies that a reader use when dealing with difficulty in reading academic text on the Internet. The quantitative scores from Online Survey of Reading Strategies (OSORS) questionnaire was analysed by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Findings
Demographic details of the Respondents

The respondents comprised 37 (30.3%) male and 85 (69.7%) female final year bachelor's degree students majoring in social science programs from two research universities in Peninsular Malaysia. The students' ages ranged between 22 to 26 years old. A total of 56 students are 23 years old (45.9%), 46 students are 22 years old (37.7%), 11 students are 24 years old (9.0%), 5 students are 25 years old (4.1%) and 4 students are 26 years old (3.3%). Majority of the respondents are in Band 2 with a total of 111 students (91.1%) and 11 students are in Band 1 (9.0%). For this study, based on their MUET scores, the students with Band 1 and Band 2 for MUET were categorized as students with low level of proficiency in English.

TABLE 1: Reading materials frequently read on the Internet

Reading Materials	Frequency (N) = 122	Percentage (100%)
Academic Materials - Class materials, Journals, E-mails	45	36.9
Leisure - Blogs, Movies Review, Online Comic/Manga	43	35.2%
General Knowledge - Local News, Sports, Travel, World News	34	27.9%

Table 1 above illustrates the types of reading materials that respondents read the most on the Internet. Forty five respondents (45, 36.9%) claimed that they read academic materials such as class materials, journal and emails the most on the Internet. Another 43 respondents (35.2%) claimed they read leisure reading materials the most on the internet which include blogs, movies review and online comic or manga and 34 respondents (27.9%) claimed that they read general knowledge reading materials the most on the internet such as reading materials on local news, sports, travel, and world news.

TABLE 2: Percentage of online materials read in English

Percent	Frequency (N) = 122	Percentage (100%)
100 percent	2	1.6
75 percent	38	31.1
50 percent	50	41.0
less than 25 percent	32	26.2

As shown in Table 2, the results show that 50 respondents (41.0%) read 50 percent of their online reading materials in English, another 38 respondents (31.1%) read 75 percent of their online reading materials in English, 32 respondents (26.2%) read less than 25 percent of their online reading materials in English and only 2 respondents (1.6%) read 100 percent of their online reading materials in English. From Table 2, it can be concluded that the students read English reading materials on the Internet in order to complete their academic tasks.

The next section discusses two aspects related to the students' reading difficulties on the Internet. The aspects are about 1) factors which may make reading in English on the Internet are

difficult for them, 2) strategies used by the students to deal with difficulty when reading academic texts on the Internet as to provide a measure of their awareness of repair strategies.

Reading Difficulties among ESL students in reading online academic texts

TABLE 3: Reading difficulty on the Internet as perceived by the students

Item	Reading Difficulty	Low Proficient (N=122)	
		M	sd
1	The sounds of the individual words.	3.68	0.85
2	Pronunciation of the words.	3.50	0.84
3	Recognizing the words.	3.61	0.78
4	Grammatical structures.	3.59	0.82
5	Relating the text to prior knowledge	3.59	0.73
6	Getting the overall meaning of the text.	3.62	0.86
7	Organization of the text.	3.52	0.77
8	Scientific terms.	3.60	0.79

Table 4 shows reading difficulties on the Internet as perceived by the low proficient students. For the low proficient student, the item with the highest mean is item, 'The sounds of the individual words' (M=3.68), followed by the item 'Getting the overall meaning of the text' (M=3.62) and the item, 'Recognizing the words' (M=3.61).

Strategies used by the students in dealing with difficulties when reading online academic texts

TABLE 5: Strategies used by the students in dealing with difficulties when reading online academic texts

Item	Solving Difficulty Strategies	Low Proficient (N=122)	
		M	sd
1	Keep on reading and hope for clarification further on.	3.77	0.74
2	Reread the problematic part.	3.81	0.80
3	Go back to a point before the problematic part and reread from there.	3.72	0.65
4	Look up unknown words in an online dictionary.	3.84	0.83
5	Find another text	3.72	0.73
6	Guess the meaning of unfamiliar words	3.44	0.81
7	Use prior knowledge to understand the text	3.42	0.84
8	Give up and stop reading.	3.38	0.98

As for the strategies used to deal with difficulty when reading academic texts on the Internet, the low proficient students have reported using the these strategies regularly as the item with the highest score is item, 'Look up unknown words in a dictionary' (M= 3.84). The least strategy used to deal with difficulty when reading on the Internet by the low proficient students is item, 'Give up and stop reading' (M= 3.38). This proved that although the students may not understand the contents of reading materials on the Internet, they will find ways to overcome this problem and will not stop reading it.

Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions
Discussion of the Findings

As for reading online, the teacher needs to consider the students' ability to surf and retrieve information from the Internet since students nowadays are exposed to the use of the Internet in their learning process. The students need to equip themselves with the new literacy to prepare them for a future in an increasingly digital society. Besides, reading on the Internet is also more active than reading printed texts. Hypertext provides an interactive environment where the reader participated with the text by providing links to other pages.

Compared to many textbook articles, a website is often not read in entirety or accessed again. The differences between reading printed texts and online reading materials are numerous and distinct. Printed texts are often linear, and mostly read from left to right, while online reading materials are often non-linear or multi-linear. The reading path in a printed text also is often fixed and predictable, compared to online reading materials which is random and unpredictable (Kymes, 2007).

The researchers found that the poor readers tend to avoid taking risks in reading whenever they find difficulties in comprehending. Throughout the reading process, they will tend to slow down their reading, resort to other reference materials such as dictionaries, circle information, note taking and reading aloud instead of continuing reading and making guesses in the process.

In the area of online reading, the students' vocabulary knowledge in English is strongly related to their reading comprehension. In this study, the researchers found that due to the number and complexity of the unfamiliar words in English that students were confronted with, the low English proficiency students regarded vocabulary as their greatest concern when they read in English on the Internet. The students facing difficulty with online reading comprehension was largely attributed to their narrow English vocabulary repertoire. The findings in this study correspond with those from Chumpavan (2000) who agreed when reading English texts, a great deal of unfamiliar words and complex grammatical structures usually prevent readers from fully comprehending the information.

Overall, as evidence presented in this study, some students struggled with difficulties when reading academic texts on the Internet. However, they can employ different reading approaches and strategies to solve their difficulties when they read academic texts in English on the Internet in order to understand the text as much as possible and if they want to become an

effective online reader, they need to possess the ability to not only navigate sites to locate necessary information but they must be able to comprehend it.

Recommendations and Conclusions

In order to help students to become a good reader, teachers can provide explicit instruction in introducing effective reading strategies to the students by emphasizing how to use these strategies, when to use them, and why they are beneficial. Teachers can help their students by assisting them in developing their abilities to monitor and regulate their thinking because some of the students have problems identifying what reading strategies to use in particular situations to overcome problems when reading on the Internet.

Moreover, it is highly recommended that teachers and instructors of ESL understand the significant role of metacognition in reading and the challenges the students face in reading English materials on the Internet. The teachers should teach various reading approaches to the learners. Such strategies include the Planning Strategy (e.g., using background knowledge, predicting, determining what to read carefully and what to ignore and reviewing), Monitoring Strategy (e.g., re-reading, skimming and using contextual clue), Problem Solving Strategies (e.g., using online dictionary and translating), and Evaluating Strategies (e.g., summarizing and read additional reading materials). It is also important to teach the students how particular strategies are applied and the contexts in which they are needed.

Besides, since this study has presented the findings on what types of reading difficulty they encountered when reading academic texts in English on the Internet, future study may focus on relationship between L1 and L2 in the students' use of repair strategies when reading academic texts on the Internet. This may disclose the strategies the students will employ in their online reading in both languages and the types of assistance the students need in order to transfer their existing L1 reading strategies into L2 reading context.

In conclusion, the mastering of reading skill in the context of technology, specifically related to computers and the Internet access requires the teachers and the students to reflect on what it means to be literate in this context. Teachers need to think beyond simply bringing technology into their classrooms but also how they can utilise it to help students to become better readers. Moreover, teachers need to introduce effective online reading strategies to the students and how they might integrate online reading into the existing structure of reading instruction in order to help students to be able to comprehend information they have gathered from the Internet.

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