| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The Impacts of Explicit Strategy Instruction on Reading Performance from Students Perspective: A Case Study

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| **ABSTRACT**

This paper reported on part of a larger study to explore how Vietnamese non-English major students perceived the impacts of explicit strategy instruction (ESI) on reading comprehension. Instruction on reading strategies was conducted for 6 weeks in which students were taught explicitly previewing and predicting, skimming, scanning, guessing the meaning of the unknown words from the context and summarizing strategies. Data were collected from forty-five non-English major students at a university in Vietnam through group interviews and learning reflections. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted in groups of three to four students, and thirty-nine learning reflections were collected to obtain in-depth information about the impact of the ESI. The findings revealed that, after the instruction, the students reported using various reading strategies in four strategy categories, namely problem-solving, global, support and local strategies. In addition, the ESI was perceived to be cognitively beneficial, as students reported heightened awareness of using reading strategies in reading comprehension, expanded reading strategy repertoire, greater reading fluency, and higher reading scores. From a non-cognitive affective perspective, students reported that the ESI motivated them to read with a higher level of confidence and become more autonomous in reading in English. The study offers implications for teachers, students and materials writers in teaching and learning English reading skills in non-English major learning contexts and perhaps in other settings.

1. Introduction

In accordance with the adoption of CEFR-based standards, a number of university institutions all over the country have implemented English learning outcomes policies for university students. Meanwhile, many students at universities face problems in reading comprehension. As a matter of fact, they are not confident in reading. They usually encounter linguistic and psychological problems, and they lack strategic learning (Nguyễn Hiệp Thanh Nga & Kim Kha Tú, 2021).

In response to reading efficiency, numerous studies on learning strategies maintain that strategy teaching can facilitate students' reading comprehension (Cohen, 2014; Chamot, 2001). Strategy instruction is believed to support L2 and FL reading development as it explicitly introduces learners to strategic approaches to engage with reading and provides extended opportunities for learners to practice using strategies in a contextualized manner (Brevik, 2019; Davies, Newton, D., & Newton, L., 2018).

However, in an EFL context, the majority of English non-major students are usually unaware of the strategies that teachers apply when teaching reading (Amini, Alavi, & Zahabi, 2020). Also, it is unlikely that strategy instruction will make its way into language

classrooms unless teachers understand what to do (Goh, 2019). Hence, strategy instruction is worth implementing to equip students with knowledge and application of reading strategies in their reading comprehension process.

Furthermore, reading comprehension is an important process involving different cognitive and metacognitive activities that need exploring. As a result, in order to improve Vietnamese non-English majors' reading comprehension, a comprehensive study on how learners actually perform during their reading process is worth investing in. The findings from this study will contribute to discovering the students' perceived changes in reading comprehension after strategy instruction.

The study seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the possible effects of explicit reading strategy instruction on reading development. In particular, it aims to identify students' perceptions of such an intervention in their English reading skills. To be specific, this study seeks to answer the following research question :

What are Vietnamese non-English major students' perceptions of explicit strategy instruction?

2. Literature Review
2.1. Definitions of reading strategies
The working definition of the reading strategy for the current study can be conceptualized as all the deliberate actions readers take to make sense of what they read in the text with the intention of completing a specific reading task or goal. These actions can be used in a variety of ways depending on context and learners' needs. In addition, "these actions may take place prior to reading, during the reading process, or following a reading task as will be made apparent when discussing the particular strategies which pertain to reading" (Bedle, 2018, p. 13).

2.2. Categorizations of reading strategies
Given the importance of reading strategies in EFL reading comprehension, reading strategies have been developed and classified into various categories based on the aforementioned reading models, and there are numerous similarities among the identified strategies. Among those, the classifications provided by Oxford's (1990) and O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) framework have been widely used by many researchers and scholars. In O'Malley and Chamot's classification, reading strategies are divided into three categories, namely cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social/affective strategies. Cognitive strategies are those that 'operate directly on incoming information, manipulating it in ways that enhance learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p.44), such as summarizing and repeating information (rereading). Metacognitive strategies focus on the learner's interaction with the text and include such strategies as monitoring and evaluating, which would most commonly refer to the reader's comprehension of the text, for instance, having an awareness of when comprehension is breaking down (monitoring) and if their strategy use and reading performance are successful (evaluation) (Bedle, 2018, p. 14). Social/affective strategies relate to interactions with others in relation to the learning task (discussing a text with teacher/other students) or reflecting upon one's mental state in order to 'assure oneself that a learning activity will be successful or to reduce anxiety' (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p.46).

Although the classifications of strategies offered by Oxford, O'Malley, and Chamot are equivalent, most of the strategy types are described in a way that allows them to be used with all four of the language skills. Abbott's (2010), Block's (1986), Carrell's (1989) and Mokhtari and Sheorey's (2002) classifications, on the other hand, are built upon different assumptions, have different structures and only include reading strategies. Metacognition in their frameworks presuppose the use of reading strategies. Their frameworks are designed on the premises that the meaning of a text is co-constructed by the contents of the text and the reader of the text, and they assume that "constructing meaning from a text is an intentional, deliberate, and purposeful act" (Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002, p. 250). Abbott (2010) and Barnett (1989) put reading strategies into bottom-up and top-down strategies, which are associated with low-level and high-level processing, respectively. Global, general, or top-down strategies are "those having to do with background knowledge, text gist, and textual organization" (Carrell, 1989, p. 126). They include anticipating text content, recognizing text structure, integrating information, question information, distinguishing main ideas, interpreting the text, using general knowledge and associations to background, monitoring comprehension, focusing on textual meaning as a whole and reacting to the text. Top-down strategies apply schematic knowledge and focus on the broad context of the text, its text structure and discourse organization, its general meaning, its purpose, and its central topic. In other words, readers must have background knowledge and language competence as well as an understanding of cues in print that can activate the content schemata when using general/ global/top-down strategies. Local or bottom-up strategies, on the contrary, are "those having to do with sound-letter, word meaning, sentence syntax, and text details" (Carrell, 1989, p. 126) and consist of paraphrasing, rereading, questioning the meaning of a word and solving a vocabulary problem which use systemic knowledge and local text context to aid comprehension. As they deal with linguistic elements in the reading, they help make sense of the text by transforming separate items into "a hierarchical network of semantic relations, which in turn is linked to a conventional superstructure" (Van Peer, 1987, p. 599). These strategies are more related to textual decoding and identification processes and, therefore, are considered local, input-oriented, language-based, data-driven, detail-oriented, or text-oriented (Enciso, 2015).

Anderson (2009), on the other hand, has a quite different category from those of the aforementioned researchers. He groups reading strategies into supervising strategies, support strategies, paraphrasing strategies, strategies for establishing coherence in the text, and test-taking strategies. Another category of reading strategies can be interactive strategies, which assume that the process of translating print to meaning involves making use of both print and prior knowledge. Budiharso (2014) describes these strategies as the process of reading initiated by decoding letters and words and by formulating hypotheses about meaning. Readers using interactive strategies often start by decoding the visual information found in the text. Then, they use this to activate the higher level of schemata, which enables them to form predictions about the text's understanding. At the final stage, the new information found in the text is applied to confirm these predictions. Pearson and Duke (2002) state that there are six reading strategies: prediction or background knowledge, using think-aloud strategies to observe comprehension, applying text structures, utilizing visual models not excluding graphic organizers and imagery, summarizing and questioning and answering questions as they read. El-Kaumy (2004) further divides reading strategies into metacognitive and cognitive strategies.

In the present study, the participants were EFL non-English majors who tended to face "vocabulary knowledge, prior knowledge, grammatical knowledge, the meaning of the phrase, word difficulty, syntax, environmental factors, reading strategies, anxiety, attention, and text structure" (Al-Jarrah & Isamail, 2018, p.36) in their reading comprehension. Additionally, the researcher's personal observations as an English teacher for non-English major students have shown that a majority of them seem to have difficulties in global strategies and understanding new words; a few of them are aware of the reading techniques and the application of these techniques in reading; their sources of vocabulary are quite limited. In addition, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the learning outcome of this course for students is to achieve level 3 of the Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency, which is equivalent to level B1 in the European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Finally, results from the questionnaires in the pilot study also informed the researcher of the strategies that the students employed during the reading process that need to be added to the instruction.

Based on the aforementioned background, the instruction of reading strategies in the present study targets both global and local strategies, which include summarizing, identifying the purpose of reading, previewing and predicting, scanning and skimming, and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words from context. These strategies are believed to assist students in previewing the text, drawing on prior knowledge, creating an outline of what to expect before reading, keeping track of the process, adjusting reading speed by reading quickly or slowly and rereading the difficult and/or important paragraphs throughout the reading process, and decoding unfamiliar words from context.

The proposed set of strategies, therefore, is hoped to meet the learners' needs, as the reading test for EFL non-English major students at level B1 requires the application of previewing and predicting, guessing the content of texts, understanding the main ideas of texts, and locating detailed information.

2.3. Previous studies

While empirical studies on ESI are abundant, and their findings have proved the positive effects of ESI on learners' outcomes, studies on students' perceptions of learner training are still few. However, there are some researchers who focused their interests on examining the students' self-evaluation of the strategy training, and these studies at least provide an understanding of the significance of surveying students' perceived usefulness of training. For example, dating back to the early days of strategy intervention, Auerbach and Paxton (1997) reported that students in the ESL university classroom showed positive perceptions of and responses to the training. Students expressed that they gained greater knowledge of reading strategies and felt more confident in reading in English as a result of the intervention. According to the researchers, the training was successful because students were given the opportunity to investigate their own reading as part of the instructional process and were encouraged to apply what they learned to their reading.

Also, concerning the perceptions of students on the ESI, Adaba, Metaferiab, and Doboche (2021) reported that the metacognitive reading strategy training course was conducted at Guder Secondary School in Oromia. Grade-11 students in the experimental group were provided with explicit instruction on metacognitive reading strategy within the classroom and out of classroom practice for four months. Results from semi-structured interviews indicated that students had a good perception of the direct instruction of the metacognitive reading strategy. The majority of the interviewees reflected positive views on the strategy instruction and believed that the training had long lasting effects on their metacognitive reading strategy awareness and use due to their improved reading strategy knowledge. However, this research failed to address other affective values, such as learners' motivation and confidence in reading comprehension.

Overall, the previous studies related to reading strategies and ESI share two common points. First, methodologically, the studies employed questionnaires, interviews, and pre/post-tests to collect the data. Secondly, the results of past studies show that both EFL/ESL teachers and students are aware of the benefits of reading strategies in reading comprehension performance, and many

teachers have integrated strategy instruction into their classrooms to facilitate students' reading performance. So far, the review of the related studies has shown that research on strategy instruction has been carried out both in ESL and EFL contexts and found largely positive effects on ESL/EFL learners' reading performance.

In short, the current literature does an extensive job of discussing the different aspects of reading strategy use among EFL and ESL learners in various contexts, as well as the effects of explicit strategy instruction on reading skills. Although the above-mentioned studies varied in the reading categories they investigated, the participant learners were in the contexts in which language was learnt, and their findings and implications shared one major feature in common. They have indicated a consistent trend in various reading strategies used among ESL and EFL learners for understanding English reading texts and compensating for their reading difficulties. Studies on the non-English majors' use of reading strategies are unfortunately few, especially those on the tertiary level and the context in which English skills are taught and learnt integratedly in limited time allowance. Furthermore, although past research has revealed the great potential of reading strategy teaching on students' reading strategy awareness and use and their reading performance, the provision of another perspective of examining the effects of reading strategy intervention has been called for. Evaluating the instruction through the learners' viewpoints may enable EFL teachers to make adjustments to strategies that are more aligned with students' perceptions and expectations or can uncover ways to modify participants' perceptions to gain the expected outcomes of the instruction.

In addition, the majority of reviewed studies were carried out in ESL/EFL learners' strategic reading from different first language backgrounds (e.g. Chinese, Thai, Arabic, and French) and English majors; there has been a lack of evidence about reading strategy use by Vietnamese EFL non-English major university learners. Moreover, to the researcher's knowledge, most research in the Vietnamese context focuses on examining the use of reading strategies in general and exploring the relationship between the use of these strategies and learners' reading performance and outcome. There is little research on whether there exists an association between strategy instruction and student reading strategy among Vietnamese non-English tertiary contexts.

Furthermore, while most previous experimental research focused on the effects of reading strategy instruction on learners' reading performance, few studies explore students' perceptions of strategy intervention on reading comprehension improvement. For those reasons, there is an urge to carry out research to examine further the role of strategy use in reading comprehension, especially in view of non-English major tertiary students and in relation to the English level 3 reading texts in order to improve students' performance on reading tests and the expansion of their reading strategy repertoire. Based on the lack of empirical research in this area, the present study aims to fill this gap by addressing the issue related to identifying the differences in strategy use after the instruction as well as the perceived improvements in terms of learners' awareness of reading strategy and use, their reading fluency and comprehension, their motivation to read and confidence in reading after the intervention for Vietnamese non-English major tertiary students.

3. Methodology
3.1. Research Setting and Sample
The present study was conducted at the University of Foreign Languages in Central Vietnam, which is under the direct control of the Ministry of Education and Training. The university specializes in teaching different languages to students who are majoring in both foreign languages and non-major languages. Non-English major language teaching is one of the training majors offered to students from the research site's member universities and faculties. Although the students enrolled in the college came from many parts of the country, the majority of them come from highlands, rural areas and suburban provinces in Central Vietnam, where English teaching and learning at secondary and high school is not as important as in other regions. However, when entering university, students are required to achieve the English level 3 outcome upon graduation. In other words, students have to take the English level 3 proficiency test, which is modified from the preliminary English test by Cambridge, which consists of four parts.

3.2. Participants
The participants in the present study were selected from an intact class on the basis of being accessible. This type of convenient sample made it easy to conduct the study. Although this type of sample was not randomly selected, they share characteristics of non-English major students in Vietnam. They were undergraduate students from colleges and faculties of the research site, majoring in different subjects except English. They came from different regions all over the country, and all learned English at high school before entering university. Therefore, they can represent non-major English students who are the subjects of this study. Moreover, their English proficiency level varied considerably, though they were supposed to reach level 3 after the course. These students had attended English- level-1 and level-2 courses before they enrolled in this course. However, some students could take English- level- 3 courses even if they did not pass their previous courses since the policy was made by the local university to help students accumulate their language learning credits continuously (7 credits in total), which includes three periods per week (on average) over three semesters. Accordingly, non-English-major students must achieve Level 3 (B1 equivalent) in the adapted version of the CEFR upon graduation. At the beginning of the semester, the teacher explained to the students the purposes as well

as the procedure of the strategy intervention and asked for their voluntary participation in the instruction and the data collection process. 100% of the students in the group agreed to join the project without any requirements.

3.3. Research instruments

3.3.1 Interview

In the present study, semi-structured and focus group interviews were used. In this type of interview, some questions are predetermined, while others are not planned, and the questions are presented to a group instead of one individual. This type of interview can be useful as an adjunct to supplement and add depth to other approaches in a mixed-method design study (Adams, 2015). The purpose of the interview was to gather retrospective data on the students' recollections of the strategies they applied to specific tasks. This type of data helps to understand the reason why people act in particular ways by exploring participants' perceptions, experiences and attitudes (Harvey-Jordan & Long, 2001). Semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted in three groups with three to four participants voluntarily right after the last session of the ESI. This helps to ensure the full reflection of participants' thoughts and feelings about ESI.

3.3.2 Learning reflections

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, students had to do the course online in the second half of the semester. To add more validity to the data and to find out the long-term effects of the instruction, learning reflections were additionally used to understand what students reported learning after the ESI. Originally, the interviews were supposed to yield deeper information from the participants for the intervention. However, the population that took part in the interviews were rather small, which could not be used to make generalizations.

Moreover, learning reflections provided students more time to reflect on their own. Hence, the researchers decided to conduct the learning reflections for the whole group. Clearly, the interviews and learning reflections data provided valuable insights into the positive impact of strategy training on students' strategy use in reading. The questionnaire in the present study was used to measure students' strategies as well as to assess the frequency of use of different kinds of reading strategies.

Forty-five students who took part in the intervention were asked to write a learning reflection about what they benefited from the ESI 4 months later after they completed their course. The participants were instructed on how to write the learning reflections. They individually typed their reflections in Vietnamese and submitted them through a Google form link. Students were given 6 guided questions about the influences of ESI on different aspects of English reading comprehension in Vietnamese, and they gave their answers and explanations. The participants had one day to complete their reflections and submit them.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Reduced cognitive processing load

4.1.1. Heightened awareness of using reading strategies

One of the most significant themes emerging from the analysis of the interview and learning reflection protocols was the students' perceived increased awareness of reading strategies. This means that the participants were provided with knowledge of the strategies after the ESI. More specifically, 24 students in this study shared that they had had no idea about the so call reading strategies before the instruction; 12 students admitted that they had known some popular strategies, such as scanning and skimming, and the intervention had informed them with more strategies such as previewing and prediction, guessing meanings of unknown words from the contexts and summarizing. The instruction was reported to provide the students with more knowledge of the reading strategies, which were grouped into two main categories below.

4.1.1.1 Increased awareness of careful reading strategies

The first theme emerging from the verbal and written reflections was related to the perceived acquisition of careful reading strategies at both local and global levels that helped students understand sentences, comprehend main ideas, and understand the overall texts. More specifically, after the course of instruction, a majority of students narrated that they knew more how to figure out the meanings of unknown words in the text using different techniques, which can be seen in a female law student's comment as follows:

> *Thanks to your [the teacher] instruction, I have learned some strategies such as guessing the meaning of unknown words and summarizing. And I could guess the meaning of many unknown words in the text, ... and then summarize the text. I then saved the main points of the text and understood the text better. (S14- interview)*

Knowing more about reading strategies is a common feedback found in both the interview and learning reflection protocols. Thanks to the instruction, students tended to be more informed of the strategies and developed their reading strategy repertoire. One student from Agriculture and Forestry College admitted, "Your [the teacher] instruction during this course was very useful. I

now know how to guess the meaning of some unknown words using the techniques you taught. I also know how to summarize the reading texts using subtitles and guided questions" (S30, learning reflections).

The gains from the instruction were reported in students' progress from dependence on external resources, such as dictionaries or hints, to greater independence through more controlled use of guessing and other techniques. A senior student wrote that he then could guess the meaning of words based on the context without using a dictionary.

In brief, the students' verbal and written responses indicate that their awareness of both local and global reading strategies in careful reading was raised after the intervention. The students seemed to be able to develop their knowledge of guessing and summarizing strategies and change the way they read, thanks to the instruction.

4.1.1.2 Increased awareness of expeditious reading strategies

The students' reflections echoed that the participants tended to acquire more knowledge in expeditious reading strategies after the intervention. They developed a wider repertoire of expeditious reading strategies such as previewing and prediction, skimming, scanning, search reading and re-reading, which were believed to be helpful to them in English reading.

As for previewing, in some journals and interviews, the students pointed out that thanks to the teacher's instruction, they were able to see in advance the purpose of the reading by using titles and typographical features. For example, a female student wrote, "I knew how to guess the content of the texts by carefully reading the title, reading in advance the capital, boldface or italic words" (S7, learning reflections). This indicates that after the instruction, the students have developed their knowledge of expeditious global reading strategies to identify the purpose of reading.

Besides, after the six-week explicit strategy instruction, most participants shared that they were more informed of expeditious local strategy, namely scanning, to search for specific details and expeditious global strategy skimming to search for main and important ideas. To illustrate, a student commented:

Thanks to your [the teacher's] instruction, I have learned some strategies such as scanning and skimming... And I could use skimming to get the gist .... I later on saved the main points of the text and understood the text better. (S14- interview)

Many students admitted that from a limited repertoire of reading strategies, the instruction has made them become more aware of the reading strategies and take greater control of their reading process. Another one shared in his learning reflection that the ESI had contributed more to his understanding of the features of each single strategy and the way to employ them in specific reading tasks. Below is the reflection,

> *"I had known some strategies in reading, such as scanning, skimming and previewing but I couldn't use them fluently. Especially, I didn't distinguish the difference between scanning and skimming before the course. However, after being instructed by the teacher, I now know these strategies well and can use them in many reading texts". (S34- learning journals)*

After the instruction, many students reported skimming and scanning strategies to be used while reading English texts. In this regard, the instruction at least informed the students of the strategies they could employ to comprehend and interpret given English texts. Most students assumed that skimming and scanning used to be the two most troublesome skills for them before the intervention, but after the ESI, they could differentiate these two strategies and knew how to use them effectively. One second-year student answered in the interview:

> *"I know 'skimming' and 'scanning' means 'đọc lướt'; but I found it difficult to differentiate between the uses and definitions of these two strategies. Thus, they are not applied properly, causing lost time and inefficiency. However, you [the teacher] showed me the difference between them, so I can use them correctly now".*

Some of them further reported that the instruction had taught them other expeditious reading strategies that helped them to self-regulate their reading process, such as underlining, note-taking and re-reading.

In short, the discovery of reading strategies was one novel impact of the instruction for many students. This demonstrates that the ESI at least equipped the participants with strategy knowledge in reading comprehension and helped to develop their reading strategy repertoire. Scanning, skimming, and guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context strategies were claimed to be the three strategies that they first learned through the instruction in this course. Before the instruction, the students had little understanding of reading strategies. Furthermore, the ESI also contributed to enriching the participants' reading strategy knowledge.

4.1.2. Students' effective use of reading strategies

An increase in strategy use was another perceived improvement originating from the ESI. A large number of students admitted that they had known some reading strategies and their usefulness in reading comprehension. However, they found it quite confusing and challenging to employ them in specific reading tasks. In particular, seven students wrote in their reflections that prior to the instruction, they knew some strategies, such as *skimming* for main ideas, *scanning* for details and *previewing* the reading titles, but they did not know how to use them efficiently.

Furthermore, a large number of the students maintained that the ESI had provided them with more knowledge of the ways to use reading strategies such as *scanning, skimming or previewing* more correctly and effectively than before. They admitted that they used to have difficulty in applying strategies such as *guessing the meaning from the context, skimming* and *scanning* appropriately. A third-year primary education student shared:

> I had known guessing meaning from the context strategy, but I still used the dictionary to look up new words instead of guessing the meaning of words from context. I was confused when I could not guess the meaning of the word without hinting. Now I can identify different techniques to guess the meaning of the words and I don't find vocabulary in reading texts a burden anymore.

The strategies that most students reported employing during reading included *guessing the meaning of the words from context, skimming, scanning and, previewing and predicting*. Only a few students reported in the interviews that they had applied *summarizing* strategies as they found this strategy rather challenging to employ.

When being asked how they applied the instructed reading strategies for the two types of questions in the English level 3 reading test, namely multiple choice and gap-fill questions, these students reported using different strategies for the two types of questions. With multiple choice questions, the majority of them said that they use *scanning* to find specific details for each question after u*nderlining* the keywords. For the gap fill task, they combined *guessing the meaning of the words, skimming* and *scanning*.

Obviously, the ESI has empowered the students' acquisition of cognitive tactics they could employ and the usefulness of reading strategies in specific reading tasks.

4.1.3. Reconceptualization of the reading process

Another significance of the ESI found in students' perception was related to students' changes in conceptualizing towards reading. Of the 10 students who were interviewed, eight of them revealed a conceptual change from focusing on individual words to constructing the meaning of the text using the instructed strategies.

As mentioned earlier in the previous chapter, the student participants in this study came from different majors in the member colleges of the research site; hence, the majority of them were not proficient in English, and many of them claimed that they were obsessed with the number of unknown words in the reading texts. Nearly half of the participants (21 students) admitted that they used to read word by word from the beginning to the end of the text and translate into Vietnamese. However, they now knew how to read effectively using different strategies. A third-year Medicine student shared,

> I used to read every word before. Now, I know how to use the instructed strategies to read more effectively. (S16, learning journals)

As a result, it was necessary for students to actively plan how to achieve the task goal, solve any problems that arose, keep track of comprehension, and assess and adjust any strategies as needed.

Students' perceptions seemed to indicate that the ESI could lead students from reading locally by decoding words to reading more globally by constructing the meaning of the text, which released them from their obsession with individual words.

In general, most students in the study claimed that they then became aware of the reading process. Previewing, scanning and skimming strategies seemed to help them improve the way they interact with the reading texts. A top-down rather than bottom-up approach was identified as being used more by the participants.

4.2. Greater reading fluency

The qualitative data reveal that students also perceived improvement in reading effectiveness. More specifically, they reported that the increased knowledge and repertoire of reading strategies after the intervention seemed to lead to better reading comprehension skills, which was associated with the increase in reading rate and reading comprehension after the ESI.

4.2.1 Perceived improvement in reading rate

Together with the improvement in reading strategy awareness and use among non-English majors, ESI was also believed to enhance their reading speed. Nearly all students mentioned this perceived value in the interviews, from simple remarks to more elaborate comments as follows:

> "...I found that I could read faster...I could guess the meaning of unknown words from the contexts, and scanning helped me save more time" (S20- interview).

One senior male student shared, *"After the instruction, I can read faster. I no longer focused on new words. I knew how to read faster and more efficiently by guessing meaning of new words using different techniques...Then I scanned and skimmed through the text..."* (S37, interview)

By the same token, the phrases "*read faster*" and "*improved reading rate*" were repeated by 33 students out of 39 learning reflections. In fact, many of the students claimed that they could read the texts faster after the instruction, and this would benefit them when taking reading examinations. A male student felt that he could then ignore new words in the text and just focus on key details needed for the answers; as a result, he could read faster and do the test better within his language ability. Another example of how using multiple strategies resulted in faster reading can be visualized from the following reflection,

> *My reading speed is a bit faster now. Skimming, underlining the main ideas in the reading text, relating the unknown words with the previous or the following sentences to guess their meaning helped me understand the text better in a shorter time. (S16, learning reflections)*

The present reflection echoed that when students combined various strategies in reading English text, they could improve their speed of reading. As explained by the participants, the application of various strategies such as *scanning* for specific details, *skimming* for gist and *guessing meaning of unknown words* helped them save much time in reading.

Using strategies such as scanning, skimming, *or guessing the meaning of the words from context* helped the participants spend less time decoding individual words to understand the whole text as well as specific details needed for the answers. More specifically, most participants wrote in the reflections that their reading speed had improved statistically. Three students rated that their reading speed had increased by 20-30 percent. Meanwhile, the majority of them reported that they could read a bit faster than before and grasp the gist of the text more quickly. However, they still needed more practice so that they could perform better on their reading test. Only one student admitted that there was no change in her reading speed. Two students thought that they had made huge improvements in their reading speed, which could help them significantly reduce reading time. One Law student shared in the interview that thanks to the instructed strategies, he could save a lot of time by *scanning* for details and *skimming* to understand main ideas.

When being asked what strategies they found most useful in their reading performance, it was found that the students agreed that the strategies *'scanning', 'skimming', 'previewing and predicting'* as instructed in class were key elements in boosting their reading speed.

In short, knowledge of the reading strategies and their application have helped the students to speed up their rate of reading. Knowing how to employ individual strategies in specific stages of reading benefited students in decoding the text and constructing its meaning at a faster rate.

4.2.2 Perceived improvement in reading comprehension
The findings from both verbal and written reflections also revealed that many students perceived improvement in reading strategy use after the ESI could lead to improvement in reading comprehension. This means that together with faster decoding of the text, the students could understand the text much more quickly. In particular, 29 students reported increased speed in finding the correct answers to given reading questions as they were able to avoid word by word decoding. As shared by a student in the interview,

> *I felt that the speed of finding the answers to the comprehension questions was also faster than before.* (S5, interview)

This reflection was widely held, with another student stating

> ... *your [the teacher] instruction on reading strategies helped me read the text faster without translating into Vietnamese like before, and I could find the correct answers to the comprehension questions with less time. (S9, learning reflections)*

> Similarly, the female student stated, "*I could find the answers to the comprehension faster with more correct options*" (S20, learning reflections)

It is worth noting that the intervention of reading strategies seemed to help students have better understanding of the texts, and as a result, they could perform better in their reading tasks.

In sum, non-English major students at the research site perceived improvement in reading effectiveness after the ESI. It is noted that the knowledge of reading strategies tended to contribute remarkably to the ways students decoded the text by not focusing on the individual words. Furthermore, the speed at which they found the correct answers to the comprehension questions was also accelerated due to their increased text comprehension.

4.3. Students' reported improvement in reading scores

The most noticeable improvement reported by the students was probably a gain in scores. This perceived gain was echoed in students' reflections that knowing how to employ multiple learned strategies has helped them perform better in their reading tests afterwards. A female Law student shared,

> *With the use of reading strategies that you instructed, my reading test scores were much higher than the previous ones. I think the strategy instruction was very useful for me*. (S14, interview)

And a sharing from a third-year student, "*I found that my scores in my recent reading test were higher than before, and I completed the test faster*" (S42, interview), was obvious evidence of the value of ESI in improving students' reading performance.

In particular, thirty-four students said that they were happy with their reading comprehension because they could score better in their reading performance. It is worth noting that the ultimate purpose of this English course is to raise the percentage of students passing the English Level 3 examinations. Improvement in reading scores, hence, can be seen as one significant and noticeable effect of the ESI. After the course of the intervention, the participants seemed to realize that the instructed strategies contributed to improving their reading performance. In particular, *previewing and predicting* could help them to identify the main idea of the text to activate their background knowledge of the text's topic; *guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context* could compensate for their weakness in vocabulary mastery and, therefore, contributed more to students' comprehension of the text.

One second-year student wrote in his learning reflection that learning reading strategies had helped him choose more correct answers in the reading test, which he found the most useful improvement after the ESI. Another Vet student shared in the interview,

> *I find almost every reading strategy helpful, and they helped me read better in the English reading test. In fact, my reading test scores were higher in the reading test.*

To conclude, data from the interviews and learning reflections reveal that students reported positive improvement in their learning to read English level 3 texts. Specifically, the positive effects of ESI contributed to developing students' knowledge of strategy application, making them more engaged with the text to construct the meaning of the text in their English reading skills. Such improvements have led to the reported increase in students' ability to select and appropriately use strategies to monitor their comprehension, overcome difficulties in their reading and perform better in their reading tests.

4.4. Added affective values

In response to the significance of ESI during the English level 3 course, perceived improvement in affective values, namely reading motivation, confidence and learners' autonomy, were also identified.

4.4.1. Students' reported improvement in English reading motivation

Perceived improvement in students' reading motivation was a theme relating to affective values emerging from the qualitative results. After the instruction, most students claimed that they felt more interested and motivated in doing English reading. One student majoring in Pharmacy wrote,

> *I am not scared of reading English level 3 texts anymore. The teacher is friendly and committed, and she doesn't put any pressure on learners…. I don't feel English learning is a burden anymore. (S9, learning reflections)*

They further explained that after learning reading strategies, they became less dependent on unknown words and did not read word by word. As a result, they then enjoyed reading more and felt more motivated to read English texts. For example, a female Economic student shared,

> *I felt like reading English texts more, and I could choose more correct answers for the test than before.*

Similar affective improvement was also perceived by a senior Law student in the interview with the third group,

> *Before this course [English level 3 course], I used to read every word and felt worried with the time pressure when doing the reading test. Now I feel like reading more with the use of your [the teacher] instructed strategies. I skim the text, sometimes I read only the first and last paragraph in order to get the main ideas. I don't feel worried when reading longer texts. (S42, interview)*

The phrases "*more motivated in reading*", "*like reading more*", or "*feel like reading*" were raised by 23 out of 39 reflections written by the students. To these students, knowledge of reading strategies greatly contributed to their reading pleasure and motivation. The fact that they could read faster and get more content comprehension made reading more enjoyable, and as a result, they were more engaged with reading activity in the English classroom.

This was supported by the fact that learners found it easier to read, and they could read faster when they read more strategically.

As a result, they seemed to enjoy their reading more and that they felt more motivated, disregarding vocabulary and words they did not know. They clearly claimed that reading strategy learning had enabled them to find pleasure in reading. One senior male student narrated,

> *I like reading more than before. I don't pay attention to words in the reading text anymore. I knew how to read effectively using your [the researcher's] instructed strategies by preview using key words, then read the questions and using scanning or skimming to find the answers to the questions. (S37, learning reflections)*

In brief, it was noticed that students' improvement in reading speed and their improved strategic approaches to reading comprehension show that they tended to consider themselves as capable readers who could read and manage the problems in their reading by themselves. As a result, they found more interested in reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, students expressed the intention to use strategies in their future learning tasks further. This is evidence of the positive effects of ESI on learners' motivation to read both in in-class and out-of-class contexts.

4.4.2. Students' reported improved confidence in English reading
The perceived values of instructed reading strategies were not only the improvement in increased awareness of strategy use, reading effectiveness, or motivation to read, but they also perceived improvement in affective factors in terms of confidence. During the interviews and in the learning reflections, the participants reported an increase in confidence level thanks to the ESI. Nearly half of the students stated that they now felt more confident when reading in English since they could interact with the reading texts to construct the meaning. Also, after the strategy instruction, they felt more confident in reading longer texts as vocabulary was not a big concern to them. These students also added that *guessing the meaning of words from the context* was also an awesome technique since English was not their preferred subject in high school, so they had very limited knowledge of vocabulary. Therefore, they used to spend little time learning English reading. This strategy was said to help them save time decoding the words, which made them feel more confident in their reading comprehension.

This viewpoint was echoed in students' reflections, where they stated that not finding new words was a constraint but instead being able to decode words at a more rapid rate and more accurately, and this could maintain many sources for comprehension. One student reported as follows,

> *I find guessing the meaning of word from the context the most useful. It helps me to figure out the meaning of the unknown words in the reading text, so I can save me a lot of time. I don't need to look up the words in the dictionary anymore. Therefore, I became more confident in reading English text. (S7, learning reflections)*

In addition, strategy instruction is said to help the students overcome their negative emotions in reading. A second-year student shared in her reflection that after learning reading strategies, she felt less nervous when doing a reading test because she knew how to use different types of strategies in different question types of the test. One student explained,

> *I am not scared of reading like before because I can read faster, and my reading scores get higher now*. (S34- learning reflections)

One student mentioned that his experiences during the intervention and his improved reading competence had made him feel more confident when reading English texts. Before the instruction, the majority of participants stated that vocabulary difficulties were major obstacles to understanding the English texts. Many of them admitted that they had the most difficulties reading because they lacked vocabulary. Some of them mentioned that unknown words resulted in the translation of the whole sentence and the whole text into Vietnamese. Unknown words also made them read the text slowly.

When encountering unknown words, using a dictionary to find their meanings and reading several times to understand the meaning of the texts were the two most common ways that most students reported using. A student majoring in Vet wrote,

> *I found too many new words in the reading texts, so I couldn't understand the meaning of the text thoroughly. I needed to look up the words many times and re-read the texts to understand them.* (S29, learning reflections)

Some other students reported that technical terminology made the text difficult to comprehend. In addition, they added that their reading problems were about spelling and pronunciation. They could not spell and pronounce the words correctly. They also could not interpret what the text was about. Moreover, some students mentioned that repeated unknown vocabulary and sentence structures in the text brought about reading problems. They also had difficulties understanding the meaning of the texts as a whole since they found too many new words in the reading texts, and the topic of the text was not familiar to them. As a result, they felt demotivated and unconfident in reading skills. A student of Pharmacy also added,

> *I had experience in doing English tests because I had taken them quite often. However, my biggest challenge was new vocabulary. When I couldn't know the meanings of the words, it made me embarrassed and confused and took me more time to read.*

However, many students mentioned that the instruction had helped them feel more confident in reading various ESP materials, which contains several terminologies in their fields. A third-year student shared that they need to read in English for their subject major, and reading strategies contributed to the understanding of long and difficult ESP texts. One student majoring in General medicine reported,

> *I used to be very nervous when doing the reading test, but I'm not scared anymore because I practiced guessing word meanings from the contexts. I could make a good guess by looking at pictures or illustrations. I could understand more and could answer more questions compared to the beginning of the semester. (S45, learning reflections)*

This reflection might represent the students' view that English reading has become more manageable, although it was considered a challenging task. A typical explanation by the students for their confidence in reading was that their confidence originated from knowing how to combine various strategies to construct meaning from what they read. They attributed this newfound confidence to the ESI in this English course.

4.4.3. Students' reported improvement in learners' autonomy

ESI in this study also contributed to learners' improved metacognitive knowledge about learning. After the intervention, the students carried out their reading comprehension tasks using the reading strategies proposed by the teacher and, through those tasks, learned to make decisions about their reading process autonomously. They began to take up reading comprehension as an extra activity to improve their English reading skill. One senior student reported, "I can use the strategies learned in this course to practice reading PET materials for my final exams" (S9, learning reflections). There was a general agreement that the strategies taught in the instruction had helped the students engage more with the reading texts and make sense of the texts using multiple strategies. This demonstrates that learners would be able to improve their ability to self-regulate for reading tasks.

In general, this enhanced metacognitive knowledge enabled students to take effective control of their reading and their learning process (Chamot & Harris, 2019; Zhang, 2009). They started taking the initiative in order to conduct specific activities when doing their assigned reading homework, such as finding out the meaning of unknown words, locating specific information in a text, finding the main ideas in a passage, and relating the content of the reading to their own schemata. One student shared,

> "*Well, I am interested in with your assigned reading practice now.... I normally preview the text by the key words and subtitle, scan to locate specific information in the text and find the answers to the comprehension questions*". (S30, learning reflections)

The reflection above indicated that the students felt empowered to carry out their assigned homework on their own and to transfer those strategies to reading effectively.

Additionally, the majority of students reported that the strategy instruction made them feel like reading not only for the English level 3 texts but also any kind of reading in English outside the English classroom context. This indicates that the instruction has helped develop learners' autonomy and lifelong learning. Five students answered that they would use reading in English outside the classroom context in order to read English newspapers, magazines or English for specific purposes in the future or self-practice for other international English examinations like TOEIC, TOEFL or IELTS so that they could apply for a job in foreign companies. One student stated,

> *...This [learning the reading strategies] could make reading more enjoyable, and I can practice more reading and writing on my own for my upcoming English Level 3 examinations, and if possible, I will practice to take TOEIC examinations in the future. (S42, learning reflections)*

In sum, these features of perceived autonomy seemed to lead students to be less dependent on the teacher and more focused on their reading tasks both inside and outside the classroom. They tended to take up reading activities on their own with the aim to improve their reading comprehension skill for further purposes. Though many of them admitted that they still encountered difficulties in reading due to the lack of their vocabulary knowledge, students were aware of the importance of self-regulated learning and had an intention to promote reading skills without any obligation imposed by the teacher.

5. Conclusion

In relation to the impact of the instruction, the findings of the current study showed the instruction benefited students in different ways. Firstly, the instruction was cognitively beneficial, through students' reported heightened awareness of using reading

strategies in reading comprehension, expanded reading strategy repertoire and employment, greater reading fluency, and higher reading scores. From a non-cognitive perspective, students reported added affective values such as greater reading confidence, motivation, and autonomy. Overall, the instruction was found to bring about positive effects on students' reading development. Hence, it is essential for English teachers to raise students' awareness of the value of using reading strategies. Following an explicit approach to instruction based on declarative knowledge (knowing what strategies to use in different contexts), procedural knowledge (knowing how to use those strategies) and conditional knowledge (knowing why and when to use strategies) (Paris, Lipson, & Wixson, 1983), appears to be effective in training students to use reading strategies for reading at least in classroom and test settings. The findings of the present study also show that there was a reduction in students' cognitive processing load and an increase in affective values. This implies that students need to consider learning these strategies deliberately and develop their own repertoire of reading strategies in order to improve their reading comprehension skills. Moreover, as the students shared, more practice in reading both inside the classroom and beyond is required if they want to improve their reading effectively and become successful or skilled readers. Therefore, students do need to play an active part in developing their skills. They should engage themselves in regular reading practice by integrating reading strategies into their reading process. Regular reading will assist students in becoming strategic readers and gaining more benefits from their academic reading and reading in real life (Strickland, Ganske & Monroe, 2002).

However, the overall design of this study was subject to four major limitations that have implications for further research work. The first limitation is related to the small sample size of participants. The length of the course of instruction was another limitation. A six-week course of instruction may not be long enough to allow significant differences in reading abilities to emerge. Though the students in this study reported noticeable gains after the instruction, they still encountered difficulties in reading. Restrictions on time and resources made these limitations unavoidable for this study, but it would be interesting to conduct similar research on a larger scale and over a long period of time. Further study should be built to compensate for the major shortcomings of this study, which lie in the design of the research, to yield more convincing and reliable results.

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