

Perceptions of Difficulties in English Reading Comprehension: A Case Study of Thai Secondary School Students

Sunisa Hoklang¹, *Wanpen Poomarin² and Benjaporn Meeprom³

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi

*Corresponding author, E-mail: wanpen_p@rmutt.ac.th

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Abstract

The study investigated the difficulties with English reading comprehension among 120 Grade 9 Thai EFL students at Nongbunmak Pittayakhom school, along with contributing factors and proposed practical instructions for reading development. Mixed-methods research was implemented with data collection through a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. Quantitative data analysis consisted of frequency distribution, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, while thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. The research results revealed that most students struggled with English reading comprehension, particularly in grammatical barriers, a heavy dependence on dictionaries, academic vocabulary, and long sentence structures. In relation to higher-order cognitive skills, identifying main ideas and distinguishing facts from opinions, and recognizing authors' tone and mood were considerable obstacles for the students. Qualitative results identified four profound challenges: vocabulary barriers, motivation, preferred active learning approaches, and technology integration. Therefore, the students in this study faced challenges across linguistic, cognitive, and affective aspects. The implications of this study suggested that effective reading instruction should focus on building vocabulary, training metacognitive strategies, using technology smartly, boosting motivation, and encouraging active learning in Thai secondary education.

Keywords: *English reading challenges, reading comprehension, Grade 9 students, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Thai secondary education*

1. Introduction

English has become increasingly important worldwide. Over 360 million people speak it as their first language, and over 750 million speak it as a second language (Ministry of Education, 2017). It is also an official language in 61 countries and the main language in a number of states around the world. As such, English is a central means of communication encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing, facilitating international media dissemination (Festallor Education School, 2020). Boonnu-chit (2019) further stated that English is now widely used in many contexts, including business, politics, and education. Consequently, proficiency in English enhances educational and career opportunities, as competence in this language increasingly correlates with success in the 21st-century society dominated by interconnected digital networks.

Reading is an important part of language development as it helps learners learn new words, spelling and punctuation, and provides ideas for writing (Harmer, 2007). Reading also enhances their intelligence by helping understand matters better and come up with better ways to learn (NCSALL, 2005). This skill is especially important for individuals who study English as a second language because it helps them reach their educational goals (Anderson, 1999). Proficiency in reading comprehension is crucial for students to develop into proficient readers. It enables them to read with competence and acquire knowledge with efficiency (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). According to Pressley (2002), the attributes of a "good reader" can be briefly described as: 1) Readers should be engaged and have certain objectives that are directly tied to the material, 2) Prior to reading and during the reading process, individuals should engage in the practice of perusing the text and formulating conjectures on the forthcoming events in the subsequent session, 3) Examine the sections and attempt to deduce the meaning and organization of words based on the surrounding context, 4) Employ their prior knowledge and assess their comprehension, 5) Reorganize its meaning, restate it, and scrutinize it, 6) Consider the characters and events while reading works of fiction. They are known to simplify informative texts into a concise summary, 7) Consider reading as a productive activity. Consequently, proficient readers draw upon a set of elements, including linguistic competence, analytical reasoning, knowledge assimilation, study techniques, cognitive growth, and engagement to optimize their reading performance.

Although reading is crucial, many students encounter difficulties due to different factors such as the relevance of the content, vocabulary comprehension, and insufficiently organized reading guidance (Thodwisud, 2009; Oranpattanachai, 2010). One of the difficulties in English reading is caused by specific subskills that are necessary for fluent and accurate comprehension, including the main idea and supporting details identification, contextual guessing, inference making, and skimming and scanning strategies. If students do not master these subskills, they are likely to read word by word and have trouble getting the holistic meaning of the text, leading to their slow speed in reading and decline in comprehension efficiency. For example, it is difficult for students who do not know how to employ the appropriate strategies to guess words or skim and scan for key information and tend to read ineffectively. In the same vein, students who often get meaning of word-by-word cannot identify the main ideas or understand the implicit meanings. This causes their partial understanding and dependence on dictionaries.

Previous studies on EFL students (Thodwisud, 2009; Oranpattanachai, 2010) indicate that limitations in the specific reading subskills, especially in main idea identification and contextual inference, are major causes of low reading performance. The translation of text and the grammatical structure are highly proportional to teaching rather than reading processes and strategy practices (Srioon, 2012).

Furthermore, PISA (2024) reported that in 2022, 15-year-old Thai students gained the average reading score of 379 points, which fell below the OECD average of 476 points. These results signified a decline of approximately 60 points in their reading competence from 2012 to 2022. The English reading performance of secondary school students has been found to correlate with the results of the General Aptitude Test (GAT), a standardized examination used for university admissions. The score reports of 2018 to 2022 (the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), 2024) demonstrate that students gained an average score of approximately 50.23 out of 150. This average score is

substantially below half of the overall score, implying that Thai students' reading performance falls below national standards and there is a need for effective English reading instruction and educational management in schools. It is important to improve students' mastery of higher-order comprehension subskills such as inference-making and critical thinking.

Within this context, Nong Bunmak Pittayakom school—a government secondary school located in Nakhon Ratchasima Province—possibly faces difficulties in English, especially reading skills. There are some considerable obstacles for Thai secondary students to comprehend English texts, including main idea identification, contextual guessing, and skimming and scanning, so appropriate instruction and strategy-based training should be provided to address their difficulties in English reading. Recognizing the urgency of addressing this issue, the main purpose of this study is to explore the difficulties in English reading comprehension encountered by ninth-grade students at Nong Bunmak Pittayakom school, along with the goal of proposing strategies for instructional improvement.

2. Research Objectives

2.1 To investigate the difficulties in English reading comprehension encountered by Grade 9 Thai EFL students at Nongbunmak Pittayakhom school and identify the contributing factors affecting their reading performance.

2.2 To propose practical instructional techniques for enhancing Thai secondary school students' English reading comprehension.

3. Research Questions

3.1 What are the main challenges in English reading comprehension faced by Grade 9 Thai EFL students, and what factors contribute to these difficulties?

3.2 What instructional techniques can be recommended to improve Thai secondary school students' English reading comprehension?

4. Literature Review

Reading Comprehension

According to Greenleaf, Cziko, and Hurvitz (1999), reading is a fundamental skill for gaining knowledge and a complex activity that incorporates goals, interest, and interaction. This is because a reader engages with the text by posing questions and seeking answers across the current and subsequent pages. Reading comprehension in a second language is mainly dependent on readers' fluency in word recognition, as indicated by their accuracy and speed in identifying words within a text, as well as their capacity to read smoothly with proper expression (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Furthermore, Tompkins (2011) defined reading comprehension as a level of text understanding that integrates four skills—phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics—in a creative process. Many skills, such as word recognition, fluency, lexical knowledge, and prior knowledge, are necessary for reading comprehension, which allows the reader to extract information from the text (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Therefore, the efficacy of reading comprehension integrates

different skills in which readers interact with text meaningfully, acquire new knowledge, and engage with it cognitively.

Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension Skills

Reading comprehension is an essential skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning because it relates to learners' linguistic, cognitive, and environmental factors. These factors affecting EFL learners' reading comprehension performance are discussed below.

1) Linguistic Factors

Linguistic factors involve language knowledge and skills to understand, process, and apply a language in practice. In EFL learning factors, vocabulary knowledge is an important cause of reading comprehension. According to Qian (2002), readers with a large vocabulary have a significant advantage in comprehending the entire text, as they can effectively decode messages and derive meanings from the text. Grammatical knowledge is a crucial element since it enables readers to analyze sentence structures, hence facilitating the understanding of interconnected concepts inside the text through grammatical proficiency (Nation, 1990). Furthermore, the phonological factor affects reading comprehension skills, especially in novice readers, addressing accuracy and fluency in decoding words (Martin-Chang & Gould, 2008)

2) Cognitive Factors

Information processing and retention influence cognitive abilities, including working memory and metacognitive strategies. Working memory serves to store and manipulate information, while metacognitive strategies primarily monitor readers' comprehension and make predictions to enhance their reading comprehension (Baddeley, 1992). Furthermore, proficient readers can utilize their cognitive resources to comprehend the text beyond mere word decoding, since reading fluency - characterized by speed, accuracy, and prosody—correlates with reading comprehension (Fuchs et al., 2001).

3) Environmental and Affective Factors

The environmental factors involve the readiness of resources, and related support to learning beyond academic settings which influence EFL learners' reading comprehension. The opportunities to access to learning English outside the classroom can enhance reading proficiency. To enhance EFL learners' engagement and literacy skills, it is essential that environment provides language-rich resources, including libraries, social activities, and online platforms (Dong, Pan, & Zhou, 2022; Literacy Dive Podcast, 2023). Additionally, affective factors such as attitude, motivation, and anxiety influence EFL learners' literacy competence. EFL readers with positive self-perception toward reading are more likely to achieve better literacy performance (Poomarin & Adunyarittigun, 2020). However, high anxiety can hinder cognitive process, causing incomplete comprehension (Dong, Pan, & Zhou, 2022; Anderson & Gerbing, 1988).

4) Sociocultural and Contextual Factors

Socioeconomic status and cultural setting profoundly affect reading comprehension. Learners from higher socioeconomic origins have greater access to educational resources and support networks, leading to improved learning outcomes (Lindo, 2014). To increase reading comprehension, cultural familiarity with reading resources is an important factor because it helps learners with valid background knowledge, resulting in a reduced cognitive load for new information processing (Garcia et al., 2024).

5) Instructional Approaches

Instructional methods immensely influence EFL readers' comprehension. Many research studies illustrated that relevant instruction in reading strategies, including questioning, summarizing, and specifying main ideas, has facilitated their comprehension skills (Aghaie & Zhang, 2012; Wendaferew & Damtew, 2023). For example, cooperative learning and extensive reading activities in interactive and student-centered approaches have highly augmented readers' engagement and comprehension performance (Chinpakdee & Gu, 2021; Li et al., 2022).

In conclusion, reading comprehension in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting is influenced by different factors, including linguistic, cognitive, affective, environmental, sociocultural, and instructional aspects. These factors collectively shape students' effective reading comprehension performance. Consequently, this study aims to investigate the challenges in English reading comprehension encountered by ninth-grade Thai students with a focus on analyzing key linguistic, cognitive, and affective factors affecting their performance. By exploring these aspects, the study is providing insights into improving educational practices and support mechanisms tailored to the needs of EFL learners.

Previous Studies

McKenna and Kear (1990) proposed an instrument for reading interest and attitude assessment known as the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS). This study identified students' attitudes toward reading regarding three aspects: self-perception as readers, classroom experiences, and external influences. This survey provided to what extent positive or negative attitudes had an impact on students' engagement in reading. From the study, it was found that students with positive attitudes toward reading were likely to perform better; on the contrary, ones with negative attitudes tended to have low reading achievement and motivation. This survey showed how readers' motivation and perception influenced their reading performance.

Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) developed the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) and explored the metacognitive awareness and reading strategies utilized by EFL students. Mokhtari and Sheorey designed the SORS to evaluate students' approaches to English reading tasks. There were three categories of reading strategies: global reading strategies, problem-solving strategies, and support reading strategies. The results showed that competent ESL readers displayed more strategic awareness and more frequent application of metacognitive strategies compared to less proficient ones. Competent ESL readers were likely to plan, monitor, and evaluate their reading process.

Nanda and Azmy (2020) studied the causes, impacts, and possible solutions for less skilled readers from Indonesian secondary schools in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). All previous empirical studies and literature were thoroughly analyzed and identified into main factors influencing students' reading problems: low motivation, limited background knowledge, and insufficient English vocabulary. These difficulties negatively affected academic achievement, the development of critical thinking, and restricted future opportunities in prospective education and careers. To cope with these challenges, this study proposed two potential instructional approaches: cooperative integrated reading and composition (CIRC) technique and metacognitive strategy.

Rungswang and Kosashunhanan (2021) explored the problems in employing English reading strategies employed by 412 Thai EFL undergraduate students in Bangkok and suggested instructional strategies to deal with these problems. A mixed-method study was utilized to gain the quantitative data from an online questionnaire and the qualitative data obtained from focus interviews. Students had the most trouble reading when they skipped over words they didn't know (Mean = 2.67, SD = 1.01), changed their reading speed (Mean = 2.66, SD = 0.97), and used context clues (Mean = 2.59, SD = 0.92). These study results suggested that instructional strategies such as guided reading, enhancing vocabulary knowledge, integrating technology into the classroom, and promoting critical reading skills can effectively improve students' comprehension outcomes.

Recently, Kongcharoenkitkul et al. (2022) examined the English reading challenges encountered by nine Thai high school students when dealing with the English part of the General Aptitude Test (GAT). Data on both qualitative and quantitative types were gathered from test scores, observations, and focus group interviews. The study identified the following difficulties: ineffective reading strategies, limited vocabulary, poor comprehension, grammar issues, confusion with answer choices, time constraints, and insufficient background knowledge. It also proposed a way to enhance students' performance in national English proficiency examinations through tailored interventions in order to address these challenges.

In summary, previous research above proposed main factors influencing EFL students' reading performance. McKenna and Kear (1990) found that positive reading attitudes profoundly increase reading motivation and performance. Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) asserted that many proficient readers could use effective reading strategies with metacognitive awareness. The mentioned previous studies highlights common English reading comprehension challenges among EFL students in Asian countries by (Nanda & Azmy, 2020; Rungswang & Kosashunhanan, 2021; Kongcharoenkitkul et al., 2022). These issues include low motivation, limited prior knowledge, poor vocabulary, ineffective reading strategies, and restricted examination periods. The findings from previous research emphasize the importance of implementing effective instructional approaches that address both cognitive and affective aspects of reading.

5. Research Methodology

A mixed-methods approach through survey and interview responses was designed to gain the understanding of English reading difficulties faced by ninth-grade students at Nongbunmak Pittayakhom school, Thailand.

Sample

The population and the sample of this study consisted of 120 Grade 9 students who enrolled in a basic English course and used English as a foreign language. They were a representative sample that reflected varying levels of English ability and educational backgrounds. The students were asked to participate freely in the study; their parents and relevant educators submitted informed consent to the researchers prior to data collecting.

Research Instruments

Quantitative and qualitative research instruments were designed for data collection as follows.

1) Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was used to explore English reading challenges in vocabulary, sentence structure, fluency, comprehension strategies, and attitudes among ninth-grade students. The questionnaire used in this study was developed based on the previous instruments originated from Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) and McKenna and Kear (1990). All items were validated through three experts before administration. The questionnaire consisted of 16 items derived from the main concepts of perceived difficulty in English reading, reading challenges, and affective and environmental factors. It was designed in both Thai and English to facilitate Thai students comprehending and responding fully to questions.

2) Interviews

The semi-structured interview was used to gain insights into students' personal experiences and specific English reading challenges. It included five open-ended questions reviewed from the previous studies and questionnaire items related to three themes: perceptions and attitudes toward English reading, challenges and strategies for reading English, and suggestions for improving reading skill. The interview questions were validated by experts in English language education. Ten students who indicated their willingness to participate in the interview session through specifying this in the questionnaire responded to the interview questions for approximately 20 minutes each.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection in this study took over three weeks for two phases. First, all participants were asked to respond to a structured questionnaire with clear instructions and appropriate time for completion. In the final phase, 10 willing participants participated in a semi-structured interview. Each interview was conducted with confidential and supportive environments to reinforce them for open discussion.

Quantitative data on English reading difficulties gained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, mean scores, and standard deviation. The 5-point Likert scale interpretation is referred to Best and Kahn's (2006) and Likert's (1932) theoretical concepts. On the other hand, the qualitative data derived from an interview were analyzed thematically to categorize the common themes in relation to

participant responses in experiences, strategies, and factors of English reading comprehension. The quantitative data compliments the qualitative one to understand the challenges in English reading comprehension faced by the 9th Grade students.

6. Results

Quantitative Findings from the Questionnaire

Table 1: Grade 9 Students' Perceptions of English Reading Difficulties (N=120)

Statement	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
<i>Fundamental Reading Difficulties</i>			
I find reading English difficult.	4.73	0.62	Very High
I often need to use a dictionary while reading English.	4.73	0.62	Very High
<i>English Structure and Vocabulary</i>			
I have trouble reading English grammar.	4.63	0.68	Very High
I find academic vocabulary difficult to understand.	4.67	0.71	Very High
I do not understand complex English sentence structures.	4.30	0.72	Very High
<i>Comprehension and Critical Reading Skills</i>			
I have difficulty remembering information from English texts.	4.22	0.78	High
I have trouble identifying the main ideas in English texts.	4.58	0.69	Very High
I can't distinguish facts and opinions from the texts I read.	4.58	0.74	Very High
I have difficulty identifying the author's tone and mood in texts.	4.66	0.66	Very High
<i>Affective Factors</i>			
Reading interest affects improving English reading skills.	4.68	0.65	Very High
I lack confidence in reading and understanding English texts.	2.76	0.95	Moderate
I lack motivation to read English texts outside of required assignments.	3.02	0.82	Moderate
I believe that reading in English is an important skill for my future.	4.52	0.73	Very High
<i>Reading Fluency and Background Knowledge</i>			
I read English texts slowly compared to my native language.	3.37	0.75	Moderate
I lack the ability to relate background knowledge or personal experience to readable subjects.	2.85	0.89	Moderate
<i>External Support</i>			
I receive adequate support from teachers or parents in improving my English reading skills.	3.46	0.65	High
Overall average	4.11	0.74	High

Table 1 presented meaningful difficulties in English reading among Grade 9 Thai students, with an overall mean score of 4.11, indicating high levels of difficulty in the following reading aspects. The items were initially categorized under broad terms, but results were distinctly analyzed in relation to reading subskills to illustrate students' actual comprehension challenges.

1) Vocabulary and sentence structure

Students identified vocabulary and sentence structure as primary challenges in reading, indicating issues with word recognition and sentence comprehension. These issues pertain to semantic recognition and syntactic analysis. 95% of students reported that reading English was very difficult ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 0.62$), as was dependence on dictionaries ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 0.62$). The significant reliance on dictionary aid indicates that students have not yet employed independence-oriented strategy necessary for contextual comprehension in autonomous reading. Furthermore, 93% of them experienced challenges with vocabulary ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 0.71$) and grammatical understanding ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 0.68$), respectively. It is proposed that word recognition and morphological awareness are inadequate controls, resulting in constraints on reading comprehension and fluency.

2) Main ideas and supporting details

Students had significant challenges in identifying the main ideas of texts ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.69$). The findings indicate students' inadequate capacity to distinguish between primary ideas and supporting details, which is crucial for summarizing and comprehending the overall meaning of the text. Readers may fail to comprehend the details and construct a coherent grasp of the content, regardless of this ability.

3) Facts from opinions and recognizing tone

92% of students had challenges in distinguishing between facts and opinions ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.74$), while 93% struggled with identifying the author's tone and mood ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.66$). These findings elucidate the skills associated with higher-order understanding, encompassing inference generation, text evaluation, and the interpretation of the author's perspective. The specified skills are pertinent to the critical reading required for proficient readers.

4) Reading speed and efficiency

67% of students encountered difficulties in understanding and reading English at a slow rate ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 0.75$). This may suggest limitations in skimming and scanning techniques, which allow readers to grasp the primary concepts and details of texts; hence, readers deficient in these skills are likely to read English at a reduced pace. Constraints in vocabulary, understanding, and confidence may occur irrespective of these skills.

5) Affective and motivational factors

55% percent of students demonstrated a shortfall in confidence ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 0.95$), while 60% indicated a lack of motivation for engaging in reading beyond the classroom ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.82$). 90% recognize the importance of English reading ($M =$

4.52, $SD = 0.73$); nonetheless, their lower motivation negatively affects self-reading habits, which are crucial for developing critical abilities including contextual guessing, scanning, and skimming.

6) External support

Students reported a modest degree of support from educators and parents ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.65$). It is proposed that the chances for instructional assistance and practice aimed at developing reading skills are inadequate for improving independent reading skills.

In summary, students' challenges in reading comprehension pertain to distinct subskills: word recognition, contextual word inference, main idea identification, inferential reasoning, evaluation of authors' viewpoints, and the application of scanning and skimming techniques. The proficiency in utilizing these subskills influences the fluency and precision of English reading.

Qualitative Findings from the Interview

The main themes gained the semi-structured interviews with ten Grade 9 students were analyzed and identified as follows:

1) Vocabulary difficulty

Regarding this difficulty, there was a relationship between students' dependence on dictionary assistance and limited range of vocabulary, possibly hindering their reading comprehension. This is an important concern among students because it is an inference of the meanings of unfamiliar words, indicating insufficiency of lexical proficiency. This is an excerpt from their interview.

"I don't know the meanings of these English words in this passage." (S1, S5)

2) Motivation and reading habits

Many students pointed out that they read only assigned text, resulting in a limited range of texts. This limitation also decreases possibilities for self-initiated reading practices, which is important for developing reading fluency, accuracy, and confidence. The skimming and scanning skills can be beneficial to help them improve their comprehension. A student shared an example of interviews during the interviews:

"I only read when teachers assign it, but I know I should read more". (S1, S2, S6)

3) Preferred teaching approaches

Different students had different reading levels of competency, so they needed different resources and instruction appropriate to their different background knowledge. The existing instruction embedded in passive and textbook-heavy instruction made them difficult to read. Additionally, they preferred applying their personal experiences to analyze reading text, which allowed them to interact actively with texts, classmates, and teachers. Apparently, interactive teaching can provide guided reading instructions to assist students

in distinguishing essential concepts and decoding meanings. The activities related to reading and personal experiences can boost their engagement and understanding of topics and inferences. The supporting evidence was as follows:

"The teacher just tells us to read passages and answer questions". (S3)
"When I can relate to the characters or situations, it makes more sense". (S6)
"I need more support and explanation than other classmates". (S4)

4) Technology applications

Translation applications have become important among students who always use these applications in their reading, causing a decline in their practice of necessary reading skills: contextual clues and word identification. An excerpt from the interview is presented as follows:

"I can't understand the text without my translation app." (S2)
"Sometimes I think technology makes me lazy in reading English" (S3)

Both quantitative and qualitative research indicates that students' difficulties mainly arise from the mastery of reading subskills: word inference, main idea identification, inference deduction, and skimming and scanning. These difficulties pertain to dictionaries, constraints on independent reading practice, insufficient reading fluency, and a lack of confidence in reading. Consequently, the targeted subskills must be conveyed through focused effective instruction, supported by constructive reading activities and explicit techniques.

7. Discussion of the Results

This study examined the English reading comprehension difficulties faced by Grade 9 Thai EFL students at Nongbunmak Pittayakhom school and proposed practical instructional strategies to enhance English reading comprehension among Thai secondary school students using a mixed-methods approach. The following discussion addresses the primary categories concerning reading subskills, together with the interpretation of difficulties with reading, and the proposal of appropriate pedagogical approaches within the EFL context.

7.1 Vocabulary and context inference

The findings revealed that students' limited vocabulary and strong dependence on dictionaries indicated weakness in the subskill of guessing meaning from context. Dictionaries are a good resource for study, but overreliance on dictionaries can interrupt their development of independent reading practice. As discussed by Nation (1990) and Qian (2002), readers' fluency and autonomy are not developed due to too much dependence on dictionaries. This reflects that they tend to emphasize vocabulary memorization and translation rather than contextual interpretation. To develop students as proficient readers, teachers may provide relevant practice in contextual guessing, morphological analysis, and word-part recognition.

7.2 Main ideas and supporting details

Traditional teaching focuses heavily on translation and post-reading comprehension questions (Shin, 2013; Al-Issa, 2006). This causes students' difficulties in identifying main ideas.

Therefore, the reading instruction should focus on macrostructure comprehension and strategy-based instruction that guide students how to find main ideas. There are explicit reading techniques like think-aloud modeling, topic sentence mapping, and note taking to develop this subskill for readers (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

7.3 Inference and tone recognition

Many students reported that they could not differentiate between facts and opinions as well as evaluate the author's attitude, which hindered their development of inferential and critical thinking. Proficient readers can relate background knowledge to context clues in interpreting text (Pressley, 2002). English reading instruction not only focuses on literal comprehension, but also encourages think, prediction, and inference-oriented activities to enhance students to identify authors' intentions and attitudes. Additionally, experiencing different types of text can improve their advanced reading.

7.4 Reading speed and efficiency

Most Thai EFL students focus on more accuracy than fluency, resulting in word-by-word reading (Anderson, 1999). With the problem of slow reading, skimming and scanning practices can help students deal with the reading text quicker. Extensive reading activities and timed reading tasks can enhance the strength of automatic reading and comprehension efficiency. Moreover, technology related to interactive reading comprehension or online reading devices can improve their fluent comprehension with strategic use.

7.5 Affective and instructional dimensions

Students' low motivation and lack of confidence continue to limit their reading practices and development. Although the importance of English reading is perceived by them, their passive involvement points out that motivation in reading should be designed explicitly in the instruction. Positive attitude and engagement are essential for mastering different reading skills (McKenna & Kear, 1990; Poomarin & Adunyarittigun, 2020). Consequently, effective instruction should integrate reading subskill training with affective support with relevant and relatable topics, collaboration, and constructive feedback.

In conclusion, the reading difficulties that arose among Grade 9 Thai students can be referred to the limitations of specific subskills including vocabulary inference, main idea identification, inferential deduction, and reading efficiency. Present reading instructions based on translation and grammar are not sufficient for specific reading subskills, so strategy-based and student-centered instruction with explicit reading subskill training is necessary for developing EFL reading comprehension in Thai classroom.

8. Conclusion and Implications of the Study

This study reported on the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings on existing difficulties in English reading comprehension encountered by Grade 9 Thai EFL students. Regarding the insufficient mastery of specific reading subskills, the students have difficulty with vocabulary inference, main idea identification, inference making, and skimming and scanning strategies. These findings indicate that teaching methods in English reading based on translation and grammar may not optimally develop students' strategic and independent reading ability. Consequently, the implications of this study require a balance of cognitive, metacognitive, and affective aspects of learning to improve EFL students' reading performance. Teachers should:

1. provide authentic texts and activities related to word-part analysis and lessen the use of translation to develop students' vocabulary inference and contextual guessing.
2. train students to identify main ideas and summarize texts through explicit modeling, mapping, and constructive questioning.
3. provide activities and tasks about prediction, opinion comparison, and tone analysis to practice inference-making and critical thinking for students.
4. promote students' automaticity and confidence in reading efficiency using skimming, scanning, and extensive reading activities.
5. offer students with personal topic interests, technology-based reading resources, and collaborative learning approaches to support their motivation and engagement in English reading.

In further research studies, it is recommended that the effectiveness of these subskill-based techniques in different contexts of schools, different demographics, or longer timeframes can be investigated to evaluate students' progress and learning transfer. To address reading comprehension challenges, this study suggests practical approaches and specific strategies for enhancing EFL reading instruction.

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10. The Author

Ms. Sunisa Hoklang is a graduate student in the Master of Arts Program in English for Career Development at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi.

Asst. Wanpen Poomarin, PhD, is a full-time lecturer in the English Language Teaching Innovation Program at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi.

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