English Language Reading Strategies: Low Proficiency Adult Learners in a Malaysian University

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Abstract
In order to comprehend reading, readers need to apply various reading strategies. The same goes to adult learners in universities as higher education demands substantial readings in the English language, thus they need to be able to comprehend it via implementation of various reading strategies. This paper investigates the reading strategies used by low proficiency adult learners in a Malaysian university when reading English materials. The findings are that as these students are low proficiency second language learners of English, they do not always apply reading strategies when it comes to reading English materials. Also, the respondents do not have a specific preference on implementing any of the reading strategies. However, if English language reading strategies are given better emphasis in schools, it might be implemented more frequently by the adult learners. The findings are believed to help educators facilitate reading strategies in order to be employed by readers.
Keywords: Adult Learners, Language Learning Strategies, Low Proficiency Learners, Reading Strategies, Second Language Learners

Introduction
It is known that to learn a language, an individual would have to employ various language learning strategies in order to grasp it. Which is why, having a good strategy can ease language learning consequently leading to the importance of learners in employing appropriate learning strategies. These language learning strategies are introduced by teachers of the language, thus it is important that learners be given proper instruction and are able to understand the language learning process in order for them to be able to practice the strategies on their own (Ang et al., 2017; Tran & Tran, 2021; Weng et al., 2016).

English language learning strategies are diverse and in the Malaysian context, it goes together with second language acquisition. Reading is an important component of the English language as it affects an individual's intellectual and emotional growth (Baba & Affendi, 2020) and it

has positive impacts on learners' achievement (Krashen, 2007; Krashen, 2013). However, learners in Malaysia are lacking in this aspect due to the lack of explicit introduction to reading strategies in the classroom (Rashid et al., 2016; Tanveer, 2013). This leads to the importance of the learners employing various English language reading strategies for comprehension.

Utilising various english language reading strategies extends to adult learners in universities. According to Rashid et al (2016), employing effective reading strategies will allow meaningful comprehension of reading materials. This is supported by Meniado (2016) who stated that higher education demands substantial readings, therefore students should essentially use reading strategies to be able to understand what they are reading. Apart from that, a study on tertiary institution students by Baba and Affendi (2020), discovered that reading is eminently connected to students' academic achievement and it undoubtedly contributes to their future careers.

One issue as stated by Muhamad et al (2020) is that many English learners in Malaysia are unable to cultivate a love for reading. They find it boring, thus unable to form a reading interest. If English language reading strategies are well implemented, students might have a different perspective on reading and would be able to cultivate interest in reading English materials. This can aid reading proficiency issues. According to Sajid & Kassim (2019), they have stated that there is an issue of weak reading proficiency that needs critical attention. Also, based on Meniado's research in 2016, reading is one of the least developed linguistic skills based on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and International English Language Testing Service's (IELTS) test reports. As the aforementioned reading problems, hence, there is a need for a study to identify reading strategies used by low proficiency adult learners to improve their English language reading skills. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the reading strategies used by low proficiency adult learners in a Malaysian university when reading English materials.

Literature Review
Language Learning Strategies
Language learning strategies are defined as any actions, methods, plans and formulas used by language learners to facilitate the acquiring, storage and use of information (Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Besides that, language learning strategies are also known as the intentional actions and thoughts implemented by language learners when they are learning in order to help them understand, learn and remember new information better (Richards & Platt, 1992). In addition to that, Hismanoglu (2000) emphasised that language learning strategies are used both consciously and unconsciously by language learners when they are processing new information and completing tasks in language classrooms. Successful learners implement various language learning strategies in order to be more efficient in their learning. This includes the ability for them to have self-directed participation in their learning process to reach a higher level of competence (Ramli, 2021; Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018).

Second Language Learners
Many people acquire and use a second language, leading it to be an essential part of everyday life, therefore second language learners need to master the basic skills of second language learners (Farooq et al., 2020). In Malaysia, English is the second language and is taught as a

compulsory subject in schools. It is also widely used for reading, communication and professional purposes.

According to Rubin (1975), good second language learners have a strong drive to communicate and are prepared to make mistakes, practice when they have the opportunities, monitor their speech and pay attention to meaning. Other characteristics of good language learners are the ability to identify recurring patterns in language learning problems and being able to solve language learning problems by using the patterns (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Apart from that, good second language learners are uninhibited as when learners interact and use their second language without inhibition, they are exposed to many opportunities to practice the language (Lightbrown & Spada, 2006; Rubin, 1987).

However, some second language learners have poor performance on the language due to the teaching approaches and their own attitude towards English (Kummin, Surat, Amir, Mohamad & Yunus, 2020). A negative attitude will inhibit their learning process causing them to not assimilate various learning strategies. This in turn will lead them to be low proficient learners of the language. Rashid et al. (2016) emphasized that tertiary learners of all levels of proficiency need to be able to employ learning strategies in order to avoid difficulties when it comes to their academic reading materials.

In addition to that, when it comes to reading, second language learners react to L2 reading materials differently compared to how they react with L1 materials. One of the reasons is because second language learners have a limited knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and text structure of the target language. Next, second language learners' experience with second language reading is less compared to their reading experience in their first language thus, they have less exposure and practice with L2 reading. Lastly, second language learners may encounter materials that are foreign to them due to distinct social and cultural background knowledge (Barzegar & Fazilatfar, 2019).

Definition of Reading
Reading has changed in meaning and understanding massively over the years. Reading is defined as an active attempt on the part of the reader to understand a writer's message. It involves cracking the code and analysing, reasoning, thinking, imagining, and judging as one reads (Smith & Robinson, 1980). Toit (2007) stated, reading is a process of thinking, recalling and relating ideas under the functioning of written words. Reading also has been described as the act of translating symbols or letters into words or sentences that actually have meaning to an individual. It is the ability to comprehend what is seen in the text, which is the ability of the reader to capture before processing that information and acquire meaning from it (Adetunji, 2007). Additionally, reading is considered as a complex process as it requires interaction between the reader and the text which is constructed by the reader's schemata, attitude and experiences that are socially and culturally situated (Tran & Nguyen, 2021). Noor (2011) claimed that reading is valued as the most vital academic language skill for both second and foreign language learners in any higher learning environment. Through reading, students get to learn new information and become more proficient in their subject matters. It was also found that reading is crucial in order to teach individuals on how to cope with new knowledge in the developing and technologically changing world today.

Reading Strategies

Harris and Hodges (1995), defined reading strategies in education as a systematic plan, consciously adapted by learners and monitored in order to improve learners' performance in learning, particularly reading. Also, proficient language learners are always aware of the significance of employing reading strategies in developing their reading skills (Albiladi, 2019). Several studies on reading strategies have discovered that learners rely on several strategies when it comes to reading and they do not depend on one specific strategy (Chomphuchart, 2006; Nordin et al., 2013; Tran & Nguyen, 2021).

According to Ali and Razali (2019), the process of reading involves various types of reading strategies which include cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies. O'Malley (1987) classified cognitive strategies as strategies that are used when readers interact with the material by manipulating it mentally such as creating images or manipulating it physically which is done through grouping the items into meaningful categories and jotting down important information that needs to be remembered. O'Malley added that cognitive strategies are important in language classrooms as it contributes to successful learning. Some of the strategies categorised under cognitive strategies are planning and goal setting, inclusion of prior knowledge, making predictions and asking questions, monitoring, reflecting and revising meaning (Ali & Razali, 2019; Tunga, 2021). Lastly, Tunga (2021) deduced that in order to use cognitive strategies effectively and efficiently, learners have to be provided with appropriate ways of instructions.

Metacognitive strategies on the other hand, are classified as strategies that involve the executive process in planning and monitoring the reader's production and comprehension and evaluating the progress of learning objectives (O'Malley, 1987). Ali and Razali (2019) asserted that metacognitive strategies include global reading strategy, support reading strategy and problem solving reading strategy. Notably, metacognitive strategies are used to assist the readers in understanding the texts. As reported by Tunga (2021), learners employed metacognitive strategies so that they are able to coordinate their learning process through arranging, planning, centering and evaluating which give them the power to control their own learning. Hence, they are able to choose strategies that suit them best. Additionally, when metacognitive strategies are employed by learners, they will be able to identify their shortcomings and improve themselves during the learning process (Kummin et al., 2020). As learners are equipped with metacognitive strategies that are suitable for them, they will be able to comprehend their reading material.

Methodology

This study applied a quantitative research method to investigate the reading strategies used by low proficiency adult learners when reading English materials. This study was carried out in a public university in Malaysia and consists of 65 diploma students as the respondents. The respondents are second language learners of English and have low proficiency in the language based on the grade of their previous English subject. Data was collected via a questionnaire, adapted from Andrew D. Cohen and Julie C. Chi's "Language Strategy Use Inventory". The questionnaire's "Reading Strategy Use" section was adopted to a simpler version where respondents chose the scale of strategies used based on rarely, sometimes and always. The data was then analysed using descriptive analysis in order to answer the research question.

Findings and Discussion

Data from the findings were grouped into several strategies: 1) Read as much as possible in the English language, 2) Planning, skimming, scanning and re-reading the text, 3) Focusing, summarising and predicting the text and 4) Making connections and using the dictionary.

Read as much as Possible in the English Language

Table 1 illustrates the frequency and percentage counts for items categorised under 'read as much as possible in the English language'. It is found that 47.7% (n=31) of the respondents always try to read as much as possible in the target language and the other 52.3% (n=34) answered that they sometimes do this. Next, 33.8% (n=22) of the respondents always try to find things to read for pleasure in the target language, while the other 66.2% (n=43) of them use this strategy sometimes. Furthermore, 47% (n=31) of the respondents admitted that they always find reading materials that are at their level. On the other hand, 52.3% (34) of the respondents answered that they only implement this strategy sometimes.

Table 1: Read as Much as Possible in The English Language

No.	Items	Always	Sometimes	Never
		N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
1.	Read as much as possible in the target language.	31 (47.7)	34 (52.3)	0 (0)
2.	Try to find things to read for pleasure in the target language.	22 (33.8)	43 (66.2)	0 (0)
3.	Find reading material that is at or near my level.	31 (47.7)	34 (52.3)	0 (0)

The findings found that these students are trying to read as much as possible in the target language as one of their reading strategies. It can be inferred that they opt for this strategy as they are lacking reading experience with L2 materials hence they are trying to improve on their L2 reading. This is supported by Barzegar and Fazilatfar (2019) in which they mentioned that second language learners have less reading experience and exposure to L2 materials compared to their L1 reading experience. Besides that, it can be deduced that the reason why these students find reading materials that are at their level is because as aforementioned, these students have low level of English proficiency.

Planning, Skimming, Scanning and Re-Reading the Text

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage counts for items grouped under planning, skimming, scanning and rereading the text. Based on the results of the questionnaire, 52.3% (n=34) of the respondents plan before they read and monitor their reading to see how much they understand. Another 46.2% (n=30) of the respondents said that they sometimes do this and only 1.5% (n=1) of the respondents revealed that they never plan their reading. In

addition to that, 32.3% (n=21) of the respondents always skim the text first and then read it again carefully, while the other 58.5% (n=38) of them use this strategy sometimes. However, a small number of the respondents (9.2%, n=6) admitted that they do not use this strategy. Lastly, a large number of the respondents (67.7%, n=44) always use the strategy of reading a text several times until they understand it, while the other 32.3% (n=21) of them do this sometimes.

Table 2: Planning, Skimming, Scanning and Re-reading The Text

No.	Items	Always (N/%)	Sometimes (N/%)	Never (N/%)
4.	Plan out in advance how I'm going to read the text, monitor to see how I'm doing, and then check to see how much I understand.	34 (52.3)	30 (46.2)	1 (1.5)
5.	Skim an academic text first to get the main idea and then go back and read it more carefully.	21 (32.3)	38 (58.5)	6 (9.2)
6.	Read a story or dialogue several times until I understand it.	44 (67.7)	21 (32.3)	0 (0)

The findings discovered that the students employed the metacognitive strategy associated with planning before reading, monitoring progress and checking comprehension. Ali and Razali (2019) highlighted that metacognitive strategies are important in assisting the readers in understanding the texts and it helps learners to control their own learning (Tunga, 2021). The findings also explored that the students implemented cognitive strategies as they skim the text to get the main idea and then read it again carefully until they understand. According to O'Malley (1987), it is essential to use cognitive strategies in language classrooms as it contributes to successful learning.

Focusing, Summarising and Predicting the Text
Data from Table 3 shows the respondents employed certain reading strategies that are related to focusing, summarising and predicting the text. According to item 7, 44.6% (n=29) of the respondents always pay attention to the organisation of the text, especially headings and subheadings, while 53.8% (n=35) sometimes do so and 1.5% (n=1) never use this strategy. Based on item 8, 33.8% (n=22) always make ongoing summaries of the reading either in their mind or in the margins of the text, while 63.1% (n=41) sometimes do so and 3.1% (n=2) of the respondents never use this strategy. For item 9, "make predictions as to what will happen next", 41.5% (n=27) of the respondents always employ this strategy while 55.4% (n=36) sometimes do so and 3.1% (n=2) never use this strategy.

Table 3: Focusing, Summarising and Predicting The Text

No.	Items	Always (N/%)	Sometimes (N/%)	Never (N/%)
7.	Pay attention to the organization of the text, especially headings and subheadings.	29 (44.6)	35 (53.8)	1 (1.5)
8.	Make ongoing summaries of the reading either in my mind or in the margins of the text.	22 (33.8)	41 (63.1)	2 (3.1)
9.	Make predictions as to what will happen next.	27 (41.5)	36 (55.4)	2 (3.1)

From the findings, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents rarely employ metacognitive reading strategies related to focusing, summarising and predicting the text. This can be due to the fact that the respondents are from a low English proficiency background. This is supported by previous research by Rashid et al. (2016) and Tanveer (2013) whereby English learners in Malaysia lack the exposure to reading strategies. Another researcher, Albiladi (2019), stated that reading strategies are usually implemented by highly proficient language learners. It can be seen that previous studies are parallel with this study's data that shows the respondents rarely employ metacognitive reading strategies due to the fact that they are not good language learners and lack exposure to reading strategies. This situation should change as focusing, summarising and predicting the text are highly effective and crucial metacognitive reading strategies (Ramli, 2021).

Making Connections and using the Dictionary
Table 4 shows reading strategies that the respondents employ that are related to making connections and using the dictionary. From item 10, it can be seen that 60% (n=39) of the respondents always guess the approximate meaning by using clues from the context of the reading material, while 38.5% (n=25) do so sometimes and 1.5% (n=1) never use this strategy. Next, item 11 shows that 50.8% (n=33) use a bilingual dictionary to get a sense of what the equivalent word in my native language would be, 46.2% (n=30) sometimes do so and 3.1% (n=2) never use this strategy. Lastly, item 12 shows that 27.7% (n=18) of the respondents use a target language dictionary to see how words are defined by means of other target language words, whereas 67.7% (n=44) only do so sometimes and 4.6% (n=3) never uses this strategy.

Table 4: Making Connections and Using The Dictionary

No.	Items	Always (N/%)	Sometimes (N/%)	Never (N/%)
10.	Guess the approximate meaning by using clues from the context of the reading material.	39 (60)	25 (38.5)	1 (1.5)
11.	Use a bilingual dictionary to get a sense of what the equivalent word in my native language would be.	33 (50.8)	30 (46.2)	2 (3.1)
12.	Use a target language dictionary to see how words are defined by means of other target language words.	18 (27.7)	44 (67.7)	3 (4.6)

The findings show that cognitive strategies are employed in order to understand words that the respondents do not know. It can be seen that they try to guess the meaning and use a dictionary in order to comprehend their reading. However, the respondents prefer to use a bilingual dictionary (eg: English - Malay) instead of a target language dictionary (eg: English - English). Based on Ramli (2021), comprehension of the text can only be achieved when the respondents manage to find the interpretation of the English word. This can be related to the fact that the respondents are second language learners of English. According to Barzegar & Fazilatfar (2019), it is found that low proficient second language learners have limited knowledge of vocabulary. This shows that when it comes to reading, they need to employ cognitive strategies in order to know the meaning of the word. Also, the preference of using a bilingual dictionary can be attributed to the fact that low proficiency second language learners lack knowledge of English vocabulary, thus they are more comfortable in finding meanings in their native language.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the students applied both cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies particularly by reading as much as possible in the English language, planning, skimming, scanning and rereading the text, focusing, summarising and predicting the text and making connections and using the dictionary in dealing with second language reading materials. However, since the students are low proficiency second language learners, they do not have specific reading strategies that they prefer when it comes to reading English materials and it is also found that the strategies are not always applied by the learners. Based on the findings from this research, it can be inferred that both learners and educators play a significant role in language learning strategies as learners and educators work best hand in hand. Learners need to identify reading strategies that suit them best in second language learning by exploring all the strategies available and this is where educators play a crucial role as the facilitators and assist the learners. Educators ought to introduce suitable and significant reading strategies depending on the learners' level of proficiency and guide them through so that they are familiar with the strategies and able to decide on which strategies that they are most compatible with. Lastly, it is hoped that this study highlights the importance of reading

strategies in language learning among tertiary second language learners despite their proficiency level as reading itself is highly connected to students' academic achievement and unquestionably contributes to learners' careers in the future.

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