

Foreign Language Reading Anxiety and Reading Strategies among Vietnamese Learners of English

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Abstract— The quantitative study was carried out at Thai Nguyen University of Education to measure the levels of reading anxiety among EFL students who have just finished one year of intensive English. These students are about to take the IELTS exam with expected result was 5.5 overall band (B2-CEFR). The finding shows that the level of anxiety measured was at medium level ($M= 3.31$, $SD= 0.5937$). The second research question focuses on the relationship between reading anxiety and the uses of reading strategies. The results show that there were no significant discrepancy between reading anxiety and the uses of reading strategies. The results also indicate that reading anxiety does not affect the uses of different groups of reading strategies.

Keywords— Reading anxiety, reading strategies, Thai Nguyen EFL students

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Undoubtedly, reading is one of the most crucial language skills serving as the foundation for other language skills to be developed, especially for academic writing at tertiary level. It is thought to be the primary means for gaining access to various sources of information, providing the basis for “synthesis and critical evaluation skills” (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 187).

Reading academic texts is far beyond the for-pleasure readings. It is the process of extracting meaning from written texts. Carrell (1998) refers to reading comprehension as the interaction between knowledge existing in a learner’s mind (prior knowledge) and the new knowledge from the information being read in the text, it takes the use of strategies in reading, and the readers’ awareness in monitoring their comprehension and in using appropriate strategies to deal with their problems in comprehending texts. Crème (2008, p. 55) shares an idea that readers are required great efforts and strategies to comprehend because ideas are embedded in the text and it can take a lot of rereading to unravel them so that they appear clear and understandable. In the same view, Yukselir (2014) considers reading comprehension as a result of a complicated process between a numbers of elements such as, text, setting, reader background, and reading strategies.

Numerous studies have been done to investigate the importance of reading strategies. However, a psychological factor that hampers readers from successfully comprehension of a written text but has likely been left out, the foreign language reading anxiety, especially in Vietnamese foreign language teaching context. That is the reason why the present study attempts to investigate the interplay between reading

strategies and reading anxiety among foreign language students at Thai Nguyen University.

1.2. Research Questions

For the sake of investigation the correlation between reading anxiety and the uses of reading strategies, the proposed study looks for the answers to the following questions

1.2.1. What is the level of reading anxiety among EFL students at Thai Nguyen University?

1.2.2. What is the relationship between reading anxiety and reading strategy use?

1.3. Significance of the Study

The findings from the study might fill in the gap of language anxiety and preferred strategies in reading. Besides, teachers who teach reading comprehension might take the references to develop activities to lower negative impacts of language anxiety.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Reading Strategies

Language learning strategies have been defined as “an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language - to incorporate these into one’s inter-language competence” (Tarone, 1983, p. 67). Rubin (1987) concluded that language learning strategies are those which contribute to the development of the language system which the learner constructs and affect learning directly (p.22). Finally, language learning strategies are referred to as specific actions or steps on the part of learners that facilitate the acquisition of a second or foreign language (Chamot & O’Malley, 1996; Oxford, 1990).

To be more specifically, reading strategies is defined ‘the mental operations or comprehension processes that readers select and apply in order to make sense of what they read’ (Abbott, 2006, p. 637). Readers’ strategy use while reading demonstrates their interaction with written texts, and effective use of strategies can improve their reading efficiency and text comprehension (Carrell, 1989). Anderson (1991) posits that reading strategies are deliberate, cognitive steps that readers can take to assist in acquiring, storing and retrieving new information. Williams and Burden (1997) further classifies reading strategies as cognitive, metacognitive and social strategies which deal with (a) efficient retrieval, storage, and acquisition of information for readers to extract and construct meaning from texts, (b) readers’ knowledge of cognitive

resources, awareness of cognitive processing, and the ability to adjust utilized strategies and (c) “asking for clarification or verification,” “cooperating with peers and proficient users of the new language,” “developing cultural understanding,” and “becoming aware of others’ thoughts and feelings respectively. In the present study, the researcher adopted the reading strategies inventory developed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) the Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) as the main tool to identify students’ utilization of reading strategies for their reading. According to the SORS, reading strategies are classified as Global strategies (GS), Problem-solving (PRB) and Support strategies (SUP). (see appendix A).

2.2. Language Anxiety

The language learning and teaching science is closely connected to studies of psychology. In other words, psychologists have defined many phenomena in the language teaching and learning practices. Psychologically, anxiety is defined as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry that are experienced by an individual, and the heightened activity of the autonomic nervous system that accompanies these feelings (Spielberger, 1976, p. 5). The more recently definition of anxiety by Zeidner that anxiety refers to a psychological state in which the person’s sense of uneasy suspense and worry is triggered by ambiguous circumstances (Zeidner, 2010, p. 5). Zeidner distinguishes the confusing term “anxiety” from “fear” which refers to an intense biologically adaptive physiological and behavioural response to the occurrence of a specific, identifiable stimulus. In other words, fear is objective, clear, and in the present, while anxiety is subjective, ambiguous and relates to future danger (p. 6).

Language anxiety can be defined as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 128). Longman dictionary defines language anxiety as subjective feelings of apprehension and fear associated with language learning and use (Richards, 1985, p. 313).

Explicitly, anxiety is the automatic reaction of the nerve system when confronting with unfamiliar situations or events. Naturally, the feeling affects seriously to the language performance of the language user. The relationship between anxiety and performance can best be illustrated with an inverted “U”, that is, “when anxiety is low, performance is also low. When anxiety is optimal, performance is high, but beyond an optimal level of anxiety, performance deteriorates” (Walker, 1997, p. 17). Numerous studies have found that anxiety has debilitating effects on the language learner and was said to be one of the strongest predictors of success in language learning (McIntyre, 1999 in Woodrow, 2006). Gardner & MacIntyre (1993) shared a definition of foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in a second or foreign language. Horwitz et al. (1986) concluded that foreign language anxiety frequently shows up in listening and speaking activities, testing situations, over-studying, and so

on. Overtime, anxiety has been a major concern for many other aspects such as; computer anxiety, sport anxiety, social anxiety... . In terms of language learning and teaching, the concept of ‘reading anxiety’ was first introduced by Saito and her colleagues. She developed the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) which has been using to measure foreign language anxiety level in reading comprehension (Saito, et al. 1999).

2.3. Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Studies

The concepts of LA and FLA had been the basis for many related inventories such as Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA), Foreign Language Listening Anxiety (FLLA), Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (SLWAT). Reading skill has long been seen as less interpersonal interaction in comparison with other skills i.e. speaking and listening which contain more anxiety provoking factors. However, research confirms that reading anxiety does exist when second or foreign language learners have to cope with reading passages (Saito *et al.* 1999). Saito highlighted the reading anxiety which emerges from text processing rather than reading difficulty. The primary focus of the study was on the cognate of the languages. Basing on the findings from levels of anxiety of learners whose native language were French which has many cognates to English (both languages use Roman alphabet), Russian which has few cognates and Japanese which is completely non-cognate to English, Saito *et al.* developed an instrument (FLRAS) that is claimed capable of measuring levels of reading anxiety in both unfamiliar orthographic and cultural diversities, i.e. both different writing system and content (Zoghi, 2012). The introduction of the FLRAS was seen as the compensation for the paucity in the literature of language anxiety. Although many arguments around Saito *et al.*’s (1999) hypotheses about foreign language reading anxiety (Spark *et al.* 2000), FLRAS has been utilized in many studies in many countries, mostly in China. Chen (2005) investigated foreign language reading anxiety among 46 Year-1 non-English majors and concluded that these participants demonstrated a high level of reading anxiety which was negatively correlated to and an indicator of their English achievement, especially for the females. Shi and Liu (2006) studied on 211 Year-2 non-English majors. The findings were that found Chinese university students’ FL reading anxiety was negatively correlated to both their College English Test Band-4 (CET-4) overall grades and their reading comprehension grades and that males demonstrated remarkably higher reading anxiety but lower English achievements than females. Qiu and Liao (2007) carried out a study with 153 non-English majors and found that foreign language reading anxiety was caused by exam-oriented reading practice. The findings also revealed that reading anxiety was negatively correlated to foreign language proficiency. More than that, reading anxiety could predict male students’ English proficiency much better than it did that of females, Wang and Fang’s (2008) findings indicated that reading anxiety was significantly negatively correlated to both reading performance and reading strategy use while the latter

two were significantly positively correlated to each other. Capan, *et al.* (2012) examined the relationships among gender, education level and language anxiety, associated with two major language skills; listening and reading. The subject was 159 EFL students at a Turkish University. The results revealed moderate correlations between education level and reading anxiety.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

The participants were 48 second year students of English as a foreign language at Thai Nguyen University of Education. These students have just finished one year of intensive English. In the second year, they will be required to take an IELTS exam with overall band of 5.5 (B2-CEFR) to be accepted in the second phase of their 4 year program.

3.2. Data Collection Instruments

In order to measure the levels of reading anxiety, the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) developed by Saito *et al.* (1999) was used to assess students' reading anxiety. The FLRAS consists of 20 items which consists of five- points Likert Scale, ranging from five points "strongly agree" to one point "strongly disagree." To score each item in questionnaire depends on the negative wording or positive wording. The internal consistency of FLRAS was 0.982 (N = 20). Then, Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS) designed by Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002) was used to investigate learners' choice of strategies while reading English. SORS consists of 30 items on five-point Likert Scale, ranging from one point (I never or almost never do this) to five points (I always or almost always do this). The internal consistency of SORS was 0.768 (N= 30) (see appendix A & B).

3.3. Data Analysis Instruments

The SPSS 20 was used to analyse the data for the present study.

IV. FINDINGS

4.1.1. RQ1: What is the level of reading anxiety among EFL students at Thai Nguyen University?

Table 1 presented the descriptive statistics from the FLRAS. It shows that levels of reading anxiety among EFL

students at Thai Nguyen University was medium (M= 3.31, SD= 0.5937)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of FLRAS

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FLRAS	48	2.05	4.30	3.3135	.59437
Valid N (listwise)	48				

Table 2 presented the descriptive statistics from SORS. It shows that EFL students at Thai Nguyen university use reading strategies at medium level (M=3.2, SD = 0.492).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of SORS

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SORS	48	2.09	4.71	3.1568	.49241
Valid N (listwise)	48				

4.1.2. RQ2. What is the relationship between reading anxiety and reading strategy use?

Table 3 shows the correlation Pearson between FLRAS and SORS, the Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.229 > 0.05 (r= 0.177) so we can conclude that there was no correlation between FLRAS and SORS. In other words, the levels of reading anxiety did not make any changes in the uses of reading strategies. In order to measure the correlation between levels of reading anxiety on the uses of different groups of reading strategies, the researcher further analyse the correlation between FLRAS and GLOB, PROB and SUP strategies respectively (table 4)

Table 3: Correlation between FLRAS and SORS

Correlations			
		FLRAS	SORS
FLRAS	Pearson Correlation	1	.177
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.229
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	16.604	2.435
	Covariance	.353	.052
	N	48	48
SORS	Pearson Correlation	.177	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.229	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	2.435	11.396
	Covariance	.052	.242
	N	48	48

Table 4: Correlation between FLRAS and the uses of different reading strategies groups.

Correlations					
		FLRAS	Supported Strategies	Global Strategies	Problem Solving Strategies
FLRAS	Pearson Correlation	1	.153	.060	.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.299	.688	.441
	N	48	48	48	48
Supported Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.153	1	-.042	.026
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.299		.778	.861
	N	48	48	48	48
Global Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.060	-.042	1	.404**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.688	.778		.004
	N	48	48	48	48
Prob-Solving Strategies	Pearson Correlation	.114	.026	.404**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.441	.861	.004	
	N	48	48	48	48

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.299 for Supported Strategies, = 0.688 for Global Strategies and = 0.441 for Problem Solving strategies, all >0.05. There are no significant discrepancy between the levels of reading anxiety and strategies uses.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings from the study indicated level of reading anxiety of EFL students at Thai Nguyen University was at medium (M= 3.31, SD= 0.5937). The results were similar with some studies carried out in the world about language reading anxiety and reading strategies (Sari, 2017; Wu, 2015, Ghonsooly, 2012). There was no correlation between foreign language reading anxiety level and the uses of variety of reading strategies.

The study was conducted at the International School of Thai Nguyen University. The findings may not be generalized for all Vietnamese English language learners until other triangulation is made by further studies.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY OF READING STRATEGIES (SORS)

Kouider Mokhtari and Ravi Sheorey, 2002

The purpose of this survey is to collect information about the various strategies you use when you read school-related academic materials in ENGLISH (e.g., reading textbooks for homework or examinations; reading journal articles, etc.). Each statement is followed by five numbers, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, and each number means the following:

1. means that 'I never or almost never do this'
2. means that 'I do this only occasionally'
3. means that 'I sometimes do this'. (About 50% of the time.)
4. means that 'I usually do this'.

5. means that ‘I always or almost always do this’.

After reading each statement, circle the number (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) which applies to you. Note that there are no right or wrong responses to any of the items on this survey.

#	STATEMENTS	RATING				
1.	I have a purpose in mind when I read.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I take notes while reading to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I think about what I know to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I take an overall view of the text to see what it is about before reading it.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	When text becomes difficult, I read aloud to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I think about whether the content of the text fits my reading purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I read slowly and carefully to make sure I understand what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I review the text first by noting its characteristics like length and organization.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I try to get back on track when I lose concentration.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I underline or circle information in the text to help me remember it.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I adjust my reading speed according to what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	When reading, I decide what to read closely and what to ignore.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I use reference materials (e.g. a dictionary) to help me understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	When text becomes difficult, I pay closer attention to what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I use tables, figures, and pictures in text to increase my understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I stop from time to time and think about what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I use context clues to help me better understand what I am reading.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I paraphrase (restate ideas in my own words) to better understand what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	I try to picture or visualize information to help remember what I read.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	I use typographical features like bold face and italics to identify key information.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I critically analyze and evaluate the information presented in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I go back and forth in the text to find relationships among ideas in it.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I check my understanding when I come across new information.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I try to guess what the content of the text is about when I read.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	When text becomes difficult, I re-read it to increase my understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	I ask myself questions I like to have answered in the text.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	I check to see if my guesses about the text are right or wrong.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	When I read, I guess the meaning of unknown words or phrases.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	When reading, I translate from English into my native language.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	When reading, I think about information in both English and my mother tongue.	1	2	3	4	5

SCORING GUIDELINES FOR THE SURVEY OF READING STRATEGIES

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Write the number you circled for each statement (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) in the appropriate blanks below.
2. Add up the scores under each column and place the result on the line under each column.
3. Divide the subscale score by the number of statements in each column to get the average for each subscale.
4. Calculate the average for the whole inventory by adding up the subscale scores and dividing by 30.
5. Use the interpretation guidelines below to understand your averages.

Global Reading Strategies (GLOB Subscale)	Problem Solving Strategies (PROB Subscale)	Support Reading Strategies (SUP Subscale)	Overall Reading Strategies (ORS)
1	7	2	GLOB _____
3	9	5	
4	11	10	
6	14	13	PROB _____
8	16	18	SUP _____
12	19	22	
15	25	26	
17	28	29	
20		30	
21			
23			
24			
27			
GLOB Score _____/13 GLOB Average _____	PROB Score _____/8 PROB Average _____	SUP Score _____/9 SUP Average _____	Overall Score _____/30 Overall Average _____

KEY TO AVERAGES: 3.5 or higher = High 2.5 – 3.4 = Medium 2.4 or lower = Low

INTERPRETING YOUR SCORES:

The overall average indicates how often you use reading strategies when reading academic materials. The average for

each subscale shows which group of strategies (i.e., Global, Problem Solving, or support strategies) you use most often when reading. It is important to note, however, that the best possible use of these strategies depends on your reading ability in English, the type of material read, and your reading purpose. A low score on any of the subscales or parts of the inventory indicates that there may be some strategies in these parts that you might want to learn about and consider using when reading (adapted from Oxford 1990, pp. 297-300).

Mokhtari, K., & Sheorey, R. (2002). Measuring ESL students reading strategies. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 25 (3), pp. 2-10.

APPENDIX B: Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS)
by Y. Saito, T.J. Garza, and E.K. Horwitz (1999)

1: Strongly disagree	2: Disagree	3: Neutral	4: Agree	5: Strongly agree
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#	Statements	Rating				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	I get upset when I am not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English					
2.	When reading English, I often understand the words, but still can't quite understand what the author is saying.					
3.	When I am reading English, I get so confused that I can't remember what I am reading.					
4.	I feel intimidated whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.					
5.	I am nervous when I am reading a passage in English when I am not familiar with the topic.					
6.	I get upset whenever I encounter unknown grammar when reading English.					
7.	When reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word.					
8.	It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while reading English.					
9.	I usually end up translating word by word when I am reading English.					
10.	By the time I get past the funny letters and symbols in English, it is hard to remember what you've reading about.					
11.	I am worried about all the new symbols I have to learn in order to read in English.					
12.	I enjoy reading English					
13.	I feel confident when I am reading in English					
14.	Once I get used to it, reading English is not so difficult.					
15.	The hardest part of learning English is learning to read.					
16.	I would be happy just to learn to speak English rather than having to learn to read as well.					
17.	I don't mind reading to myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read in English.					
18.	I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English that I have achieved so far.					
19.	English culture and ideas seem very foreign to me.					
20.	I have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read English.					