

READING STRATEGIES USED BY ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS AT THU DAU MOT UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

In the accelerating pace of globalization and internationalization of trade, professionals from a wide range of organizations believed that English as an international language, which is a way of thinking, researching and practicing, was used in almost all areas of life, study, and work. That's why the study's foremost objectives were to comprehend reading learning strategies used by English-majored students at Thu Dau Mot University. A quantitative method was used to conduct the research with a questionnaire divided into four parts. The subjects of this study are 100 English majors from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Thu Dau Mot University. According to the results, the majority of students agree with the difficulties faced when learning English reading. Likewise, students also subscribe that they also use some reading learning strategies such as extensive reading strategy, the phonics strategy, the whole language strategy, reading comprehension strategy and vocabulary building strategy. Moreover, some solutions, such as the function of the word in the sentence, the main gist, guessing the unfamiliar word and reading aloud are recommended to them to read more effectively and improve their reading ability. Ultimately, some recommendations are made in the hope of helping both teachers and students.

Keywords: challenge, English reading, reading strategy, Thu Dau Mot University

1. Introduction

1.1 background to the study

If English serves as a means of worldwide communication to satisfy the requirements of modern civilization, reading will fulfill the necessary role of second language acquisition, which is central in the context of "sociocultural constructed literacy practices" (Purcell-Gates, Duke & Stouffer, 2016, p. 1218). Mikulecky (2008) stated that effective reading is not only a major contributor to success in acquiring a second language, but reading is also the foundation of imparting knowledge in other language skills: "writing, revising, developing vocabulary, acquiring grammar" (p. 1). In the mid-to-late 1960s, Grabe (1991) emphasized that "reading was seen as little more than a reinforcement for oral language instruction" (p.3), which is attributed to the fact that motivation from reading is a vital determinant of being a master in reading skills. In addition to this, it is the unseparated relationship between reading and literacy due to the fact that "language and culture cannot be separated" (Mikulecky, 2008).

The number of people learning English has been going up quickly throughout Vietnam. In Vietnam, English has grown in importance as a means for international integration. Due to its significance, the primary concern of all English teachers today is how to inspire students to study the language or

acquire the skills to study it efficiently. At Thu Dau Mot University (TDMU), the English Language Program for English majors currently includes four reading courses which are frequently connected. The courses, called Essential Reading, are designed to help students improve and fulfill their ability to comprehend text. The curriculum materials Q-Skills Reading and Writing 2 through 5 correspond to these courses. Through Academic Reading, Critical Reading, and IELTS Strategies, the courses allow learners to become more proficient in English. These courses are designed to help students keep up with the present state of affairs. Essential Reading and Writing is the name of the first course, which corresponds to the course book Q-Skills Reading and Writing Skills 2. The second course aims to enhance students' vocabulary, teach them how to read, and further develop their reading skills. Students' reading proficiency in a greater variety of academic subjects is improved in the third course. The fourth course improves pupils' ability to read critically. Students are encouraged to employ their ability to problem-solve to reading tasks in the course. The four reading lessons are generally intended to develop and enhance students' knowledge of what they read so as to get them ready for advanced language acquisition.

A major factor that makes English reading difficult is deciphering and decoding unknown words. Torgesen (2002) demonstrated that decoding skills play an integral and supportive role in the reading process and accumulating detailed memories for word recognition. Another factor is the challenge of choosing the appropriate sort of reading material. Abraham (2002) stated that picking up appropriate and interesting material for readers is a vital determinant of their engagement in reading lessons. Janzen and Stoller (1998) researched that a wide range of aspects influence a choice of a text, including the students' proficiency level, interests, text access, prior experience, and academic foremost. Torgesen (2002) also argued that the bulk of ESL learners who are having difficulty learning to read encounter a host of words in grade-level text.

There are a couple of reasons why I decided to focus on the reading learning strategies of Thu Dau Mot University students. Firstly, reading strategies refer to any activity with the goal of "a richer understanding of text meaning and performance on tests of comprehension" (Janzen & Stoller, 1998, p. 251). Secondly, Alexander, Graham, and Harris (1998) also stated that an expert reader should cultivate many skills like "decoding, word recognition, knowledge of vocabulary and grammar" (p. 251), which could result in the learner "enhancing reading comprehension and overcoming comprehension failures" (Singhal, 2001, p. 1). Thirdly, in order to become a good reader, using a wide variety of strategies flexibly cannot be discounted altogether. Because a large influx of strategies can be used to "comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts" (Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008, p. 365). More specifically, they said "what the actions are, how they are learned, or how they can be taught" (p. 366).

1.2. Research questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the reality of challenges English-major students confront in learning English reading?
2. What are reading learning strategies English-majored students use at Thu Dau Mot University?
3. What solutions for learning English reading effectively should English-majored students apply?

2. Literature review

2.1. The importance of reading in EFL learning

Reading is a basic life skill (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985). Reading plays an importance role in "interaction between language and thought" (Goodman, 1988, p.12). The researcher further point out the correlation between reading and other language skills. Developing the bank of vocabulary plays an essential part of reading process (Farrell, 2001) and reading fluently (Frankel, Becker, Rowe and Pearson, 2016). It cannot be discounted the importance of the relationship between reading and literacy. Mikulecky (2008) stated that readers from 2 different backgrounds of culture can come up with different structures of what the content implies in similar text.

2.2. Main challenges of learning english reading skills

According to Lyon (1998), most reading issues stem from challenges with decoding and word recognition. It is assumed to arise from three particular hallmarks of such difficulties: a complicated approach to decoding novel or unfamiliar words, a lack of alphabetic knowledge, and a weakness in phoneme awareness at the decoding level. Lyon (1998) found that the individual letters must be linked to equally abstract sounds, called phonemes, blended together, and pronounced in an English alphabetic system. Torgesen (2002) additionally identified that students tend to predict and recognize the word based on the context or meaning of paragraph. It is not only the lack of alphabetic knowledge and fluency but the deficiency of phoneme awareness leads decoding skills to be extremely slow and weak and will be difficult at the decoding level (Miller & Clark, 2011).

The second challenge of learning to read is manifested by choosing the appropriate sort of reading material. Janzen and Stoller (1998) discovered that a wide range of aspects influence a choice of text, including the students' proficiency level, interests, text access, prior experience, and academic foremost. When it comes to students' proficiency level, Kelly, Kelly, Offner and Vorland (2002) and Janzen and Stoller (1998) agreed that the significance of selecting relevant material cannot be exaggerated or underestimated. The material is neither overly complex nor overly simple. Regarding interests, students may become unmotivated to read in English if the reading material is irrelevant to their needs and interests. In terms of a choice of text, Janzen and Stoller (1998) admitted that the choice of reading material has a beneficial impact on students' engagement and involvement and their ability to take advantage of knowledge in their reading processes. The next point is the available reading materials should be relevant to engage students' interest. Berardo (2006) said that the extensive sources of authentic materials that can be taken advantage of are infinite, but the most common sources of content availability are newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs and literature (p. 62). More especially, Berardo (2006) emphasized that the Internet is both continually updated news and a current reality; it fosters an energetic approach to learning reading rather than a comprehension task to go with a reading lesson. Last but not least, teachers ought to evaluate the connections between students' academic knowledge and their prior experience. It is widely known that "the language presented to them may be a genuine record of native speaker behavior" (Widdowson, 1990, p. 45) so students should read the text in a way that matches the reading purpose and the type of text to be suitable with their schema knowledge.

2.3. Reading strategies

Carrell et al (1998) defined ESL reading strategies as what readers convey in how they handle interactions with the content and how they use techniques that lead to successful reading comprehension. Reading strategies, according to O'Malley and Chamot (1990), are conscious or unconscious procedures, activities, tactics, or behaviors that readers use to address issues with interpretation and understanding. Reading learning strategies play an integral role in language achievement. Farrell (2001) stated that students benefit from effective reading strategies taught because the purpose of reading is to make the invisible layer, the underlying meaning, visible. Janzen and Stoller (1998) emphasized that strategy instruction endeavors students' knowledge about the reading process, affords students to accumulate precious strategies and stand a better chance to practice strategies while reading.

Strategy 1: Extensive reading strategy

Students read a wide range of content of simple language material for comprehension without doing any tasks following reading.

Strategy 2: The phonics strategy

Students have exposure to fundamental decoding abilities such as deciphering characters, phrases, sentences, and words that contain letter sound blending.

Strategy 3: The whole language strategy

Students depend on their previous experience to guess the meaning of the text such as looking at the visuals to derive meaning, reading until the conclusion of the phrase and guessing the meaning of the

unfamiliar word, or thinking up a term that makes sense in the context of the sentence, using visual clues, taking notes, reviewing, and summarizing subsections or paragraphs.

Strategy 4: Reading comprehension strategy

Reading comprehension strategy is used before, during, and after reading. Students often use pre-reading activities such as linking images with a couple of pieces of authentic material, asking questions, examples and showing graphical or visual diagrams related to the reading topic. During-reading activities like prediction inquiries, a brief conversation question is used before a brief summary of each section. Students enjoy post-reading activities like the use of matching exercises, cloze exercises, cut-up sentences as well as comprehension questions or other numerous ideas such as visualization, storytelling, mural creation, and composing a script for the stage or readers drama.

Strategy 5: Vocabulary building strategy

Students learn new words in the word formation process (morphological) or phrases that have similar meanings or have links to the same field for study (semantic clusters). It is important that students be taught prefixes and suffixes with base words, word roots as well as spelling knowledge to decipher words when reading.

3. Material and method

3.1. Materials

In order to have the reliable findings, the author refers to the three main steps, which are: designing the questionnaire, collecting data for the survey and analyzing the results of the survey. More specifically, the author used an online survey questionnaire divided into three small parts to collect data for this study on "Reading Strategies Used by English-Majored students at Thu Dau Mot University".

The first section was titled "Demographic Information" and investigated participants about their age, gender, years spent learning English, how much time they spend reading every day and how difficult it is to learn reading skills. The participants tick a particular box most appropriately themselves.

The second section was entitled "Reality of Challenges English-majored Students Confront in Learning English Reading". The purpose of this section was to find out the challenges students encounter when learning English reading skills. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was chosen for the statements in which the participant indicated their level of agreement on five points: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neutral; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree. a Likert scale giving responses from "strongly agree" through "strongly disagree."

The third section was entitled "Reading Learning Strategies Used by English-majored Students at Thu Dau Mot University". The aim of this section was to examine how often English reading learning strategies are used by English-majored students to enhance their reading skills. A 5-point Likert Scale questions responded to their level of frequency of applying reading strategies typically in five points: (1) Always; (2) Usually; (3) Sometimes; (4) Seldom; (5) Never.

The last section was entitled "Which Solutions for Learning English Reading Effectively they should apply". The aim of this section was to find out how to self-study English reading more effectively. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was chosen for the statements in which the participant indicated their level of agreement on five points: (1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neutral; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree.

The questionnaire was clearly set up to be distributed to 100 participants via an online Google form. They were all assured that the study was for research purposes only and that their identities would be kept private through the questionnaire, which did not ask for any personal information about them.

3.2. Method

This section utilized a quantitative study approach to investigate "Reading Strategies Used by English-Majored at Thu Dau Mot University". Quantitative research is a way of investigating and

deciphering meaning that depends upon "the measurement of quantity or amount" (Kothari, 2004, p. 3) and individuals or organizations associated with social or human race issues (Creswell, 2014). According to Williams (2007), "quantitative research can be used in response to relational questions about variables within the research" (p. 66). Creswell (2014) reported that the study's process for this approach consists of the creation of new questions and procedures, data collection in the setting of the participant, inductive data analysis developing from particular to broad themes, and the examiner's interpretations of the data. The former entails gathering quantitative data that may be delivered to "rigorous quantitative analysis in a formal and rigid fashion" (Kothari, 2004, p. 5).

4. Result and discussion

4.1. Reality of challenges english-majored students confront in learning english reading

The first research question was used to find out the reality of challenges students confront in learning English reading. Participants were asked about the adversities of learning English reading, and ten questions addressed this aspect.

Table 1 shows the percentage of students who responded that the challenges of learning English reading involve the challenges of deciphering and decoding unknown words. The majority of the 100 replies from Thu Dau Mot University's English language majors who took the survey strongly agreed and agreed with the notions above, while a few students had neutral views and one to two students disagreed and strongly disagreed.

First, the given table records that the majority of students concur that "Most reading issues result from challenges with decoding and word recognition". Up to 70% of students strongly agree with this viewpoint, meanwhile only 5% of students disagreed. From the collected data, it can be seen that this is a factor that significantly affects the difficulty of deciphering and decoding unknown words when learning English reading.

Second, "When encountering unknown words, students tend to predict and recognize the word based on the context or meaning of the paragraph" 79% of students agree with this idea. By contrast, the lowest proportion of students who disagreed was 8%. This shows that the importance of the context and the meaning of paragraphs cannot be discounted.

With the third viewpoint, "The lack of alphabetic knowledge and fluency will be difficult at the decoding level" 66% of students agree with this idea; however, 9% of students disagree with this idea. The next opinion about the role of phonological processes and the influence of shortage of phoneme awareness has the same as the total percentage of students who agree and strongly agree (71%). A host of students feel that the alphabet knowledge and phoneme awareness cannot be downplayed in the role of learning English reading.

TABLE 1. The reality of challenges of deciphering and decoding unknown words in learning English reading

Survey Statements	%SD	%DA	%N	%A	%SA
Most reading issues result from challenges with decoding and word recognition.	5%	6%	19%	21%	49%
When encountering unknown words, students tend to predict and recognize the word based on the context or meaning of the paragraph.	3%	5%	13%	28%	51%
The lack of alphabetic knowledge and fluency will be difficult at the decoding level.	2%	7%	25%	27%	39%
Phonological processes including naming latency, alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness have a better impact on guesses in word recognition processes.	3%	4%	22%	31%	40%
Deficiency of phoneme awareness leads students' decoding skills to be labored and weak, resulting in extremely slow reading.	1%	4%	24%	23%	48%

Table 2 gives information about the percentage of students who claimed the reality of the challenges of choosing the appropriate sort of reading material when learning English reading. It can be seen that the percentage of strong agreement and agreement was significantly greater than that of disagreement and strong disagreement.

The highest proportion of respondents agreed with the statement, "A huge number of aspects influence a choice of reading material, including the students' proficiency level, interests, text access, prior experience, and academic purpose" with 75% (50% of students strongly agree and 25% of students agree), followed by a neutral 20%. It is clear that the irrelevant materials spell trouble for both the integration of real-world scenarios into the ESL learning environment and dramatically take a heavy toll on the ESL program. Moreover, choosing inappropriate and uninteresting information for readers has an adverse impact on their engagement during the reading process.

When it comes to the statement "The significance of selecting relevant material cannot be overwhelming and underestimated: The material is neither too complex nor too simple," the majority of respondents strongly agree with this statement with a rate of 51%, followed by neutral with 25% and agree with 18%. It can be assumed that students may become unmotivated to read in English if the reading material is not relevant to their level.

Looking at the table, "Students find it difficult to select reading material relevant to their needs or interests" has 70% of students agreeing with this idea. In particular, the majority of respondents strongly agree and agree with this statement with a respective rate of 49% and 21%, followed by neutral with 22%. Therefore, it is noticeable that students may become unmotivated to read in English if the reading material is irrelevant to their needs and interests.

TABLE 2. The reality of challenges of choosing appropriate sort of reading material in learning English reading

Survey Statements	%SD	%DA	%N	%A	%SA
A huge number of aspects influence a choice of reading material including the students' proficiency level, interests, text access, prior experience, and academic purpose.	2%	3%	20%	25%	50%
The significance of selecting relevant material cannot be overwhelming and underestimated: The material is neither too complex nor too simple	2%	4%	25%	18%	51%
Students find it difficult to select reading material relevant to their needs or interests.	1%	7%	22%	21%	49%
Various types of reading materials are provided irrelevant to engage students' interest.	1%	7%	20%	24%	47%

There are a host of similarities and differences with previous research. According to Shang (2010), poorer readers reported having trouble anticipating what will happen next, knowing what to read slowly, quickly, or not to read at all, integrating their previous knowledge with the contents of the text, recognizing unfamiliar words, and filling in any blanks. That finding is unexpectedly at the same as the difficulties of the current study: decoding unknown words; however, it is more detailed to point out whether the text should be read slowly or fast or not to read all. Tran and Duong (2018) further stated that their research paper discussed the difficulties in reading comprehension encountered by English-major students at tertiary level. The findings indicate that inadequate foundation vocabulary and previous knowledge were the main factors restricting them from grasping ESL texts; however, the deficiency of foundation vocabulary and prior knowledge are the main factors respectively leading to the challenges of decoding unknown words and choosing materials in the current study. As can be seen that there is correlation between the research of Tran and Duong (2018) and this study.

4.2. Which reading learning strategies english-major students use at thu dau mot university

The second research question is used to get students' responses to which reading learning strategies used by English-major students at Thu Dau Mot University. Participants were asked about the frequency of using reading strategies, and eight questions addressed this aspect.

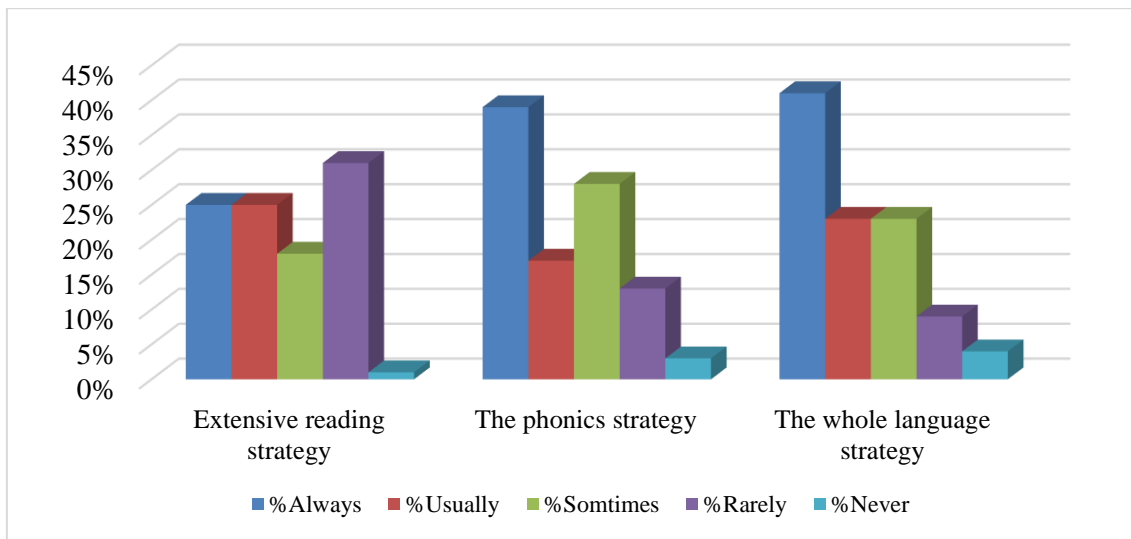


Figure 1. Extensive reading strategy, the phonics strategy and the whole language strategy English-majored students use

Looking at the figure 1 in the subsequent for these three strategies, the extensive reading strategy is seldomly used among students of foreign languages because of a high proportion of neutral and rarely. On the contrary, students always use the phonic strategy following 39% of students always, 28% of students sometimes, and just 13% of students seldom employ the phonic strategy. Therefore, the phonics strategy is apparently a common choice among students of foreign languages. Compared to the whole language strategy, more than 60% of both students always and usually utilize, only 9% rarely. This approach is actually as broadly relevant to students as the idea that collaborating with peers may provide better results.

As can be seen from the below figure, the degree to which students frequently apply reading comprehension strategy is examined in a detailed way. First of all, pre-reading activities are employed by 24% of students, only roughly 24% always use it, 35% do so sometimes, 16% do it seldom, and 0% never do. It is necessary that students be introduced to the content of reading material before during-reading. Regarding during-reading activities, approximately 43% of students always use this kind of activity, and 26% of students utilize it sometimes, compared to 15% of students who usually utilize it. This can be considered the most practical strategy as students make use of learning reading to build a reading knowledge background. In terms of post-reading activities, just approximately 23% of students use it always, just approximately 21% usually, and 31% sometimes. It may be argued that these activities are still restricted to apply in the reading process at TDMU.

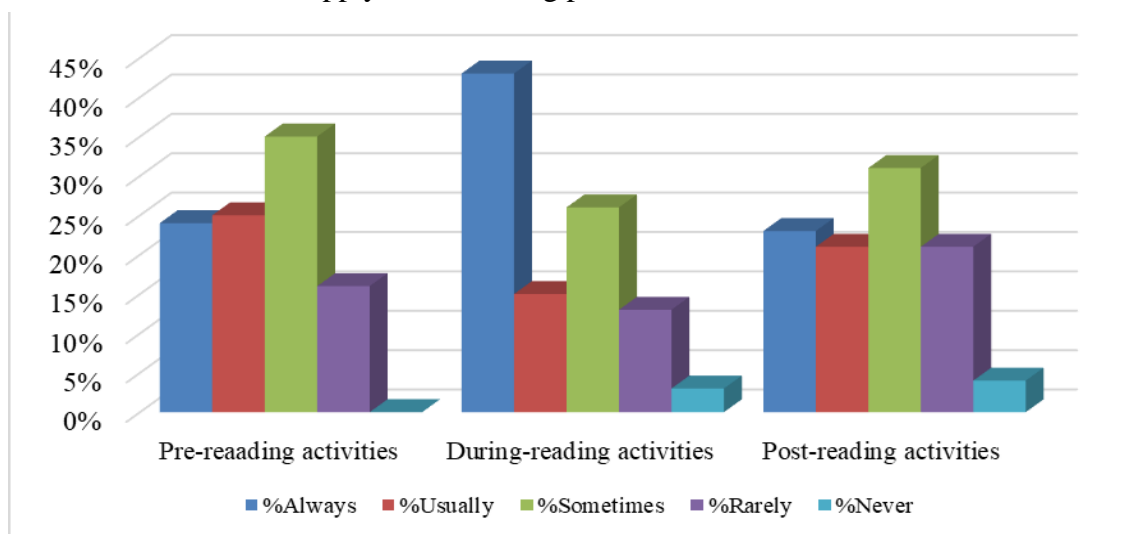


Figure 2. Reading comprehension strategy English-majored students use

Looking at the figure 3, the vocabulary building strategy is the last one combined with two aspects: morphological and semantic clusters; prefixes, suffixes, word roots and spelling knowledge. It is noticeable that the figure of the percentage of students who always use prefixes, suffixes, word roots and spelling knowledge is higher than the other strategy (up to 47%)

Regarding morphological and semantic clusters, most opinions are always with this statement, with a specific rate of 45%, followed by the rate of usually and sometimes with the same rate is 18%. To expand the quantity of vocabulary that learners comprehend concepts, therefore, it is often inducive to impart these words in morphological or semantic clusters.

Regarding prefixes, suffixes, word roots and spelling knowledge, it can be seen that the figure of participants have an interest in learning deciphering words: 17% of students rarely, only 1% of them never use it and the highest rate students always use it reach 47% compare to the other strategy, the rest is sometimes with 21%. It can be argued that the reader is placing heavy importance of the numerous meanings and word families that a single word form may represent.

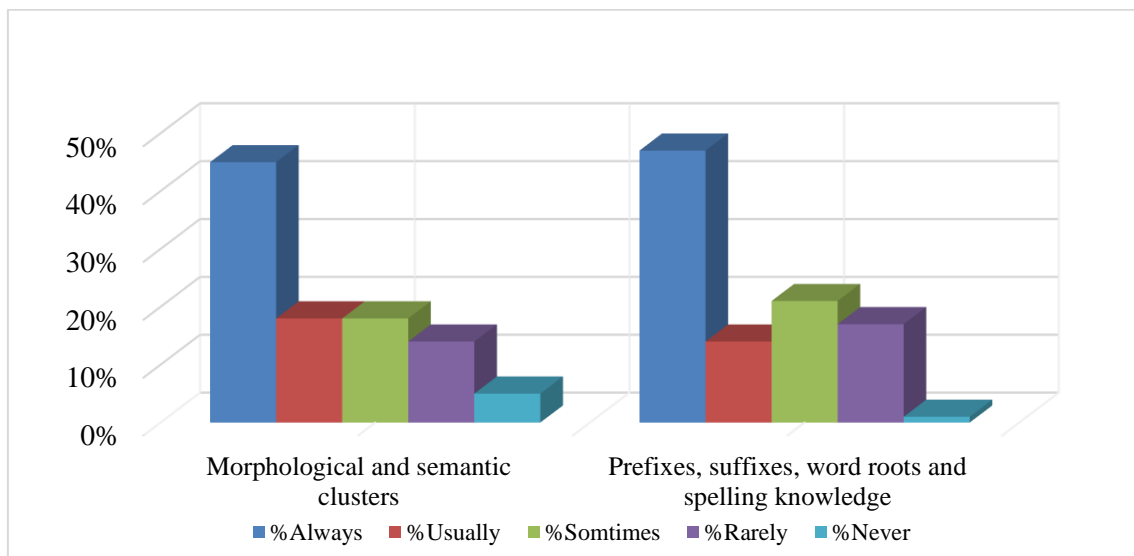


Figure 3. Vocabulary building strategy English-majored students use

Furthermore, the findings of previous studies were presented with the aim of comparing them with the present study. There are some similarities and differences in the research on reading learning strategies among writers.

First, mentioning the differences, the present study, Küçüköğlü (2013) and Shang's study (2010) both focus on researching reading learning strategies. The key findings of Shang (2010) include the metacognitive strategies followed by compensation strategy and cognitive strategy. Meanwhile, the strategies discussed in the current study include extensive reading strategy, the phonics strategy, the whole language strategy, reading comprehension strategy and most importantly, vocabulary building strategy.

From the additional perspective of the research of Küçüköğlü (2013), all reading strategies are used throughout the process of before, during, and after reading in a general way. However, in this study, we did analyze specifically the reading comprehension strategy respectively following pre-reading activities (linking images with a couple of pieces of authentic material, asking questions, examples and showing graphical or visual diagrams related to the reading topic), during-reading activities (prediction inquiries ,a brief summary of each section, a brief conversation question), post-reading activities (the use of matching exercises, cloze exercises, cut-up sentences as well as comprehension questions or other numerous ideas such as visualization, storytelling, mural creation, and composing a script for the stage or readers drama).

Secondly, there are some similarities with the study Do and Phan (2021). It figures out that students frequently adopted problem-solving reading strategies of “guessing the meaning of the text”, “using

prior knowledge”, “trying to keep focused after distractions” as well as “focusing closely on the content of the text” about which the current research mentioned the strategy of the whole language strategy. What's more, the author has other recommendations in this study that are looking at the visuals to derive meaning, using visual clues, taking notes, reviewing, and summarizing subsections or paragraphs.

4.3. Which solutions for learning English reading effectively English-majored students should apply

TABLE 3. Which solutions for learning English reading effectively English-majored students should apply

Survey Statements	%SD	%DA	%N	%A	%SA
It is essential to consider the function of the word in the sentence	2%	7%	23%	17%	49%
Guessing the meaning of the word is regarded as one of the good ways to read more effectively	2%	7%	18%	25%	48%
Students focus on gaining main idea comprehension rather than word-level comprehension in order to avoid the word-by-word reading process.	3%	6%	20%	31%	40%
Reading aloud can be justified as a useful skill to self-study effectively.	1%	7%	23%	27%	42%

It can be seen that Table 4.3 illustrates that the solutions students should apply to learn English reading effectively have the highest strongly agree ranging from 40% to 49%. Most students strongly agreed that “It is essential to consider the function of the word in the sentence” and this issue has the highest proportion (49%). Meanwhile, “Guessing the meaning of the word is regarded as one of the good ways to read more effectively” has less than 1% of those. Furthermore, the data in Table 4.3 also demonstrates that 40% of them strongly agreed with the statement “Students focus on gaining main idea comprehension rather than word-level comprehension in order to avoid the word-by-word reading process” as the next solution for learning English reading; while 31% of students agreed (the highest proportion of those who agreed). Finally, 42% of students strongly agreed that “Reading aloud can be justified as a useful skill to self-study effectively.” However, this statement has the same percentage of neutrality (23%) as the first one.

According to Song (1998)'s research, the teaching strategy assist EFL tertiary students become more proficient readers and enhances students' performance on particular kinds of reading comprehension difficulties. More specifically, regardless of self-study English reading strategies, Song (1998)'s study expand and make the differences from the current study is how to learn reading effectively depending significantly on the teaching method from instructors.

5. Conclusion

This study investigates the reality and solutions for reading strategies used by English-majored students. Based on three research questions, the present study produced three summaries of the results obtained.

The first research question was used to find out the reality of the challenges that English-major students confront in learning English reading. Indeed, it is assumed to arise from three particular hallmarks of such difficulties: a complicated approach to decoding novel or unfamiliar words, a lack of alphabetic knowledge, and a weakness in phoneme awareness at the decoding level. In addition to this, students agree that one of the difficulties in learning to read is manifested by choosing the appropriate sort of reading material. More especially, a large number of aspects impact the choice of text, including the students' proficiency level, interests, text access, prior experience, and academic foremost. From that, it can be said that English majors at Thu Dau Mot University are aware of the challenges of learning English reading.

The second research question was used to collect student feedback on the reading learning strategies they used. Based on the research results, it can be seen that English-majored students frequently use the phonics strategy, the whole language strategy, reading comprehension and especially vocabulary building strategy.

The third research question aims to identify which solutions for learning English reading English-majored students should apply. According to research's findings, students admit that paying attention to the function of the word, guessing the meaning of the word, gaining main idea comprehension, and reading aloud are good ways to enhance English reading.

This section addresses three research questions along with a very quick overview of the results. Both teachers and students can find effective methods to improve English reading in the process of teaching and learning through the research's findings.

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