

# Language Education in Asia



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## ***Editor's Note***

# **The Peer Reader Program: Supporting the Regional English Language Education Research Community**

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Language Education in Asia (LEiA) exists to offer regional authors a place to participate in the English language education research community and share their research, teaching practices, and commentaries. However, each year, the LEiA Editorial Board regrettably has to decline a number of papers on topics that would be of interest to our readers. Many times, bringing these papers to publication would require more time and resources than are available throughout our publication process.

Until this year, we at LEiA could only hope that these authors would be able to find publication opportunities elsewhere. At the same time, we were concerned that some authors, particularly those writing in their second or third language, would be discouraged about continuing to seek publication for papers that had been rejected once. John Middlecamp and I wondered what support these authors had. While LEiA has encouraged authors to seek colleagues to read and critique submissions, it was possible that not all authors would have local access to extensive, constructive feedback on academic writing for publication in English, whether in developing or developed contexts in Asia. This kind of feedback might be necessary to help these authors succeed in strengthening their papers and achieving publication.

This year, to address this need, John Middlecamp and Alan Klein created an initiative called the Peer Reader Program, with the larger goal of supporting the development of the English language education research community in Asia, particularly in the ASEAN region. Separate from the LEiA publication process, the program provides a free, short-term service to non-native English-speaking authors whose papers were submitted to LEiA but not chosen to undergo review.

The feedback in the program is provided by Peer Readers, volunteers who have had papers published in peer-reviewed journals. The Peer Reader positions offer the volunteers an opportunity to further participate in the academy by using their knowledge and publication experience to support other authors. The first group of Peer Readers was recruited from the ranks of authors who have published with LEiA. The strong positive response was a pleasant surprise: 19 LEiA authors working or studying in 10 countries volunteered. This was the first opportunity for some of the Peer Readers to formally provide professional guidance to a peer author. Regardless of experience, the feedback offered has been thorough and thoughtful, and we look forward to the continued participation of the Peer Readers.

The process is kept simple and relatively short. Papers declined by the LEiA Editorial Board at the screening stage are sent to John and Alan, the Peer Reader Coordinators, for evaluation of

their suitability for the program. Papers are selected for the relevancy of their research topics to the ASEAN context. Authors of these papers are invited to participate in the program. If they accept, the coordinators send the authors' blinded papers to the Peer Readers. The Peer Readers, who are anonymous to the authors, examine the papers using a feedback form. They send their feedback to the coordinators, who in turn send it to the authors. The authors then have a limited period to ask questions about the feedback or ask for comments on a revision based on the feedback. The entire process may take up to approximately two months.

This year, thanks to the large number of Peer Reader volunteers, the program was piloted with authors of seven papers, more than twice the number first envisaged. While the long-term results of the program – publication of the papers – will not be apparent for some time, the pilot was successful in providing the participating authors with valuable peer and community support. Now it is up to these authors to take the initiative to revise and submit their papers to a publication. As the authors know, participation in the program does not guarantee eventual publication in LEiA, and they can freely choose where to submit their revised papers. Because the perspectives of each Peer Reader and future reviewer may differ, the authors can expect that pursuing publication will involve further revisions. We wish them the best in having their work published in LEiA or another journal.

I would like to thank John Middlecamp and Alan Klein for all of their work on the Peer Reader Program, and the inaugural group of volunteer Peer Readers, listed here, for their generosity in providing feedback to the participating authors.

Dr Scott Aubrey, Kansai University, Japan  
Mr Brendan Bartlett, Australian Catholic University, Australia  
Ms Bui Le Diem Trang, Victoria University of Wellington (PhD Student), New Zealand  
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Mr Michael Wilkins, Kwansei Gakuin University, Japan

Turning to the current volume, this is the first year that LEiA has one submission date for papers for both issues. This issue, Volume 7, Issue 1, has three research papers and one teaching practice paper.

In the first research paper, Viet Thi Nguyen investigates differences in language learning strategy use between English majors and non-English majors at a university in Vietnam. Next, Leander S. Hughes examines the effects of parsed and block text formats in online extensive reading in English on the reading proficiency of Japanese university students. In the last paper in the research category, Thi Khanh Doan Nguyen, Steven Pickford, and Barbra McKenzie look at why learner resistance occurs in the language learning classroom in Vietnam, using the activity theory as a framework, and how resistant learners are viewed by their teachers.

The teaching practice paper in this issue is by Rosyi Arina and Nur Kamilah in Indonesia. The authors explain how students read local folktales in English for extensive reading and then make and present posters about the folktales, encouraging both extensive reading in English and learning about their culture.

The publication of these four papers for Issue 1 reveals just a glimpse of the dedicated work that the members of the editorial team put into screening all submissions (much gratitude here to John Middlecamp), advising authors through revisions, copy editing, and formatting. The reviewers on the Editorial Board generously supported authors with detailed feedback to guide their revisions. We also appreciate the continued support of the publication by the Advisory Board and IDP Education (Cambodia).

Thank you to all authors who submitted papers, and congratulations to the authors whose papers are published in this issue.

Finally, we hope our readers will find the papers in this issue of interest.

## **Research**

# **Exploring Language Learning Strategies of Vietnamese University English and Non-English Majors**

**Viet Thi Nguyen**  
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This study compares language learning strategies (LLS) and their frequencies between Vietnamese English and non-English majors. The Strategies Inventory of Language Learning (SILL) questionnaire from Oxford's 1990 taxonomy was employed as the main research instrument. The questionnaire was administered to 140 students at a public university in Vietnam. Semi-structured interviews with ten students of both groups were also carried out to provide more qualitative information. The data analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics and manual interview transcription. Both groups of students used a wide range of LLS across six strategy groups with metacognitive strategy group use the most frequent and compensation the least frequent. A significant difference was shown in the ways both groups employed LLS ( $p < .05$ ). Results from this study can provide a solid foundation for educational administrators and practitioners to better support these students and can add to an overall theory of LLS in Asia.

Functioning as the main medium for international communication and to better prepare Vietnam to participate in the move towards globalization, English is widely taught as a compulsory subject at a large number of schools and universities in Vietnam. To help learners advance their English, understanding the LLS they use when learning English is essential because LLS are considered one of the most vital factors in determining language learners' success (Cotton, 1995; McDonough, 1995) and finding strategies is an important characteristic of successful learners (Hedge, 2000). There is a firm relationship between LLS and elements of learners' responsibility in taking charge of their own learning and self-efficacy (Oxford, 1990). The role of the teacher is important in teaching students ways to learn now that learning a language is a lifelong process (Cribb, 2000) and teaching students appropriate strategies can mold them to be more independent, autonomous, and committed to life-long learning (Lee & Oxford, 2008).

This study explores LSS employed by Vietnamese English and non-English majors when they are learning English as a foreign language and investigates if significant differences exist between students' majors and learning strategy use. Understanding the ways both groups of students have learnt English can be helpful for educational institutions and teachers to better

assist the students to learn English. Specifically, the present study addresses the following research questions:

- What LLS do the English and non-English majors report using? What strategies do they use the most and least frequently?
- Is there any significant difference between students' majors and the learning strategy use?
- What are similarities and differences in LLS employed between English and non-English majors?

## Literature Review

### Definitions and Classifications of Language Learning Strategies

**Definitions of LLS.** The learning strategy literature is not theoretically consistent, especially regarding strategy definitions and classifications. Scholars hold different viewpoints towards these matters (Cohen, 1990; Griffiths, 2008; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden & Rubin, 1987). Oxford (1990) considered LLS to be "specific actions" of learners (p. 8), whereas others defined it as any learner's sets of operations, steps, plans or routines (Wenden & Rubin, 1987), special thoughts or behaviors (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) or a conscious process of stored, recallable and applicable information (Cohen, 1990) to strengthen their language learning. LLS are defined as "activities consciously chosen by learners for the purpose of regulating their own language learning" (Griffiths, 2008, p. 87). Although the definition may be controversial, Griffiths' (2008) has been chosen for this study because it reflects the meaning and the semantic components of the term "learning strategy" and it has the merit of breadth and precision (Wahyuni, 2013, p. 39).

**Classification of LLS.** Three main learning strategy approaches are those described by O'Malley and Chamot (1990), Oxford (1990), and Stern (1992). For the purposes of this study, the Oxford approach was selected because of its comprehensiveness (Ellis, 1999) and it is considered the most detailed and systematic strategy classification (Radwan, 2011). O'Malley and Chamot's (1990) and Stern's (1992) frameworks were not selected because the former focuses mainly on communication in language learning and factors such as learners' feelings are not mentioned, while the latter reveals some overlaps between groups of LLS. Specific tasks for each type of strategy are shown in the questionnaire in Appendix A.

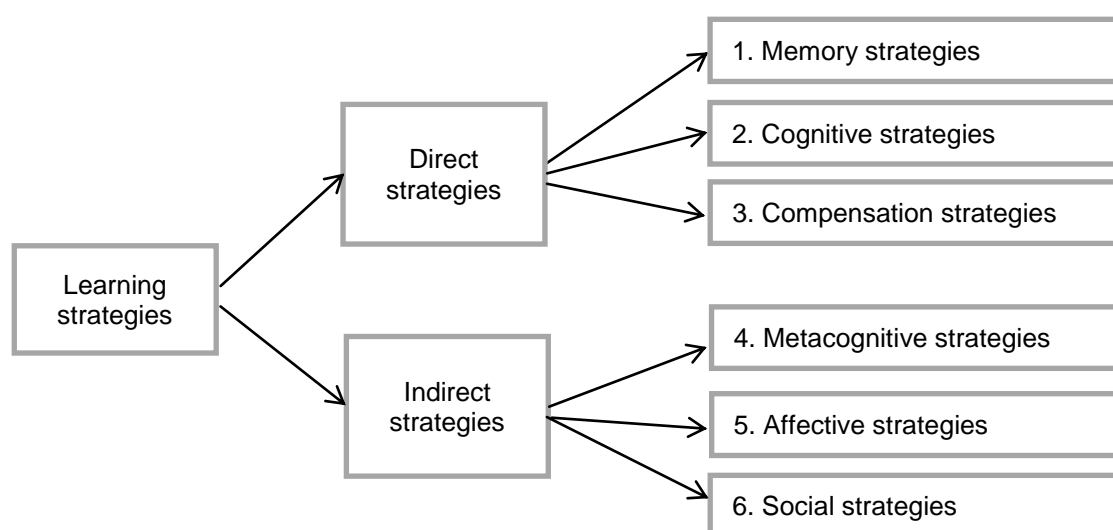


Figure 1. Diagram of a strategy system: Overview (Oxford, 1990, p. 16).

### **Major Differences in LLS Usage**

Most of the research on differences in the use of LLS tends to be focused on sub-categories of non-English majors such as arts versus science majors. However, results from these studies reveal inconsistencies. Some studies suggest that there exist significant differences between LLS of non-English majors such as industrial management versus engineering and political science majors (Alireza & Abdullah, 2010), and computer science versus management information systems majors (McMullen, 2009). Nevertheless, in a study with 1,110 Korean students in middle school, high school, and university, when analyzing data from 558 students majoring in humanities and science / engineering, Lee and Oxford (2008) found that the major itself did not have any significant influence on learning strategy use ( $p = .916 > .05$ ). These conflicting results confirm the need for clarity on whether or not differences between majors exist.

Regarding strategy usage, Chen (2005) investigated LLS of 134 students of both English majors and non-majors at a university in Taiwan using SILL questionnaires (Oxford, 1990). The results revealed that both groups used the compensation strategy group most frequently, the affective strategy group least frequently and English majors used LLS more frequently than non-English majors. The weakness of the study is that it appeared too descriptive while comparing the differences among variables (gender, major, and strategy use), and no inferential statistics were provided to show if there existed any significant relationships between these variables.

Tsan's (2008) study with 330 Taiwanese undergraduate university students, including 212 English and 118 non-English majors, addressed these limitations by employing both descriptive and inferential statistics. One similar finding to Chen's (2005) was that all subjects of the study employed compensation strategies most regularly and English majors used overall LLS with higher frequency compared to non-English majors. However, the most infrequently used strategy group was the affective group. The study also shows significant differences between the two groups in using overall LLS and within six sub-categories of LLS.

In the Vietnamese context, according to Hoang (2013), there are a surprising limited number of research studies on LLS employed by Vietnamese EFL learners. Studies conducted on LLS in the Vietnamese EFL context had a different focus of investigation (e.g., overall learning strategies or the most frequent strategies that the students reported to use). Hang (2008) examined the effect of variables on the choice of learning strategy use such as proficiency and gender. Little attention has been paid to non-English majors such as science-oriented students at the university level (Minh, 2012). Additionally, no research has placed the focus on comparing overall LLS between English and non-English majors in the context of Vietnam.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

In this study, participants were 140 Vietnamese EFL students, ages 19 to 22, from a large university located in central Vietnam. The participants came from different regions of Thanh Hoa Province. Half were English majors and the other half were non-English majors, namely business administration or finance and banking majors. Of the 140 questionnaires, two were incomplete and were eliminated. Of the 68 English major students, who were at the intermediate level of English proficiency, 32 were freshmen, 16 were in the second year, and 20 were in the third year. Fifty-one English majors were females and 17 were males. They had been studying English for three to ten years. Of the 70 non-English majors, all were first-year students, and all had been studying English for at least three years; there were 48 females and 22 males. They were all at the beginner level of English (see Table 1). All participants were chosen randomly to ensure objectivity. Ten participants, five English majors and five non-



English majors, were chosen randomly for follow up interviews so that more information might provide a better understanding of the meaning of numbers in the questionnaire data.

**Table 1**  
**Participants' General Background**

	Total	Gender	Major	Year	English Proficiency
English majors	68 (2 questionnaires were eliminated)	51 females 17 males	- English	1 <sup>st</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> , and 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Intermediate
Non-English majors	70	48 females 22 males	- Finance and Banking - Business Administration	1 <sup>st</sup> only	Beginner
Total	138				

### Procedure, Data Collection, and Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used with a two-phase sequential procedure explanatory design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), such that the quantitative study was conducted first, followed by the qualitative study to build on the quantitative results. Generally, the quantitative data has greater weight. A quantitative method was employed to explore learning strategy use by the students; a qualitative method was used to better understand the meaning.

The quantitative data was collected using a SILL questionnaire from Oxford (1990; Version 7). The questionnaire consists of 50 items across six strategy groups. These items were made up of nine statements for the memory strategy group, ten for the cognitive strategy group, six for the compensation strategy group, nine for metacognitive strategy group, six for the affective strategy group; and six for the social strategy group. The statistical software SPSS (V. 22) was used to analyze the data. To answer the three research questions, the frequencies, means ( $M$ ), and standard deviations ( $SD$ ) of LLS and Spearman's rho two-tailed tests were calculated using descriptive statistics and an independent samples  $t$ -test. The statistical significance of .05 was set for the study. The mean scores were interpreted using the five-point Likert scale: 3.50 to 5.00 is high use; 2.50 to 3.49, medium use; and 1.00 to 2.49, low use.

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews in person with five students from each group over ten minutes. The interviews were in Vietnamese to ensure that the students had no language difficulty in answering the questions. The interviews were recorded with the participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim and carefully checked by the researcher individually. For analysis, the transcription was coded by grouping strategies used by the students to learn English vocabulary and four skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing), as well as their reasons for studying English.

### Reliability of the Questionnaire

With the purpose of minimizing errors and biases in the study, the questionnaire and the interview guide were piloted. In this study, the reliability scores of the whole questionnaires for English majors and non-English majors are 0.92 and 0.94 respectively, which are much higher compared to the reliability coefficient of 0.70 recommended in most social science research

situations (Santos, 1999). The reliability coefficient for each sub-category of LLSs for both groups was also no less than 0.80.

## Results

### Overall LLS Usage and Frequency of LLS Usage

The results from the questionnaires show that all LLS mentioned in the SILL questionnaire across six strategy groups were reported to be employed by both the English and non-English majors.

**Table 2**

#### ***Frequency of Strategy Groups Used by English and Non-English Majors***

English majors ( <i>n</i> = 68)				Non-English majors ( <i>n</i> = 70)			
Ranking	Strategy Groups	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Ranking	Strategy Groups	Mean	<i>SD</i>
1	Metacognitive	3.79	0.49	1	Metacognitive	3.12	0.70
2	Social	3.57	0.54	2	Affective	2.82	0.72
3	Cognitive	3.45	0.70	3	Social	2.81	0.67
4	Memory	3.33	0.55	4	Cognitive	2.78	0.63
5	Affective	3.29	0.66	5	Memory	2.76	0.59
6	Compensation	3.15	0.69	6	Compensation	2.70	0.60

As can be seen from Table 2, the two strategy groups used at a high level of frequency for the English majors were metacognitive ( $M = 3.79$ ;  $SD = 0.49$ ) and social ( $M = 3.57$ ;  $SD = 0.54$ ). They were followed by cognitive, memory, affective, and compensation respectively at medium level of frequency. Non-English majors also used the metacognitive strategy most frequently, however, at a medium level of frequency. All the other strategy groups were also at the medium frequency level.

### Most and Least Frequently Used Learning Strategies

An interesting finding is that non-English majors reported to use the metacognitive group most frequently, but of the 50 itemized strategies, the two most frequently used strategies belonged to the cognitive group. Both groups of the students reported to use the affective strategy *I write down my feelings in a language learning diary* and the compensation strategy *I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English* the least frequently, at a low level. Tables 3 and 4 display the two most and least used strategies employed by both groups of the students.

**Table 3**

#### ***Most Frequently Used Learning Strategies***

English majors ( <i>n</i> = 68)	Category	Rank	Mean
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	Metacognitive	1	4.26
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking in English.	Metacognitive	2	4.10
Non-English majors ( <i>n</i> = 70)			
10. I say or write new English words several times.	Cognitive	1	3.66
32. I pay attention when someone is speaking in English.	Cognitive	1	3.66

**Table 4**  
***Least Frequently Used Learning Strategies***

English majors ( $n = 68$ )	Category	Rank	Mean
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	Compensation	1	2.06
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	Affective	2	2.18
Non-English majors ( $n = 70$ )			
43. I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	Affective	1	1.66
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	Compensation	2	2.07

### **Major Differences in Using LLS**

An independent sample  $t$ -test was run to see if there is a significant difference between English and non-English majors in using LLS. It can be seen from Table 5 that the relationship between the two variables was significant ( $p = .000 < .05$ ). Also,  $p = .000 < .05$  for all sub-types of strategy use indicates that both groups of students used not only overall LLS but also sub-types of LLS differently from each other, with non-English majors being more infrequent employers of LLS.

**Table 5**  
***Correlations Between Major and Overall Learning Strategy Use and Its Subcategories***

	Sig. (two-tailed)
Overall LLS use	.000
Sub-categories of LLS	Memory
	Cognitive
	Compensation
	Metacognitive
	Affective
	Social

*Note:* Independent variable: major (English and non-English majors);  $N = 138$ ;  $p < 0.05$ .

As illustrated in Table 6, first year English majors used overall LLS and sub-categories of LLS more frequently than first year non-English majors and the difference in using LLS by both groups was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The first-year English majors used the cognitive, metacognitive, and social groups at a high level of frequency, and the non-English majors did not use any strategy groups at a high frequency.

**Table 6**

**Frequency of Strategy Group Use by First-Year English and Non-English Majors, Correlations Between Majors and Learning Strategy Use and Its Subcategories**

Strategies	English majors freshmen ( <i>n</i> = 32)		Non-English majors freshmen ( <i>n</i> = 70)		Sig. (two-tailed)
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Memory	3.45	0.49	2.76	0.59	.000
Cognitive	3.58	0.56	2.78	0.63	.000
Compensation	3.21	0.75	2.70	0.60	.001
Metacognitive	3.96	0.51	3.12	0.70	.000
Affective	3.31	0.73	2.82	0.72	.002
Social	3.65	0.70	2.81	0.67	.000

Note:  $p < 0.05$ .

Table 7 shows that there was no significant difference between the first-, second- and third-year English majors in general ( $p < .05$ ), except for cognitive and metacognitive strategy groups when comparing the first- and second-year students. This difference was also found in the use of cognitive strategies between the first and third-year students.

**Table 7**

**Strategies Used by First, Second, and Third-Year English Majors**

Strategy groups	1 <sup>st</sup> year students ( <i>n</i> = 32)		2 <sup>nd</sup> year students ( <i>n</i> = 16)		3 <sup>rd</sup> year students ( <i>n</i> = 20)		<i>P</i> 1	<i>P</i> 2	<i>P</i> 3
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Memory	3.45	.49	3.33	.41	3.35	.44	.419	.497	.869
Cognitive	3.58	.56	3.07	.39	3.41	.51	.002	.259	.038
Compensation	3.21	.75	3.02	.68	3.16	.64	.401	.805	.535
Metacognitive	3.96	.51	3.55	.50	3.70	.55	.011	.080	.416
Affective	3.31	.73	3.30	.55	3.26	.65	.960	.787	.832
Social	3.65	.70	3.50	.73	3.50	.67	.490	.443	1.00

Note: *P*1 compares 1st & 2nd year students; *P*2 compares 1st & 3rd year students; *P*3 compares 2nd & 3rd year students;  $p < .05$ .

One crucial finding from analyzing the interview transcription of ten participants showed that both groups of students used a variety of strategies in acquiring English. This finding confirms the results from the quantitative analysis that all strategies mentioned in the questionnaire were used by the students of both groups. Additionally, the qualitative data revealed reasons why the students learn English and use the strategies.

Among five randomly selected English majors (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5) participating in the interviews, S1 and S2 reported to use flashcards, S3 and S4 used the strategy of "writing down new words repeatedly" to learn vocabulary; and S3, S4, and S5 reported learning English words through listening to English songs, reading magazines, and watching English videos on the Internet. To

strengthen their English skills, various ways were applied such as speaking in front of the mirror (S4), and using YouTube and / or social networks (S2, S3).

Similarly, non-English majors reported learning English vocabulary and English skills by writing down the words repeatedly (S6, S7), using flash cards (S7, S8) or using imagination, using social networks, watching TV, and listening to music (S9, S10). S7 explained his way of learning and provided the reason for choosing this learning method: "Now I am using flash cards to learn new words. I stick these cards on the things in my room so that I can see them every day. I think it helps me remember new words better."

Responding to the question of why the students learn English, the majority of the English majors said they learn English because it is very interesting and because English is the key to advance their knowledge and to have a good job in the future. All non-English majors also agreed that English is important for future job opportunities, but what they paid more attention to was "studying for exams" since English is a compulsory subject for their course.

### Discussion

The first finding is that the adult students of English and non-English in this study used various LLS spread over six strategy groups identified in Oxford's 1990 taxonomy. The overall mean scores of LLS used by both groups of students were at medium level of frequency. The results are supported by many studies in EFL contexts (Chen, 2005; Lee & Oxford, 2008; Tsan, 2008). This suggests LLS play a significant role in students' learning of a language and that the learners are aware of using strategies to enhance their learning.

Significant difference was found between major and strategy use. English majors used strategies differently and more frequently than non-English majors as in Chen (2005) and Tsan (2008). The reason may be that English is an interesting and core subject for English majors now and likely they will use English for their future careers; therefore, they should acquire it to the fullest extent. The reason for non-English majors to use strategies in learning English may be because they wanted to pass the TOEIC test to graduate. It can be concluded that the teaching and learning English for English majors is quite successful because the students have a clear goal for their study and are better motivated. However, the teaching and learning in this research context reveals difficulties when motivations for the non-English majors to study English are external motivation (future jobs, final exams).

One finding is that the metacognitive strategy group was used most frequently by the students. When students use metacognitive strategies most frequently for coordinating the learning process to achieve their goal, it may indicate a good sign of learning English as students will be more motivated and gain more if they have a goal to work towards (Hom & Murphy, 1983). Compensatory strategy use ranked the lowest amongst the six strategy groups. This result contradicts the findings of other studies in EFL contexts (Chen, 2005; Lee & Oxford, 2008). One possible reason could be the interference of culture and educational system factors. Shmais (2003) took Palestine as an example: due to the constraints of curriculum (exams and textbooks) and big class size, students in Palestine have had few chances to employ functional practice strategies which results in their hesitation in using compensation strategies.

Two top frequent strategies that English majors used are *I try to find out how to be a better learner of English* ( $M = 4.26$ ) and *I pay attention when someone is speaking in English* ( $M = 4.01$ ). This means that English majors recognised the importance of English and pay a great deal of attention to discover ways to advance their English. Non-English majors seem to not have as applicable plans for their whole learning process, but were more likely to pay attention

to actual tasks the teachers gave them. Along with *I pay attention when someone is speaking in English* ( $M = 3.66$ ), *I say or write new words several times* ( $M = 3.66$ ) was also the most often used strategy by non-English majors as they had to take the TOEIC test. The two least frequent strategies that both groups of the students used were *I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English* and *I write down my feelings in a language learning diary*. All students reported using these strategies at a low level. Writing in English is considered the most difficult skill for not only Vietnamese EFL learners to master but also for many learners in other EFL contexts. This was evidenced by the lowest average scores for the writing of Vietnamese and other EFL learners taking the IELTS academic test in 2015 ("Test taker performance," 2015). The reason for the low quality in English writing of EFL learners may be a poor habit of freewriting every day; therefore, instructions for a process of freewriting need to be provided so that students learn how to initiate their writing and write well (Chen, 2005). For example, teachers should encourage and instruct students to frequently write down their feelings freely in a language learning diary.

The findings show that English majors have a higher overall mean value of all LLS used to learn English than non-English majors. Additionally, the mean values for English majors employing each LLS were higher than those of non-English majors. This indicates that English majors have a better awareness of using English learning strategies and used them more actively.

The findings from the present study derived from answers of students from just a particular university in the country where the researcher played a dual role as a teacher and a researcher. Future research, thus, should involve a larger number of students at various universities in the Vietnamese context so that a broader view of Vietnamese students' LLS can be drawn. Additionally, the number of English and non-English majors should have been more well-balanced in terms of years of study and students' language proficiency levels should have been approximately equal. Regarding research instruments, in addition to questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, observations and learning diaries should be used to maximize the validity of the study.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined LLS of Vietnamese English and non-English majors. The results reveal that overall, students were using all strategies in the SILL questionnaire. The most frequent and infrequent use of LLS employed by both groups belongs to the metacognitive and compensation strategy groups respectively. The students' major reflects a significant relationship with learning strategy use. Future research in this field may take the form of action research in which researchers plan and teach students English learning strategies, observe, and reflect on the research idea to see how teaching LLS influences learners' study of English.

### **Implications for the Teaching and Learning of English in EFL Contexts**

Findings from this study suggest that strategy training would be advantageous for students in English learning as a foreign language. Training LLS would become more effective with the recognition of education authorities and teachers.

For education authorities, training courses on teaching LLS could be provided for teachers before it is carried out in the real classroom. Formal training and / or training through workshops on LLS could be carried out so that teachers can raise their awareness and skills of teaching LLS for students. A certain amount of time (e.g., two hours) could be allowed in the curriculum to teach LLS.

For teachers, if time is given to insert strategy training sessions, it may be significant to raise students' consciousness of using LLS such as brainstorming techniques that they used for an oral task in the past. According to Rubin, Chamot, Harris, and Anderson (2007), such brainstorming techniques can help students explore a variety of their classmates' LLS, and this can motivate them to try out new strategies.

Teachers can also encourage non-English majors to use LLS more frequently, especially the strategies that English majors employed with high level of frequency because English majors can be considered better learners of English. For instance, non-English majors may benefit from more frequently practicing the cognitive strategy *I read for pleasure in English* ( $M = 2.49$ ) and the metacognitive strategy *I look for people I can talk to in English* ( $M = 2.70$ ), which were being used with a high level of frequency by English majors ( $M = 3.65$  and  $M = 3.56$  respectively). It is also essential to note that English majors and non-English majors also have differences between LLS and motivation to learn English; therefore, teachers should apply different teaching techniques and activities to best support them. Additionally, less frequent compensation strategies should be practiced with higher levels of frequency by both English and non-English majors since compensation strategies are claimed to help learners correctly guess meaning without having much English grammar and lexicology (Yang, 2007).

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**Appendix A**  
**Learning Strategies in SILL (Oxford, 1990)**  
**Used by Vietnamese EFL English and Non-English Majors**

Strategy group	Item	L2 speaking strategies	English majors ( <i>n</i> = 68)		Non-English majors ( <i>n</i> = 70)	
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Memory	1.	I think of relationships between what I really know, and new things I learn in English.	3.16	0.87	2.79	0.93
	2.	I use new English words in a sentence so I can remember them.	3.74	0.77	3.01	0.93
	3.	I connect the sound of a new English word, and an image or picture of the word to help remember the word.	3.41	1.12	2.81	1.07
	4.	I remember a new English word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used.	3.49	0.94	2.79	1.09
	5.	I use rhymes to remember new English words.	2.69	1.06	2.7	1.07
	6.	I use flashcards to remember new English words.	3.9	1.04	2.91	1.05
	7.	I physically act out new English words.	2.97	1.02	2.1	0.85
	8.	I review English lessons often.	3.79	0.82	3.06	0.81
	9.	I remember new English words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on the street sign.	2.87	1.19	2.63	1.16
Cognitive	10.	I say or write new English words several times.	3.91	0.88	3.66	0.85
	11.	I try to talk like native English speakers.	3.69	0.1	3.13	1.13
	12.	I practice the sounds of English.	3.57	0.85	2.81	0.95
	13.	I use English words I know in different ways.	3.21	1.02	2.63	1.16
	14.	I start a conversation in English.	3.31	0.83	2.46	0.96
	15.	I watch English language TV shows spoken in English or go to movies spoken in English.	3.71	1.01	2.83	1.15
	16.	I read for pleasure in English.	3.65	1.02	2.49	1
	17.	I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in English.	3.03	1	2.17	0.97

	18.	I first skim an English passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back, and read carefully.	3.65	0.9	2.67	1.14
	19.	I look for words in my own language that are similar to new words in English.	3.32	1.13	2.94	0.99
	20.	I try to find patterns in English.	3.5	1.04	2.97	0.93
	21.	I find the meaning of a English word by dividing it into parts that I understand.	3.01	1.09	2.64	0.92
	22.	I try not to understand word-for-word.	3.21	1.05	2.67	1.05
	23.	I make summaries of information that I hear or read in English.	3.5	1	2.89	1.03
Compensation	24.	To understand unfamiliar English words, I make guesses.	3.96	1.07	3.26	1
	25.	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures.	3.51	1.2	3.01	1.19
	26.	I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in English.	2.06	1.01	2.07	1.05
	27.	I read English without looking up every new word.	2.6	1.08	2.44	1.1
	28.	I try to guess what the other person will say next in English.	3.13	1.09	2.71	1.05
	29.	If I can't think of a English word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing.	3.63	1.02	2.69	1.02
Metacognitive	30.	I try to find as many ways as I can to use my English.	3.81	0.78	3	0.99
	31.	I notice my English mistakes, and use that information to help me do better.	3.76	0.9	3.13	1.02
	32.	I pay attention when someone is speaking in English.	4.1	0.81	3.66	1.12
	33.	I try to find out how to be a better learner of English.	4.26	0.79	3.46	1.07
	34.	I plan my schedule so I will have enough time to study English.	3.57	0.83	2.91	1.02
	35.	I look for people I can talk to in English.	3.56	0.98	2.7	0.97
	36.	I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in English.	3.63	0.88	3.13	0.99
	37.	I have clear goals for improving my English skills.	3.62	0.91	3.03	0.87
	38.	I think about my progress in learning English.	3.75	0.85	3.07	1.05
Affective	39.	I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using English.	3.57	0.94	3.33	1.06
	40.	I encourage myself to speak English even when I am afraid of making a mistake.	3.76	0.98	2.97	1.06

	41.	I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in English.	3.38	1.16	2.89	1.12
	42.	I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using English.	3.49	1.17	3.14	1.09
	43.	I write down my feelings in a language learning diary.	2.18	0.96	1.66	0.78
	44.	I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning English.	3.38	1.13	2.91	1.23
<b>Social</b>	45.	If I do not understand something in English, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again.	3.97	0.96	3.21	0.98
	46.	I ask English speakers to correct me when I talk.	2.68	1.24	2.3	1.05
	47.	I practice English with other students.	3.9	0.98	2.71	1.01
	48.	I ask for help from English speakers.	3.91	0.93	3.3	0.93
	49.	I ask questions in English.	3.63	0.96	2.93	1.05
	50.	I try to learn about the culture of English speakers.	3.34	1.13	2.7	1.17
<b>Overall</b>			<b>3.45</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>2.84</b>	<b>1.02</b>

**Appendix B**  
**Interview Guide on Language Learning Strategies**  
**(English Version)**

**Introduction**

Hello! My name is Viet. I am conducting research on the overall learning strategies of English majors and non-majors at Hong Duc University. Thank you for coming today. The interview will last about 10 minutes. The interview will be recorded and will remain strictly confidential. Extracts from the interview may appear in my research report but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included. Your participation is totally voluntary; you are free to withdraw from the interview at any time or decline to answer any of the questions.

**Background Information**

1. What is your name?
2. What is your major?
3. Do you find learning English difficult?

**Content Information**

4. Is English important for you? Why do you study English?
5. What is your difficulty in learning English in general?
6. How do you learn new words in English?
7. How do you learn English grammar?
8. How do you improve your English pronunciation?
9. How do you improve your English speaking?
10. How do you improve your English reading?
11. How do you improve your English listening?
12. How do you improve your English writing?
13. Do you think using strategies can help you better your English?

# **Parsed Text Format Versus Regular Block Format in Online Extensive Reading**

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This study investigated the effects of online extensive reading in a syntactically parsed text format compared to regular block format on speed, retention, and proficiency in English reading among Japanese learners of English. A syntactically parsed text format breaks sentences of a text into smaller groups of words or *chunks* with the intention of increasing the ease of reading. For one academic year, 289 participants at a public university in Japan read English texts of their choosing online in either a parsed format or regular block format. The results showed no significant differences between formats on any of the variables of interest. This suggests that reading in a parsed text format neither hinders nor enhances reading ability or proficiency growth among EFL learners whose first language is linguistically distant from English. Evidence emerged, however, that the reading itself had promoted a significant increase in reading proficiency for both groups.

Extensive reading, or the reading of a large quantity of freely chosen texts at or below one's current reading proficiency level, is an effective means of improving English reading proficiency for learners of English as second or foreign language (Nakanishi, 2015). Unfortunately, traditional paper-based extensive reading programs have been difficult to implement in most EFL contexts due to the vast number and variety of reading materials such programs require (Davis, 1995). However, with the steady rise of smartphone and internet use in emerging economies across Asia (Poushter, 2016), extensive reading can now be done online at little or no cost (Lin, 2014), making it a more viable option for a widening range of EFL contexts.

At the same time, viewing texts through a browser rather than off of a printed page allows readers to change the font size, page width and other aspects of the text's format. This new level of control over how a text is displayed raises the question of whether texts could be made more readable through systematically altering their format in some way. Indeed, basic changes in font size, white space, and positioning of a digital text can affect reading performance for both native and non-native readers (Bernard, Chaparro, Mills, & Halcomb, 2003; Chaparro, Baker, Shaikh, Hull, & Brady, 2004; Soleimani & Mohammadi, 2012).

Going beyond conventional format considerations, a number of applications have appeared online which attempt to enhance the readability of digital texts by dramatically altering the way those texts are displayed. One such application is LiveInk.com's WebClipRead (Walker Reading Technologies, Inc., 2016), which uses natural language processing algorithms to display English texts in a syntactically parsed format where sentences are broken into smaller syntactic groups or *chunks* to improve the ease of reading (Warschauer, Park, & Walker, 2011).

The creators of WebClipRead refer to its syntactically parsed text format as visual syntactic text format (VSTF). Figure 1 shows the previous sentence displayed in VSTF.

The creators  
of WebClipRead  
refer  
to its syntactically parsed  
text format  
as visual syntactic text  
format (VSTF).

*Figure 1.* An example of a sentence displayed in visual syntactic text format (Walker Reading Technologies, Inc., 2016).

The use of such a syntactically parsed text format to enhance language learning represents a new direction in EFL. The present study is, to the author's knowledge, the first to investigate whether extensive reading in a parsed text format improves EFL learner's speed, retention, and proficiency in English reading compared to doing the same amount of reading in normal block text format. Though conducted in Japan, this study is relevant for other Asian EFL contexts—particularly emerging economies where internet usage is on the rise—as it investigates the viability of doing extensive reading online as opposed to the traditional and much more expensive paper-based approach.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Basis for Employing a Parsed Text Format

Displaying texts in a syntactically parsed format such as VSTF may improve reading among learners of English as a foreign language in three ways, by reducing eye regressions, adding *virtual prosody* to the text, and promoting the acquisition of high-frequency language chunks.

**Reducing eye regressions.** Reading is rarely a simple linear process. Instead of moving from one word to the next, the reader's eyes frequently backtrack or *regress* to reread words or find words that were previously skipped over (Brysbaert, Drieghe, & Vitu, 2005). By limiting the number of words per line, syntactically parsed text formats may decrease the likelihood of losing one's place while reading. The consequent reduction in eye regressions should, in turn, lead to more efficient reading, with lower chances of accidentally skipping over important information (Warschauer et al., 2011).

**Adding virtual prosody.** Carlson, Frazier, and Clifton (2009) demonstrated the strong relationship between sentence prosody (rhythm, stress, and intonation) and listening comprehension, particularly with regard to syntax. Meanwhile, Kuhn and Stahl (2003) showed how adding prosody to a text can aid reading comprehension. They found that assisted reading, in which learners listen to and shadow a fluent reader's rendition of a text, significantly increased reading proficiency among native remedial learners. Syntactically parsed formats may similarly enhance reading comprehension by breaking and indenting sentences to reveal their internal syntactic boundaries, paralleling the way prosody indicates such boundaries in natural spoken language (Warschauer et al., 2011).

**Promoting the acquisition of language chunks.** Ellis (2013) provided extensive evidence that language acquisition is a process in which language is constructed from high-frequency formulaic language collocations or chunks. Learners first acquire these chunks and use them intact but gradually learn to manipulate them to create more novel constructions. As learners move from formulaic chunks to more novel expressions, they begin to generalize the syntactic

patterns shared by the chunks into formal grammar rules (Ellis, 2013). Although, the process of chunk acquisition is largely unconscious, the conscious recognition of common chunks may also play a role (Schmidt, 2001). If so, a syntactically parsed text may directly accelerate language acquisition by clearly demarcating high-frequency language chunks. Moreover, once the learner acquires enough chunks, reading in the parsed format should become more efficient, because the learner can then easily read chunk-by-chunk rather than word-by-word.

### **Possible Drawbacks**

Parsed text formats may also have some potential drawbacks. First, although shorter line lengths may reduce the number of regressions readers experience, Dyson and Kipping (1998) showed that the corresponding increase in line breaks may slow readers down, hindering fluency. Second, the parsed format may make it difficult to distinguish between paragraphs. This is because parsed formats use indentation and line breaks to display chunks of sentences rather than to demarcate paragraphs as traditional block format does. Parsed formats must therefore use other methods to signal paragraph changes—VSTF, for example, changes the background color. However, this may feel unnatural to the reader or even result in paragraph changes going unnoticed. Finally, the parsed format is not practical for printed text since it requires many times more pages than block format, so only readers with access to computers or smartphones may benefit from it.

### **Prior Studies with American Students**

Most studies to date on syntactically parsed text formats have focused on native English readers and have employed WebClipRead's VSTF. Walker, Schloss, Fletcher, Vogel, and Walker (2005) reported on a study involving 40 American university students whose L1 was English. The students read six academic texts, half of which were shown in block format and half in VSTF, with the format for each half randomly determined. Results showed that reading comprehension of texts presented in VSTF was 40 percent higher than that of texts presented in block format. Additionally, readers reported significantly lower eye strain for the texts in VSTF. A more recent study involving 27 American university students compared VSTF to text randomly truncated into lines of the same average length as the lines in VSTF (Warschauer et al., 2011). Again, reading in VSTF resulted in significantly higher comprehension.

Another study reported in Walker et al. (2005) involved 100 American high school students who read their history textbook in class for approximately 50 minutes per week for a year. Half of the students read it on computers in VSTF, while the other half read the conventional paper-based version. Results showed that the VSTF group significantly outperformed the paper-based group both on course quizzes and tests as well as in terms of overall reading proficiency growth. Walker, Gordon, Schloss, Fletcher, Vogel, and Walker (2007) repeated this study using the same design except for having the block format group read their textbooks on computers so that the only difference between groups was the format of the text. Again, the VSTF group achieved significantly higher quiz and test scores as well as overall reading proficiency growth.

While the majority of the participants in the year-long studies reported in Walker et al. (2005) and Walker et al. (2007) were native English speakers, approximately 30 percent of them were non-native English speakers whose L1 was Spanish. Like their native English speaking peers, the non-native participants in the VSTF group also experienced significant gains in test performance and in reading proficiency relative to their counterparts in the block format group. However, unlike the native English participants, who experienced immediate relative gains in quiz scores, it took approximately eight weeks before this difference emerged for the non-native participants.



The reason for the delay among the non-native participants remains unclear, but the previously described construction grammar approach of Ellis (2013) may hint at a possible explanation. Essentially, native English readers have already acquired the basic chunks that make up much of the target language, so they can take full advantage of the parsed format's chunk-by-chunk presentation of sentences—reading sentences more fluently because those chunks are clearly isolated by the format. On the other hand, non-native readers may not have acquired many of these chunks yet, so they must interpret each line word-by-word, rather than as a chunk. However, as non-native readers acquire more chunks, they gradually become able to read chunk-by-chunk as native English speakers do and a corresponding improvement in reading emerges.

### **Studies Targeting Non-Native Readers**

Few studies targeting non-native readers have been done on parsed text formats. One of these, by Yu and Miller (2010), involved 30 Asian non-native English speakers (primarily from Taiwan and China) who read English articles in block text, VSTF, and the researchers' own format, spending approximately 20 minutes reading in each. Results showed no significant difference in reading comprehension for texts in VSTF versus regular block format.

Herbert (2014) had 60 Japanese college students do intensive timed scanning, skimming, and other reading activities using 20 English texts of approximately 200 words each over a three-month period. The texts were displayed in block format for half of these students and, for the other half, in a syntactically parsed format devised by the researcher to resemble VSTF. After the training period, the two groups were tested on two final texts—one in the parsed format and the other in block format. Results showed no significant differences between groups on any of the skills tested. However, there was a significant difference for all participants in their performance on the final parsed text versus the final block text. On average, participants could find more key words during their timed scanning session in the parsed text than in the block text.

Contrary to Herbert's (2014) expectations though, the majority of the participants who found more key words when reading the parsed text came from the group that had trained on block formatted texts. This result implies that the 20 prior training sessions had no lasting impact on reading ability for the parsed text group and echoes the delay in the emergence of benefits Walker et al. (2005) and Walker et al. (2007) found for their non-native readers.

Parsed text formats represent a highly experimental direction in EFL research. Still, the potential benefits suggested by the American studies justify further investigation. As previous studies seem to show no short term benefits of parsed formats for non-native readers, the present study investigates the longitudinal effects of regular reading in a parsed format for non-native learners of English as a foreign language. Specifically, it addresses the following question:

Does long-term extensive reading in a syntactically parsed text format lead to increased speed, retention, and proficiency in English reading compared to the same amount of reading in regular block format?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study involved first-year students enrolled in a general English skills course taught by one of eight different teachers at a public university in Japan. Course work included doing extensive reading online as homework. Specifically, students were to read 40,000 words worth

of English texts of their choosing each semester for two 15-week semesters for 20 percent of their course grade. Students were to do this reading on their computers or mobile phones via AnyRead, an online extensive reading application created by the author. A total of 763 students enrolled in the course and began their extensive reading work. These students were randomized into a syntactically parsed text format group ( $n = 381$ ) and a block format group ( $n = 382$ ). Of these students, 289 completed all of the reading for both semesters. Because this study investigates the effects of long-term regular reading in two different text formats and because no correlation was found between grouping and assignment completion ( $\chi^2(761) = .02$ ,  $p = .581$ , two-tailed), only the data for these 289 participants were included in the final analysis (parsed format group:  $n = 147$ ; block format group:  $n = 142$ ).

### **Procedure**

As mentioned above, participants did their reading outside of class using AnyRead. At the beginning of the first semester, teachers provided participants with instructions on how to do their extensive reading using AnyRead. These instructions also mentioned that AnyRead would sometimes display texts in an unconventional format and that when it did, participants should just keep reading as they normally do.

Upon creating an AnyRead account, each participant was randomly assigned by the application to either the parsed format or block format group. Randomization was done within-class to control for differences between teachers and classes. To read in AnyRead, participants simply copied an English text they wished to read from anywhere on the Internet and entered it into the text box in the application. The program would then display the text to read in the assigned format. To display texts in parsed format, the author had previously obtained permission from Walker Reading Technologies, Inc. to allow AnyRead to send the texts directly to the WebClipRead server which formatted them in VSTF and then sent them back to be displayed in that format within AnyRead.

Although participants were aware of being part of a study on reading, they were not aware of their group assignment or even that there were groups. To avoid alerting participants to the existence of the groupings, AnyRead displayed texts in both formats to both groups, but in greatly differing amounts depending on group assignment: the parsed format group read in VSTF 90 percent of the time and block format 10 percent of the time, whereas the block format group read in block format 90 percent of the time and VSTF 10 percent of the time. The researcher and teachers also remained unaware of the group assignments until after the yearlong course had finished, making this study triple blind.

Upon finishing a text, participants clicked a button which led to a retention question (explained further below). If they answered correctly, the number of words they had just read was added to their "Words Read" displayed at the top of their screen. If they answered incorrectly, no words were added and they were not allowed to read the same text again. Students had to increase their words read from 0 to 40,000 each semester for a total of 80,000 words to receive full credit for their reading.

### **Instruments**

Reading speed and retention were measured via AnyRead. To obtain each participant's mean reading speed, AnyRead measured the time from when each text was displayed until when the participant clicked a button taking them to the retention question. Then it calculated the mean words read per minute (WPM) for all texts read.

The retention question for each text was generated automatically by AnyRead using a complex algorithm based on the Jist system previously developed and tested by the author (see Hughes, 2013). The question displayed four sentence fragments, each seven to 12 words long. Between one and three of these fragments were extracted verbatim from the text the participant had just read, while the other fragments were taken verbatim or modified from other texts of a similar style from Wikipedia and other sources in the public domain which shared the same key words. To answer correctly, participants had to select the fragments that came from the text they had just read within one minute (see the Appendix for an example question). This was considered a valid method of measuring retention of the content, because the recollection of the ideas and events from the reading was generally necessary for the reader to accurately distinguish between correct and incorrect fragments under time pressure. At the end of the year, overall retention for each participant was then calculated as the percent of retention questions that participants had answered correctly (measuring comprehension would have been preferable to retention, but was technologically infeasible).

To measure participants' English reading proficiency growth, the Test of English for International Communication for Institutional Programs (TOEIC IP) was administered to participants before and after the study period. The researcher would have preferred to use a more widely accepted standardized test, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). However, the TOEIC was employed despite concerns regarding its validity (see Bresnihan, 2012), because it was the only test that the university administers free of charge. Pre-test reading scores were then subtracted from post-test scores to obtain each participant's reading proficiency growth. Of the 289 participants who completed the required amount of extensive reading, 277 took both the pre- and post-TOEIC tests.

## Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the reading speed, retention, and proficiency growth of the parsed format and block format groups.

**Table 1**

***Reading Speed, Retention, and Proficiency Growth for Block Versus Parsed Formats***

Group	Speed (WPM)		Retention		Proficiency Growth	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Block Format	120	32	72.1	13.3	23.9	48.5
Parsed Format	118	32	72.2	12.8	19.8	52.3

In addition, a two-tailed *t*-test with an alpha level of .05 was conducted for each measure to determine whether any significant differences between groups existed. Table 2 displays the results.

**Table 2*****t-Test Results: Parsed Format Means Minus Block Format Means***

Measure	Mean Difference	95% CI for Mean Difference	<i>df</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
Speed (WPM)	-2	-10, 5	287	-0.64	.254
Retention	0.1	-2.9, 3.1	287	0.06	.956
Proficiency Growth	-4.1	-16.1, 7.9	275	-0.68	.500

As shown in Table 2, there were no significant differences between the parsed and block format groups in reading speed, retention, or proficiency growth.

Of note, though, is the reading proficiency growth of both groups as indicated by a paired *t*-test comparing post TOEIC reading scores ( $M = 229$ ,  $SD = 67$ ) to pre ( $M = 207$ ,  $SD = 62$ ). This revealed a significant mean increase of 22 points,  $t(276) = 7.20$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [16, 28]. Moreover, there was a significant partial correlation between reading retention and post TOEIC reading scores after controlling for pre TOEIC reading scores,  $r(274) = .17$ ,  $p = .002$ , one-tailed. These findings imply that extensive reading significantly increased reading proficiency, particularly for participants who maintained high rates of retention throughout their reading, regardless of their initial proficiency or the format in which they read.

### Discussion

While the amount of reading done appears to have affected reading proficiency growth, no corresponding effect emerged for the parsed text format. The absence of an effect for the parsed text format in this study seems to contradict the results obtained by Walker et al. (2005) and Walker et al. (2007) for their non-native English speaking participants. The non-native participants assigned to the parsed format group in those studies experienced a significant, albeit delayed gain in course quiz scores and after reading for a year in the parsed text format, their reading proficiencies had significantly increased compared to their counterparts in the block text group. Some important differences exist, however, between the non-native learners in these previous studies and the non-native learners in the present study. One is the immersive ESL environment that non-native learners in the previous studies were in. Most notably the L1 of non-native learners in those previous studies was Spanish, whereas the L1 of the participants in the present study was Japanese.

Chiswick and Miller (2005) developed a quantitative measure of the relative amount of difference between English and other languages called *linguistic distance*. This measure was not based on a comparison of specific phonetic, lexical, or morphological characteristics, but rather on how proficient native English speakers could become at those languages over a given period of time. The lower their average achieved L2 proficiency level, the more linguistically distant their L2 was considered to be from English. The researchers then found that this measurement of the linguistic distances between English and the other languages strongly correlated with the English proficiency levels achieved by immigrants to the United States whose L1s were those respective languages included in their research. Out of the 45 languages analyzed, the researchers found Japanese to be the most linguistically distant from English (along with Korean, followed closely by Cantonese). In comparison, Spanish was less than half as distant from English as Japanese. Thus, perhaps the more linguistically distant one's L1 is from English, the less effective it is to read English in a syntactically parsed text format, or the longer it takes for any benefits to emerge. Recalling Ellis's (2013) construction grammar

approach, this may be due to the lack of similarity between the high frequency formulaic language chunks of English and those of the distant L1, which make it more difficult and time consuming to acquire enough basic chunks in English for the advantages of the parsed text to emerge. To explore this possibility further, future studies might involve large samples with several L1s at varying linguistic distances from English.

There are other differences that set the present study apart from previous studies. Foremost is this study's within-class randomization and triple-blind design. This design helped guard against the subtle effects of teacher expectation on the performance of the two groups. Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) experiment investigating the Pygmalion effect demonstrates just how much teacher expectation can influence student performance, even when both the students and the teacher are unaware of that influence. In the experiment, elementary school teachers were told that a randomly selected group of their students were "late bloomers" or learners who could be expected to show significant intellectual growth in the next year. At the end of the year, the randomly selected students in the first and second grades showed significantly higher IQ test score gains over that year than their peers. The researchers concluded that teachers had unconsciously given preferential treatment to students who had been labelled late bloomers. Similar unconscious influences may have played a role in producing the highly positive results reported in Walker et al. (2005) and Walker et al. (2007). Teachers may have unconsciously given preferential treatment to students in the VSTF group, because teachers expected that reading in VSTF would lead them to do better than their peers. The real effect of the parsed format may thus be weaker than those studies imply.

At the same time, participants in the present study probably read much less than those in the longitudinal studies in Walker et al. (2005) and Walker et al. (2007). In those previous studies, students read a conservatively estimated total of 210,000 words—more than double what participants read in the present study—and they probably read more carefully, because that content was discussed and tested in class. This difference highlights the main weakness of the present study's design, namely the lack of integration between the content students read outside of class and in their in-class activities. This probably lowered their motivation to attend to their reading, which may partially account for the failure of an effect to emerge.

Finally, it is possible that the parsed format *did* actually have an effect, but that this study's instruments were not sensitive enough to discern it. Indeed, independent attempts to correlate TOEIC scores with other measures of language proficiency have revealed a lower reliability for the test than claimed by its creators (Bresnihan, 2012). The test was sensitive enough, however, to detect the reading proficiency growth expected for both groups due to their extensive reading. This, together with the lack of significant differences between groups on *any* of the measures used, suggests that the instruments were not at fault.

### **Practical Implications**

This study has two immediate practical implications for teachers of English in Asian contexts. First, parsed formats may not help Asian EFL learners, most of whom have L1s that are as, or nearly as, linguistically distant from English as Japanese. The second, more positive implication is that having learners do extensive reading using freely available texts online may be a viable and cost-effective way to raise their English reading proficiency in contexts where paper-based English reading resources are limited, but access to the internet is available. Learners would not require any special applications such as AnyRead to engage in extensive reading online. They could simply surf the web and read English texts they find of interest. To monitor learners' reading, teachers could have them write brief reports on what they read and where they read it. For further ideas, see Lin's (2014) thorough review of online extensive reading research.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigated whether online extensive reading in a syntactically parsed text format leads to increased reading speed, retention, and proficiency growth compared to reading in regular block text format for learners of English whose first language is linguistically distant from English. Results indicated that, while doing the reading itself seems to have benefitted reading proficiency, no effect emerged for the parsed text format on any of the variables of interest. These findings may imply that the benefits of reading in a parsed text format decrease or take longer to emerge as the linguistic distance between learners' L1 and English increases. At the same time, reading in a parsed text format did not adversely affect speed, retention, or proficiency in English reading. It may be the case then, as Herbert (2014) has suggested, that the proper question to ask is not if reading in a parsed text format is good for EFL learners, but which learners would benefit from it and which would not. Thus, future research might investigate for possible interactions between various individual differences among EFL learners, including the linguistic distance between their L1s and English, and the effects of reading in a syntactically parsed text format. Certainly, further studies in EFL contexts are warranted.

### **Author Note**

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Leander Hughes is an associate professor at the Saitama University Center for English Education and Development. He is primarily interested in finding new ways to accelerate language learning. Other research interests include learner autonomy, motivation, and communicative task effectiveness.

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## Appendix

### An Example of an AnyRead Retention Question

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL `su-apps.org/AnyRead/index.php`. The page header includes the user's name "Leander Hughes", their role "Teacher: Leander Hughes", and links for "Log Out" and "Change my password". It also displays reading statistics: "Words Read: 500" and "Words to Read: 39,500". The "AnyRead" logo is in the top right corner. The main content area contains a question: "Which choice(s) were FROM your text? [Time Left: 41]". Below the question are four text input fields. The first field contains "kids all groaned when I switched off the TV". The second field contains "was a CD player in the car, but I needed to concentrate\*", which is highlighted in green. The third field contains "watched my feet and counted my steps out loud", also highlighted in green. The fourth field contains "don't know about you, but I'll be glad when Christmas is over". At the bottom left of the question area is a "Check Answer" button, with a mouse cursor hovering over it. The Windows taskbar is visible at the bottom of the browser window.

This question was generated for the first two chapters of the story "Fish and Chips" (Lauder & McGregor, 2015). The correct choices, which came verbatim from that text, are shown in green when the user clicks the "Check Answer" button.

# Understanding Resistant Vietnamese Learners of English from an Activity Theory Perspective

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This paper aims to explore the reasons for learner resistance in the language classroom. English language learners may resist joining in the process of responding to language tasks. However, under activity theory, a number of sociocultural factors in the language classroom may result in such a task performance. Participants in this study were college students and teachers of English. The data collection methods were class observations, stimulated recall with the students, and semi-structured interviews with the teachers. The results indicate that resistant learners were viewed as problematic and passive in the eyes of teachers. However, seemingly passive students saw themselves as internally active. Additionally, students pointed out personal and sociocultural factors in the class which resulted in their resistance during the class. This paper suggests that teachers may consider the role of learner agency when evaluating learners' performance.

Recently, the cognitive approach to language learning has been critiqued because it does not consider the contextual and sociocultural elements which influence language learning (Yashima 2012). For instance, Nunan (2004) argued that language learning is not only a personal but also a highly social process. Thus, researchers have called for the adoption of sociocultural perspectives on the language learning process (Gebhard, 1999). Through the lens of sociocultural perspectives, learners are perceived as people in the learning process, so learner agency must be accounted for in that process (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). From this perspective, Lantolf and Pavlenko (2001) contended that learners may choose to fully or peripherally participate in the community of learning. Studies in this line are distinct from those advocating cognitive views that focus only on learners' internal characteristics (e.g., level of English proficiency) to explain learning performance.

Sociocultural studies adopt the perspective that individual development is a socially mediated process, and that language learning is an activity determined by both personal factors of the individual and sociocultural factors of the learning context. Seen from this view, activity theory, which is a critical component of sociocultural theory, is a powerful standpoint from

which learning activity might be viewed (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Since learning is equated to an activity in a specific context, factors in that context will affect it (Yashima, 2012).

In application of this view to learners' performance in language classrooms, those unlikely to follow the normative classroom discourse must be reconsidered. Learner resistance is often seen as negative in the classroom. For example, Norton and Toohey (2001) showed that teachers designate students choosing to exclude themselves from classroom activities as poor or unmotivated learners. Under activity theory, nevertheless, understanding their performance in a context of learning requires attention to social practices in that specific context (Sirisatit, 2010). Consequently, a focus on activity theory may throw light on how learners situate themselves in the context (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Arising from an interest in understanding learner resistance, which is noted as a problem for language teachers (Tran & Richard, 2007), this paper aims to shed light on such language learning performances during English classes. The study will be viewed within the context of Vietnamese language education to gain insights into the reasons behind learner resistance and how teachers perceive it in their class. The study may help English language teachers in Vietnam and in similar settings to develop an understanding of learner agency so they may foster learner participation in the language classroom.

## **Literature Review**

### **Learner Agency**

Gao (2010) defined agency as a person's will or ability to act, while the term earlier was described as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). In the second language learning context, agency may refer to the perspective that learners are not only submissive or complicit, but can also resist or make informed choices about learning (Duff, 2012). The notion of agency is, therefore, considered as behavior that facilitates learning, such as participation and actively seeking out assistance within a context which is socially mediated (Hawkins, 2005). However, agency also relates to learners' actions that do not lead to participation or positive learning outcomes (Harklau, 2000; Morita, 2004). Language learners may actively participate in or resist learning tasks depending on the sociocultural and interactional context. In the event that class conditions are favorable, they would be active; if conditions are not, students may remain passive in classroom activities. Therefore, learner agency is mediated and renegotiated with the social and cultural factors present in the classroom (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

However, Fogle (2012) demonstrated the limitation of the treatment of agency in second language studies. The author indicated that there has been over-attention on one type of agency (i.e., complicit or participatory agency), whereas resistance to the target language, which is also a form of learner agency, has not been widely explored. Hence, the present paper examines this type of agency. With respect to the present paper, the researchers argue that learners may exercise their agency through being active or resistant during task engagement determined by social conditions in that classroom.

### **Learner Resistance**

As aforementioned, agentive responses towards language learning may be in the form of resistance. Duff (2012) and Ahearn (2001) identified resistance as one form of agency occurring in and through discourse. In reference to second language learning, resistance (e.g., being silent) is often perceived as a type of avoidance or deliberate failure to replicate target language norms (Morita, 2004). Based on the notion that as a sense of agency learners would

shape their own learning in the context where they are situated, the researchers argue that learners may conduct a task in ways varied from that required by the teacher. Therefore, the term *learner resistance* in the present paper is confined to learners who are silent or disregard classroom norms.

These forms of agency are hard to recognize because teachers may interpret them in negative ways (Skinnari, 2014). Resistance to second language learning is often viewed as the cause of problematic outcomes such as troubles at school or not learning (Harklau, 2000). This is a view shared by Fogle (2012), who argued that such misinterpretation may result in the marginalization of learners through their failure to participate. Nevertheless, as stated previously, learners' performance in a class is influenced by sociocultural factors in that class. Activity theory provides a useful framework to illuminate underlying reasons for learners' task performance (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Accordingly, activity theory is adopted as a framework in the present paper to obtain improved insights into language learners who appeared to be silent or resistant during classroom activities.

### **Activity Theory**

Activity theory was developed by Engeström (1987), based upon the work of Vygotsky (1978) and Leontiev (1979). The theory represents individual actions within a broader collaborative setting through six elements: tools, subject, object, rules, community, and division of labor.

**Tools.** Tools are the devices that humans use to act on the physical world (Vygotsky, (1978). Tools in this study refer to the instruments that learners employ to complete the language task. Hence, the tools in use may include textbooks, video-audio materials, or diagrams, to name a few. Sirisatit (2010) argued that the mediational tools that learners use may influence the way learners perform a task. From this perspective, the tools being used may result in silence or resistance among learners.

**Subject.** Subject in this paper refers to learners, and subject is the central and driving characteristic defining the activity. Yashima (2012) reasoned that learners with their own language learning goals, motives, linguistic history, and beliefs will determine their activities in responding to a specific task. In reference to this study, these factors may contribute to learner resistance in class.

**Object.** Object is defined as the purpose or the goal held by learners when engaging in a language task. For example, an individual's object toward a task may be to pass an exam, to master a grammatical rule or to improve his or her speaking skill. Lantolf and Thorne (2007) showed that in alignment with certain goals, learners may then conduct different goal-directed actions during the completion of the task. Therefore, learners may be resistant to the given task due to their object being different from the teacher's object.

**Community.** Community involves various individuals or groups of people sharing the same general object towards an activity (Sirisatit, 2010). In this paper, community includes the class teacher and peers who contribute to similar objects of a given task. Norton (2001) noted that the extent to which learners participate in the practices of a community depends on the favorable conditions created by that community.

**Rules.** Rules are perceived as any formal or informal regulations that determine how and why individuals may act (Hashim & Jones, 2007). In this paper, rules refer to task rules, scoring rubrics of the English class, or the normative classroom discourse. These may make learners resistant or silent in a task.

**Division of labor.** In the language classroom, division of labor is construed as the formation of pairs or groups of students when fulfilling an assigned task (Sirisatit, 2010). Noticeably, Lantolf and Genung (2002) and Sirisatit (2010) emphasized that forms of division of labor contribute to the success or failure of task performance. In relation to this study, a learner may or may not prefer groupwork or pairwork, hence causing silence or resistance during the task engagement.

Generally, through activity theory, a sense of agency identifies the level of learner participation in a language task (Yashima, 2012). Learners appear to be silent or resistant to language tasks due to sociocultural factors in the classroom as well as their own personal factors. However, as argued earlier, learner agency may be misinterpreted by teachers. Accordingly, the present research aims to find answers to the following questions:

1. How do class teachers perceive learners who are silent or resistant in the classroom?
2. Why do students appear to be silent or resistant in response to classroom tasks?

### **Methodology**

Through the lens of activity theory, a language class is considered a sociocultural context that is changing constantly, and language learners are viewed as agents mediated by the sociocultural factors within that learning context. Thus, experimental research designs are inappropriate for the present study because such designs perceive that learners could be manipulated by the intentions of the researcher and by task instruction. Therefore, the study adopted a qualitative research design.

### **Participants**

Because qualitative studies seek to understand a phenomenon in depth and detail rather than to generalize their results, this study applied convenient and purposive sampling strategies. The study was conducted and the data were collected in a college in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, where the one of the researchers has worked as an English teacher. The participants of the study were second-year non-English major students aged from 19 to 21 and their English teachers. They were asked to volunteer for the study and two classes agreed to participate. One class involved 20 students who were majoring in accounting, while the other had 21 students majoring in business administration. The former was taught English by a female teacher with 10 years' experience of teaching English. The latter was taught English by a male teacher who had been teaching English for 5 years. According to the written test (focusing on listening, reading, and writing) conducted at the beginning of the course, student English proficiency ranged from elementary (A1) to upper-intermediate (B2) based on the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). They studied English as a compulsory subject for graduation. The English course lasted nine weeks, equating to three credits, with five 45-minute class meetings every week. According to the purpose of the study, the researchers focused their attention on students showing silence or resistance during her presence at the research site. The participants are identified by pseudonyms.

### **Class Observation**

Observations were conducted in the two classes over four class meetings with the teacher's permission. These observations aimed to note learners who were apparently silent and resistant during tasks. While observing the classes, the researcher took the role of a "nonparticipant" (Creswell, 2013, p. 167). She observed, took field notes, and recorded data without involvement in participants' activities. Additionally, video recordings were used to capture learners' interactions which might be missed during the observations.

### **Stimulated Recall**

Lyle (2003) suggested that stimulated recall is a useful research tool as it helps to uncover thinking processes which may not be evident through simple observation. In this study, stimulated recall was used to assist the researchers to investigate what students thought while engaging in the tasks. Students who demonstrated silence and resistance while participating in their task performance were asked to participate in the stimulated recall. Immediately after each observed class, they were shown selected video excerpts and asked about their thoughts and reasons while dealing with a task at a critical point.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Interviews with the two class teachers, conducted at the end of the course, aimed to shed light on their perceptions of learner resistance. They were asked to express their perspectives concerning learners being silent or resistant (e.g., reasons for and solutions to the issue).

Regarding the learners' English proficiency and the research aims, which were focused on the information given by participants, interviews and stimulated recall sessions were all conducted in Vietnamese, the native language shared by the participants and the researcher. The stimulated recall and the interviews were audio-recorded. The data were transcribed and analyzed through the use of content analysis.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Teacher Perspectives on Learner Resistance**

Interviews with teachers demonstrated that both teachers regarded remaining silent and defying normative classroom practices as negative behavior and problematic to English learning. Teacher 1 revealed her unhappiness with resistant learners who she thought did not obey the class teacher.

I am so unhappy with some students who always do the tasks in their own ways in spite of whatever my requirements are . . . I ask them to do A, and they will do B. (Teacher 1)

She provided an example of students translating whole reading passages while she requested them to skim or scan the passage. She then stated:

At first I think they have their heads in the clouds, but then I find that they always disregard my instructions. They just do the way they like . . . it's disrespectful to their teachers. (Teacher 1)

This is similarly shared with the second teacher who found resistant students annoying.

I am annoyed when I try to remind them of doing exercises in alignment with the requirements. They are in the process of learning so they need to follow the teacher's instruction as well as instructions in the textbook. They should first complete the exercises as the teacher expects. (Teacher 2)

As an example, he identified one student in his class who never did speaking tasks or writing tasks in the order of the given questions, and another student who appeared not to cooperate with other students in group work or pair work.

When asked what they did for these students, both teachers said that they ignored them.

It just takes my time to pay attention to these students who never account for their teacher's instructions. (Teacher 1)

They are just some in one class of many students so I don't care about them. (Teacher 2)

For silent students, both teachers perceived them as lower proficiency and inactive learners.

They rarely speak up in the class because they are not quite confident in their English. (Teacher 2)

For me, they are such passive learners of language who just sit and never speak. It's not good to learn a language in that way. (Teacher 1)

They also claimed that these students would get lower marks than active students. Teacher 1 reasoned that:

It's fair that if they want to get high marks for their participation they should say something, do something which shows that they are learning the language. (Teacher 1)

Class participation was one of the criteria to evaluate students' subject completion in both classes. The in-class written tests were worth 70%, and class participation amounted to 30% of the total grade. Therefore, students who actively participated in the class would get higher grades than others who were passive.

These results are in line with research conducted by Morita (2004) and Harklau (2000), who indicated that student silence or resistance are often equated with deficiency in the eyes of their teachers. As criticized by Norton and Toohey (2001), teachers just evaluate good learners on the basis of "their control of a wider variety of linguistic forms or meaning than their peers" (p. 310).

### **Reasons for Learner Resistance During Task Accomplishment**

The data collected from stimulated recall by students who were passive and resistant during the task completion revealed some reasons for their behavior. Under activity theory, it could be summarized that subject, object, community, and division of labor determined the students' task performance in this study.

**Subject.** In terms of the subjects, Students B and C's actions might illustrate that learning history and prior experience strongly influenced their task performance. Student C, who tended to be silent, revealed that her language learning history shaped the way she conducted the task. She had studied English with a teacher who was nice and cared about her grammar. Thus, she had really liked English at that time and equated English learning to learning English grammar and being with caring teachers. However, her subsequent teachers were different, so she lost interest in English learning. She wished some teachers of English could help her with English grammar to motivate her English learning.

They just want to finish their job by keeping asking us to speak but never care about what I really need [grammar] since once I master English grammar I can speak and write English well. (Student C)

Likewise, Student B, who had family problems, avoided talking about topics related to family. Hence, he talked about questions related to this at the end though the teacher might expect him to answer these questions at first.

When introducing myself I do not like to talk about my family because my parents died when I was very young. Since then, I've been living with my grandparents. I feel lost and upset when someone asks me about my family. Thus, I will leave this in the end. (Student B)

This finding illustrates the view that various linguistic histories or prior experiences affect learners' task performance. This is aligned with the study conducted by Gillette (1994). The study points out that learners' prior experience has an impact on their language learning perceptions, which in turn may influence their behavior towards language learning in class.

**Object.** Furthermore, the study shows that students might find their desired object in conflict with the teacher's object, so they resist what is assigned by the teacher. For example, Student A wanted to translate the reading text, not just scan or skim it, because he preferred to understand the whole text.

The teacher sometimes asks us to read and then answer the questions following the reading passage, but I think the exercise is as easy as pie when we can just guess the right answers. We are encouraged to ignore unknown words, but I want to understand what the passage is about because I need to learn new words as well as structures in the passage. (Student A)

Similarly, Student C admitted that she favored acquiring grammatical points while her teachers of English focused on speaking instead, thus causing her refusal to engage in the task activities.

It's disappointing that the teacher totally ignores the thing I need - grammar. (Student C)

**Community.** Another finding indicates that the community where students conducted the task might make them quiet or active. Student E illustrated this point; when the learning community consisted of more capable students, she lost her confidence and became silent.

To be honest, I don't feel like working with very good classmates since they may pick up my mistakes easily . . . I find they never take account the contribution from their friends worse than them, like me . . . I feel I'm inferior to them; thus, I just keep silent. (Student E)

However, when the community consisted of others who were of the same or lower English proficiency level, she felt more confident and became active.

I feel much more comfortable to work with these students. We take the contribution of each of us into a lot of consideration . . . They sometimes appreciate my ideas since they know that I'm a bit better than them . . . This makes me feel confident. (Student E)

This result relates to aspects of Duff's (2002) research which revealed how non-native English speaking international learners chose to be silent to save face when grouped with more



proficient local learners. When located in a community of more proficient peers, some learners may refuse to engage in the task.

**Division of labor.** The study demonstrates that fulfilling tasks in groups or pairs might discourage some learners from joining the discussion. Student F reported that he refused to cooperate with other classmates during tasks though he belonged to the group of more advanced students. He then stated that he did not favor collaborative tasks.

Groupwork is just unfair since not all members do the task but just one or two who are responsible, and the result is then shared. . . . Moreover, I have to respect ideas from others, which are not always good. I go with working alone with my dictionary. (Student F)

This result is similar to that found by Parks (2000), which showed that one of the participants preferred working alone rather than cooperatively with others since she perceived groupwork as being a form of groupthink where students were not required to think for themselves. This suggests that dislike for a certain type of division of labor (e.g., groupwork or pairwork) may detract from participation in a task.

Interestingly, remaining silent is not equated to not learning. Although Student C remained silent in the class, she stated that she studied in her own ways. For example, after a task requiring students to make a conversation based on a reading passage, she said:

While my friends are making the conversation, I like to underline grammar points new to me. I ask my classmates to explain these points for me. I then self-study these at home. (Student C)

This might be useful for her when dealing with in-class tests, thus leading to high results in the tests requiring no oral performance.

I get low marks for the class participation but I'm proud of 45-minute tests for which I always achieve quite good marks. (Student C)

Similarly, both Students E and D affirmed that although they rarely actively participated in class activities, they actually learned through carefully taking notes and listening to others. For example, Student D, who seldom raised his hand to speak in class, stated:

I try to listen and take notes of the feedback from the teacher and classmates. I compare how my friends' answers are different from mine. (Student D)

In spite of being silent when grouped with more advanced students, Student E said that she learned English from her groupmates.

I'm learning the way they express an idea in English . . . I've picked up a new interesting expression, "cost an arm and a leg." (Student E)

Students were passive during discussions, but they might have been learning internally. Listening attentively and concentrating on a task are ways of active participation among silent learners. This finding is shared with Skinnari (2014), where remaining silent in language classrooms may have a positive effect on language learning. In Skinnari's (2014) study, Finnish

elementary learners who were quiet during their English class confirmed that their silence meant attentive listening and concentrating on the task.

### **Conclusion**

Under the framework of activity theory, the findings demonstrate that learners act as agents of their own learning activity, thereby causing resistance among some of them when working on a task. Remaining silent or resistant proves that learners actively construct their learning position in a specific learning context. In their negotiation with the social context, they may choose to exclude themselves from engaging in a task. As shown in the study, they might refuse to work with some partners (e.g., more advanced learners). Their learning perceptions, histories or prior experience determine their task performance. Learners might also conduct the task in their own way to suit their learning objects. However, teachers might misinterpret such learner task performance as passive or negative behavior which affects language learning.

The study suggests that teachers may find it useful to consider both social and personal factors when assessing learner task performance, especially in relation to students who are passive or resistant to classroom norms. The silent students stated that they learned and participated in tasks internally. By critically reflecting on these students, teachers may have opportunities to learn more about the nature of their instruction and students' needs. Therefore, teachers may reposition these students from disruptive or deficient to valuable classroom participants. Evaluating language learning requires the consideration of sociocultural practices in the context where the language is learned and the examination of the ways that learners exercise their agency in that context (Norton & Toohey, 2001).

Teachers may learn about their students through a brief survey at the beginning of the course or through explicit discussions about their language learning beliefs and goals, therefore enabling understanding of their language learning history and learning object. Accordingly, teachers will be better able to select the topics, methods, and behavior more suited to their students. As a result, learner participation in language tasks may improve.

This study paves the way for other research in learners' task engagement in the Vietnamese context or in other Asian contexts from the perspective of activity theory. In particular, to understand learners who are resistant, it utilizes the concept of agency, which is undertheorized in SLA research.

However, the study has limitations. The data were collected in four class meetings because time for data collection depended on class teachers' permission. Further studies should involve someone who is not a member of the college to help the researcher with observing the class at some point during the data collection. This may avoid worry or anxiety among the participants. Additionally, more students could be involved in the stimulated recall process. Interviews with class teachers should be conducted more often (e.g., at the end of every lesson). Further studies may also focus upon other components of the English learning activity system, such as Rules and Tools and their relation to learner resistance since these were not a focus in this study.

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## ***Teaching Practice***

# **Using Folktales to Encourage Extensive Reading in L2**

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This paper provides practical guidelines for an alternative technique using folktales to promote extensive reading and increase its value for EFL senior high school students. The technique is based on the production and exhibition of a local folktale poster (*lofopost*), which is made by students after doing extensive reading on local folktales, and then summarizing and identifying the relevant moral values. A lofopost exhibition and presentation by students is offered to create lively class interactions and to give students an opportunity to share their cultural values. This alternative technique for extensive reading is believed to enhance students' reading comprehension by motivating them through reading for enjoyment and by encouraging learning about local culture.

EFL reading teachers usually focus on achieving reading comprehension goals by employing traditional teaching strategies so that students can eventually read certain texts and answer comprehension questions. Strategies employed generally include skimming, scanning, and retelling (Brown, 2007; Field, 2002), as well as other empirically-investigated strategies such as Preview, Question, Read, Summarize, Test (PQRST; Miqawati & Sulisty, 2014), Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review (SQ3R; Graham, 1982), and Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR; Vaughn et al., 2011). Nation (2009) argued that these intensive reading strategies are still considered insufficient to facilitate students' reading comprehension as they lack the key essence of enjoyable learning. However, there have been studies showing that extensive reading can be an effective way to complement intensive reading (Meng, 2009; Mermelstein, 2014; Renandya, 2007).

A focus on integrating cultural resources into extensive reading is a recent trend. Kumaravadivelu (2003) suggested that in L2 classes, teaching culture should start from the local culture that the students bring to the class as it can help them understand perspectives between their own culture and the L2 culture. This paper presents a teaching practice to encourage extensive reading that focuses on local folktales.

## **Literature Review**

### **Extensive Reading**

Extensive reading has as its main concern grasping the main idea of the text (Richards & Schmidt, 2002) and it is self-selected by the readers according to their reading capabilities (Meng, 2009). These are the two major characteristics of extensive reading, however there are ten additional principles which were offered by Day and Bamford (2002):

1. The reading material is easy.
2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics must be available.
3. Learners choose what they want to read.
4. Learners read as much as possible.
5. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.
6. Reading is its own reward.
7. Reading speed is usually faster than slower.
8. Reading is individual and silent.
9. Teachers orient and guide their students.
10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

(pp. 137-139)

Extensive reading is different from intensive reading. Extensive reading is not textbook reading where all students are reading the same material and are tested on it. Compared to extensive reading, intensive reading is considered more difficult for EFL learners. Teaching this type of reading usually aims at helping students obtain “detailed meaning from the text, develop reading skills, and enhance vocabulary and grammar knowledge” (Renandya, 2007, p. 135). To achieve these purposes, intensive reading is traditionally more teacher-centered than extensive reading. Moreover, the text for intensive reading is commonly shorter than the text for extensive reading because it is targeted to be finished in one meeting in the classroom. In contrast, the text for extensive reading is longer since extensive reading helps students improve reading comprehension skills through considerable quantities of texts (Renandya, 2007).

The benefits of extensive reading are that it is capable of improving not just EFL reading comprehension skills (Shang, Briody, & Lin, 2007) but also vocabulary and structure acquisition, linguistic skills, reading speed, motivation, and enjoyment of reading, which may lead to good reading habits (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Hayashi, 1999; Janopoulos, 1986; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Meng, 2009; Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Tsang, 1996; Yamashita, 2004). The logic is that as EFL learners continue to enjoy reading, they will acquire more vocabulary, understand the main idea of a text faster and therefore read faster since they tend to read easier texts that do not contain challenging sentence formation and unfamiliar words. This in turn leads to motivation to read English texts so that a good reading habit can be built. Thus, the empirical evidence shows that extensive reading in EFL classes helps students build and strengthen their reading skills holistically.

### **Local Culture in English Language Learning**

Culture is an integral part of language learning. The traditional approach of teaching culture focuses only on gaining an understanding of the native speakers' perspective. This has shifted to an approach involving learners as cultural informants (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). The latter approach, according to Kumaravadivelu (2003), aims to bring the learners' cultural knowledge into the classroom in order to provide opportunities for teachers and learners to reflect on their

own culture in addition to the target language culture. The implementation of this approach helps students gain fresh perspectives on their own culture, as well as increase their appreciation of other cultures.

In EFL contexts, the approach which integrates students' own culture into English language learning undoubtedly gives some particular benefits to students. By allowing students to explore their own culture, their anxiety in English learning can be minimized because they bring what they are familiar with into the learning context and thus they may feel more motivated (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Students also get the opportunity to compare and contrast their local culture with English culture to develop their cross-cultural understanding (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; McKay, 2000) and to promote meaningful learning (Barfield & Uzarski, 2009). Meaningful learning occurs when students relate the target culture with their own cultural components and values.

In the ELT context in Indonesia, for instance, there has been an effort to incorporate English culture as well as local / home culture in English textbooks as suggested by a number of researchers (e.g., Majdzadeh, 2002; Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011; Victor, 1999), namely by inserting English versions of Indonesian folktales in English textbooks. This effort is actually in line with the spirit of national education that "is rooted in the religious values, national cultures of Indonesia, and one that is responsive to the needs of the ever-changing era" as stated in Indonesian educational policy (Act of the Republic of Indonesia, p. 6). As part of the national education system, policy makers for the teaching of English in Indonesia have recognized the necessity of local culture to maintain the spirit of national education and to facilitate cross-cultural competence. Additionally, the practice of incorporating Indonesian folktales into ELT supports the Indonesian government's objective of preserving and promoting local cultural knowledge among Indonesian students to counter the negative effects of globalization associated with western culture in English language teaching and learning.

In combining these principles of extensive reading and the value of culture, particularly local culture, we propose an EFL teaching practice involving local folktales, as described in the following section.

### **Reading for Lofopost**

Extensive reading and culture learning in EFL can be combined in a novel technique we call *reading for lofopost*, in which *lofopost* is the acronym for *local folktale poster*. This technique incorporates both the major characteristics and the principles of extensive reading including reading material, learner's preference and role in reading, reading activity, and the teacher's role as a model. The idea of using a poster in this technique was based on Renandya's (2007) suggestion that post-reading tasks in extensive reading should be interesting and less laborious.

This technique can be implemented in teaching narrative texts since the folktales used for the extensive reading are categorized as narrative texts. This technique requires students to do extensive reading of a local folktale of their choosing and then produce a poster. Through extensive reading, the students are expected to understand the story in the folktale and then to design a poster which contains relevant images, a summary of the story in sequence based on the images, and the moral value of the story. Language skills demonstrated in the lofopost activity are not only reading skills but also communication skills when speaking during the lofopost exhibition to express their interpretations of the moral value of the story. In addition, this technique is recommended for upper secondary students, and requires previous instruction in speaking and presentation skills. In other words, teachers need to make sure that the students already have enough practice of these skills before applying this technique.



## Requirements

Several local folktales in English or translated by teachers are needed. There should be a sufficient number so that every student can choose without compromise or overlap. In situations in which the local folktales are written in students' local language, the teacher can provide an English version of the folktales. This version can ensure that the text uses language suitable for the students' level of proficiency and is neither too long nor too short. The teacher can also select appropriate topics for the students and select those folktales that students may not be familiar with to make the reading activity more interesting and more challenging. If possible, the folktale should have one or two images to ease the students in designing their poster. In addition to folktales, the teacher prepares a model or a basic format of the lofopost with the complete parts: summary, relevant images, and moral values. A suggested example of a basic format is shown in Figure 1 and a student example is shown in Figure 2.

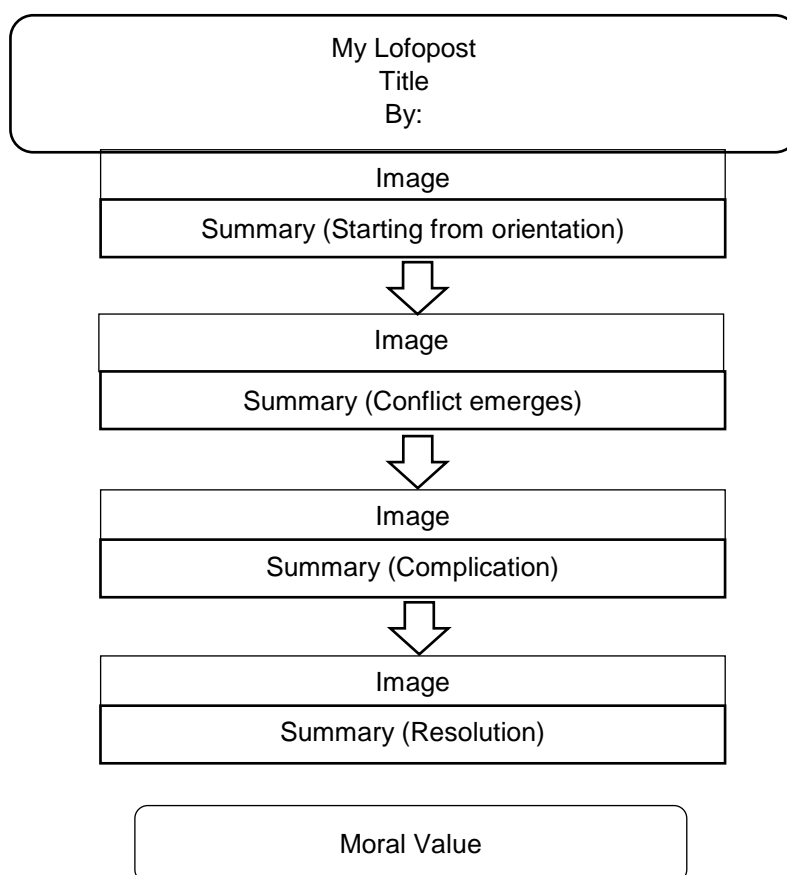


Figure 1. Suggested lofopost format.



Figure 2. Student example of lofopost.

### The Implementation of Reading for Lofopost

The procedure can be summarized as follows. First, the teacher gives the reading instructions about the narrative text using one or two examples (see Appendix A). The instruction may include previewing and brainstorming toward the selected text as prereading activities; reading the text, identifying the characters, the structure of the text (i.e., orientation, complication, resolution) and the moral value of the text as a postreading activity. Some comprehension questions can also be assigned to the students (see Appendix B).

Secondly, the teacher provides the students with a number of folktales exceeding the number of students and asks them to choose one they want to read at home. In this step, several important points are emphasized. They need to understand the story and make a lofopost, which shows a summary of the story, relevant images and the moral value. The summary should be at least five sentences and not more than ten sentences (or at least 75-150 words). The images can be drawn by the students or taken from other sources like magazines or the Internet. They are also allowed to decorate their lofoposts as creatively as possible because a lofopost exhibition will be held to promote class interactions. A model of the poster as in Figure 2 can be shown to the students. The students are also informed of the two-week allotted time for both extensive reading and making the lofopost, which is considered sufficient given that the folktales are not too long to read, so the remaining time can be used for making their lofopost. During this time, the students need to report their progress to the teacher about their extensive reading activity and the draft of their lofopost design using a simple book record (see Appendix C).

Finally, upon collecting all the work, the lofopost exhibition is held. This activity is ideally divided into at least two sessions. At the first session, half of the students will show their lofopost, present the summary, moral values, as well as their comments orally. The other half walk from one lofopost to another listening to presentations and are encouraged to ask questions or give comments to the presenters. The second session will be similar to the first session with different students presenting their lofopost.

### Evaluation

The teacher can conduct a process assessment on (1) a comprehension question activity and (2) the book record. This is only aimed at knowing the students' progress and motivating them, not at giving them any score. Meanwhile, during the lofopost exhibition, the teacher can assess each part of the summary separately (i.e., orientation, the emergence of conflict, complication and resolution). We suggest using the scoring rubric by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) for its practicality (see Table 1). As this rubric is not intended to assess writing skills, the focus of the assessment is only main ideas and supporting details which make up students' comprehension of the folktale. Furthermore, to assess the design of the lofopost, we suggest using the rubric as shown in Appendix D, adapted from NCTE / IRA (2006). Moreover, the teacher can evaluate the moral value presented by the students on the basis of the relevance between the moral value and the content of the folktale.

**Table 1**

***Reading Skill Rubric Proposed by Brown and Abeywickrama (2010)***

Score	Criteria
3	Demonstrates clear, unambiguous comprehension of the main and supporting ideas
2	Demonstrates comprehension of the main idea but lacks comprehension of some supporting ideas
1	Demonstrates only a partial comprehension of the main and supporting ideas
0	Demonstrates no comprehension of the main and supporting ideas

### Follow-up Activity

Students can be asked to identify what cultural components are encoded in the story. To make the follow-up activity more challenging, students could be asked to find similar cultural components from other countries; for example, a student chooses a folktale of *Punakawan* from Indonesia which contains an iconic cultural drama of shadow theatre called *Wayang*. To do the follow-up activity, s/he might try to find shadow theatre in folktales from other cultures such as Cambodia, which is called *Lakhaong Nang Sbek*. This way the students from Indonesia will learn that such shadow theater also exists in Cambodia yet with different forms.

### Possible Limitations and Solutions

The first major limitation is the preparation time for collecting the folktales, translating, designing the model of the lofopost and preparing a book record. Once created, these can be reused in subsequent classes. The second major limitation may be a limited number of local folktales in each region. The teacher can add other folktales from different areas or different countries which still represent similar characteristics of their culture or region. The other solution to this limitation is to pair the students to do extensive reading with the same folktales. The teacher could also solicit students' help in finding folktales as long as the students who submitted them chose different ones.

### **Conclusion**

Extensive reading is one method to improve EFL students' reading skills; especially in that it is a powerful way to raise their motivation to read English texts. This could happen due to its major characteristic of grasping the main idea of a text without being tested at the end, which may spoil the pleasure of reading for some students. Integrating culture learning in extensive reading might add more value since students can improve not only their reading ability but also their intercultural competence. To address these two areas of importance, reading for lofopost is proposed as an alternative activity for teaching reading in which extensive reading is the main activity and culture can be learned from the content. It is also apparent that this technique meets the major characteristics and ten principles of extensive reading: the folktales are easy to read and have various topics, the students are allowed to choose the folktales based on their preferences, the reading activity becomes less demanding, and the teacher acts as a good model and facilitator. Future studies will look at implementing this technique to empirically investigate its efficacy in terms of students' reading comprehension and perception of this technique.

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**Appendix A**  
**English Version of Sample Folktale from Kalimantan, Indonesia**  
**The Legend of Batu Hapu Cave**  
**(Marini, 2015)**



In Tapin, South Kalimantan, there is a tourist destination. There is a cave and people name it Batu Hapu Cave. Local people say that there is a legend how the cave was made. Do you want to know the story?

There was an old woman who lived with her only son. The woman's name was Nini Kudampai and her son's name was Angui. They were really poor while Angui was still a kid. He was kind and very helpful. His father died when he was a baby. Though he was very young, he behaved like an adult. He knew he had to help his mother to earn a living. And that made his mother love him very much.

Angui had three pets. They were a white pig, a white dog, and a white cock. He liked playing with them after helping his mother. It was a beautiful day when Angui was playing with his three pets. A rich merchant was passing Angui's house. He stopped and paid attention to the kid. He liked Angui very much. He asked some people about Angui. And when he knew that Angui came from a poor family, he wanted to adopt Angui.

The rich merchant came to Angui's house. He talked to Nini Kudampai. He told her that he wanted to adopt Angui. He promised that he would let Angui go home and live with her after Angui was an adult. And he also promised that he would give Angui a good education.

Nini Kudampai was so touched. She was in a big dilemma. She was happy that her only son would get a good education, however she was also sad that she would not see her son anymore. She finally agreed with the merchant's plan. She let him adopt her son.

With a big ship, the merchant and Angui sailed to the city. He raised Angui very well. He sent Angui to the best school. And he also taught him how to do business. Angui was smart. He could understand everything very fast. The merchant was very happy. He slowly gave some of his business to Angui. And Angui paid the trust by giving the merchant a lot of profit.

Angui was adult, the rich merchant planned to give all his business to Angui. However the rich merchant asked Angui to get married before he could receive the entire merchant's business. Angui agreed.

Angui had fallen in love with a girl. He knew it was time for him to get married, especially when the merchant had promised to give him all the business. He did not waste much time. Angui proposed to the girl and the girl happily accepted him.

Angui and his wife were very happy. Also, they were very rich. The merchant remembered his promise to Nini Kudampai. He told Angui to go home. But Angui refused. The merchant then reminded Angui about his promise. His wife also asked Angui to go to his hometown. Angui gave up. He asked his crew to prepare his ship. They would sail to Tapin.

The news spread very fast. People were talking that Angui would go back home. His mother finally heard the news also. She brought Angui's pets, the white pig, the white dog, and the white cock.

Nini Kudampai was standing at the harbor. When she saw Angui, she called out his name. Angui saw his mother. She looked very old and shabby. He was ashamed. His wife asked him who the old woman was, but he said that he did not know her. He then asked his crew to continue sailing. The ship did not stop.

Nini Kudampai was so sad, and she was also very angry. She cursed Angui for ignoring her. She had been waiting for her son to come back. And when he arrived, he ignored and did not want to admit her as his mother.

God heard the old woman's praying. Suddenly the rain fell down heavily. Thunder attacked the ship. It turned upside down! The ship finally stranded. Slowly the ship changed into a big stone. Later, the big stone slowly changed into a cave. People then named the cave as Batu Hapu Cave.



**Appendix B**  
**Sample Comprehension Questions in a Post-Reading Activity**  
**Based on the English Translation of the Folktale “The Legend of Batu Hapu Cave”**  
**(Marini, 2015)**

Answer the following questions based on the folktale entitled “The Legend of Batu Hapu Cave.

1. What is the folktale about?

---

---

2. Who are the major characters in the folktale?

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3. Where did the story take place?

---

---

4. What is the main idea of Paragraph 4?

---

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5. How did the merchant raise Angui?

---

---

6. What is the main idea of Paragraph 8?

---

---

7. Why did Nini Kudampai feel sad and angry with Angui?

---

---

8. What does the word ‘shabby’ in “She looked very old and shabby” (Paragraph 11, Line 2) mean?

---

---

9. Which part of the folktale indicates the resolution?

---

---

10. Can you mention the moral value of the folktale?

---

---

**Appendix C**  
**Simple Book Record of Extensive Reading Activity**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

No.	Student's Progress	Date of Report	Feedback	Teacher's Signature
1.	Reading the selected folktale			
2.	Making a summary of the folktale			
3.	Identifying the moral values from the folktale			
4.	Making the lofopost			

**Appendix D**  
**Rubric for Assessing the Lofopost Appearance**  
**(Adapted from NCTE / IRA, 2006)**

Categories	4	3	2	1
Use of Images	All images are related to the topic and make it easier to understand.	All images show acceptable understanding / relevancy with the topic and most make it easier to understand.	Some of the images used do not relate to the topic and some still make it easier to understand.	All images do not relate to the topic.
Organization	Summaries of folktales are presented based on accurate generic structure of narrative text.	Summaries of folktales are presented, not following accurate generic structure of narrative text, but still help the reader understand	Summaries of folktales are not presented in accurate generic structure of narrative text, making it hard for the reader to understand.	Summaries of folktales appear to be disorganized.
Layout and Design	Use various colors and font sizes. All information on the poster is in focus and can be easily viewed and identified from 6 ft. away.	Use less various colors and font sizes. Most of the information on the poster is in focus and the content easily viewed and identified from 6 ft. away.	Use less various colors and font sizes. Most of the information on the poster is in focus and the content is easily viewed and identified from 4 ft. away.	Use few colors and only one type of font size. Much of the information on the poster is unclear or too small.
Mechanics	No spelling errors. No grammar errors. Text is in author's own words.	Few spelling errors. Few grammar errors. Text is in author's own words.	Some spelling errors. Some grammar errors. Most of the text is in author's own words.	Many spelling and / or grammar errors. Text is copied OR the whole text is copied (despite the accurate spelling and grammar).

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