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Editorial

This edition of *rEFLections* comprises articles on research conducted by teachers and masters students in the Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). There is a range of topics in the five articles, four of which describe studies conducted in Thailand and one of which was conducted in Vietnam.

The first article, by Richard Watson Todd, presents evidence that may, at first, seem counterintuitive, that native speakers are not necessarily good models of English proficiency. Analyzing a 12,000-word corpus of English written by native-speaker teachers working in Thailand, the author shows some startling misuse of English. In addition, he questions whether the widely perceived superiority of native-speaker models is tenable in EFL contexts such as Thailand, where non-native speakers often use English with other non-native speakers.

Next is an article by Atipat Boonmoh, Wareesiri Singhasiri and Jonathan Hull on problems students encounter using electronic dictionaries. In this study, Thai undergraduate students wrote short essays in Thai and then translated them into English with the free use of electronic dictionaries. The findings show that the two most common problems were the inability to find target words and the difficulty of selecting from a range of words given in the dictionaries; to minimize such problems, detailed suggestions are given for training students in the effective use of dictionary strategies. The article also found some extraordinary errors in the electronic dictionaries used in the study.

The third article, written by Parinun Tepparat, Richard Watson Todd and Punnee Buato, describes the process of designing a computer-based placement test for Student English Access Rooms (SEARs) in Thailand. The aim of the test was to pinpoint the level at which students should start using the self-access materials provided in the SEARs. The test fulfilled its purpose and the levels of the materials suggested to the test-takers were appropriate. Interestingly, the study resulted in a product that is available in the public domain, either on a CD-ROM with an auto-run program or by downloading from a website.

Ursula Wall’s study, described in the fourth article, concerns Thai EFL business students’ preferred learning styles and strategies. She found that her subjects had varied styles but with a slight preference for learning via group interaction and a distaste for studying grammar; also, there was a tendency to use cognitive strategies over metacognitive ones. The author notes that her findings are not typical of those in some other Asian EFL contexts and concludes that teachers of business classes in Thailand can safely use a variety of activities including those requiring interaction among students. However, she points to a dilemma for teachers in that the subjects’ reported dislike of studying grammar seems to conflict with their stated anxiety and shyness about speaking English that is full of errors.

The final article, by Liem DoHuy, Jonathan Hull and Saowaluck Tepsuriwong, was set in Vietnam, where a group of information technology students participated in a seven-week study of extensive reading. The results indicated that extensive reading appeared considerably to enhance the subjects’ motivation not only to read but to read more widely in terms of genres. There was also a general sense of improved reading ability. Further, there were reports of greater and more frequent use of reading strategies, notably guessing the meanings of unknown words, but there was a remarkable decrease in the use of dictionaries. With the aim of improving reader autonomy, the authors end by recommending the widespread adoption of extensive reading programs in Vietnam, whose educational culture remains highly teacher-centred.

Jonathan Hull & Wareesiri Singhasiri, Editors
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Myth of the Native Speaker as a Model of English Proficiency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Watson Todd</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems Using Electronic Dictionaries to Translate Thai Written</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essays into English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atipat Boonmoh, Wareesiri Singhasiri &amp; Jonathan Hull</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing a Placement Test for Use in Student English Access Rooms</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SEARs)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parinun Tepparat, Richard Watson Todd &amp; Punnee Buato</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Preferred Learning Styles and Strategies of Adult Thai EFL</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students in a Bangkok Business Setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ursula Wall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Extensive Reading on Students’ Perceptions of Reading</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability and Use of Reading Strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liem DoHuy, Jonathan Hull &amp; Saowaluck Tepsuriwong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Myth of the Native Speaker as a Model of English Proficiency

Richard Watson Todd
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

Abstract
Although academics generally take a neutral position on the pros and cons of native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) teachers of English, the general public perceives NS teachers as preferable because they provide a 'better' model of English. Even ignoring the arguments favouring NNS models in English as an International Language, many NS teachers do not provide a truly proficient model of English. Based on an analysis of a corpus of informal NS teacher writing, their English proficiency is dubious. The findings cast doubt on the usefulness of recent proposals to employ more NS teachers in Thai schools.

Perceptions of native speaker teachers in Thailand
When considering English language teachers, one basic consideration is whether they are native speakers (NSs) or non-native speakers (NNSs). Generally in society, and perhaps especially in Thailand, NS teachers are perceived as being somehow 'better'. A few quotations from articles and letters in the Bangkok Post illustrate this preference for NS teachers (especially, it seems, where these NSs are farangs).

"Native speakers are the best teachers of their own language."

"Almost all parents would rather their child be taught English by a native English speaker and are only concerned with that person's knowledge of the target language."

"It is absolutely not necessary, or even advantageous, to be taught by a bilingual teacher."

"Some people seem to believe that if you can speak a language, you can teach it."

"Thai teachers of English are weak in English writing for lack of practice."

"Filipinos teaching English rob children of a good education."

Even ignoring the overtly racist overtones of the last quote, these statements imply that there is a general feeling that NSs (or, at least, farangs) make better teachers of English. This perception is so widespread that many schools explicitly state in their advertising that they employ NS teachers. Advertisements for language programmes and schools often include statements like the following:

"Native language speaking tutors."

"Professional foreign teachers."

(-Taught by teachers from Australia and England)
Similarly, the vast majority of advertisements seeking teachers, even for the kindergarten level, stress that the school only wishes to employ NS teachers (admittedly, the English used in the adverts sometimes suggests that a NS may be useful for checking the language before the advert is published):

"We are seeking native English speakers."

"Now! ... require Native Speaker teaching English."

"Native English speakers, female, work with small kids."

Frequently, such job advertisements are even more specific, requiring a specific kind of NS:

"Native English speaker only (UK, USA, AUS, NZ, CAN)."

"English teacher American/British only wanted."

Advertisements like these may aim to bar certain kinds of NSs, such as the Filipinos who "rob children of a good education". Indeed, it seems likely that, for some schools, if they could get away with it, adverts would state that white-skinned, blond-haired Aryans are preferred.

It is not only the private sector which is so besotted with NS teachers. From time to time, the Ministry of Education has suggested initiatives focusing on using NS teachers. At various times, for example, the ministry has promoted bilingual programmes with NS teachers at secondary schools, has set requirements for teachers in certain situations at levels which few Thais are likely to attain, and has even made the wild proposal that all secondary schools should have a resident NS teacher. While little has actually come of these ministry pronouncements, they reinforce the widespread belief that NS teachers are preferable.

**Arguments for and against native speaker teachers**

The main argument given for employing NS teachers is that their English is better than that of non-native speakers. For example, their pronunciation meets accepted norms, their use of vocabulary is more appropriate and accurate, and they do not make grammatical mistakes.

This argument, however, may be invalid for two key reasons. Firstly, the accepted norms against which a speaker's language use can be compared may not actually favour NSs. Most learners of English in Thailand will use their English in Thailand, where they are more likely to need to communicate with other NNSs than with NSs. Thus, the end-goal of most English teaching in Thailand should be English as an International Language (EIL), defined as the use of English by speakers of different first languages to communicate with each other (McKay, 2002). Secondly, the assumption that NSs' English is necessarily 'better' than that of NNSs bears examining. Is the pronunciation of NSs really clearer? Do NSs really make no mistakes concerning vocabulary and grammar?

I will examine these two key arguments against employing NS teachers in more detail.
Teaching English as an International Language

English in Thailand is primarily used as a lingua franca between NNSs of English rather than as a means by which NSs and NNSs communicate. A few statistics bear this point out. The tourism sector is one of the main aspects of society where English is used widely. In 2001, about 50% of all tourist arrivals to Thailand were from East Asian countries with another 18% from Asean neighbours. In contrast, only 27% were from Europe, the Americas and Australasia, and only a proportion of these are likely to be NSs of English (Intarakomalyasut, 2001). In other words, well over three-quarters of tourists in Thailand are NNSs of English, and most communication between them and Thais is likely to be in English. Similar patterns also emerge concerning investments into Thailand and the import-export industry. Throughout all economic sectors, the predominant use of English is between NNS and NNS. Such usage reflects the worldwide use of English, where it is estimated that 80% of regular users of English are NNSs (Kachru, 1996).

The predominance of NNS-NNS use of English in Thailand means that the goal of learning English should be EIL rather than any NS norms of English. In EIL, the use of English is not connected to British or American culture (McKay, 2002), and thus using British or American standards for English is probably inappropriate (Honna and Takeshita, 2001). Instead, the standard NS norms for English should be viewed as possible varieties of EIL among a plethora of other possibilities.

The switch away from the NS as the end-goal of English language teaching (ELT) represents a clear paradigm shift. Until about ten years ago, the NS as goal was unquestioned in ELT. For example, the blurb for the Collins COBUILD English Course (Willis & Willis, 1988) states that the book "focuses on the real English that students will encounter and need to use", despite the fact that the book is based on the COBUILD corpus of NS-NS English usage. More recently, however, arguments have been put forward suggesting that competent NNSs are a more suitable model of proficiency than NSs.

The arguments in favour of NNS models for ELT fall into two categories. Firstly, the predominance of EIL vastly reduces the value of using NS models of competence (McKay, 2002). Secondly, for the overwhelming majority of learners, NS models present an unattainable goal for learning, especially for pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000). A model of a successful L2 learner of English, on the other hand, is by definition attainable and therefore makes a more realistic and motivating goal for learners (Cook, 1999). If we accept these arguments, the value of NS teachers of English is also greatly reduced.

Is native speaker English really error-free?

The second argument against using NS teachers questions the assumption that NSs use language correctly and produce error-free English. In considering NS errors, I will not examine the careless or intentional errors investigated by Eaves-Walton (1999), such as slips of the tongue and errors perpetuated to create effect. Instead, I will focus on those errors which seem to originate from insufficient competence in English.

When investigating NS teachers, these errors of insufficient competence fall into two categories. Firstly, there are the errors made when teaching, such as incorrect explanations of grammar points and attestations of erroneous rules. These errors are
usually due to the gap between being able to use English and being able to explain English, and highlight the need for NS teachers to improve their language awareness (see Grundy, 1995; Thornbury, 1997). Such errors also illustrate why being a NS is not a sufficient qualification for being a teacher.

The second kind of error of insufficient competence is those made by NSs when using the language for ordinary, everyday, real-world purposes. These language use errors of insufficient competence are the focus of the remainder of this article.

Collecting data of native speaker errors
To investigate errors of insufficient competence made by NSs, a corpus of NS use of English is needed. Since the rationale for conducting this investigation is to examine the suitability of NS teachers in Thailand, this corpus should comprise the language of NS teachers working in Thailand at present. To this end, a corpus of approximately 12,000 words of written English produced by NS teachers working in Thailand was collected from publicly accessible bulletin boards concerning ELT, such as those at www.ajarn.com and www.teflasia.com.

In constructing the corpus, the bulletin boards were chosen since the language used conformed to the norms of written English, rather than being the shortened forms found in Internet chatrooms. Contributions to the bulletin boards were chosen based on the likelihood that the writers were working in Thailand and were NSs. It was impossible to check whether this was true in every case, but each entry was considered on these bases.

Having constructed the corpus, it was examined for errors. In doing this, typographical mistakes were ignored as far as possible. For example, in examining the use of apostrophes, omission of apostrophes was only considered for those contributions which included the use of apostrophes elsewhere in the same text. Furthermore, extremely prescriptive grammar rules (such as the infamous split infinitive rule) were not applied in identifying errors. The errors identified can be classified as errors of vocabulary and of grammar.

Native speaker teachers' errors of vocabulary
Perhaps unsurprisingly, vocabulary errors largely concerned spelling rather than collocation or vocabulary choice. Indeed, throughout the whole corpus, there was not a single unambiguous example of a miscollocation and only one example of incorrect vocabulary choice:

... some of the impressionable resources, such as the video room.

There were, however, large numbers of spelling errors. Many of these (the total number in the corpus is 60) concerned words which are not very frequent in English, a selection of which are given below:

It would depend a lot on the individual student ...
I think as an inexperienced teacher ...
... until I gain the experience and confidence ...
... losing it in paradise ...
Preparation is of course a must ...
... one of the most important factors in regards to time management.
A comparison of accents ...
... to analyze as a class.
Those last suggestions were very helpful.
... any unaccommodating schools or institutions.
... it is such an unprofessional school.
... or, in my opinion, bribery.
... in hindsight it has been worthwhile.
I was very analytical of the instructors ...
... might alleviate this feeling.
... it creates unprompted participation.
... changed the tense atmosphere ...
I try to supplement the coursework.
... fails to achieve the desired response ...
Will they be of benefit or hindrance?
... as opposed to a question.

More surprisingly, more common words in English also led to frequent spelling errors (the total number is 18):
All I ever here on this board is ...
... to be doing, dispute whether they are ....
... using different pictures ...
... many students would ask themselves if ...
... it may be easier to tell a student ...
... but will not always make enough ...
... the song "All ways look on the bright side of life". I found the discussion very useful.
I was really nervous about becoming a teacher.
... then you'll loose interest from your students.
... as this seems to be an exam subject.
... to find out the rules of language for themselves.

While some of the errors for less common words could be viewed with sympathy, it is difficult to excuse the second group of errors when made by NSs who are teachers of English.

Native speaker teachers' errors of grammar
As with vocabulary, some aspects of grammar, such as syntax and tense choice, caused few or no problems. However, two areas in particular led to multiple instances of errors. The first concerns commonly confused words (the total number is 19):
Their not what I thought they are.
Your scary.
To me their a game for girls.
They don't know what there talking about!
Their thinking of more exciting things to do.
... the student sleeping obviously work's to hard.
You think he is too nice too be true.
... when I worked their, the gates ...
... hard to narrow it down as there all important.
I would of thought ...
I find my self-defending us all the time ...
The second aspect of grammar leading to errors is the use of apostrophes (the total number is 32):

... and the teacher didn't have the lesson planned ...
... on what you should and shouldn't do.
... with other westerners and Thai's.
... they are being disruptive to other's.
I enjoyed reading book's, comic's etc.
... if you can find a book the student's are going to enjoy.
... the student sleeping obviously work's to hard.
They always were at the end of the day.
A taperecorder in the classroom has it's uses.
... taping students stories and playing ...
... leads into a preview of today's lesson.

As with vocabulary, perhaps incorrect use of apostrophes is forgivable, but some of the errors concerning commonly confused words are perhaps inexcusable for teachers.

Discussion
While the data above suggests that NS teachers cannot be relied on as models of English proficiency, there are some caveats concerning the data which strengthen the case for NS teachers.

Firstly, it should be noted that the errors shown above were made by only some of the contributors to the bulletin boards. In fact, roughly half of the regularly contributing NS teachers made no errors other than a few typos. Nevertheless, error-free proficiency in English, while relatively common, is not an attendant feature of being a NS. Secondly, the errors which were made do not clearly interfere with comprehension. For the vast majority of the errors shown above, it is relatively easy to identify what was intended in the contributions. The errors that NS teachers make, therefore, may be considered not very serious. Thirdly, the NS teachers' errors above are not the same types of errors as those which NNSs typically make. For example, while the majority of NS vocabulary errors concern spelling, NNSs are more likely to have problems with appropriate word choice – an aspect with which the NSs are fully proficient. We might argue that, if the differing strengths of NSs and NNSs were combined, we could attain error-free English proficiency.

In contrast to these caveats, it should be pointed out that only a tiny minority of NS teachers working in Thailand contributed to the bulletin boards. Since these contributing teachers chose to visit websites concerned with English teaching rather than on other topics and took the time to read others' contributions and make their own, it is likely that they are more interested in and dedicated to teaching than many other teachers who do not spend time discussing teaching. Given their interest and dedication, the contributing teachers may also make more effort to follow standard models of English than less interested non-contributing teachers. We might therefore expect that the English of the NS teachers collected in this study contains both fewer errors and less serious errors than might be contained in a corpus truly representative of the NS teaching population of Thailand.
Conclusion
From the errors of insufficient competence made by the NS teachers in the corpus, it can be seen that it should not be assumed that, purely because of their NS status, NS teachers are models of proficiency. Arguments favouring NS teachers based on the assumption that they are necessarily 'better' at English are therefore less persuasive than they might at first appear. Given that many NS teachers in Thailand view teaching as a source of income rather than a career and so may be less dedicated than their Thai counterparts, many of the commonly stated justifications for employing NS teachers are dubious.

This is not to say that there are no dedicated and proficient NS teachers – about half of the contributors to the bulletin boards would seem to be just that. Furthermore, there may be some non-linguistic advantages accruing to NS teachers. For example, many NS teachers use a very different teaching style and different techniques from most Thai teachers. Characteristics such as these may, in fact, be more valid justifications for employing NSs as teachers than language proficiency.

To summarise the arguments in this paper, simply being a NS does not guarantee proficiency in English and is not enough on its own to warrant employment as a teacher. While English proficiency is a key criterion for selecting teachers, it should not be used as a justification for restricting recruitment of teachers to NSs. At least as much attention should be paid to quality of teaching, dedication and willingness to develop, and these characteristics are at least as prevalent in NNSs as in NSs.

References

Richard Watson Todd has been working at KMUTT for nearly fifteen years. His research interests are wide-ranging.
Problems Using Electronic Dictionaries to Translate
Thai Written Essays into English

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Abstract
This article describes problems that Thai students have when they use electronic dictionaries to translate Thai written essays into English. The subjects were six first-year undergraduate students studying at the Faculty of Engineering of a Thai university. The research instruments were questionnaires, written essays, verbal reports (think aloud), retrospective semi-structured interviews and observation check sheets. The subjects wrote an English essay by writing a draft in Thai and then translating it into English. Their electronic dictionaries were the only technical support they were allowed to use while they were producing these essays. The results reveal that there were six identified problems when the subjects used electronic dictionaries to translate Thai written essays into English. Furthermore, the observation, the think aloud and the interview reveal the subjects’ problems using the electronic dictionaries and some problems with the electronic dictionaries themselves.

Introduction
Writing English assignments tends to be a serious problem for many students. From our teaching experience, we have observed that great numbers of undergraduates have difficulties in writing. Many of them compose English assignments by writing in Thai first and then translating into English. The quality of their written assignments, however, is quite poor partly because they contain many poor word choices as well as grammatical mistakes. In order for students to translate, one very important language tool is dictionaries, especially electronic dictionaries. The first writer observed that a number of students use electronic dictionaries in the classroom. Since these dictionaries might be one cause of students’ mistakes, it seemed interesting to study the problems they have when using electronic dictionaries to translate in essay writing.

Research questions
The purpose of this study is to find the answers to the following research questions:

- How do Thai students use electronic dictionaries to conduct word searches?
- What problems do they have while using electronic dictionaries to translate Thai written essays into English?

Literature review
Approaches to writing in a second language
Cohen et al. (2000, pp. 4-12) describe three approaches to second-language (L2) writing. The first approach is to write directly in L2; the second is to use mental translation or think about ideas and concepts in the first language (L1) and then translate them into L2; and the third approach, which is the focus of this study, is to write a draft in L1 and then translate the draft into L2. Writing directly in L2 seems to be quite a
difficult task for low proficiency learners. Cohen et al.’s second approach of initially using L1 may be of greater help for some L2 writers than initially using L2 when writing a particular topic. However, a study by Lay (1982, cited in Friedlander, 1990, pp. 110-111) of four Chinese students learning English reveals that they tended to use their L1 when writing about a topic familiar to them in their L1 background and then translated into L2. Thus, it seems, many learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) do not follow Cohen et al.’s first two approaches to writing mentioned above; instead, they follow the third approach (writing everything down in L1 and then translating into L2). A study by Cumming (1987, cited in Friedlander, 1990, p. 111) found that inexpert French ESL writers used their L1 to generate content, regardless of whether the topic was familiar to them in their L1 or L2.

Atkinson (1993, p. 95) states that, if learners’ language ability is restricted by lack of vocabulary and unfamiliarity with English-speaking culture, translation is the simplest solution. Lewis (1997, p. 60) suggests that, if students cannot express themselves in L2, they naturally resort to their L1 and then translate into L2. For this study, the researchers were interested in students who employed this approach.

Types of electronic dictionaries
As already mentioned, dictionaries are important tools that students might use when they have writing problems. Dictionaries can be categorized using diverse criteria; one of the most widely known ways is by number of languages, usually monolingual and bilingual. Generally, when students begin their study of a foreign language, they tend to start with bilingual dictionaries and then, as language proficiency develops, they make increasing use of monolingual dictionaries (MacFarquhar & Richards, 1983, p. 111). However, Nesi (1998) suggests another way of classifying dictionaries: paper-based and computer-based (or electronic) dictionaries; for the latter category, she mentions three types: hand-held electronic dictionaries, dictionaries on CD-ROM and dictionaries on the Internet.

Nesi mentions that hand-held dictionaries are the least widely-known of all the different types of electronic dictionaries; however, she notes that they are particularly popular in South-East Asia. Interestingly, although there is an indication that hand-held electronic dictionaries have gained popularity with users, they are largely ignored by lexicographers and reviewers because:

“... these dictionaries appeal to users who may find paper-based learners’ dictionaries inaccessible, but unfortunately it is difficult for teachers and academics to check on their accuracy, coverage and treatment of words. For one thing, they are sold in electronic goods stores rather than bookshops, and are advertised in terms of their technological rather than lexicographical features.” (Nesi, 1998, p. 4)

One of the biggest difficulties in reviewing or assessing these types of dictionaries is that there are many hand-held devices on the market: older versions are continually being replaced and the costs of reviewing them are likely to be higher than assessing hard-copy or paper-based dictionaries.

However, although hand-held dictionaries have limitations, many students still prefer to use them. A survey of 495 students in Hong Kong by Taylor & Chan (1994, cited in Nesi, p. 4) shows that most of them preferred hand-held dictionaries to dictionaries in
book form because of the ease and speed of electronic look-up even though they also believed that paper-based dictionaries were more detailed and accurate. This evidently shows that educationalists and lexicographers, who support the development of collocation and pragmatic information in paper-based learners’ dictionaries, seem to have no influence over the design, marketing and purchase of hand-held devices. In short, it can be said that students impose the use of hand-held dictionaries on themselves although they may know that these dictionaries are, in some respects, inferior to paper-based dictionaries; in other words, many students put convenience before content.

**Methodology**
This section describes the subjects, instruments, procedures and data analysis.

**Subjects**
The researchers had the following two criteria in selecting the subjects, both of which were ascertained in the questionnaire used in this study. First, the students reported that they possessed and normally used the following electronic dictionaries, which are popularly used by students: ‘Super Smart’ (1983/2001) and ‘Super King’ (1996/2002). In an analysis of the use and functions of these two dictionaries conducted by the first writer, it was found that there were no differences between them except that ‘Super King’ versions contained an English-Chinese section and more games. The second selection criterion was that the students reported that, when given any written assignment from their English language teacher, they normally began by writing their ideas in Thai and then translated them into English. The questionnaires identified six first-year students whose responses indicated that they met the criteria above: all were male and studied in the Faculty of Engineering.

**Instruments**
The instruments were a questionnaire, written essays, verbal reports (think aloud), observation check sheets, and retrospective interviews.
1. **Questionnaire**: This was a ‘Survey on the Dictionary Use of Thai University Students’ (see appendix). It was used to obtain demographic information on the students’ age, gender, scores on the English language university entrance examination, types of dictionaries they used, and their writing behaviour when they wrote an essay. As already mentioned, the information helped determine who should be selected as the subjects of the study.
2. **Written essays**: The subjects (N=6) were asked to write an essay on the following topic: ‘Studying in a university is different from studying in a high school. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?’ They could use reasons and specific examples to support their opinions. The suggested length was 100-150 words.
3. **Verbal reports (Think aloud)**: The introspective verbal reports were required to see how the subjects used dictionaries when they were translating.
4. **Observation check sheets**: These were used to note every word the subjects looked up in the dictionary and its meaning(s). These check sheets were used to ask the subjects some specific questions during the retrospective interview (e.g. why they looked up a particular word, why they gave up searching for a particular word).
5. **Retrospective semi-structured interviews**: These interviews were used to elicit the subjects’ problems with their electronic dictionaries and/or translation and reasons for using or not using particular words in their translation after consulting the dictionaries. The researcher asked each subject to clarify any unclear points while they were using
the dictionaries. In order to make it easier for the subjects to give accurate answers, the medium of the interview was Thai.

**Procedures**
The questionnaire was distributed to a group of 110 first-year students, from which six were selected as subjects. Then each of the subjects was asked to produce an English essay on the topic assigned. Specifically, they were asked to write the essay according to what they reported in the questionnaire they normally do when given written assignments from their English teachers (i.e. write a draft in Thai first and then translate it into English). They were also asked to think aloud as they were writing. An audiotape recorder was used to record what they thought aloud. One of the researchers (the first writer) sat near the subjects to observe which words they sought in their dictionaries and to remind them to keep talking if they were silent. Finally, the retrospective semi-structured interviews were recorded.

**Data analysis**
First, the verbal reports and interview tapes were transcribed. Then, the observation check sheets were checked for which words the subjects looked up in their dictionaries. To decide whether or not the subjects had had problems translating their essays into English, the transcriptions of both the verbal reports and interviews were analyzed; the problems were categorized by using a coding list. The analysis and coding list were then checked by an external coder in order to check for reliability.

**Findings**
The findings are presented in terms of how the subjects conducted word searches (RQ1) and the problems they encountered when they used electronic dictionaries to translate their essays from Thai into English (RQ2).

**How subjects conducted word searches**
The four identified stages in the process of finding target words from electronic dictionaries indicate how each subject started a word search, any problems he had, and how he tried to solve them. These stages are explained and shown in the figure and below.

*Stage One: Did the subjects consult their dictionaries?*
If so (Yes), a stage two was analyzed; on the other hand, if not (No), since dictionary use is the focus of this study, the target words were ignored.

*Stage Two: Did the subjects find the target word in their dictionaries?*
If they found the target word in their dictionaries in the first place (Yes), a third stage was then analyzed. In contrast, if they did not find the target word (No), three reasons were identified: first, they could not find the target word in their dictionary entry; second, they could not retrieve the word from their memory; finally, they were unable to spell the target word.

The subjects used four possible routes to try and solve the problem of not finding target words. Firstly, they might try to find a synonym or antonym of the target word. For example, when the subjects could not find the words /kan rian/ (kan = n., rian = v. learn, kan rian = n.; studying, learning), they used the synonym /kan sueksa/ (kan =n, sueksa = v. learn, kan sueksa = n.; studying, learning) as the target word. Secondly,
they might change the part of speech of the target word; for instance, from the noun /kan sueksa/ to the verb /sueksa/. Thirdly, they might skip the target word and start a new, related word search; for instance, changing the target word from /a-chip/ (= n.; job, occupation) to /wichachip/ (= n.; profession). Finally, the subjects might simply give up searching. If they chose the first possible route, they would start stage two again while they would have to return to stage one if they chose the second or third routes. Words they gave up searching for in the fourth route were not analyzed.

Stage Three: Did the subjects use word(s) found in their dictionaries? 
If the subjects used the word found immediately (Yes), the final stage was analyzed; alternatively, if they did not use the word found in their essays (No), there were three reasons why they did not select it. First, they were not familiar with the words; second, they were not sure which words in the dictionary entry to choose; and finally, the translation of the target word provided in the dictionaries did not match the subjects’ existing knowledge. However, the subjects tried to solve these three problems by using one of the following five routes: checking other words in the same entry to see if these might match or be more appropriate in the context, checking part of speech, skipping the target word and starting a new related word search, using a word not found in the dictionary, and giving up seeking the target word. In the second and the third cases, they had to start at stage one again.

Stage Four: Why did the subjects select the particular word found? 
Derived from the data from the subjects’ verbal reports, the researcher’s observation and the retrospective interviews, seven main reasons were found why the subjects selected words found: 1) the dictionary provided the right meaning; 2) the dictionary activated the subjects’ memory of the provided words; 3) the subjects were familiar with the words found; 4) they simply chose the first word provided in the dictionary; 5) the word found matched the part of speech they were looking for; 6) it matched the subjects’ spelling; and 7) there was only one word found in the dictionary.

Problems encountered
As previously mentioned, after the subjects finished writing their Thai essays, they were asked to translate them into English. In the ‘translation’ stage, they were allowed to use their electronic dictionaries as technical support; however, when translating, all six subjects encountered problems using their dictionaries, as revealed in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems encountered (by Subjects A-F)</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Could not find words</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure word to choose</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation did not match</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not familiar with words</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to spell words</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could not retrieve words</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table, we may see that the three most frequent problems encountered were: the subjects could not find words, they were not sure which words to choose, and the
translation did not match their preconceptions. The relatively high frequencies of these three reported problems are now discussed.

Subjects could not find words
The most frequent problem encountered when using electronic dictionaries was that the subjects could not find words (39.45%). According to the table, the subjects could not find 43 words. Data analysis revealed some interesting patterns, which might provide evidence on why these subjects were unable to find these words. These patterns involved nouns, phrases and connectors, and negative words.

Nouns: It was found that 13 of the 43 words (30.23%) the subjects could not find were nouns. A careful search for these nouns in the electronic dictionaries revealed that none of them were listed; however, when these nouns were changed into verbs, all them could be found. This indicates that, if the subjects had changed these nouns into verbs, they would have found them and, having found their meanings, they could then have changed the verbs into nouns again. Some examples of nouns which the subjects could not find are /kan sueksa/ (kan = n., sueksa = v. learn, study, kan sueksa = n.; learning, studying), /kan sob/ (kan = n., sob = v. to test) and /kam pueksa/ (kam = n., pueksa = v. advise, consult, kam pueksa = n.; advice).

Phrases and connectors: The second most common groups of words that the subjects were unable to find were phrases and connectors. There were 7 phrases and connectors altogether. The subjects tried to look for these items in Thai; they did not try to paraphrase any word if it could not be found. In Thai, there might be a single word combining with one or more other words to make another, longer word. For example, the Thai word /doi-chapo-yang-ying/ is equivalent to the English word ‘especially’; however, it can be broken down into four different words: /doi/, /chapo/, /yang/, and /ying/. The fact that many Thai words can combine to make other, longer words might be the reason why the subjects were unable to find some meanings. Some examples where the subjects could not find words are /kuen-u-kab/ (= according to, depend on), and /yang-ngai-kor-tam/ (= however).

Negative words: The last main factor is negative words. Although only Subject A did this, it is worth presenting. He tried to look up a word which starts with a negative unit. For example, instead of looking up the word /aojaisai/ (= v. to pay attention to), he looked for /mai-aojaisai/ (mai = no, mai-aojaisai = not to pay attention to), but he was unable to find it.

Subjects were not sure which words to choose
Although this is the second most frequent problem (26.61%), it occurred mostly with Subject B (15 out of 29 times) and it did not occur with Subject A at all. From the think-aloud and the retrospective interview data, it was found that there were two main circumstances connected with this problem.

When at least two words were known: The subjects knew or were familiar with at least two words provided in the dictionary entry but could not decide which word should be chosen (e.g. ‘different’ and ‘difference’).

When all words were unknown: When the subjects looked for a word in their dictionaries and found that none of the meanings provided were at all familiar, they would have a higher degree of difficulty compared to when they found words with
which they were somewhat familiar. Some examples of words the subjects were not familiar with are /dam noen/ (= v.; to proceed, to carry out a task), /noi long/ (= v.; to lessen, to decrease), /doi/ (= adv.; through, by means of), and /rabpidchob/ (= v.; to undertake, to afford [an expense], to be responsible for).

Translation did not match subjects’ preconceptions
This is the third most frequent problem (13.76%), and two reasons for it were identified. The first reason is that the word provided did not match what the subjects were looking for in terms of meaning. This might imply that they had some possible words to choose in their minds but, when they saw the words which did not match their anticipations, they did not use any word provided and tried to use other strategies to solve the problem. For example, Subject A wanted to find the meaning of the word /hen doi/ (= v. to agree) but he could not find it. He then changed this word to /hen kuan/ (= v. to approve), and his electronic dictionary provided the following meanings: ‘v. to be worth, to deem it proper’. After that, he checked the word ‘worth’ in his dictionary and finally the dictionary provided the Thai meanings of this word as ‘kumka, meeka, meemulka’, which did not match what Subject A was looking for. He, therefore, gave up searching for this word and, for his essay, used another word, ‘sure’, which was not provided in the dictionary entry.

The second reason is that the word provided did not match what the subjects were looking for in terms of part of speech. This reason occurred less than the former reason and it occurred mostly with Subject A. When the electronic dictionary provided the meaning of the word the subjects were searching for, they did not select that word right away but tried to change its part of speech by themselves or search for its part of speech in the dictionary. For example, when Subject A could not find the word /kan sueksa/ (kan = n., sueksa = v. learn, study), he changed its part of speech to /sueksa/.

Discussion and implications
The following factors were found to hinder these subjects in writing their Thai written essays and translating them into English: users’ insufficient knowledge of electronic dictionaries and inherent problems with the electronic dictionaries used in this study.

Users’ insufficient knowledge of electronic dictionaries
It was found that the subjects did not use, probably because they did not know how, many functions provided in the electronic dictionaries (e.g. searching for synonyms or antonyms). This suggests that there was lack of training in how to use electronic dictionaries. However, before instituting such training, teachers need to know the nature or characteristics of electronic dictionaries as well as what and how they are going to train their students.

As mentioned earlier, Nesi (1998, p. 1) classifies dictionaries into two: paper-based and computer-based or electronic dictionaries. These two types of dictionaries, however, are different in many ways (e.g. ways of searching for target words, ways the words are presented). These differences must be taken into account in order that teachers will know how they have to train their students to use electronic dictionaries. Koren (1997, p. 10) states that “the electronic dictionary requires different skills or habits than those required by the printed dictionary. These skills resemble ‘computer skills,’ which usually do not take long to master”. This explicitly shows that, rather than needing ‘dictionary skills’, using an electronic dictionary, to a certain extent, requires students to
have computer skills (such as being able to type, use space command, shift buttons, drag information, or click a lot of buttons). In contrast, using a printed dictionary requires reading skills (e.g. skimming or scanning) that are essential for students when they use encyclopedias, telephone books, indexes of textbooks, and various kinds of guides. Therefore, teachers must be aware that training students to use electronic dictionaries should differ, at least in certain respects, from training them to use printed dictionaries.

Users’ lack of effective strategies in using electronic dictionaries (and probably conventional dictionaries, too) suggests the need for teachers to provide further training in dictionary use. Here are some recommendations.

a. Teachers should train their students to try to change the part of speech if the target word cannot be found. For example, if the target word is a noun, its verb form could be sought or vice versa.

b. It is important for teachers to raise awareness about the differences between L1 (Thai) and L2 (English) in terms of derivations. The stem of a Thai word is changed to other derivatives by adding a prefix, e.g. /sueksa/ (= v.; educate), /kan sueksa/ (= n.; education), /nak kan sueksa/ (= n.; educator); on the other hand, the stem of an English word is usually changed to other derivatives by adding a suffix, e.g. educate, education, or educator.

c. For phrases or connectors, teachers may have to suggest students start by using a formal word as a headword and not to use colloquial words since these might not appear in the electronic dictionary. For example, instead of using /yang ngai kotam/ (a colloquial form of ‘however’), teachers might tell students to use /yang rai kotam/, which is more formal.

d. If the target word is long and the students cannot find its meaning, teachers should make sure that they know how to break it down into smaller units that still contain the sense or the meaning of that target word. For example, the target word /doi-chapo-yang-ying/ (= adv.; especially) could be broken down into four smaller units: /doi/, /chapoh/, /yang/, and /ying/. However, none of these smaller units has the same meaning as the target word; therefore, students should know that the first two smaller units can have the same sense as the target word, and they should use these two units to search for the English equivalent.

e. Teachers should train their students to avoid starting a headword with a negative unit, e.g. instead of using /mai mi kuamsuk/ (mai = no., mai mi kuamsuk = adj.; unhappy) as a headword, using /mi kuamsuk/ (= adj.; happy).

f. Teachers should raise students’ awareness of the potential of utilizing synonyms in their first language when they cannot find the target word.

g. Teachers may train their students how to ‘check other words in the same entry’, i.e. by writing the words they find on a piece of paper and checking all of them to see which one is the most appropriate to use in the context. To achieve this, teachers might have to train their students to make use of monolingual dictionaries. Students may also have to use the ‘back translation’ strategy (Shoebottom, 2001, pp. 2-3) that is, checking all the words found in their electronic dictionary in a monolingual dictionary. By doing this,
students will be able to see all kinds of useful information (provided that the monolingual dictionary is a good one), facilitating their selection and use of words from dictionaries in their writing.

h. Students need to know how to use the space command as in a computer. It was found that some subjects in the study were unable to find the target word because they did not put a space between units (e.g. ‘bytheway’, or ‘ontime’). These two examples should be typed in electronic dictionaries as ‘by the way’ and ‘on time’ in order for them to provide their meanings.

**Inherent problems with the electronic dictionaries used**

Several types of problems with the subjects’ electronic dictionaries were found. The dictionaries provided: wrong words; insufficient information about words given; only one equivalent meaning; and more than one possible word but failed to differentiate them. These problems are now discussed in detail.

The first problem was the electronic dictionaries provided the wrong word for the noun form of ‘learn’; it should have been spelled ‘learning’ but it was spelled ‘lear’. In another case, *behind was found; it should have been ‘behind’. Next, one of the words found, ‘a precedent’, was not equivalent to the meaning of the headword /tuayang/ or ‘example’. For the fourth word, the dictionary provided the meaning of /sukasueksa/ as ‘n. hygiene’, which was not exactly the same meaning as the headword.

For the second type of problem, the dictionary provided insufficient information about words; several difficulties were observed. For instance, Subject A wanted to find the English word for the Thai headword /bot/ (= n. chapter or unit); however, none of the words he had expected appeared in his dictionary. The dictionary provided the words as ‘n.; a foot; a stanza of verse; the words of a song or a play’. As a result, he gave up searching for a translation of this word and used a word not provided in the dictionary.

The third type of problem is the dictionary provided only one equivalent meaning. For example, the Thai headword /nueaha/ (= n. body, content, core, etc.) is given the meaning ‘n. body’ in English; and /a-cheap/ is only given the meaning ‘n. occupation’ whereas other possible meanings are ‘career, profession or job’.

For the last type of problem, the dictionary provided more than one word but failed to differentiate them. From the dictionary analysis, a number of examples which fall into this type of problem were found. The subjects might not have known how each particular word can be used in a particular context and they might have believed that all of the provided words have the same meaning. For example, the meaning of a Thai headword /fuek/ is translated as ‘v.; to train, to practice, to exercise, to drill’.

The problems found here will be valuable feedback for dictionary compilers to evaluate or improve their products in the future. Firstly, the electronic dictionaries used in this study were not user-friendly since they failed to provide many words; consequently, compilers should increase their vocabulary storage in order to satisfy their users’ needs. Furthermore, it is suggested that compilers should check whether or not all words are spelled correctly and also whether the meanings of the headwords are accurate. Moreover, they should provide examples (e.g. how a particular word is used in a particular context) as this might prevent learners from using inappropriate words. Apart
from these recommendations, the compilers should also avoid reinforcing the belief in a one-to-one relation at word level, and provide full semantic, grammatical and stylistic information as well as usage notes that are not available in traditional bilingual dictionaries (Thompson, 1987, p. 285).

**Conclusion**

In this study, the subjects’ most common problem using electronic dictionaries was the inability to find words, a problem exacerbated by their evident lack of compensatory strategies. Thus, teachers should be aware of the need for dictionary training, which should include essential strategies for all kinds of dictionaries as well as the computer skills needed to use electronic dictionaries effectively. Another finding was that there were several inherent problems with the electronic dictionaries used in this study, which should be considered by electronic dictionary compilers. If they improve dictionaries to achieve or even exceed users’ expectations, students and teachers will definitely be among the main beneficiaries.

Note: The research reported in this paper was part of the study the first writer conducted for his MA thesis.

**References**


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Appendix: Survey on the Dictionary Use of Thai University Students

I am Mr Atipat Boonmoh, a second year MA participant in Applied Linguistics conducting a research thesis on the topic of Problems Using Electronic Dictionaries in Writing Essays. I would like to know what problems you have when using dictionaries, particularly Thai-English dictionaries. I assure you that all of the information you give will be kept confidential.

Please answer the following questions by (/) ticking the appropriate spaces provided or answering in the spaces given.

(Personal information)
Gender _____ Male _____ Female
Age: _____
Faculty of study: ____________ Major of Study: ____________
National university entrance scores in English subject: _________

(General use of dictionaries)
1. Were you trained how to use dictionaries when you studied in high school?
   ___ Yes ___ No
2. Do you have any problems in using dictionaries?
   ___ Yes ___ No
3. Do you have a dictionary? (including traditional, electronic dictionary, a dictionary in a computer)
   ___ Yes (please answer questions 4-15)
   ___ No (please answer questions 12-15)
4. Which of these dictionaries do you have? (You can tick more than one item.)
   ___ Thai-English dictionary ___ how many?
   ___ English-Thai dictionary ___ how many?
   ___ English-English dictionary ___ how many?
   ___ Thai-Thai dictionary ___ how many?
   ___ Other(s), please specify language(s) ……… ___ how many?

(Specific use of Thai-English dictionaries)
5. Do you ever use Thai-English dictionaries?
   ___ Yes. If yes, please continue.
   ___ No. If no, please go to question number 12.
6. What type of Thai-English dictionary do you have?
   ___ traditional dictionary
   ___ pocket dictionary
   ___ dictionary in a computer
   ___ electronic dictionary, please specify brand name of your dictionary.
   ___ Cal-Comp Electronics (Thailand) Co., LTD
   ___ CyberDict (Besta) by CyberDict Technology LTD
   ___ Talking-Dict by Group Sense LTD.
   ___ VTech by VTech Electronics LTD.
   ___ others, please specify ………………

19
7. If you answer that you do not have electronic dictionary, please answer question 8.
If you answer that you have electronic dictionary in question 6, what were your criteria in buying your electronic dictionary?
____ price  ____ convenient to carry  ____ famous author  ____ widely used
____ self-study  ____ enough content  ____ provide illustration
____ provide part of speech  ____ calculator  ____ provide organizer
____ other(s) ........................................

8. When do you normally use a **Thai-English dictionary**?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9. What do you usually do when you are given any written assignment from your English language teacher(s)? **You may tick more than one item.**
____ think about the ideas in Thai and then translate in English (before starting writing)
____ write ideas down on a piece of paper in Thai first and then translate into written English
____ think and write in English (without thinking or writing in Thai)
____ other(s) …………………………………………

10. **For class work**, how often do you normally use a **Thai-English dictionary**
to translate your work when you study LNG 101?
____ always (81-100%)  ____ usually (61-80%)  ____ often (41-60%)
____ sometimes (21-40%)  ____ rarely (1-20%)  ____ never (0%)

11. **For homework**, how often do you normally use a **Thai-English dictionary**
to translate your work when you study LNG 101?
____ always (81-100%)  ____ usually (61-80%)  ____ often (41-60%)
____ sometimes (21-40%)  ____ rarely (1-20%)  ____ never (0%)

(Buying a dictionary)

12. If you do not have a dictionary or if you plan to buy a new dictionary, which of these dictionaries would you like to buy?
____ Thai-English dictionary  Why? ........................................
____ English-Thai dictionary  Why? ........................................
____ English-English dictionary  Why? ........................................
____ Thai-Thai dictionary  Why? ........................................
____ Other(s) ................................ Why? ........................................

13. And what type of dictionary would you like to buy?
____ traditional dictionary  Why? ........................................
____ pocket dictionary  Why? ........................................
____ electronic dictionary  Why? ........................................
____ other(s) ........................................

14. What are your criteria in buying a dictionary? (You may tick more than one item.)
____ price  ____ convenient to carry  ____ famous author
____ widely used  ____ self-study  ____ enough content
____ provide illustration  ____ provide part of speech  ____ calculator
____ provide organizer  ____ other(s) ........................................

(Suggestions)
15. Do you have any suggestions about the dictionary use?

_____________________________________________________________

Thank you for your cooperation.
Designing a Placement Test for Use in Student English Access Rooms (SEARs)

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Abstract
One project in Thailand in which self-access has been implemented recently is Student English Access Rooms (SEARs), which is funded by the World Bank. The aim is to promote English development and improvement through self-access learning. To serve the aim, a placement test is needed as supportive guidance on where to start using the materials. This paper investigates whether a computer-based placement test, which was specially designed for use in SEARs, is an appropriate test and whether the levels of the materials suggested are appropriate for students’ language levels.

Background to Student English Access Rooms (SEARs)
Similar to Self-Access Centres (SACs), Student English Access Rooms (SEARs) aim to promote independent learning in education. In other words, SEARs are self-access centres which encourage students to move from teacher dependence towards autonomy. Self-access centres allow students to “direct their learning in two essential ways. They choose and use the self-access materials on their own and they are able to correct the material and/or assess their own performance” (Sheerin, 1989: 3).

As has been noted by Watson Todd (2005: 5), the project to set up SEARs is one of the largest recent innovations in Thai education. The World Bank funded the Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project (SEQI-2), which was implemented by the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) with the aim of improving teaching methodologies and upgrading laboratories and equipment for science, mathematics and English.

For English teaching, the SEQI-2 project aimed to develop effective SEARs in 80 schools throughout Thailand as a model for implementing self-access learning in secondary English education (Watson Todd, 2004a). With support from the World Bank, materials were supplied to the schools where SEARs are located. These materials were specially designed to meet the learning needs of Thai students (OBEC, 2004).

Overview of the placement test
Due to the large quantities of materials available in the SEARs, a placement test is one of the materials that should be provided to help students know where to start when using self-access materials in the SEARs. The test, therefore, was produced not only to match this need, but also aimed to fulfill the following purposes:
- to overcome the limitations of the paper-and-pencil-based placement test provided in the manual for SEARs by designing a computer-based test;
• to meet the need for a more efficient placement test to identify students’ language levels. Based on an analysis of areas requiring further support in SEARs, placement testing was rated 4th out of 10 potential areas needing more support (Watson Todd, 2004b);
• to serve the objectives of the new curriculum requirements, emphasizing the need to introduce technology into education (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999: Section 66);
• to serve the objective of engendering independent learning by designing the test based on King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) self-access materials (package 5). These were designed specifically under contract to the OBEC and were based on the Basic Education Curriculum B.E. 2544.

The key features of the test design are as follows:
• The test is a computer-based placement test. *Macromedia Authorware* version 6.5 program was selected as an appropriate program for designing the placement test because it allows interactivity and a scoring system.
• Based on KMUTT self-access materials (package 5), the test covers five areas: listening, reading, writing (all focused on strategies), vocabulary, and grammar. Each of these parts consists of 12 items (60 items altogether). In each part, three levels are addressed, elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate. Each part of the placement test provides a score for the students. At the end of the test, the test results are provided to identify the students’ language levels and suggestions are given for the levels of the materials that are appropriate for each student.
• Three different closed-ended item test types, namely, multiple-choice, matching, and fill in the blank, were used to facilitate computer marking. Most questions are multiple-choice because students are familiar with this item type and the appearance is very similar to the appearance of the paper-and-pencil-based tests.
• The timing of each item is fixed. Students have one minute to work on each question. A time clock icon is provided to show the students the time remaining. The next question will appear automatically after the fixed time has expired.

In short, this placement test is a computer-based test that covers five aspects: listening, vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing skills. The test results provide immediate feedback to determine the students’ language levels and also suggestions for appropriate levels of the materials for students.
Figures 1-4 below show screenshot examples of some aspects of the test and the test results:

![Figure 1: A screenshot of one of the items for listening](image1)

![Figure 2: A screenshot of one of the items for reading](image2)

![Figure 3: A screenshot of the instructions of the writing section](image3)

![Figure 4: A screenshot of test results](image4)

Having designed the computer-based placement test, we needed to investigate whether the test is an appropriate test for the target students and whether the levels of the materials suggested by the test are appropriate for the students. Thus, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Is the placement test an appropriate test for the students?
2. Are the levels of the materials suggested from the results of the placement test appropriate for the students?

**Research methodology**

This section provides an overview of how the research was conducted by describing the subjects, instruments and process of test design.

**Subjects**

In this study, the subjects consisted of six students who volunteered to take the placement test. There were four students from Mathayom 4 and two students from Mathayom 5 at Pichai Rattanakhan School, where the SEAR Ranong is located. These subjects provided useful information both for comments and feedback for final test
development and for the appropriateness of the test. Their experience and feedback enabled the researcher to determine whether the levels of the materials suggested from the results of the placement test were appropriate for students.

**Instruments**

There are three main types of instruments in this study: two questionnaires, the record of test response sheet, and two interviews.

**Questionnaires**

There were two sets of questionnaires: questionnaires 1 and 2. Both of them were presented both in Thai and English. Thai was used in these instruments because it could help clarify the students’ understanding. The information in these two questionnaires was differentiated according to their purposes as follows:

Questionnaire 1 was designed to determine the students’ reactions to the test. The aim was to find out if the placement test was an appropriate test for the students (research question 1). It consists of three parts: personal data, students’ opinions towards the test, and students’ suggestions for changing the test and a comparison of the computer-based test with the paper-and-pencil-based test, which students had previously experienced.

Questionnaire 2 was used in the follow-up stage (after the students used the materials from the levels suggested by the test results) to find out if the levels of the materials suggested from the results of the placement test were appropriate for the students (research question 2). It consists of two parts: personal data, which is the same as in questionnaire 1, and students’ opinions towards the levels of the materials and the level of difficulty of the suggested materials.

**The record of test response sheet**

A record of test response sheet was designed to obtain data on the students’ responses during the test. The data obtained allowed item analysis and an evaluation of the time limits of the test to be conducted.

**Interviews**

The students were interviewed after completing each of the questionnaires to elicit more detailed information.

**Process of test design**

To have an effective placement test, we needed to consider comments and feedback from various sources to improve various drafts of the test and produce the final draft.

For this study, the process of test design can be broken down into a series of stages. The diagram in Figure 5 below illustrates how the process was done.
After draft 4 of the test was produced based on the feedback from 10 students from four different SEARs, producing the final draft, which is the focus of this study, involved two phases; test development and test validation. The details of these two research phases are illustrated as follows:

**Phase 1: Test development**
Stage 1: Questionnaires 1 and 2 and the record of test response sheet were designed.
Stage 2: Questionnaires 1 and 2 were modified and corrected.
Stage 3: Six subjects volunteered to take the placement test.
Stage 4: The six subjects took the placement test.
Stage 5: The test responses were recorded while the subjects were taking the test.
Stage 6: The subjects completed questionnaire 1 to see if the test was appropriate for the students.
Stage 7: The subjects were interviewed.

Figure 5: Diagram of process of test design
Based on questionnaire 1 and interview 1, the six subjects provided useful comments and feedback in finding out if the placement test was an appropriate test for the students and for final test development. The record of test response sheet provided useful information about the level of difficulty for each test item and helped determine the appropriate time limits of the test for the students.

**Phase 2: Test validation**

Stage 1: The subjects were instructed to use materials from the levels suggested by the test results.

Stage 2: The subjects used the materials from the levels suggested by the test results in SEAR Ranong.

Stage 3: The subjects completed questionnaire 2 to find out if the levels of the materials suggested from the results of the placement test were appropriate for students.

Stage 4: The subjects were interviewed (interview 2) to fill in any missing information from the questionnaire.

Stage 5: The subjects’ feedback and comments were considered for test development.

Stage 6: The test was edited and developed.

Stage 7: The test was put on a website for free downloading.

In this phase, a follow-up was performed with the six subjects. The test validation procedures provided useful information which determined whether the levels of the materials suggested from the test results of the placement test were appropriate for the students. After final editing, the complete draft was put on CD-ROM and a website for free downloading for use in SEARs. However, since there were only six subjects, there was no intention to conduct a full assessment of the validity or the reliability of the test. Based on the subjects’ feedback, the study intended to gain only an approximate idea of the appropriateness of the levels of the materials suggested.

**Data presentation and interpretation**

All data obtained from each research instrument were analyzed and interpreted to answer the research question. The findings are presented as follows.

A variety of levels of difficulty in the test increases discrimination, a quality that is useful in placement testing. Based on the record of test response sheet, the data obtained were used for item analysis. With 60 items, Table 1 illustrates how the data were interpreted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Summary of levels of difficulty of each item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 13 items are very easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 13 items are easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 23 items are average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 5 items are difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 6 items are very difficult</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the summary above, we can see that there is a wide range in the levels of difficulty of the items. The test provides an appropriate identification of the language levels of students. It gives students a clear understanding of the test instructions, which
increases construct validity. It measures English ability, rather than measuring other constructs. Based on questionnaire 1 (part 2.1), data were obtained regarding the students’ reactions to the level of difficulty of the instructions. With six subjects, Table 2 illustrates how the data obtained were interpreted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Mean (X̄)</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Listening</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Vocabulary</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Grammar</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Reading</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Writing</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>Easy to understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 2, we can see that the subjects did not have any difficulties in understanding the test instructions. When students are clear about the instructions, the degree to which a test measures what it claims, or purports, to be measuring is increased (Brown, 1996). That is, with clear instructions, this placement test does not measure the understanding of the instructions; instead, it measures English ability.

Apart from the reading part, the time provided for each part of the test was appropriate. The time limit for the reading part may need to be reconsidered. From questionnaire 1 (part 2.2), the data obtained were used to determine whether the time provided for each part of the test was appropriate for the subjects. With six subjects, Table 3 illustrates how the data obtained were interpreted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Mean (X̄)</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Listening</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>Very appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Vocabulary</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>Very appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Grammar</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>Very appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Reading</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Writing</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>Very appropriate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 3, the data show that the time provided for most parts of the test was very appropriate, but the time provided for the reading part was only rated as appropriate. Since the time provided for a few items of the reading part was insufficient, the subjects needed more time to work on this part. Therefore, the time provided in the reading part is a factor in need of further consideration.

According to Gronlund (1981: 22), there are two types of tests, speed tests and power tests. A speed test is designed to measure the number of items an individual can complete in a given time whereas a power test is designed to measure the level of performance under ample time conditions. Since the placement test was designed for the purpose of enabling students to know their language levels after completing the test, it should be a power test. Therefore, to prevent the reading part from becoming a speed test, more time may need to be allocated for this section.
In comparing the computer-based test with the paper-and-pencil-based tests, all the subjects had a positive attitude towards the computer-based test, preferring the computer-based test to the paper-and-pencil-based ones. For example, in questionnaire 1 (part 3.1), one subject stated,

“The computer-based test is more convenient in giving responses. The test is more interesting and attractive and it also encourages me to finish the test. The computer-based test has more potential in providing me with immediate and effective test results and identifies my language level.”

However, all the subjects agreed that the paper-and-pencil-based test has a good point in the way that it allows them to revise their answers to previous items. They experienced less pressure with regard to the time limit in comparison with the computer-based test. All the subjects were satisfied with the levels of materials suggested for use from the test results. They intended to use the higher levels of the materials after they completed their suggested material levels.

Therefore, it can be generally concluded that all findings show that the placement test is an appropriate test for the subjects, and the levels of the materials suggested are also appropriate for their language levels.

However, there are three points which need further consideration: improving the sound quality for some parts of the test instructions of the listening part, increasing the time provided in the reading part, and allowing students to revise answers. Based on these findings, the test was revised so that the sound quality became clearer. However, because of the need for students to complete the test within one hour and due to limitations of the program used to design the test, no revisions were made to the amount of time for the test or the ability to revise answers.

Discussion and implications
To have an effective placement test, the test designer needs to have a good understanding of the process of test design. The test designer (the first author) has learned and experienced the steps of test design, but the test design was not always consistent with the theory.

Table 4 shows the comparison between the reading test design based on Lloyd & Davidson (2005: 54-62) and the placement test, which is the focus of this study.
### Table 4: Comparison of test design processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Lloyd &amp; Davidson (2005)</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>The Placement Test</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write test specifications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Write table of specifications of 5 parts: listening, vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing based on package 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Select an appropriate reading text</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Produce draft 1 of test: - select appropriate test contents based on package 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Modify the reading text</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>- modify test contents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Write test questions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>- write test questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Decide on the weighting of each question</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>- weigh the difficulty levels of contents for each part; 4 items for elementary level, 4 items for pre-intermediate level and 4 items for intermediate level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feedback from supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Produce draft 2 of the test: - edit and develop draft 1 of the test based on feedback from supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Pre-piloting with SEAR managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Produce draft 3 of the test: - edit and develop the test based on comments from pre-piloting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Initial piloting with 10 students from 4 different SEARs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Produce draft 4 of test: - edit and develop the test based on comments from initial piloting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Full piloting: - ensure that the test is an appropriate test for students - ensure that the levels of the materials suggested are appropriate for students - ensure test validation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Final draft: - edit and develop the test based on comments from full piloting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Draft editing: - edit and develop the final draft and put the placement test on CD-ROM and a website for free downloading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ensure standardized test administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ensure reliable rating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Rescale the score if necessary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Provide students with diagnostic feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Evaluate your test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Recycle your test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 4, we can see that, on the one hand, most steps of the placement test design are comparable to the steps of the reading test. On the other hand, there are some differences between these two test designs, particularly in the last four steps of the reading test development process. The reading test provides statistical analysis to determine the overall difficulty of the test. The test results are to identify what the student can and cannot do, and the test is recycled for use once every two years. In comparison, the test results of the placement test provide immediate language level identification and suggestions for the proper levels of materials to match their language levels. The test is not designed to be recycled but could be adapted or changed to serve different aims. The following sections discuss the similarities and differences between test design theory and the actual test design for this study.

**Similarities between theory and actual test design**
In considering the overall process of test design, this placement test was designed to be an effective test; for example, the table of specifications helped set the constructs that the test designer intended to measure. The selection and modification of the test contents were useful in matching the students’ language levels. Weighing the difficulty levels of contents (elementary, pre-intermediate and intermediate) for each part established discrimination; furthermore, ensuring the validation from piloting made the test more effective; moreover, both the reading test and the placement test applied the test validation step. However, the difference between the two tests in this step is that the reading test validated and re-validated the test twice (two drafts), but the placement test conducted these steps with more sets of drafts (five drafts); that is, the placement test was continuously revised, which, we hope, made the placement test a more effective test.

**Differences between theory and actual test design**
Based on the test design experience for this study, there were three main conflicts between the theory and actual test design. First, the test designer could not follow the whole test process step-by-step. The steps needed to be shuffled in some cases. For example, after piloting, the next step in theory would have been editing or improving the test based on comments and feedback. In the actual design, the test designer shuffled the steps by going back to the first step and fixing the table of specifications, which were not suitable for the test contents. Second, there was a conflict concerning time constraints. For this study, it took the test designer over ten months to finish the test design. In general, the test designer will have time constraints in following the suggested process of test design. Third, the test designer ran into difficulties in the test design due to the use of *Macromedia Authorware* version 6.5 program. That is, the use of this software is complex and requires a long time for fixing problems that may arise. Therefore, the complex program lengthened the time needed for the test development. If the test is going to be designed again or if other people would like to design a similar test, a more appropriate program should be used, such as *Macromedia Flash*, which would overcome the problems encountered in this study.

However, the researchers have learned new things and gained valuable experience from the underlying conflicts. The conflicts raise awareness of how to solve problems and how to avoid future conflicts when designing tests on computer. For example, it is very important at the beginning to plan well by exploring and selecting appropriate software. The test designer must know if the software serves the test designer’s requirements or if
its limitations will affect the aim of the test. Without this understanding, the test designing process is a much more time-consuming process because one must rely on a programmer in producing the test.

To conclude, the process of test design in the literature provides useful guidance in the form of steps, which make the placement test more effective. However, it is not always appropriate to follow the test design process for every step. The steps can be adapted to match the actual test design and to resolve any problems which may arise during test development. Moreover, raising awareness of the potential problems in test design at the beginning will help solve problems that may occur during test design.

**Conclusion**

In this study, the researchers aimed to develop a placement test for use in SEARs. The test results from the placement test helped identify the subjects’ English language levels. As mentioned previously, the findings show that the placement test was an appropriate test and the levels of the materials suggested were also appropriate for the subjects. Furthermore, the subjects were satisfied and had good attitudes towards this placement test.

Upon editing and developing the final draft, the test was put on CD-ROM with an auto-run program. It has also been made available for free downloading at the following website: [http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/SEARS/placement_test.htm](http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/SEARS/placement_test.htm). By putting the placement test up for free downloading, not only have SEARs throughout the country downloaded the test, but it is also being used by different institutes, such as KMUTT Self-access Learning Centre (Bangkok), Burapa University (Chonburi), Southern Technology College (Nakhon Si Thammarat), and Agriculture and Technology College (Tak). From this, therefore, we can see that this research has actually had an effect on the real world outside the university. The researchers hope that this placement test will be used as a supportive learning resource that is beneficial for students’ language development not only in SEARs, but also in any English language learning institute. Furthermore, it is hoped that, after completing the placement test, the process of learning English through these self-access materials will encourage students to become independent learners.

**References**


Parinun Tepparat obtained her MA in Applied Linguistics (ELT) from King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi. She designed a computer-based placement test for use in SEARs (Student English Access Rooms). She teaches English at Pichai Rattanakhan School, where the SEAR Ranong is located.

Richard Watson Todd has been working at KMUTT for over 10 years. His research interests are wide-ranging.

Punnee Buato is a supervisor at the office of the Educational Area Nakhon Pathom Region 1. She is a leader of English academic committee for the World Bank project in the Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of Education.
The Preferred Learning Styles and Strategies of Adult Thai EFL Students in a Bangkok Business Setting

Ursula Wall

King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi
& Spencer International, Huay Khwang, Bangkok

Abstract
This exploratory study was designed to look at personal learning styles and preferred language learning strategies in Thai students of English. A questionnaire incorporating statements from Willing (1989) on learning style, and from Oxford (1990) on learning strategies, was constructed and administered to 30 adult EFL students at a large computer-network service company located in Bangkok. Although the results are inconclusive, they suggest adult students in Thailand represent the full range of learning styles but exhibit a slight preference for what Kolb (1979) called the Concrete Experience dimension; that is, students’ scores are highest for Willing’s (1989) Communicative Learning Style, followed closely by Concrete Learning Style. These results have implications in the classroom, both for general teaching and for specific strategy training. Thai students need to be explicitly taught to make better use of their preferred styles, in other words, to turn their love of group interaction into an effective learning strategy.

Background and literature review
Thai students come from a background of rote learning. Although teachers are held in high esteem, this can be a double-edged sword; if teachers are believed to know everything, then they are also deemed responsible for the students’ learning outcomes. This can lead to students being passive recipients of information rather than being involved in their own learning process, which could be a particular problem in adult language learning situations. An awareness of one’s own learning style, and consequent strengths and weaknesses can lead to the use of effective learning strategies, which becomes more essential as we get older, and language learning is no longer as organic as it is for younger children (Hilles & Sutton, 2001).

If students are not taking an active role in their own learning, they may not be using the most effective strategies, and a lack of awareness of their own learning styles could further impede learning of, or willingness to try, new strategies. Furthermore, a mismatch of student learning styles and classroom teaching style can lead to poor outcomes (Rao, 2001).

After teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to several small groups of employees in a large Thai computer-network service organization in Bangkok, the researcher was curious to what extent these students’ learning styles and stated preference for language learning strategies would match theory. As they had come, or were coming, to the end of their company-paid language lessons, the researcher was also curious whether they would express positive feelings about English language learning. Therefore, this study was intended to investigate three general questions:
1) What learning styles do these adult Thai EFL students favour?
2) What learning strategies do they say they prefer?
3) Are adult Thai EFL students positively disposed towards learning English?

Research into strategy use has established that it is related to more global general learning styles (Oxford, 1994; 2003) in that individuals with particular styles tend to prefer particular strategies; however, students will not make use of effective learning strategies if they have no motivation or little opportunity. Thus, these three areas will be explored in turn, starting with a look at learning styles, then learning strategies, before turning briefly to students’ attitudes and opportunity.

**Learning styles**

Learning styles have been categorized and conceptualized in a variety of ways. Kolb (1979) defined learning styles as relatively stable preferences for ways of perceiving and processing information. He identified four learning modes, which he placed on two continua: from Concrete Experience to Abstract Conceptualization on one; and from Reflective Observation to Active Experimentation on the other. This model was taken up and adapted by Willing (1988). The framework is illustrated in Figure 1, below:

![Figure 1: Kolb’s four learning modes, with the four learning styles as conceptualized by Kolb (1979) and adapted by Willing (1988)](image-url)
According to Willing (1988), students with a concrete learning style are field dependent, and prefer practical, hands-on classroom activities and working in groups. Communicative learners are also field dependent, but are more holistic and active than concrete learners, and prefer to get into real-life situations where they will take risks for the sake of practice. Analytic learners are also active, but are field independent learners who prefer to work alone. They have a tendency to prefer to learn ‘about’ language, and therefore prefer language exercises rather than communicative practice. Authority-oriented learners are also field independent, but being more passive, prefer clear, structured guidance in classroom activities.

Although learning styles are a product of individual personality and cognitive style, they are influenced by socialization (including the demands of the prevailing school system) and past experience. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, in a country like Thailand, where the cornerstones of society are considered to be ‘relationship’ and ‘hierarchy’ (Holmes & Tangtongtavy, 1997), that students would group towards the concrete and reflective ends of the continua. That is: students from a hierarchical society could conform to an Authority-oriented Learning Style; their school system with an emphasis on rote practices might lead them to a Concrete Learning Style; and the societal value placed on relationship would require them to be ‘Accommodators’ (Kolb, 1979), who conform to Willing’s (1988) Communicative Learning Style.

It would be useful to establish if this is an accurate picture of learning styles predominant in this Thai student population, and, if it is, whether it predicts students’ preferred strategies, as was suggested earlier.

**Learning strategies**

Even a brief look at second language learning literature will turn up a number of different definitions of learning strategies (Ellis, 1994). For the purpose of this investigation, the Oxford (1989, cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 531) definition was used: “Language learning strategies are behaviours or actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable.”

Oxford (1990) has divided strategies into two groups: Direct Strategies, which include memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies, and which, as the name suggests, are believed directly to involve some kind of processing of the target language; and Indirect Strategies, which include metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies, and which provide more general indirect mediation towards language learning.

Strategy use changes with time and context and with the learning-task requirements (Ellis, 1994; Wenden, 1987), but, in general, good learners use more appropriate strategies than poor ones (Chamot, 2001; Reid, 1987; Rubin, 1987).

There can be cross-cultural differences, not only in initial strategy use, but also in students’ willingness to consider new strategies (Oxford, 1990; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990). One recent study of Thai first-year architecture university students learning English (Singhasiri, Darasawang & Srimavin, 2004) showed their preferred learning styles to be consistent with their cultural context; that is, they were people-oriented with a concrete learning style, and preferred learning activities, particularly practice drills, putting things into context, and using diagrams or picture cues. They scored low on
analytic strategies, and particularly disliked studying alone. Another study (Mullins, 1992, cited in Oxford, 2001), however, found that Thai university students who used the affective strategies of positive self-talk, mood monitoring, and breathing, had poorer learning outcomes. Clearly, further investigation into learning strategies in adult Thai students would be useful.

**Attitudes and opportunity**

There are innumerable studies of aspects of ‘attitude’; in the field of second language learning, and no attempt will be made here to survey this literature. However, socio-political and cultural factors (which have been briefly alluded to already), students’ beliefs about language learning and their desire (motivation) to learn, cannot be ignored. Without an intrinsic desire to learn or some strong ongoing instrumental motivation, adults are unlikely to put in the effort needed to improve their second language, and the question of their preferred strategies or learning styles becomes moot.

Virtually every book about Thailand describes the concept of ‘sánǔk’, loosely translatable as ‘fun’, which is pervasive in Thai culture. This includes the EFL classroom – if something is not fun, students will not want to persist with it (Adamson, 2003; Barnard, 2002). If students are only studying English because it is expected of them, rather than because of their own enjoyment of the language, this would have a negative impact on their attitudes to English, and a consequent impact on their motivation to learn. Green (1993) describes the case in Hong Kong, for example, where English is considered a necessary, rather than enjoyable or desirable, commodity, leading to low affective drive. He suggests that this is common in EFL contexts.

One of the biggest difficulties with improving spoken language is making the opportunity to practice. Many Thais in business settings are obliged to use English as part of their work, which is, of course, why employers often pay for English classes. However, their contact with English-speakers, inside and outside the workplace, can be very infrequent. Use of English in work and social settings can be indicative of need (i.e. have people to use the language with: therefore need to learn), or desire (i.e. want to learn the language: therefore seek out English speakers to practice with). In addition, positive practice experiences build confidence, which can in turn, enhance motivation (Dörnyei, 1998).

Thus, in addition to examining students’ predominant styles and preferred strategies, it was important to get some measure of students’ desire to learn, and their actual language use.

**Methodology**

**Subjects**

All the respondents were tertiary-educated, native Thai-speakers employed by a large computer-network support company. Although they had been out of tertiary education between one and 13 years, the largest proportion (N = 8) had finished study only two years before, and two thirds of them (N = 20) had finished university within the last five years.

As graduates of Thai schools, all of the participants had studied some English from a young age. Some had participated in additional language classes since finishing university, and all had studied between 80 and 120 hours of EFL in classes conducted
by the investigator. They had been studying from the *International Express* workbooks (Taylor, 2002) at elementary and lower-intermediate levels, and their English proficiency, as observed by the investigator, was in keeping with this range. Only seven of the participants had studied other languages, three of whom had studied Chinese, a language which is still used in some Thai families, with ethnic Chinese representing 14% of the country’s population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2005); one student reported 10 years of Chinese study. The others reported only one or two years of other language study. A summary of the demographics of the 30 subjects is shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Information about the participants</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Other languages studied</strong></td>
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</table>

**Questionnaire**

A two-page questionnaire was constructed (see appendix), utilizing simple language and an easy-to-answer format, so that it could be filled in quickly by students of elementary and intermediate English-language ability. Demographic items included questions about previous study and other language learning. A six-question self-rating scale of confidence and enjoyment, which was constructed by the author for use with EFL students at university, was included, and four questions regarding actual English usage were added. To measure learning styles, 33 statements selected from Oxford (1990) and Willing (1989) were listed with a five-point agreement scale. Some of the original statements were adapted to simplify the language for Thai students. Although it is considered advisable to include negatively worded statements to correct for response bias (Borg & Gall, 1983), that is, so respondents do not tick the same answers to everything, because of low language ability, the concern in this study was to prevent confusing the students unnecessarily. A further statement, ‘*If work didn’t pay for class, I would still study English*’, was added to assess participants’ desire to study English. Two sentence completions were included so that participants had the opportunity to comment more freely if they wished.
**Questionnaire administration**

The questionnaire was administered in one of two ways: in a worksite classroom setting and by email. This was because two groups of students were on a break from classes, and therefore most easily accessible by email. Email English had been a component of their English course, so they were familiar with this as a medium of communication with the researcher. The 12 students in the classroom setting were given the opportunity to comment on the questionnaire itself, and had they had difficulties with it, the questionnaire would have been changed.

Two questions on English usage were added to the questionnaire before it was emailed to a further 30 employees of the same company. The accompanying letter of transmittal was intentionally informal, in keeping with the relaxed atmosphere of the classroom. After the response deadline, a second request was emailed to non-respondents.

**Results**

This study aimed to look at the language-learning styles, attitudes and practices of adult EFL students in a Thai business setting through a short survey. The results of this survey are presented below, starting with a report of the response rates. Measures of the students’ attitudes and actual practice will then be examined before looking at their reported preferences on the learning-style and learning-strategy measures. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, and the smallness of the sample size, significance tests were not conducted on any of the measures.

**Response procedures**

The classroom questionnaires (12/12; 100%) were all returned. Of the 30 questionnaires emailed, only 25 reached their intended recipients; the remaining five students had changed jobs. Of the 25 questionnaires delivered, 18 (72%) were returned by the due date. A further three were returned after the reminder, but they were too late for inclusion in the data. Thus, the effective sample was 30 participants, for an overall response rate of 81%.

**Experience of English**

Participants were asked, on a five-point Likert scale, how confident they felt writing, reading, speaking, or listening to English. They were also asked how much they enjoyed written (print) or aural English. Their responses (transposed, so that 1 = ‘Not at all’, 3 = ‘OK’, and 5 = ‘Very’) are averaged across students and depicted in Figure 2. Students expressed lowest confidence with speaking, and it would appear there is a trend for students’ enjoyment of English to be in the positive range, and to exceed their confidence.
Students’ Confidence with and Enjoyment of English

2.73 2.9 2.5 2.73 3.4 3.4

Figure 2: Students’ confidence with and enjoyment of English

Likes and dislikes
Participants were given two sentence stems regarding what they liked and disliked about English. It was hoped that these sentence completions would provide a more detailed picture of the respondents. Responses will be looked at briefly in the discussion as they provide possible insight into some of the quantitative results.

Desire to study English
In response to the statement ‘If work didn’t pay for class, I would still study English’, 67% (16/30) of respondents selected ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly agree’ (4/30). Although a third of the sample (10/30, 33%) was undecided, none disagreed or strongly disagreed.

English usage
Participants were asked how often they used English. As can be seen from Figure 3, most of them (26/30; 86.67%) are using English at least weekly at work, with 12 using it almost every day, 9 (30%) using it 3-5 times a week and a further 5 (16.67%) using it 1-2 times. Frequency of usage outside work is much lower, with only 6 (20%) saying they use English 3-5 five times a week or daily.
Learning styles  
The means and standard deviations of the responses of the 30 students on a five-point Likert scale to 21 survey statements that were adapted from Willing (1989), and their categories, are tabulated in Table 2, with overall category means in Table 3.

Table 2: Participants’ learning styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Learning Style Statement</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I like the teacher to explain everything to us.</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes.</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In class, I like to learn by conversations.</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I like to learn by games.</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I like to learn by pictures, films, videos.</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I like the teacher to give us problems to work on.</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I like to go out and practice with native speakers.</td>
<td>Concrete - Communicative</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English.</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>I like to learn by talking to friends in English.</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>In class, I like working with a partner.</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I like to learn English words by hearing them.</td>
<td>Communicative</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I like to learn English words by seeing them.</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>At home, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I like to have my own textbook.</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>In class, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.</td>
<td>Concrete</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>At home, I like to learn by studying English books.</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I like to study grammar.</td>
<td>Authority - Analytical</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>I like to write everything down.</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>I like to study English by myself.</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers.</td>
<td>Analytical</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>In class, I like to learn by reading.</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Coding the subjects’ responses as numeric values results in:

Means
1.00-1.80 = ‘Strongly Disagree’
1.81-2.60 = ‘Disagree’
2.61-3.40 = ‘Agree’
3.41-4.20 = ‘Undecided’
4.21-5.00 = ‘Strongly Agree’

As can be seen from Table 2, responses range from a low of 2.7 to a high, for Statement 2 ‘I like the teacher to explain everything to us’, of 4.5. The mean response to this statement has a particularly low standard deviation; in other words, the subjects were in high agreement on this point: they want explicit explanations from their teachers. The two lowest-ranked items relate to reading, Statement 33 ‘In class, I like to learn by reading’ and Statement 8 ‘At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers’. The other reading-related item, Statement 22 ‘At home, I like to learn by studying English books’, ranked at 16/21, is also low on the agreement scale.

Overall means rank with Communicative and Concrete learning styles rating somewhat higher than the Authority-oriented and Analytic learning styles (Table 3). The variance in the latter two categories appears to be greater. Possible reasons for this become clearer when we look at the individual statements, graphed in Figure 4 below, where they are grouped into their categories. Five items are related to Willing’s (1989) Learning Style 1 ‘Communicative’. As can be seen from Figure 4, there is a consistently high agreement with these statements.
### Table 3 General learning styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Communicative Style</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Concrete Style</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Authority-oriented style</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Analytical Style</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Coding the subjects’ responses as numeric values results in:

- 1.00-1.80 = ‘Strongly Disagree’
- 1.81-2.60 = ‘Disagree’
- 2.61-3.40 = ‘Undecided’
- 3.41-4.20 = ‘Agree’
- 4.21-5.00 = ‘Strongly Agree’

### Preferred Learning Styles (From Willing, 1989)

- **Overall Mean: Communicative Style**
  - 28) I like to go out and practice with native speakers.
  - 18) I like to learn English words by hearing them.
  - 16) In class I like to learn by conversations.
  - 15) At home, I like to learn by watching TV in English.
  - 10) I like to learn by talking to friends in English.

- **Overall Mean: Concrete Style**
  - 28) I like to go out and practice with native speakers.
  - 27) In class I like to learn by games.
  - 26) In class, I like working with a partner.
  - 11) I like to learn by pictures, films, videos.
  - 9) At home, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.
  - 1) In class, I like to learn by listening to CDs and tapes.

- **Overall Mean: Authority-oriented style**
  - 30) I like to study grammar.
  - 33) In class I like to learn by reading.
  - 24) I like to have my own textbook.
  - 23) I like to write everything down.
  - 17) I like to learn English words by seeing them.
  - 2) I like the teacher to explain everything to us.

- **Overall Mean: Analytical Style**
  - 30) I like to study grammar.
  - 22) At home, I like to learn by studying English books.
  - 13) I like the teacher to give us problems to work on.
  - 8) At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers.
  - 6) I like to study English by myself.
  - 3) I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes.

(1-1.80) Strongly disagree - (1.81-2.60) Disagree - (2.61-3.40) Undecided - (3.41-4.20) Agree - (4.21-5) Strongly agree

(Scale transposed from Questionnaire)

**Figure 4: Participants’ learning styles**
There is relatively high agreement, overall, with statements relating to Willing’s (1989) Learning Style 2 ‘Authority-oriented’. However, as noted above, the responses to the six questions in this category show a lot of variation. This group comprises the statement with the highest agreement (Statement 2 ‘I like the teacher to explain everything to us’); the lowest agreement (Statement 33 ‘In class, I like to learn by reading’); and, looking back at Table 2, two of the three statements with the most variable agreement (Statement 30 ‘I like to study grammar’; and Statement 23 ‘I like to write everything down’).

As was suggested by the low standard deviations for the overall mean on the Concrete Learning Style, average subject responses were consistently positive to the six items corresponding with Willing’s (1989) Learning Style 3 ‘Concrete’.

The responses to the six statements relating to Willing’s (1989) Learning Style 4 ‘Analytical’ lean toward agreement. This category shows some scatter, however, with Statement 8 ‘At home, I like to learn by reading newspapers’ having the second lowest mean, and Statement 3: ‘I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes’ having the second highest. As noted above, Statement 30, ‘I like to study grammar’, which is considered to fit both the authority-oriented and analytic categories, has the highest standard deviation of all the statements. In other words, while some subjects responded strongly in agreement, others disagreed.

**Learning strategies**

The means and standard deviations of the responses of the 30 subjects, on a five-point Likert scale, to the 12 statements about learning strategies adapted from Oxford (1990) are tabulated in Table 4. These 12 statements were chosen as being the most representative of Oxford’s (1990) six strategy groups from within her two categories, that is: memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies from her Direct category; and metacognitive, affective and social strategies from her Indirect category. At the same time, these statements needed to have minimal overlap with Willing’s statements, already included in the questionnaire.
### Table 4: Learning strategy statements

Mean subject agreement with 12 survey statements corresponding to Oxford’s (1990) two learning strategy categories (N = 30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Learning Strategy Statement (see appendix)</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Means*</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>31) I learn best when I analyse language and understand it.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4) I learn best when I practice drills in writing, or orally.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>14) I learn best when I review things regularly.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>32) I like learning about English culture and customs.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>21) I learn best when I use pictures, or diagrams or sounds.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>19) I am good at using gestures or finding simple words.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>25) I like asking questions.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>20) I like rewards when I do well.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>7) I learn best when I put things in sentences or groups.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5) I don’t mind making mistakes.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12) I am good at guessing and predicting.</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>29) At home, I organise my study time well.</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overall Mean: Direct Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Learning Strategy Statement</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Means*</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Overall Mean: Direct Strategies</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Overall Mean: Indirect Strategies</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Coding the subjects’ responses as numeric values results in:

- Means
  - 1.00-1.80 => ‘Strongly Disagree’
  - 1.81-2.60 => ‘Disagree’
  - 2.61-3.40 => ‘Undecided’
  - 3.41-4.20 => ‘Agree’
  - 4.21-5.00 => ‘Strongly Agree’

In general, the subjects agree more strongly with Direct- rather than Indirect-Strategy statements, with five of the top six items relating to Direct Strategies. There is fair agreement between the subjects, as demonstrated by the relatively low standard deviations on the means. The lowest item, an Indirect-Strategy statement, Statement 29 ‘At home, I organise my study time well’, is noticeably lower than the next lowest item.

The seven statements pertaining to Oxford’s (1990) Direct Learning Strategies and the five statements taken from Oxford’s Indirect Learning Strategies are graphed in separate groups, with the overall group means, in Figure 5.
Looking at Figure 5, we can see a consistently strong agreement with Direct learning strategy statements. The lowest is Statement 12 ‘I am good at guessing and predicting’. Agreement with the five Indirect learning strategy statements is slightly lower, with Statement 29 ‘At home, I organise my study time well’ tending towards disagreement.

**Discussion and classroom implications**

The results of this survey study with adult EFL students in a Thai business setting have some interesting implications for business English classrooms.

Because student learning styles are global and affect both preferred classroom activities and language learning strategy use, it is important to know whether students in Thailand conform to the picture that is painted of Asian EFL students in general, that is, of highly visual, introverted, concrete learners, looking up to their teachers as a source of knowledge (e.g. Lu, 2004; Reid, 1987; Rao, 2001).

What was noteworthy in this study was that, contrary to what one would expect from reading the literature from other parts of Asia, the overall means for Willing’s four learning style categories were very similar. That is, this group of adult Thai students did not express an overwhelming preference for any particular style. This would suggest
that teachers can safely include a variety of activities and modes of instruction in their business classes.

Furthermore, although these Thai business students did, in fact, score reasonably highly on Concrete and Authority-oriented learning styles, they actually scored higher and more consistently on the five items related to Willing’s Communicative scale. Thus, the overall means show slight, but consistent (with relatively low standard deviations) preferences for Communicative and Concrete learning styles, or Kolb’s (1988) Concrete Experience dimension. This is good news for communicative classrooms, and is testament to Thai love of social interaction (Holmes & Tangtontavy, 1997).

Given a background of rote learning and the respect with which teachers are traditionally regarded in Thailand (O’Sullivan & Tajaroen suk, 1997), the relatively high agreement, overall, with statements relating to Willing’s (1989) Learning Style 2 ‘Authority-oriented’ is not surprising. The particularly strong agreement with Statement 2 ‘I like the teacher to explain everything to us’ is noteworthy. This has classroom implications for the presentation of new language points and suggests that, whether students are engaged in deductive or problem-based learning, the teacher needs to give a clear, explicit explanation of the language point to be learned at some stage in the lesson.

The subjects showed a low and variable agreement with Statement 30 ‘I like to study grammar’. Although this seems inconsistent with their desire for clear explanations, it does fit with their disinclination to participate in anything deemed ‘boring’ (Barnard, 2002), and may be a reaction against the ‘traditional grammar’ taught extensively in Thai schools. However, if an activity is ‘fun’, students may not realize they are learning or practicing ‘grammar’. Teachers need to be aware, however, that students tending towards Kolb’s Concrete Experience spectrum will be more interested in the communicative function of language than in analysing the grammatical form. Many of these students will have great difficulty with ‘correctness’. This is borne out by repeated negative references to English grammar in the sentence completions. There is a dilemma here, however, in that, while these subjects reported not liking to study grammar, their comments indicated that, for many of them, it is their worry about grammatical errors that leads to shyness and self-consciousness when communicating with English-speakers.

In general, the subjects were lowest in their agreement for statements on the Learning Style 4 ‘Analytical’ scale, expressing a particular disinclination to read newspapers at home. In addition to the low agreement with the grammar item already discussed, the subjects were low in their agreement with Statement 6 ‘I like to study English by myself’, which is consistent with their high Communicative scores. The relatively low rating for all the reading items and the higher ratings for more ‘practical’ and communicative activities have implications for how lessons can be best organized, with emphasis on small groups and practical activities.

One item, Statement 3 ‘I like the teacher to let me find my own mistakes’, stands out from the other Analytic items, and seems to disagree with Statement 2 relating to teacher explanations (above). It is possible, however, that the subjects are reading this as a predominantly face-saving, rather than problem-solving activity. Similarly, it seems that Statement 13 ‘I like the teacher to give us problems to work on’ is relatively well
endorsed because of the ‘us’ in the statement; this ‘problem solving’ is seen as a small-group (hence, communicative) activity.

The subjects’ responses to Oxford’s (1990) learning strategy statements show similar patterns, that is, Direct strategies, are responded to somewhat more favourably than Indirect strategies. The lowest item in each category, that is, Direct Statement 12 ‘I am good at guessing and predicting’ and Indirect Statement 29 ‘At home, I organise my study time well’ both require what is, in effect, a positive self-assessment. Although ‘guessing’ is not encouraged in traditional classrooms and students may have had little practice using prediction strategies, it is possible that there were also the problems stemming from Thai ‘politeness’, which proscribes immodesty. This is so well acculturated that it may have constrained respondents from providing strongly favourable assessments of their own abilities.

Even so, Thai students need to be taught explicit pre-reading and pre-listening prediction strategies, as this was, particularly for those who finished school some time ago, absent from their schooling. English was the only ‘second language’ for most of the students investigated, and they all came out of a school system where most of their language learning had been rote, grammar-translation-based and teacher-directed. These factors could negatively impact their previous experience of learning, and their understanding of their own learning processes. However, they expressed reasonable levels of enjoyment of English and motivation to learn the language, and this can be capitalized upon.

Although these students responded very favourably to the Communicative Learning Style items, most of them have insufficient contact with native speakers to make good use of this as a means of improving their spoken English. Although many of them said they were using English once or twice a week at work, it is not clear whether they are including their English class in this count. Others said they spoke to no English-speakers in an average week; although they use English for work purposes, much of this is in the form of letters, emails or technical manuals. Very few of them have English-speakers in their social circles. Ways need to be found to help them turn their enjoyment of communication into a more effective learning strategy.

**Study limitations**

Because of the exploratory nature of the study and the smallness of the sample size, significance tests were not conducted on any of the measures. Although the students seemed similar to business students in other venues around Bangkok, it is possible that the results here are idiosyncratic.

There were several difficulties in interpreting the data. Firstly, it is possible that respondents were willing to respond to an item even if they did not fully understand it. Even though the questions were framed in very simple language, misunderstandings would reduce reliability. A questionnaire with more checks and balances might solve this problem but could be unduly long.

Secondly, Thai ‘politeness’ could have inhibited disagreement. On the raw data, there is almost no strong disagreeing with any statements, skewing the data toward the positive. This is a common problem with all questionnaire data, so that looking at relative rather
than absolute scores, gives a more accurate picture. However, in this survey, this might have impacted more on some questions than others.

Of course, as with any measure of learning strategies, while students may express a willingness to use particular strategies, this does not tell us if they actually do use them, how often, or how effectively, leaving room for much further investigation.

**Conclusion**

This study was intended to give a brief overview of adult Thai EFL students and their learning styles and strategies. Clearly, adult students in business settings represent a broader mix of learning styles than might be expected, which has positive implications for learning strategy instruction.

Although learning strategies used in students’ L1 may transfer to similar tasks in the second language (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990), many students in the Thai EFL context come from a traditional, teacher-centred classroom, and therefore may be lacking those very strategies we wish them to be using. Thus, explicit strategy training may be essential. However, students are generally more comfortable with strategies that conform to their previous schooling experience, and it has been suggested that too great a gap between teacher styles and student styles can lead to dissatisfaction in both parties and consequent failure to meet learning objectives (Rao, 2001). Promoting strategies which conflict with students’ values or expectations can be counterproductive because of confusion, anxiety, or even outright resistance (Rao, 2003).

We need to bridge these gaps carefully, scaffolding our strategy training as we would any other teaching. We need to teach to students’ strengths, and from there, select a number of gaps or weaknesses to focus on. In the case of adult Thai students, we would continue to give them plenty of concrete, structured communicative activities, and to stress the strategy uses that underlie these. Many students will have little or no experience with metacognitive processes, that is, with thinking about their own learning, and therefore, may not recognise their own behaviours as ‘learning strategies’. Eliciting information about learning styles and strategy use as a whole-class activity ensures that students become more aware of what they are doing. At the same time, they will hear responses from students who favour different styles, and, in particular, from those better students, who may already be using the strategies we want all our students to learn and practice. Reframing their language-learning activities in this way teaches them about strategies while building their confidence, both in themselves and in us as ‘knowledgeable experts’, which will, in turn, allow them to try new things.

Learning styles, even though reasonably stable, can be stretched providing the predominant styles are recognised and accommodated while providing students with opportunities to try learning strategies they would not normally consider. This group represented styles and strategies from all categories. Whether they are typical of Thai business students or whether their expressed range of strategy use had already been expanded because of their previous English study is unclear but indicates their receptiveness to a variety of learning modes.

Teaching language learners the strategies that are associated with positive learning outcomes makes intuitive good sense. Surely the best way to ensure that our students learn English, especially when we have limited classroom time with them or when our time with them is coming to an end, is to teach them how to learn.
Acknowledgements
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References


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Effects of Extensive Reading on Students’ Perceptions of Reading Ability and Use of Reading Strategies

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Abstract
This paper investigates the effects of extensive reading on students’ perceptions of their reading ability and on their use of metacognitive and cognitive strategies while reading extensively. The study, conducted in Vietnam over a period of seven weeks, found that the subjects perceived that extensive reading enhanced certain aspects of their reading ability as well as their motivation to read. It also found more reports of the use of reading strategies at the end of the research than at the beginning. This suggests that extensive reading raised the subjects’ awareness of their own reading and thus might have helped them become more autonomous as readers. These findings suggest that extensive reading should be promoted in Vietnam, where the pedagogical tradition of teacher-centeredness has long been dominant.

Background of this study
To have a deeper understanding about the way Vietnamese students learn how to read, it is necessary to report that the educational system in Vietnam is still heavily teacher-centered in every aspect. Students in Vietnam are apt to follow strictly their teachers’ requirements for ways of learning. Most teachers are attached to the curriculum partly because of the constraints on time and lesson contents. The learning environment is still an exam-oriented one in which “testing strongly affects learners’ motivation and learning styles” (Nguyen, 2002: 2). This exam-oriented learning environment has affected heavily the way students choose their reading strategies and reading materials, mostly to suit the requirements of passing their exams. Le (1999: 3) points out further that all learners need is “a sufficiently good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary of the target language [English] to pass the national grammar-based and norm-referenced examinations”. There have been no significant changes in recent years in the educational policy towards a learner-centered environment and learner autonomy.

For English language learning, the English textbooks currently used in Vietnamese high schools from Grade 6 to Grade 12 (ages 11 to 17) are still a mixture of the contents found in typical materials of the Grammar-Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Method. This trend of English language teaching and learning continues throughout the years students learn in most tertiary-level institutions. In most of the EFL textbooks designed for those institutions, the ‘reading skills’, in fact, were mostly limited to skimming and scanning as well as answering comprehension questions. The texts used in those textbooks were taken directly from some academic textbooks in the students’ study fields and not designed specifically to teach reading comprehension. Most students thus had problems with vocabulary and/or grammatical structures. They also did not have much perception about self-management in reading (i.e. finding their
Definitions and characteristics of extensive reading

The term ‘extensive reading’ was originally coined by Palmer (1917/1968: 137, cited in Day & Bamford, 1998: 5), which means “reading book after book” and “reading rapidly”. Krashen (1989: 89) gave similar terms to extensive reading such as Free Voluntary Reading, or Sustained Silent Reading. In extensive reading, readers will “gain a general understanding of what is read” (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1993: 133). In this study, extensive reading is defined as reading widely, in quantity and with an emphasis on the materials that readers find interesting. The reading activities are done outside class and at students’ own pace and language proficiency level.

Purposes and benefits of extensive reading programs

The main purposes of second-language (L2) extensive reading programs are likely to be to expose students to various genres and topics, to foster enjoyment of reading and to promote autonomy in reading. In extensive reading, instead of having to do follow-up exercises to motivate themselves, students will take responsibility for their own reading. After doing extensive reading, students should enjoy a number of benefits. As Light (1970) claimed, extensive reading “would not only raise reading speeds, but importantly would reduce the negative affective consequences of slow, text-based, intensive approaches” (Light, 1970: 122, cited in Bell, 2001). Students are then likely to gain confidence in reading, increase their reading motivation, and have a positive attitude about reading in English. Nash & Yuan (1993: 28) found that extensive reading helped their Taiwanese subjects “develop a habit of reading in L2 and to see L2 reading as enjoyable”. Extensive reading also “motivates the learners to read” (Bell, 1998), and students will become eager readers (Mason & Krashen, 1997). In addition, Day & Bamford (2000: 12) claim that extensive reading “weans students away from the word-by-word processing of text, encouraging them instead to go for the general meaning of what they read, and to ignore any details they do not fully understand” (e.g. free themselves from the habit of using dictionaries for every unknown word).

Reading strategies

It is necessary to reiterate that, while working on extensive reading, students have to employ reading strategies on their own. Gardner (1987, cited in Kletzien, 1991: 69) states that “a reading strategy is an action (or series of actions) that is employed in order to construct meaning”. In Olshavsky’s definition, reading strategies are “purposeful means of comprehending the author’s message” (Olshavsky, 1977, cited in Hull, 2000: 68). Various classifications of reading strategies have been proposed, many of which derive from the literature on learning strategies, which often differentiates among metacognitive, cognitive and social-affective strategies (e.g. Rubin 1987, O’Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990). For instance, Sarig (1987) proposed a classification of her L2 subjects’ strategies (or ‘moves’, as she calls them) in terms of metacognition and cognition involving, respectively, ways that help readers plan and monitor their reading and ways readers deal with different types of texts. On the other hand, Block (1986) classified the reading strategies her subjects reported using from a different perspective: ‘general’ strategies (including comprehension-gathering and comprehension-monitoring) and ‘local’ strategies (e.g. attempts to understand specific linguistic units). Thus, while precise categories might vary among researchers, generally, we can identify the underlying traits of metacognitive and cognitive strategies.
This article comprises part of the first writer’s MA thesis (DoHuy, 2005), which was originally designed to investigate the effects of extensive reading on students’ perceptions of their reading ability and their reading behaviours. This paper seeks to answer the following research question: “What are the effects of extensive reading on students’ perceptions of their reading ability and their use of strategies?”

Methodology
Subjects
This study was done with six undergraduate students majoring in Computer Science at Saigon Institute of Information Technology in Saigon, Vietnam, during seven weeks from October to December, 2004. One of the criteria to select the subjects was that they had to show a very positive attitude towards reading in English and Vietnamese, and had to commit later, during a pre-interview (see Instruments, below) to devote a certain amount of time per week to extensive reading during the seven weeks of the study. None of them had any previous experience with extensive reading in English.

Reading materials
There were five genres used for the subjects’ extensive reading: fairy/folk tales, short stories, adventure stories, science fiction, and novels. During the seven weeks, the subjects chose items of these genres from a total of 28 items available in this study, read them and wrote reflection reports on their experience.

Instruments
The instruments used in this study were pre- and post-questionnaires, pre- and post-interviews, and reading reflection reports. The questionnaires and interviews each contained some identical items (to assess changes in subjects’ perceptions and reading behaviour during the study) as well as some different items (e.g. while the pre-questionnaire sought the subjects’ biodata, the post-questionnaire, in an open-ended item, sought their reflections on their experiences as reader subjects in this study). The strategies listed in the questionnaires were adapted from O’Malley & Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990). The reflection reports were completed by the subjects on a regular basis during the seven weeks of data gathering and sought information on such matters as the number of pages read, the duration of reading undertaken, perceived degrees of understanding and gratification as well as strategies utilized.

Data analysis
The data from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed to find out possible changes in the subjects’ perceptions of their reading ability and the reading strategies they reported using, which were grouped under the categories metacognitive, cognitive and social-affective (O’Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990). In the case of the questionnaires, analysis involved tallying frequencies of responses to closed-ended items and identifying categories in responses to open-ended items; in the case of the interviews, it entailed interpreting and categorizing transcriptions of what the subjects had said. The data from the reflection reports were analyzed to find out the comprehension problems the subjects encountered during their extensive reading and strategies they utilized to deal with those difficulties.

Results
The results of this study will be presented in two parts: motivation and improvement in subjects’ perceptions of their reading ability, and changes in their use of reading strategies (metacognitive, cognitive and social-affective).
**Motivation and improvement in perceived reading ability**

The subjects’ reading motivation is shown through the increase in the amount of time they planned to devote to extensive reading (recorded in the pre-interviews) compared with the actual time spent (recorded in the reflection reports) and the time anticipated for future such reading (recorded in the post-interviews). The precise times are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Time (minutes/week) for extensive reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Time planned</th>
<th>Time spent</th>
<th>Time anticipated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>120.83</td>
<td>143.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from Table 1 that, on average, the amount of time for extensive reading increased from 105 minutes per week (planned before the study) to 120.83 minutes (actual time during the study) and then to 143.33 minutes (anticipated time after the study). Generally, it can be said that the subjects were satisfied with the outcome of their participation in this study since they said they felt motivated to devote more time to extensive reading in the future.

By the end of the study, the subjects also perceived that their reading ability had improved in various respects, as reported in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Table 2: Perceived reading ability before and after extensive reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Before (pre-questionnaire)</th>
<th>After (post-questionnaire)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Fluent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average: 5 subjects (83.33%)</td>
<td>Average: 2 subjects (33.33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fluent: 1 subject (16.67%)</td>
<td>Fluent: 4 subjects (66.67%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Scale of perceived fluency*

Very fluent = the subject can understand practically everything written in English texts
Fluent = the subject can understand more than 80 per cent of English texts
Average = the subject can understand 50-60 per cent of English texts
Less than average = the subject can understand 40 to 50 per cent of English texts

Table 2 shows, on a four-point scale of perceived fluency, that half the subjects reported they were better readers after the study; meanwhile, the other half felt that their reading ability stayed within the same range on the fluency scale. However, this does not necessarily mean that the latter subjects felt that they had made no improvement. Using a five-point scale of perceived improvement, Table 3 shows that, at the end of the study, all the subjects felt they had made considerable or even huge
improvement in their reading ability; indeed the mean, at 4.33, easily falls within the
top range of perceived improvement.

Table 3: Perceived degrees of improvement (post-questionnaire)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>4.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale of perceived improvement
5.00-4.21 = Huge improvement  2.60-1.81 = Little improvement
4.20-3.41= Considerable improvement 1.80-1.00 = No improvement at all
3.40-2.61 = Some improvement

Table 4 shows that, after seven weeks of extensive reading, the subjects perceived
that their reading had considerably improved in several aspects, ranging from 3.5 to
4.17 on the five-point rating scale. The two most remarkable aspects of perceived
improvement were ‘being willing to read more genres’, which suggests that the
subjects had gained a positive motivation for reading, and ‘guessing meaning more
easily’, which (as shown below in the presentation of findings on reading strategies)
seems to have had a beneficial impact on these subjects’ dictionary use. Another
important aspect of improvement that needs to be reported is ‘feeling more
confident’, which the subjects reported in both the pre-questionnaire and the pre-
interview as being their biggest expectation from participating in the study on
extensive reading. Other aspects of improvements reported by the subjects during
the post-interviews (not tabulated) were ‘gaining vocabulary’ and ‘concentrating
more while reading’.

Table 4: Aspects of perceived improvement (post-questionnaire)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspects of improvement</th>
<th>Average rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being willing to read more genres</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing meaning more easily</td>
<td>4.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling more confident</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading without stopping</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying main idea</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading faster</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale of perceived improvement
5.00-4.21 = Huge improvement  2.60-1.81 = Little improvement
4.20-3.41= Considerable improvement 1.80-1.00 = No improvement at all
3.40-2.61 = Some improvement

Though the subjects reported improvements in their reading ability, they also
reported encountering various problems with all the genres available for them to
read in this study (i.e. fairy/folk tales, short stories, novels, science fiction, adventure
stories). The main problems that the subjects encountered in extensive reading (not
tabulated) are vocabulary and unknown/uninteresting contents of two genres: novels
and science fiction. The subjects, however, met no problem concerning the length of
the texts chosen or their grammar and sentence structure. In addressing these and
other factors, the subjects exhibited an evolving utilization of reading strategies.
Changes in the use of reading strategies
The findings relating to reading strategies are presented in the following categories: metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective.

- Metacognitive strategies
  Analysis of the pre- and post-questionnaire data concerning the subjects’ reported use of metacognitive strategies shows a trend towards their increased use by the end of the seven-week study, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Metacognitive strategy use before and after extensive reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Setting reading goals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning how to attain goals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding a more interesting text to read on the same topic</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on relevance of text content to future learning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning reading time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checking if text is suitable to reading level</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving up reading a text</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 5, it can be seen that, between the beginning and end of the data-collection period, there was an increase in the number of subjects who reported using all but one of the metacognitive strategies. This increase might indicate that, to a certain extent, the extensive reading seemed to help reinforce the subjects’ use, or awareness, of metacognitive strategies.

‘Setting reading goals’, ‘planning how to attain goals’ and ‘finding a more interesting text to read on the same topic’ were strategies reported by all six subjects at the end of the study. It seems from the post-interviews and reflection reports that the subjects’ reading goals relate mainly to reading for pleasure or to get new knowledge in life. Most subjects planned their reading time to attain their reading goals. It is noted that most of the subjects reported that they perceived the strategy ‘reflecting on relevance of text content to future learning’ to be an accompanying strategy to ‘setting reading goals’, and they often ticked these two strategies together in the reflection reports. One subject reflected on text relevance to future learning as follows:

“I think that, reading like this [extensive reading]…will bring me some useful information about the culture, and a variety of different aspects of life in other countries...in science...They [the information gained] would help me a lot in dealing with the new strange things I have to cope with in my school [academic] reading, help me be more familiar with the strange cultural items when I have to do the TOEFL tests.”

For the case of an increase in the number of subjects using the strategy ‘reflecting on relevance of text content to future learning’, it should be noticed that the texts here refer to various genres chosen by individual subjects, and these subjects had a
variety of goals for their extensive reading. The change in the subjects’ use of strategies could also be observed from the scope of their reading goals. Though they still concentrated on the aspects that they perceived to be useful for them, either their field of study (Information Technology), foreign language field (EFL), or some fields of entertainment, their goals expanded to cover reading for pleasure.

At the end of the study, the strategy ‘checking if text is suitable to reading level’ was reported by half the subjects as they pondered whether or not to start reading a particular text. Related to this was the strategy ‘giving up reading a text’, which refers to subjects following the fundamental precept of extensive reading that readers choose the texts they read, not outsiders such as teachers. The subjects gave up reading texts whose language level was inappropriate or whose content failed to interest them. They then sometimes used the strategy ‘finding a more interesting text to read on the same topic’, which was reported by only two subjects at the beginning of the study but by all six of them at its end, suggesting that the subjects became more aware of their autonomy in choosing texts.

There were also two strategies that subjects nominated in open-ended items in the questionnaires; essentially, both these involved monitoring, for key points and for reading speed. Two additional subject-nominated strategies were recorded in the reflection reports (not tabulated), each mentioned by one subject: ‘re-reading the story many times until getting a favourable degree of understanding’ and ‘putting oneself in the story’ (i.e. imagining oneself as a character in that story to guess and to better understand its plot).

It can be tentatively said that, by the end of the seven weeks, the subjects had more ideas about metacognitive strategies and, from their reading experience, could draw what steps they should take to achieve their reading goals or to evaluate their reading performance.

- Cognitive strategies
The result of the analysis for the ‘before’ and ‘after’ data concerning subjects’ reported use of cognitive strategies also shows a generally rising trend. Table 6 below shows, for instance, greater reported use of titles, illustrations and background knowledge to access text meaning. It also shows consistently high figures during the study for guessing text meaning. However, the table shows a decreasing trend in reported use of dictionaries for decoding key words and a particularly dramatic fall, from all six subjects to none, reporting use of dictionaries to decode the meaning of every unknown word. This finding may relate to the increase in reported use of ‘skipping unimportant parts of the text’. Interestingly, this seems consistent with one of the expectations the subjects had for participating in this study on extensive reading, that they would gradually be freed from the habit of using dictionaries to search for the meaning of every unknown word, partly as this would decelerate their reading speed. The following extract, taken from a post-interview, illustrates how one subject dealt with an unknown word without resorting to a dictionary:

“When I want to guess the meaning of the word ‘silversmith’, I tried first to check the position of that word in some other sentences...This word always stood before a verb and after the article ‘the’. So, it must be a noun. And, it contains the word ‘silver’, so it must be related to somebody whose work relates to silver. Then, I met the word ‘goldsmith’ in another story, and since I could guess the meaning of the word...”
“goldsmith’ from the context of that story, I refer again to the word ‘silversmith’. I can conclude that my previous guess for the meaning of the word ‘silversmith’ was totally right.”

This kind of change in the subjects’ use of some strategies might reflect their increasing autonomy in extensive reading since they were reading for a different purpose (for pleasure rather than for study), they were allowed to choose their favourite genres, and they could decide their own reading schedule. Any other change in the number of subjects who reported to have used certain cognitive strategies might be explained by the reason that, at the end of the study, the subjects may have realized which strategies were useful for their reading and have formed a modified view on the use of those strategies.

Table 6: Cognitive strategies before and after extensive reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading title and trying to guess text content</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making use of illustrations to understand text meaning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using background knowledge of topic</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using dictionary to find meaning of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• every unknown word</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• some key words</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guessing meaning of words/phrases by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• identifying their part(s) of speech</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• analyzing their structure</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skipping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• unimportant part of text</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• incomprehensible part of text</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stopping reading a text for a while and trying to read it later</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the beginning of the study, the cognitive strategies that the subjects used were more related to intensive reading; meanwhile, at its end, these strategies were more related to extensive reading. It can be said that, to a certain extent, the experience of extensive reading offered by this study helped reinforce the subjects’ use, or awareness, of the cognitive strategies that they perceived to be appropriate for their reading performance. Indeed, given the inherent connection between cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such changes in the subjects’ use of the former might indicate that there was a corresponding improvement in their use of the latter.

• Social-affective strategies

There were two social-affective strategies reported by the subjects for their extensive reading: ‘taking the risk’ and ‘reinforcing oneself’. One of the subjects in the post-questionnaire anticipated that she would encounter problems with a novel she had selected: dealing with new vocabulary and the length of the item that she was going to read; however, she decided that she would read that novel since she wanted to discover new information from it. She illustrated this strategy in the post-interview as follows:

“After I read the first part of Pride and Prejudice, I found that the content of the later parts gradually become less and less interesting. However, the story was still comprehensible, and I made up my plan to finish reading
that novel even if I had to face some challenges. As my habit, I hate giving up any work half of the way. When I finished reading the novel, I felt proud and more confident because I had overcome myself: not giving up reading, and it [my feeling when I finish reading the novel] enhanced my love for extensive reading.”

Surprisingly, a social-affective strategy the researchers expected the subjects to use (‘seeking help from others’) was not reported. The study was initially designed to provide consultation during the whole data collection process in Vietnam, but none of the subjects opted for it. They reported in the post-interviews that they felt competent enough in their extensive reading and could solve their reading problems by themselves.

Limitations of this study
One of the possible limitations of this study is the classification used for perceived reading fluency. As can be observed from Table 2, there was a 20% gap between ‘fluent’ readers (i.e. subjects can understand more than 80% of the text) and ‘average’ readers (i.e. subjects can understand 50% to 60% of the text). Therefore, if any subjects estimated that they could understand about 70% of a text, they would not have been able to define their reading ability with much precision.

Conclusion
The results of this study reveal that extensive reading gave the subjects a positive change in their perception of their reading ability. After reading extensively for seven weeks, the subjects reported positive attitudes towards reading and increased motivation. Their reports also provided evidence of improved choices of metacognitive and cognitive strategies for their reading. The indications of improvements in the subjects’ reading performance, which fit well with the widely-claimed benefits for readers after an extensive reading program, were: the elimination in their use of dictionaries to find the meaning of every unknown word and a reduction in dictionary use for unfamiliar key words. The subjects’ experience of reading extensively for this seven-week study might have raised their awareness of strategy use, helped them manage their reading process and, in so doing, enhanced their autonomy in extensive reading.

References


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