




COPING WITH READING DIFFICULTY USING SOCIO-AFFECTIVE STRATEGY




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ABSTRACT

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Reading academic texts requires learners to use a variety of skills and strategies. Among the main types of academic reading are (a) reading for quick reference, (b) reading for pleasure and also (c) critical reading. Students who have just left high schools, reading academic text may post some problems. Hence, readers face challenges when they read academic texts. Different readers face different difficulties when they read different types of texts. Some readers face linguistics challenges while some face non-linguistic challenges when they read academic texts. Fortunately, many academic readers have their own way to cope with the difficulties in reading. This study explored the problem readers face when they read academic texts. This study also investigates show readers use schemata and socio affective strategies to help them cope with difficulties when reading academic texts. The instrument used is a five Likert scale survey with 33 items. Data is analyzed using SPSS version 26 to reveal frequency of responses. Findings bear interesting pedagogical implications to the teaching and learning of academic reading.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature on reading difficulties that learners face when they read academic texts. In addition to that, this study documents some coping strategies such as using the schemata and socio-affective strategies that readers can use.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Different types of reading help readers in different ways. Reading widely helps the reader to add on his/her knowledge. It gives the reader more ideas. Reading also helps the reader develop his/her thinking skills. According to Abdullah and Mahfoodh (2016) students of higher institutions have to learn to cope with different varieties of reading after leaving high school with focus on different types of reading and even different reasons to read. Among

the main types of academic reading are (a) reading for quick reference, (b) reading for pleasure and also (c) critical reading. Students who have just left high schools, reading academic text may post some problems. Aykal and Boyaci-Altinay (2019) mentioned that many academic readers lacked background. They may have the language skills to read texts, but they lacked background information to make sense of what they reading. On another continuum, there are also students who may not have the language ability to understand academic texts. According to Saengpakdeejit and Intaraprasert (2014) some academic readers face difficulty with the language, and also structure besides the content of the text. This study therefore done to explore what readers in higher institutions do to cope with the reading problems they face. This study is done to answer the following research questions;

1. *What Are Some of the Problems Readers Face?*
2. *How Do Readers Use Content Schemata in Reading?*
3. *How Do Readers Use Socio-Affective Strategy in Reading?*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Understanding Readers and Reading

Reading models are used to explain what readers do when they read. According to Ngabut (2015) reading is seen from the perspectives of (a) behaviourism and (b) cognitivism. Firstly, from the perspective of behaviourism, reading is a “stimulus-response” activity. The stimulus is the text given to the reader and the response is the behavior of the reader as a result of the reading activity. Next, from the perspective of cognitivism, reading can be considered a thinking activity. The reader makes decision while reading. These decisions include making connections and predictions. This is done by the by asking questions and even visualizing to make sense of their reading. Readers are also reported to monitor and clarify the text given to them. They sometimes consciously or unconsciously summarise and synthesize the text to determine what is important and also to analyse the author’s intention. There are three reading models often used to explain the reading behaviour of learners and they are (a) bottom-up approach, (b) top-down approach, and (c) interactive model. According to Goodman (1967) based on the bottom-up model, reading is basically the process translating, decoding and decoding performed by the reader. Readers start with letters or larger units and as they become attached to them, they begin to anticipate the words. Reading is thus seen as the translation of graphic symbols into approximation of oral language. The bottom-up model is usually used by less skilled readers. More skilled readers are reported to use the top-down model (Goodman, 1967). This model works under the assumption that readers’ cognitive and language competence play a role to construct meaning. Reading is seen as a process which involves using available language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the readers’ predictions.

Nevertheless, based on psycholinguistic theory, there is interaction between the readers’ thought and their language. This interaction has brought about the third model-interactive model. According to Rumelhart (1980) for skilled and advanced readers, the top-down and bottom-up processing occur simultaneously. Readers’ comprehension is dependent on both graphic information and information in the readers’ mind. Reading is therefore defined as the meaningful interpretation of printed or written symbols (Tommaso, 2015). This interpretation is facilitated with the readers’ language skills, reading skills and also knowledge of the world. Clearly, readers need more than one skill to get their reading done. Fahriany (2014) reports that reading is a complex act. It requires the reader to use mor than one skill. Readers need to use more than one skill because not all types of reading require the reader to understand at the same level of comprehension. According to Basaraba, Yovanoff, Alonzo, and Tindal (2013) there are three levels of comprehension; (a) literal, (b) inferential and (c) evaluative level of comprehension. Literal comprehension involves the learners to identify specific events from the text. Next, inferential comprehension requires the reader to infer implicit meaning from the text. Finally, evaluative comprehension demands that the reader evaluate situations and make judgements. Hence reading is a complex process demanding the readers to interact well with the text and also achieve different levels of comprehension.

2.2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

With reference to [Figure 1](#), the theoretical framework of the study traces the reading process of readers from the problems they face as readers ([Kasim & Raisha, 2017](#); [Singh, 2014](#)) to the coping strategies ([Carrell, 1984](#)) they reported they employed; using schemata theory and socio affective strategies ([Vijaya, 2012](#)).

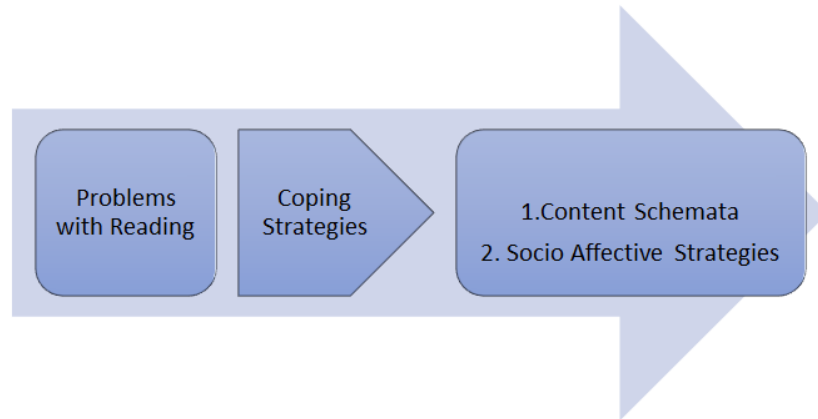


Figure-1. Theoretical framework of the study: Coping with problems in reading.
Source: [Kasim and Raisha \(2017\)](#); [Singh \(2014\)](#), [Carrell \(1984\)](#) and [Vijaya \(2012\)](#).

2.2.1. Problems with Reading

It is reported that readers will face a variety of problems when they read academic texts. According to [Kasim and Raisha \(2017\)](#) students experience problems with either linguistic or non-linguistic aspects of the text. Their study reported that readers faced more problem with linguistic aspect, especially unfamiliar vocabulary when they read academic texts. [Singh \(2014\)](#) reported that readers cannot focus on the text if they cannot understand what they are reading. Readers also face challenges such as difficult vocabulary, unfamiliar background knowledge. Some readers found the lack of infographics in texts a challenge to read. Others felt they found the length of academic text a challenge.

2.2.2. Coping Strategies

Readers who have problems in reading cope by employing some strategies to help them make sense of the text. Among some of the strategies are (a) schema theory and (b) socio-affective strategies.

2.2.3. Schema Theory in Reading

The use of schema theory to make sense of reading has helped readers understand academic texts. According to [Bartlett \(1932\)](#) the schema theory guides the readers from known to the unknown. The schema (background knowledge) that the reader helps the reader make sense of the new information by relating it to his/her existing schema. [Liu \(2015\)](#) referred to schema as the knowledge structure. This knowledge helps the readers understand texts through the continuous strengthening of the background knowledge ([Yafeng, 2017](#)).

Different types of schema help readers in different ways. According to [Carrell \(1984\)](#) there are three types of schema. Firstly, when readers use linguistic schema, they depend on their prior linguistic knowledge about phonetics, grammar and vocabulary. Next, when readers use content schema, they depend on their knowledge of the topic of the text, the cultural knowledge, conventions and also previous experience. Finally, when readers use formal schema. They depend on the conventions of the text.

2.2.4. Socio Affective Strategies

Another way the reader copes with reading difficulties is by using socio-affective strategies. Readers need to first realise that they have a problem with reading to begin with. Next, some readers formulate probing questions in

their mind as they read. Others resort to ask the people around them and that includes their teachers and peers. Vijaya (2012) listed some socio affective strategies during reading and they are (a) asking questions, (b) cooperating with others, (c) empathizing with others, (d) lowering anxiety, (e) encouraging oneself, and (e) taking emotional temperature.

2.3. Past Studies

The study by Abdullah and Mahfoodh (2016) examined how international graduate students in a Malaysian public university perceive and overcome academic reading difficulties. The target population included all graduate students from Yemen, an Arab country, studying at Universiti Sains Malaysia. Data were collected using questionnaires, focus group interviews, and journal writing. SPSS was also used to analyse the quantitative data while qualitative data were analysed through content analysis. Findings revealed that most of the academic reading difficulties faced by international graduate students were five: taking brief and relevant notes, using their own words in note taking, working out meaning of difficult words, identifying supporting ideas/examples, and managing their time for completion of reading academic materials.

Next Singh (2014) examined the challenges faced in the academic reading practices as well as the strategies employed to overcome the challenges in the academic reading practices. Quantitative data was collected through the Academic Literacies Questionnaire. The findings show challenges faced by international graduate students are attributed by the fact that English is the medium of instruction and English is not their first language. At the same time, the findings also highlight the strategies employed by the students to overcome the challenges in their academic reading practices. However, it was found that the students, although exposed to challenges in their academic reading practices were not very responsive toward overcoming the challenges.

The purpose of the study by Saengpakdeejit and Intaraprasert (2014) was to investigate how EFL undergraduate students do to improve their reading comprehension, solve the problems encountered while reading, and overcome comprehension failures. The study presents a qualitative investigation to provide a clear picture of the strategies used by those students in their academic reading. A semi-structured interview served as the main source of data. Thirty-nine students from four different government universities participated in the study. The transcribed interview data was analyzed with 'open and axial coding' techniques. The data analyses revealed two main emergent categories of reading strategies: 1) strategies for comprehending reading texts (SCT); and 2) strategies for enhancing textual comprehension (SETC) with altogether 39 individual reading strategies.

The use of schema benefits readers in several ways. Liu (2015) carried out a mixed mode study to look at the effect of schema in reading. The instrument was a questionnaire and 110 sophomores responded to it. Findings reveal that students who depended on schema would recall more correct ideas and omit fewer ideas in their expansion of the original text. In addition to that, readers provided with schema were able to recall the text better. Next (Zhao & Zhu, 2012) conducted a study on 100 students and 5 teachers on the use of schema in the reading class. The instrument used was a questionnaire. Findings revealed that schema helped to cultivate students' reading interest, quicken their reading speed as well as make better judgements.

Next, the use of socio affective strategies has been reported to facilitate learners in their reading comprehension. Zeynali, Zeynali, and Motlagh (2015) investigated the effects of socio-affective strategies in reading comprehension in Iranian EFL learners. 60 students took part in a quasi-experiment study. Two classes were selected. The participants attended 6 sessions to familiarise them with the use of socio-affective strategies in reading comprehension. Findings show that using socio-affective strategies were more helpful factor for learners to answer the reading comprehension questions. A case study was done by Vijaya (2012) to find out students' use of socio-affective strategies in reading. Findings showed that the participants used 13 out of 16 socio affective strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

This quantitative study is to investigate the challenges readers face when they read and what coping strategies they used to cope with the challenges. 159 respondents responded to the instrument used is a survey. Section A are questions about demographic profile of the learner. Section B contains 8 items on questions about problems readers face (Kasim & Raisha, 2017; Singh, 2014) Section C comprised of 15 items about Content Schemata (Carrell, 1984). Section D is made up of 7 items with questions pertaining to socio affective strategy by the reader. Section E has 6 items with questions about Socio-Affective Reading Strategy -through Readers' Interaction with social circle. A reliability test showed that the instrument showed a Cronbach alpha of 0.833, thus revealing its reliability Table 1. Data is analyse during SPSS version 26 and is presented in based on the frequency using mean scores.

Table-1. Reliability Statistics of the Study.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.833	33

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Problems with Reading

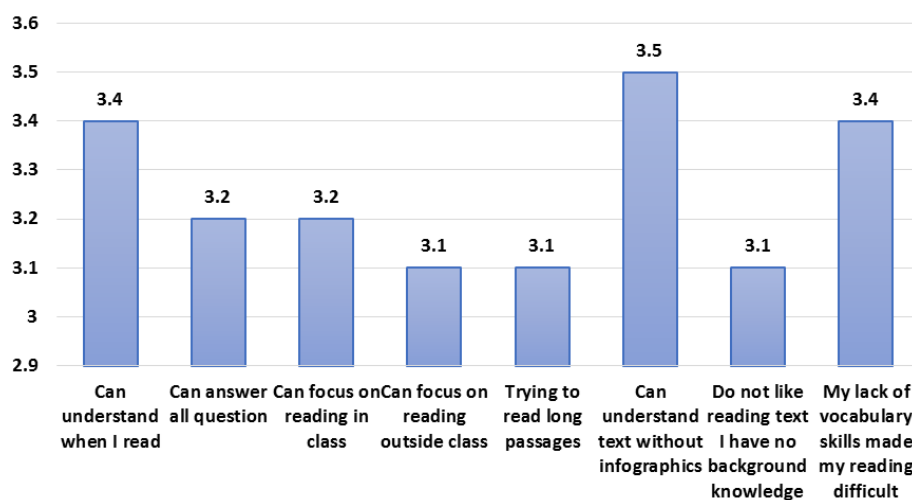


Figure-2. Mean score for problems readers face.

Source: Kasim and Raisha (2017); Singh (2014).

The mean score for problems that readers face is presented in Figure 2. It is difficult for readers to read academic texts outside class (3.1). They are also not fond reading if the text is considered long (3.1). They also do not like to read texts that they have do not have background knowledge (3.1).

4.2. Schemata

Readers are said to use their schemata when they read. Figure 3 shows the mean for the use of schemata. Readers report to prefer repeated reading (4) to help them understand the text. Readers need to visualize (3.7) when they read and guess the meaning of unfamiliar words (3.6). Consequently, they liked if authors used simpler words (3.7) in the text.

Figure 4 shows the mean scores for top-down skills. The use of top-down skills help readers use strategies such as planning, monitoring and evaluating to facilitate understanding. This approach help readers learn from their mistakes (3.3), and evaluate their understanding (3.3) as they read.

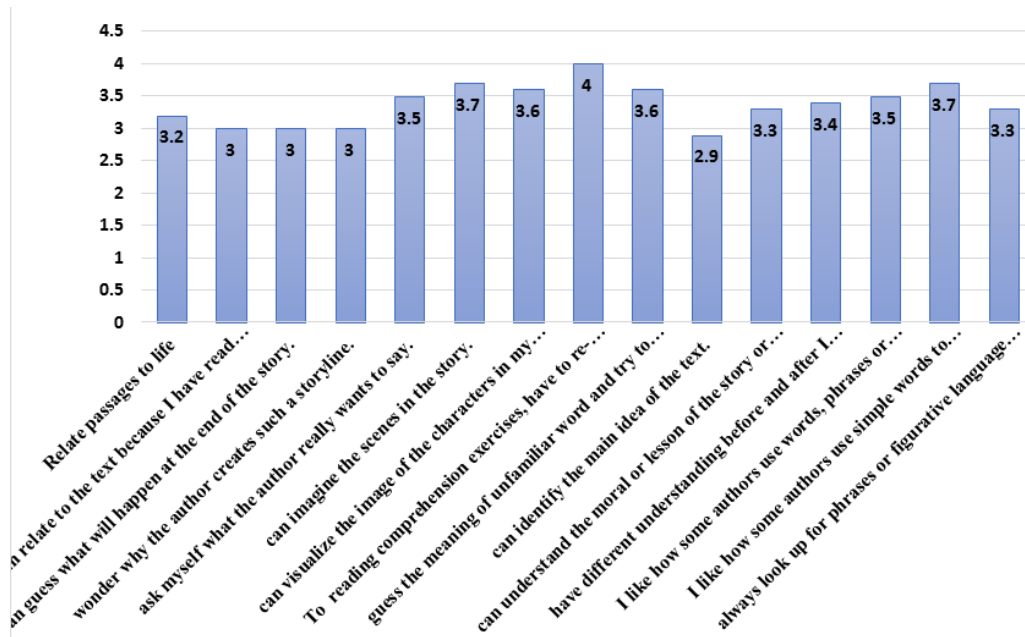


Figure-3. Mean Score for Schemata.

Source: Carrell (1984).

4.3. Socio Affective Strategy by the Reader

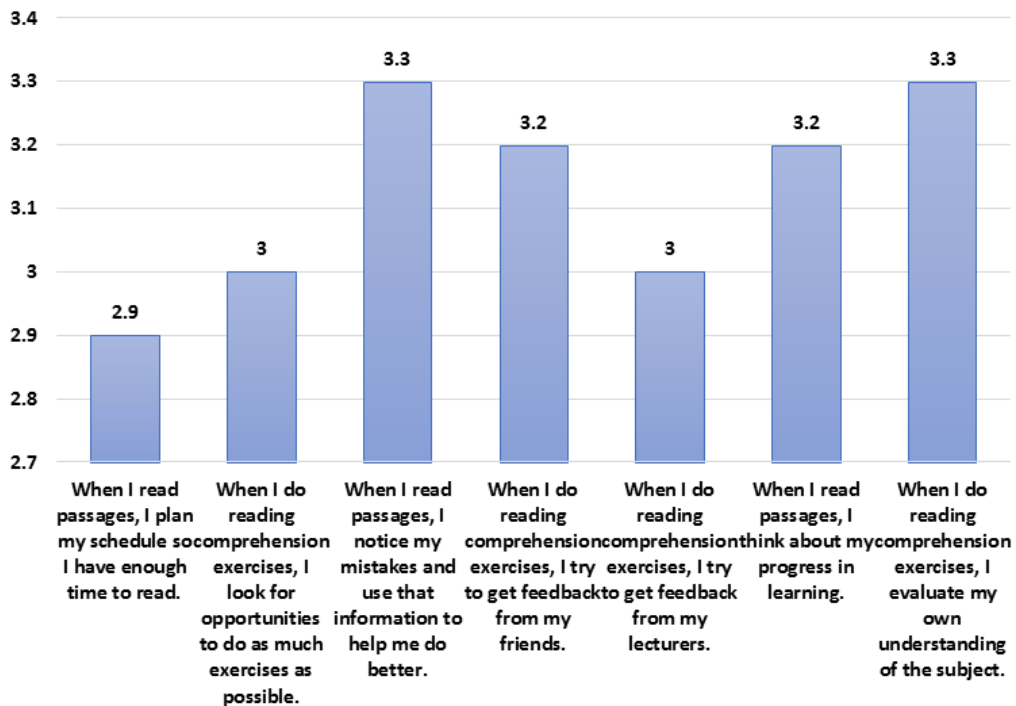


Figure-4. Mean for Socio Affective Strategy by the Reader.

Source: Carrell (1984).

4.4. Socio-Affective Reading Strategy -through Readers' Interaction

The mean for socio affective reading strategies through the readers' interaction is presented in Figure 5 above. When readers face problems, they may also turn to some socio-affective strategies that involves interaction. They ask help from their friends (3.9), or from their teachers (3.5). they sometimes choose to work with their friends (3.4).

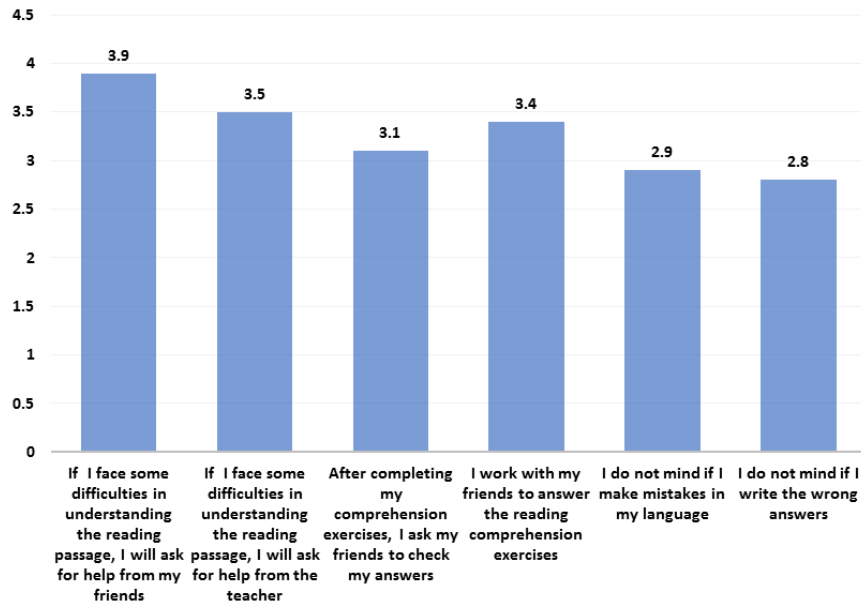


Figure-5. Mean for socio-affective reading strategy -through readers' interaction.

Source: Carrell (1984).

5. CONCLUSION

5.1. Summary and Discussion

This study has shown that readers do face problem when they read academic text. The participants in this study reported that they face both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of the text. Similar studies were also reported by Abdullah and Mahfoodh (2016) as well as Singh (2014). Their studies also found that when it comes to academic reading in higher institutions, readers would use compensatory strategies to help them cope with the challenges. Readers can use both content and formal schemata to understand what they are reading. Findings in this study showed that readers made efforts to understand both the content and the structure of the text. Studies by Zhao and Zhu (2012) as well as Liu (2015) reported similar findings of readers relying on schemata to make sense of their reading. The findings in this study is also in accordance with the findings by Vijaya (2012); Zeynali et al. (2015) who reported that readers sometimes depend on socio-affective strategies to help them cope with reading difficulties.

5.2. Pedagogical Implication and Suggestion for Future Studies

It is not uncommon for readers to stumble and face challenges when they read. The teaching and learning of academic reading should include coping strategies for readers when they encounter problems. According to Vijaya (2012) teaching and learning orientation has moved from traditional one and this puts attention on teachers' role and teaching method. The teaching of reading should include to encouraging learners' to be greatly involved in the teaching and learning process.

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