

Uncovering Language Learning Factors in Reading Difficulties: A Case Study of Thai Students in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Reading is essential for knowledge acquisition and lifelong learning, especially for students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This study explores the reading difficulties faced by Thai students at the University of Islam Malang, Indonesia, using a qualitative approach. It examines factors such as reading behavior, attitudes, teaching methods, and environmental influences. Data were collected through questionnaires adapted from the Survey of Reading Strategy (SORS) and unstructured interviews conducted in Thai and translated into English. The focus is on two primary participants, analyzing their personal experiences, reading challenges, and strategies to overcome these issues. The findings highlight four main factors affecting reading difficulties. Reading behavior is the most significant factor, accounting for 76.19% of the challenges. Teaching and learning factors are next, making up 70% of the difficulties. Attitude factors, including lack of confidence and reading anxiety, contribute to 56.67% of the difficulties. Lastly, environmental factors, particularly family support, account for 37.33% of the difficulty. This indicates that the support from the families of Thai students is not enough. This causes students to have difficulty reading English. Interviews revealed specific challenges such as difficulty with English texts, unfamiliarity with vocabulary, and lack of confidence. Students also reported anxiety, heavy reliance on dictionaries and translation, and limited family support. These insights highlight the need for improved teaching methods and cultural adaptation. To address these issues, students should practice patience and consistency, use resources like Google Translate for initial support, and engage in repeated reading to improve comprehension. Engaging with English media with subtitles can aid in pronunciation and understanding, while social media and real-life English experiences provide additional practice. Seeking motivation and advice from friends and teachers is crucial for improving reading skills. Adopting these strategies can help students enhance their reading abilities and become more proficient readers in the future.

Keywords: Factors in language learning, Reading difficulties, Thai Students.

INTRODUCTION

Reading is a fundamental skill crucial for acquiring knowledge and supporting lifelong learning. As Yunus and Ubaidillah (2021) assert, reading is not just a passive activity but an

essential tool for seeking and applying information. It involves interpreting text to derive meaning and understanding and translating written symbols into knowledge. InYaem (2019) further elaborates that reading is an active cognitive process where the reader's brain decodes letters and constructs meaning based on prior knowledge and experiences.

Reading is integral to navigating and understanding complex information. Dreher and Mikulecky (2000) emphasize that it is a prerequisite for becoming proficient readers and acquiring knowledge through texts. JALA (2020) supports this by highlighting that reading is an active process requiring focused attention to grasp the thoughts conveyed by authors. However, teaching reading at the university level presents unique challenges, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. These students often struggle with broader and more complex materials compared to high school texts, making comprehension particularly challenging. Despite various strategies implemented by educational institutions, EFL students frequently encounter difficulties in reading comprehension. Abbas (2021) categorizes these challenges into internal factors, such as difficulties with lengthy sentences, a lack of background knowledge, and concentration issues, and external factors, including a lack of interest in the reading material, limited vocabulary, and motivational problems (Satriani, 2018). Additional complexities include time constraints, difficulties with information retention, and unfamiliar topics and grammatical structures (Kheirzadeh & Tavakoli, 2012).

Previous research on Arab EFL learners has shown that these challenges negatively impact English proficiency and academic performance (Al-Jarrah & Ismail, 2018). Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from educators and policymakers. Employing problem-solving reading strategies has been shown to improve EFL students' reading comprehension significantly (Par, 2020). Effective reading strategies, as described by Lestari (2023) and Banditvilai (2020), are essential for advancing reading abilities and understanding text comprehensively.

However, reading difficulties remain a major issue globally, particularly for EFL learners. Chawwang (2008) found that Thai EFL learners face significant challenges in comprehending English texts. To address these concerns at the University of Islam Malang in Indonesia. This study aims to fill the gap in understanding Thai students' reading difficulties in Indonesia. By providing insights into the challenges faced by these EFL learners, the study aims to contribute

to the development of more effective teaching methodologies and strategies. Ultimately, this research aspires to enhance collaboration between students and educators, improving reading skills and learning outcomes in EFL contexts.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative and descriptive research design to explore the language learning factors contributing to reading difficulties among Thai students studying English at the University of Islam Malang, Indonesia. The aim is to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon by investigating real-life conditions and specific challenges faced by the participants.

A. Setting and Participants

The research focuses on Thai students enrolled in the EFL program at the University of Islam Malang. Three participants, including two females and one male, from the seventh and third semesters, were selected. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, objectives, and time commitment. They provided informed consent, ensuring their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses.

B. Research Instruments

The study utilized two primary instruments for data collection: questionnaires and interviews.

1. Questionnaire: The researcher used an adapted version of the Survey of Reading Strategy (SORS) by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002). The questionnaire consists of two parts: general information (gender and age) and a set of 33 items assessing participants' perceptions of reading difficulties on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Never" to 5 = "Always"). The questionnaire was validated by experts to ensure its validity and relevance.
2. Interviews: Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to gather deeper insights into the participants' experiences. Each interview lasted between 10 to 15 minutes. The interviews aimed to clarify questionnaire responses and explore specific challenges related to reading difficulties, including cultural differences, linguistic issues, and educational environment factors. The interviews were conducted in Thai for ease of understanding and later translated into English for analysis.

C. Data Collection

The data collection process involved administering the questionnaire to all three participants to obtain both subjective and objective data. The responses from the questionnaire provided insights into the participants' perceptions of reading difficulties, which were analyzed using a Likert scale to quantify attitudes and behaviors.

For the interviews, participants were selected based on high questionnaire scores. The interviews provided qualitative data that helped to understand the underlying factors contributing to reading difficulties. The data was collected through face-to-face interactions, allowing for a nuanced understanding of individual experiences.

D. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using a Likert scale, where responses were scored from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always). The scores were totaled for each item to determine the extent of the difficulties experienced by the participants.

The results were categorized into

Set percentage value 1 - 50 as a low value

51-100 as a high value.

the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining themes, and writing up the findings. The analysis aimed to identify recurring themes and insights related to the language learning factors affecting reading difficulties among the participants.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the questionnaire results highlights several factors affecting Thai students' English reading skills at the University of Islam Malang. These factors include English reading behavior, teaching and learning methods, reading attitudes, and environmental factors (family).

The findings reveal that reading behavior is the most significant factor, followed by teaching and learning methods, reading attitudes, and family support.

Table 4.1. Factors that contribute to overall English reading

Statement	Sum of scores	Percentage %	<i>percentage value</i>
English reading behavior	160	76.19%	<i>high</i>
Teaching and learning factors	84	70%	<i>high</i>
English reading attitude	51	56.67%	<i>high</i>
Environment factors (Family)	28	37.33%	<i>low</i>

1. English Reading Behavior (76.19%)

- Findings: Thai students show high engagement in English reading behavior, indicating a strong reliance on strategies like translation and using dictionaries. This high percentage reflects students' efforts to adapt to different vocabulary and sentence structures in English compared to Thai. The strategies employed include translating text, visualizing information, and using reference materials.
- Implications: Effective reading behavior is crucial for overcoming language barriers. Thai students need to focus on understanding context, developing reading techniques, and using tools to aid comprehension. Consistent practice and adaptation to different reading methods are essential for improving reading skills.

2. Teaching and Learning Factors (70.00%)

- Findings: Differences in teaching methods between Thailand and Indonesia contribute to reading difficulties. Cultural and pedagogical differences affect students' engagement and comprehension. Thai students may find Indonesian teaching methods less effective or less engaging, impacting their reading progress.
- Implications: To address these challenges, it is important to adapt teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles and cultural backgrounds. Providing engaging and culturally relevant content can enhance students' reading experiences.

3. English Reading Attitude (56.67%)

- Findings: Students display anxiety and lack of confidence in reading English, which affects their overall reading performance. Concerns about the difficulty of English and self-doubt hinder their willingness to read and engage with the material.
- Implications: Addressing these emotional barriers requires building students' confidence and reducing anxiety. Encouraging a positive reading attitude and providing supportive feedback can help improve students' willingness and ability to read in English.

4. Environment Factors (Family) (37.33%)

- Findings: Family support for reading English is relatively low. Thai students receive insufficient encouragement and resources from their families, which affects their reading habits and skills development.
- Implications: Enhancing family support by promoting a reading culture at home and providing access to English reading materials can improve students' reading abilities. Encouraging family involvement in students' reading activities is essential for developing strong reading skills.

4.2. Strategies to Support Thai Students in Overcoming Reading Difficulties

To help Thai students overcome reading difficulties, a range of strategies tailored to their needs is crucial. These strategies address various factors including reading behavior, limited proficiency, teaching methods, and cultural differences.

Table 4.2: English Reading Behavior

No.	Item	Sum of scores	Percentage %
13.	When I read, I translate from English into my native language.	14	93.33
2.	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	13	86.67
9.	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	13	86.67
12.	When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	13	86.67
3.	I take an overall view of the text to see what it's about before reading it..	12	80.00

4.	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I am reading.	12	80.00
10.	I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read.	12	80.00
6.	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.	11	73.33
7.	I use reference material (e.g. a dictionary) to help me understand what I read.	11	73.33
8.	When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	11	73.33
11.	I usually end up translating word by word when I'm reading English.	11	73.33
14.	When I read, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.	11	73.33
5.	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	10	66.67

Findings and Implications:

- **Translation and Use of Dictionaries:** Thai students frequently translate English text into their native language, which can slow comprehension. Encouraging strategies such as guessing meanings and focusing on overall context rather than word-for-word translation can enhance reading efficiency.
- **Visualization and Contextual Understanding:** Students benefit from visualizing information and considering the overall text context. Incorporating these strategies into reading practice can improve comprehension and retention.

Table 4.3: Environment Factors (Family)

No.	Item	Sum of score.	Percentage %
2.	Your parents are strict with you and force you to read English books regularly.	7	46.67
1.	Family members encouraged you to read English books from a young age.	6	40.00

3.	Your family members recognize the benefits of the English language and therefore always buy books with content in English to keep at home.	6	40.00
5.	Parents are attentive and supportive in finding ways to improve your English	5	33.33
4.	Members of your family regularly read English books to you when you were a child.	4	26.67

Findings and Implications:

- **Lack of Family Support:** The low percentage in family support indicates insufficient encouragement and resources for reading English at home. Establishing a reading culture within the family and increasing access to English books can enhance students' reading skills.

4.3. Cultural Differences Affecting Reading Difficulties

4.3.1. Adapting to English Reading Materials

- **Findings:** Thai students adapt to English reading materials by using patience and consistent practice. Engaging with media like podcasts and English subtitles helps familiarize them with pronunciation and usage.
- **Implications:** Regular practice, exposure to diverse English media, and using tools like subtitles can aid in adapting to English reading materials and improving comprehension.

4.3.2. Cultural Differences

- **Findings:** Pronunciation, accents, and mixed language usage in the classroom affect students' understanding. Thai students need to adjust to different language practices and accents in the learning environment.
- **Implications:** Awareness of cultural and linguistic differences is crucial for effective communication and reading comprehension. Adapting to diverse language use and pronunciation is essential for overcoming reading difficulties.

4.3.3. Support from Friends and Teachers

- Findings: Friends and teachers play a significant role in motivating and assisting students. Effective teaching methods and peer support foster enthusiasm and improve reading skills.
- Implications: Encouraging supportive interactions among peers and with teachers can enhance reading skills. Providing clear and engaging instruction contributes to students' reading development.

4.3.4. Exposure to Language Outside the Classroom

- Findings: Exposure to English through social media, public signs, and real-life situations helps students practice and understand the language. Real-world use of English contributes to language development.
- Implications: Encouraging students to engage with English outside the classroom through various media and real-life experiences enhances language acquisition and reading skills.

4.3.5. Challenges in Developing Reading Skills

- Findings: Students face challenges such as encountering new vocabulary, concerns about grammar and pronunciation, and overcoming personal barriers.
- Implications: Addressing these challenges requires consistent practice, patience, and using resources effectively. Building confidence and overcoming self-doubt are crucial for developing reading skills.

4.4. Discussion

The study highlights that Thai students at the University of Islam Malang face several challenges in learning English reading skills. The most significant factor is reading behavior, followed by teaching and learning factors, reading attitudes, and family support. The findings align with previous research, indicating that cultural differences, teaching methods, and personal attitudes significantly impact reading difficulties.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The analysis of the questionnaire and interview question results from Thai students at the University of Islam Malang. Based on the study highlights key factors in language learning and reading difficulties. These include English reading behavior, teaching methods, cultural differences, and family support. English reading behavior emerged as the most significant challenge, followed by teaching and learning factors, with family factors ranking the lowest. From all the factors mentioned above. It will affect being a good reader.

However, different strategies should be used. to overcome reading difficulties. This includes practicing and developing yourself regularly. Listening to English media with subtitles helps with pronunciation and understanding. Using social media and real-life experiences to enhance language skills and support from friends and teachers in practicing and recommending reading materials. To create an appropriate learning environment and support the development of one's reading skills. Doing so will help you become a good and steady reader in learning English effectively and sustainably.

Suggestions

From the summary of the study, the researcher advised students, teachers, and future researchers as follows:

For the students, it is recommended to practice reading regularly and be patient when encountering words or passages that are difficult to understand. Increase comprehension by using repeated reading strategies. and English listening practice with subtitles to improve reading and pronunciation skills.

For the teachers and lecturers, it is recommended to prepare interesting reading materials. and teaching methods Reading curriculum design allows students to choose their reading materials. By using a variety of teaching tools and strategies. To foster an appropriate learning environment and use technology in teaching to enhance student learning as well

For the next researcher, it is recommended that further studies be conducted on Thai students' English reading problems in different contexts. and conduct in-depth research to create understanding and find appropriate solutions in different contexts.

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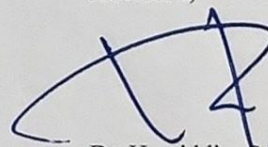
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