

# **A Study On Students' Perception Of Reading Strategies While Comprehending An Academic Text By UTM Students**

Noor Zainab Abdul Razak & Siti Norashikin Amir  
Fakulti Pendidikan,  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

**Abstract :** Membaca merupakan satu kemahiran yang membolehkan pembaca memperoleh pengetahuan dan informasi daripada teks yang dibaca. Penggunaan strategi bacaan yang sesuai boleh membantu pembaca membaca secara independen dan berkesan. Oleh itu, kajian ini dilaksanakan dengan tujuan untuk mengenal pasti persepsi pelajar tahun 1 Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai terhadap strategi bacaan ketika membaca teks akademik. Responden kajian ini terdiri daripada pelajar tahun 1 yang mengambil matapelajaran UHB 1412 (English for Academic Communication) yang terdiri daripada pelbagai fakulti di UTM sesi 2008/2009 iaitu seramai 60 orang pelajar. Satu set soal selidik yang mengandungi 58 item telah diedarkan kepada pelajar-pelajar untuk menganalisa strategi bacaan yang digunakan oleh mereka. Analisis dibuat untuk mendapatkan nilai kekerapan, peratusan dan min. Dalam kajian ini, keputusan menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar telah menggunakan tiga strategi membaca yang telah dicadangkan iaitu strategi kognitif, metakognitif dan sosial untuk memahami teks yang dibaca. Selain daripada itu, telah ditemui iaitu strategi bacaan sosial merupakan strategi bacaan yang paling kerap digunakan oleh pelajar-pelajar tahun 1. Walaubagaimanapun, menurut dapatan kajian, tidak banyak perbezaan dalam bilangan dan jenis strategi bacaan yang digunakan oleh pelajar bertahap tinggi dan pelajar bertahap rendah. Berdasarkan analisis, pelajar bertahap tinggi telah menggunakan ketiga-tiga strategi bacaan yang dicadangkan oleh pengkaji manakala bagi pelajar bertahap rendah hanya menggunakan strategi bacaan metakognitif dengan sepenuhnya tetapi tidak pada strategi yang lain. Diskusi mengenai cadangan bagi kajian masa hadapan telah disertakan sebagai rujukan bagi pengkaji-pengkaji yang berminat menjalankan kajian dalam bidang ini.

*Keywords :* student's perception, reading strategies, academic text

## **Introduction**

Reading is not merely a receptive process of picking up information from a page in a word-by-word manner (Grabe, 1991) but rather, it is a selective process and is characterized as an active process of comprehending. The ability to comprehend what has been read is a requirement for success in all aspects of learning and this extends well beyond the educational years. Therefore, in the case of non-English-speaking readers it is especially important for them to employ reading strategies to read English texts more effectively. Grabe also mentioned that effective reading is rapid, purposeful, comprehending, flexible and gradually developing. Thus, reading is a very complex process, and this is what drives many researchers to attempt to understand and explain its process.

As university students, they have to be aware of how learning strategies interact with the materials that we read. The effectiveness of the strategies that we use for reading should also be considered in the event that these strategies need to be modified to meet the challenges of the text. Some learning strategies of reading are the cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and social strategies.

The study was carried out in UTM which is situated in the state of Johor. In this investigation, a group of UTM students were the participants for the study. These first year undergraduates were taking UHB 1412 course which is English for Academic Communication.

## **Statement of the problem**

Reading is important in both acquiring the language and also in obtaining knowledge. However, not all students are able to read well especially in reading comprehension. Reading comprehension has come to be the “essence of reading” (Durkin, 1993), essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas but also to professional success and to lifelong learning (Pritchard et al.,1999) (Rings, 1994) (Strydom,1997). This means, the ability to read academic texts is considered one of the most important skills that university students of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) need to acquire (Levine et al., 2000).

Since reading revolves mostly around comprehension of the text, students who cannot sufficiently restructure the author’s main idea, supporting ideas, and supporting facts, as well as make some critical evaluation of these things, cannot read for the purposes of the course, regardless of what types of material they read outside of class (Falke, 1982). Most of the students still have these difficulties while reading academic text even for students at university level. There may be a number of reasons why they are not able to read as effectively as they should. According to Falke (1982), sometimes the reader lacks the background knowledge to properly interpret a particular item, while sometimes a reader lacks the strategies necessary to read even the simplest material. These students may not have learnt to use a variety of reading strategies and some of them might have problems due to the inappropriate reading strategies that they employ. This problem has led the researcher to investigate the reading strategies employed by university students, primarily first year undergraduates of UTM.

Thus, a survey was conducted to examine whether these university students employ a sufficient number of reading strategies while comprehending an academic text, specifically in their second language which is English. At the same time, the researcher also aims to study the variety of reading strategies employed by the subjects and determine the reading strategies most commonly used among this particular group of students as well as the differences of reading strategies between high and low proficiency students while comprehending an academic text.

## **Objective of the study**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To identify the students’ perception of reading strategies while comprehending an academic text.
2. To examine the students’ most frequently used reading strategy while comprehending an academic text.
3. To determine any differences of students’ perception on reading strategies between high and low proficiency students of UTM while comprehending an academic text.

## **Significance of the study**

This study hopes to find out the reading strategies employed by the first year students while comprehending an academic text. Besides, this study could help the students to discover their own reading strategies so that they can manipulate it in making the reading more successful. In addition, the findings of the research will contribute some ideas or knowledge to classroom teaching and learning and give the teachers the opportunity to implement strategy that appropriate to their students’ learning style and needs while carrying out the reading lesson. Furthermore, the findings will determine whether there are significant differences in reading strategies used by good students compared to that used by proficiency students.

## **Research Instruments**

The instrument used to collect the data was a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two main sections. The two main sections are Section A: Demographic Data, and Section

B: Strategies used in Reading which are Cognitive, Metacognitive and Social Strategies. The responses by the respondents were presented using the Likert scale. Then, the questionnaire was distributed to each respondent in their classes. The statements of the questionnaire for cognitive reading strategies were adapted from Yesim and Muharrem (2006), whereas the statements of the questionnaire for metacognitive reading strategies were adapted from Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002). Next, the statements of the questionnaire for social reading strategies were adapted from Noor Zainab (2000). This questionnaire contains 58 questions, which consists of 24 questions from cognitive reading strategies, 30 questions from metacognitive reading strategies and 4 questions from social reading strategies (Refer to Appendix A for a sample of the questionnaire).

### Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study are the first year students who were taking UHB 1412 subject, which is English for Academic Communication. There were 60 respondents selected in this study. Students attending this course belong to the 18 to 20 age group and they were all undergraduates. Thirty of the respondents were identified as students with high proficiency level and another 30 of them were identified as students with low proficiency level. The proficiency of each respondent was determined based on their MUET Examination results, where students who got Band 4 to Band 6 were regarded as proficient, whereas Band 1 to Band 3 were regarded as less proficient students.

### Data Analysis

The figure summarizes the three reading strategies used by the first year students in reading academic text based on the analysis that have been done in previous section.

Table 1: Summary of The Most Frequently Used Reading Strategies While Comprehending an Academic Text

Item	Strategies	Mean
1.	Cognitive Reading	3.89
2.	Metacognitive Reading	3.87
3.	Social Reading	4.05
	<b>Average</b>	<b>3.94</b>

Table 1 shows the most frequently used reading strategies among the three reading strategies used by the first year students. Based on the result, *Social Reading* strategy is the most frequently used by the student which is 4.05 as the highest mean value. As mentioned before, it is probably that the students are comfortable to work in groups or asking for help from other people to get better understandings of the readings.

The second highest strategy is cognitive reading which recorded 3.89 as the mean. As we can see, this cognitive strategy needs the students to interact with reading text or materials. They need to learn and manipulate the material mentally or physically in order to comprehend the reading text. This strategy also has not much difference with the third reading strategy which is the metacognitive reading. As an overall, the average mean for the three strategies is 3.94. It shows that students most likely prefer to use these three strategies during comprehending an academic text as the value mean is in high range.

## Conclusion

This research investigated the perceptions of the reading strategies employed by the first year students of UTM while in comprehending an academic text. Primary data were collected by distributing questionnaires to 60 students in UTM.

The following conclusion can be drawn from the study. To begin with, the study has shown that the students prefer to use the three types of reading strategies as suggested that are cognitive, metacognitive and social reading strategies. The result of this study shows that the reading strategies used by the students most often are social reading strategies. The comparison between high and low proficiency students in reading strategies show that there is actually not much differences between the two groups. For the high proficiency students, they employed all the three reading strategies, whereas for the low proficiency students, they fully used the metacognitive reading strategies. However, there are small differences for cognitive and social reading strategies where the differences are only 1 student for not using the cognitive reading strategy and 2 students for not using the social reading strategies compared to high proficiency students. Based on the students' perceptions, there is no significance difference between low and high proficiency students in their preferences of using strategies in reading.

## References

- Alderson, J. Charles (2000) *Assessing Reading*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Block, E. (1986). The Reading Comprehension Strategies of Second Language Readers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 20(3). 463-491. Block, E. 1992. See how they read: comprehension monitoring of L1 and L2 readers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26, p 319-342.
- Carrell, P.L. (1998). Introduction. In P.L. Carrell, J. Devine & D.E. Heskey (Eds.), *Interactive approaches to second language reading* (pp. 1-5). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dechant, Emerald. 1991. *Understanding and teaching reading: An interactive model*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. 522 pages. 0805808248. Location: Dallas SIL Library 372.41 D293u.
- Gough, P. B. (1972). One second of reading. In J. F. Kavanagh & I. G. Mattingly (Eds.), *Language by ear and by eye* (pp. 331-358 ). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lynch, B. & T. Hudson (1988). EST reading. In M. Celce-Murcia (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. (pp. 216-232). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- McCormick, Thomas W. 1988. *Theories of reading in dialogue: An interdisciplinary study*. New York: University Press of America. x, 399 pages. 0819171689. Location: Dallas SIL Library 372.4 M131.
- Noor Zainab Abdul Razak. (2000). *Motivational factors and learners' strategies in the English as a second language classroom at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia with special reference to computer assisted language learning*. Unpublished Thesis (Doctor of Philosophy).
- O'Malley, J.M., & Chamot, A.U. (1989). *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pritchard, R.E., Romeo, G.C., Muller, S.A.B., 1999. *Integrating reading strategies into the accounting curriculum*. *College Student Reading* . 33 (1), 77-82.