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**Reading anxiety and its relation to reading proficiency, reading strategy, and gender:  
The case of Iranian EFL learners**

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**Bioprofile:** Mojgan Roustaei has joined Amin Institute of Higher Education in 2011 as an English Instructor in Department of Foreign Languages, English Faculty. She, also, has been teaching English for 12 years. Her research interest includes contrastive linguistics, psycholinguistics, discourse analysis, and second language acquisition. She has published 2 other articles in 2012 and 2013 in the area of contrastive linguistics and second language acquisition.

This study is an investigation of the effects of foreign language reading anxiety on reading strategy use, and reading comprehension of Iranian English as foreign language (EFL) learners. It examines if reading strategy use and reading anxiety level differ across the gender divide. To this end, data were collected from 60 Iranian students (30 males and 30 females) who were enrolled in English learning classes in a language learning center. Participants were given the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) and a background questionnaire, Metacognitive Awareness Reading Strategy Questionnaire (MAQ), and a TOEFL reading section. Based on their TOEFL scores, participants were grouped into a High proficiency group and a Low proficiency group. The students' levels of foreign language reading anxiety were compared with language proficiency levels, reading strategy use (like top-down and bottom-up strategies), and gender. The results revealed that examinees experiencing lower foreign language reading anxiety perform better in foreign language reading. The findings suggest that the more students experience reading anxiety, the less they are able to deal with the reading context, because they cannot normally use as many strategies at one time. It was observed that the level of foreign language reading anxiety experienced by male and female participants do not differ in terms of language proficiency and reading strategy. However, female participants perform better than male participants in applying bottom-up strategies.

**Key Words:** anxiety, affective variable, foreign language anxiety, foreign language reading anxiety, gender, reading strategy.

## **Introduction**

Being the lingua franca in nearly all international communications and the realm of science, English has been known in virtually every country in the world, resulting in its growing demand all around the world. This trend has also led to a series of misconceptions about learning the language. A crucial factor that must be considered in foreign language anxiety (FLA) or second language acquisition (SLA) is the learner's psychological condition. One researcher in this field is Krashen (1982) who in his affective filter hypotheses (1982) argues that a learner's emotional state functions as a filter that can impede or even completely block input data. He also claims that this feeling of uneasiness could even interrupt the process of second language acquisition. The affective filter includes all sorts of discomforting feelings which are caused by threatening environments. When the affective filter is high, learners are unable to transform input data to intake due to the mental burden they bear as a result of their emotional uneasiness; conversely, the process of learning accelerates when the affective filter is low, and learning becomes feasible. Closely related to the affective realm is the concept of foreign language anxiety; however, there can be found a wide disagreement over admitting Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) both in psychology and second language learning.

Language anxiety has long been considered an important factor in second language acquisition. Certainly, neglecting this emotional variable can result in unfavorable consequences. The devastating impacts of anxiety on students' performance, achievement in learning, and self-esteem have been substantiated. This could be the reason why reducing affective barriers is the primary concern of various methodologies. Anxiety, among other emotional variables, has been a notorious effect from which a lot of learners suffer. Therefore, it deems absolutely necessary to pay specific attention to this issue in order to gain a better understanding of its nature and functions.

Another major issue to keep in mind is that, contrary to the common belief which suggests anxiety arises or is significant only in the case of speaking and listening, anxiety can irritate learners even while reading or writing. Studies scrutinizing this issue such as Zheng (2008); however, are considerably fewer than studies conducted to find the relationship between anxiety and speaking or listening. As a result, the attempt has been made in this

study to investigate the relationship and possible interactions between reading anxiety and the variables of reading proficiency, reading strategy use, and gender.

The first purpose of this study is to unearth possible correlations that foreign language (FL) reading anxiety could have with reading proficiency. Second, it tries to uncover whether reading strategies used by learners while reading a text are possibly related to the reading anxiety experienced by subjects. Lastly, the issue of whether FL reading anxiety and FL reading strategy use may differ across the gender divide is explored.

The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of foreign language reading anxiety by assessing foreign language reading anxiety among learners. To this end, the study focuses on the following research questions: (1) Is there any relationship between students' reading proficiency and the amount of language anxiety they experience? (2) Is there any relationship between learners' preferred reading strategies and their anxiety levels? (3) Is there any difference in anxiety levels among male and female learners? And (4) Is there any difference in reading strategy use among male and female learners?

## **Literature Review**

The literature on foreign language reading anxiety is not rather spare. In this regard, after reading studies on this construct, the research questions were based on two assumptions. First, foreign language reading anxiety is a construct that is related to but distinct from general foreign language learning anxiety. Second, the level of foreign language reading anxiety changes when learning different languages (Saito, Horwitz & Garza, 1999).

### **Anxiety as a Complex and Heavily-Researched Entity**

One of the earliest modern attempts to define anxiety was made by Darwin in 1872. He defined it as “an emotional reaction that is aroused when an organism feels physically under threat” (p. 343, cited in Stephenson Wilson 2006). Celebrated Austrian psychologist, Freud (1920, cited in Stephenson Wilson 2006), offered another explanation of anxiety. He distinguished between anxiety and fear in that the former can be originated from something that does not exist in reality:

*I avoid entering upon the discussion as to whether our language means the same or distinct things by the word anxiety, fear or fright. I think anxiety is used in connection with a condition regardless of any objective, while fear is essentially directed toward an object(p. 343).*

Scovel (1978), following a similar pattern, has stated that anxiety is “a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object.” He also claimed that “it is associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry (p. 134). Spielberger (1983) has defined it as the “subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (p. 1).

While Scovel and Spielberger has followed a thought line similar to Freud’s, Rholes, et al. (1985) put forward a definition which resembles Darwin’s position. They mention that this feeling occurs when physical peril is expected, and the difference between anxiety and depression is that the former can happen both before and after a loss, whereas the latter only occurs after a loss. Sarason (1986) thought of anxiety as “a basic human emotion consisting of fear and uncertainty” (p. 38). Twenge (2000) does not define anxiety through its components; instead, he held that “anxiety and fear primarily serve to warn of potential danger and trigger physiological and psychological reactions” (p. 1008).

Casado & Dereshiwsky (2001), among others, suggest that the definition of anxiety is dependent on the approach one takes toward science: at one extreme of this continuum, it can be a clear and measurable behavioral characteristic if one takes a positivist approach, to a feeling which is virtually impossible to access.

## **Types of Anxiety**

### **State and Trait Anxiety**

“Trait anxiety” is, according to Spielberger, a personality trait, and therefore, not subject to change from one situation to another and is the cause of unreal fears. It is “ the acquired behavioral disposition that predisposes an individual to perceive a wide range of objectively non-dangerous circumstances as threatening”, to use his own words (Spielberger, 1966, p. 16). In his later studies, he specifically mentioned the “relatively permanent personality trait” aspect of this kind of anxiety (Spielberger, 1972; Spielberger, 1983). The idea that high trait-anxiety sufferers experience anxiety in many different kinds of situations was confirmed in later studies (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Scovel (1978) called it a “predisposition” which is permanent, and Levitt (1980, p.11) saw it as a “constant condition without a time limitation.”

Levitt (1980, cited in Kim 2001) holds that state anxiety is manifested through the following behaviors: (1) A verbal report, spoken or written, that conveys via ordinary language the message that the reporter is consciously experiencing fear; (2) Minor surface

physical reactions such as pallor, sweating, or trembling, which are ordinarily manifest; (3) Internal physiological reactions such as elevated blood pressure and pulse rate, breathing, hormonal and gastrointestinal changes, and loss of consciousness; (4) Voluntary gross motor behavior or absence of behavior (“freezing”), most often taking the form of withdrawal from, or avoidance of, a situational threat; and (5) A verbal report, spoken or written, that conveys via ordinary language the message that the reporter is consciously experiencing fear (p. 12.).

### **Global and Situation-specific Anxiety**

MacIntyre & Gardner (1991b) view situation-specific anxiety as the trait anxiety restricted to a specific situation. Nevertheless, there are a lot of scholars who held that situation-specific anxiety is a form of state anxiety (Philips, 1992). Examples that MacIntyre (1995) enumerates for situation-specific anxiety, such as stage fright, test anxiety, math anxiety, and language anxiety. For example, all can be viewed as state anxiety since individuals suffering from any of these kinds of anxiety do not necessarily have to be placed in a specific situation to feel anxious.

### **Facilitative and Debilitative Anxiety**

Another popular dichotomy that was introduced to capture a better picture of the concept of anxiety – and consequently, to prevent inconsistency – is facilitative/debilitative dichotomy. As the name implies, facilitating anxiety refers to a kind or some level of anxiety that facilitates and enhances learning, while debilitating anxiety brings about poor performance and weak learning (Voci, Beitchman, Brownlie, & Wilson, 2006).

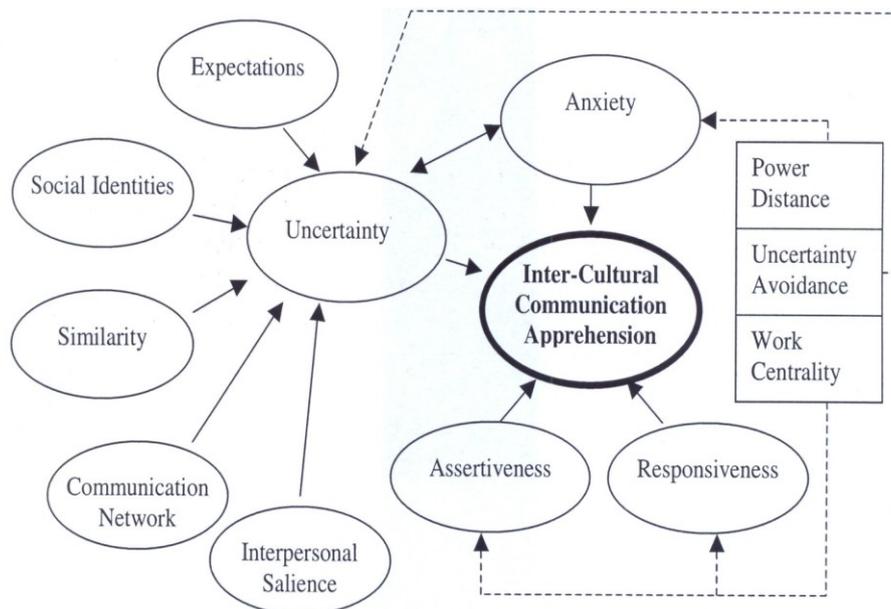
Alpert & Haber (1960) first introduced these two concepts in a study to find the relation between anxiety and achievement among college students. They mentioned that the concept is not restricted to language learning. Alpert & Haber (1960) have developed a questionnaire to identify the kind of anxiety each student was grappling with. Examples below are taken from this scale.

- Nervousness while taking a test helps me do better. It never helps - It often helps.  
The more important the exam or test, the better I seem to do. This is true of me -  
This is not true of me
- Nervousness while taking an exam or test hinders me from doing well. Always –  
Never.

- The more important the examination, the less well I seem to do. Always – Never (Alpert & Haber, 1960, p. 214).

### Sources of Anxiety

Many factors have been suggested to be the sources of anxiety in SLA. For instance, Gardner & Smythe (1975) suggest that anxiety decreases in class when the learners become more proficient; therefore, anxiety and command in language are conversely related. Cassady (2004) and Cassady & Johnson (2002) have suggested that tests can play a major role in creating a stressful learning environment as well. . Other factor influencing the level of anxiety in learners includes emotional intelligence skill (Chao, 2003). Neuliep & McCroskey (1997) stress the same point, and hold that when people communicate with others from a different culture or language, they tend to regard one another as strangers; this causes communication apprehension, which is as “the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people of different groups, especially cultural and ethnic and/or racial groups” (p. 145). Such a feeling, consequently, leads to anxiety. Later, in 1998, Neuliep & Ryan presented a schema to explain the sources of anxiety and other influential factors in it.



→ Adapted from Neuliep and Ryan 1998

### Anxiety and Reading

The first scholars who introduced the concept of reading anxiety in foreign language were Saito, Horwitz, & Garza (1999). In their study, which included 30 intact first-semester classes of Spanish, Russian, and Japanese students with the total number of 383, they found out that

reading anxiety exists and hypothesized that since the definition of foreign language anxiety is “the threat to an individual’s self-concept caused by the inherent limitations of communicating in an imperfectly mastered second language” (p. 202) and reading is not communicative in nature, and foreign language reading anxiety is independent from foreign language anxiety (Saito et al., 1999). They also recognized that different target foreign languages provoke different levels of anxiety. Another influential factor in their study was script system. They also recognized another important variable: the amount of difficulty that the participants felt towards the passage or perceived difficulty of reading texts. Finally, the results showed that reading anxiety correlates negatively with the participants’ grades.

Sellers (2000) studied reading anxiety and suggested the same findings as Saito et al.’s. Salazar-Liu (1998) found a negative relationship between reading anxiety and reading performance: to use his own terms: “Anxiety is also negatively correlated with French language achievements and with the rate of vocabulary learning, oral proficiency, oral exam grade, and EFL reading test” (p.4). Despite the fact that the concept of reading anxiety and its distinction from general reading anxiety is a rather new one, multitudes of studies have been conducted to shed more light on it. There is a consensus among scholars that reading anxiety negatively influences reading skills (Hsu, 2004; Sas, 2002; Sellers, 2000; Zhang, 2003, Batista, 2005).

### **Age and Anxiety**

Onwuegbuzie, et al. (1999), in a study aimed to identify the relationship between learner variables and language anxiety, found that there was a significant positive correlation between anxiety and age. They also claimed that age contributes to 4% of the prediction of language anxiety (p. 226-227). In simpler terms, the older the learner, the higher level of anxiety he/she has. Their findings were not corroborated in a later study by themselves (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). Conversely, Elkhafai (2005) realized in his study that freshmen are more anxious than the students who were studying at higher stages, implying that younger ones were more anxious; the findings, of course, can be the result of different levels of proficiency and not age.

### **Gender and Anxiety**

Gender can be classified as a learner’s variable, and its relationship to foreign language reading anxiety is rather vague, for different studies yielded inconsistent results. While some

studies concluded that gender has a significant role in the level of anxiety and strategy use, others held the opposite.

Aida (1994) utilized FLCAS to measure the level of foreign language anxiety among Japanese students. Despite the fact that females scored a little higher on FLCAS than males, the difference was not statistically significant. The study was repeated as a part of Onwuegbuzie, et al. (1999)'s research, and the results corroborated Aida (1994)'s findings. In another study on Belgian university students' communicative anxiety, Dewaele (2002) found no significant relationship between one's gender and his/her level of foreign language anxiety. The importance of this study was that the results were repeated for both English as a foreign language and French as a foreign language. Phakiti (2003b) investigated the effect of gender on cognitive and metacognitive strategy use in L2 reading and found no significant relationship between them. Again, Matsuda & Gobel (2004) studied 252 students who were studying English at a university. The result of their study; however, yielded no significant relationship.

### **Gender and Strategy Use**

Cohen (2003) described language learning strategies as learning procedures used consciously by learners. Cohen and Upton (2007) identified and classified reading strategies into categories of approaches to reading the passage, use of passage and main ideas to help understanding, identification of important information and discourse structure in the passages, inferences, and strategies for test management.

The findings in this area seem to be more consistent than the findings relating to the relationship between gender, strategy, and level of anxiety. It appears that females perform better in utilizing reading strategies. Ehrman & Oxford (1989), for instance, reported that female students tend to guess when they did not have enough information about a question or word. Bacon (1992) investigated listening strategy use between males and females who were studying Spanish and found out that males used different strategies than females: while males tend to use bottom-up strategies such as translation, females apply top-down strategies like guessing the meaning. He also discovered that females use a broader range of global/synthetic strategies; whereas males utilize more decoding/analytic strategies. In Vianty (2007) an attempt to identify the metacognitive strategies used by students is reported. In his study it was discovered that the analytic and pragmatic reading strategies are mostly 101 Indonesian students.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Setting**

Sixty Individuals participating in this study were English learners of Iran Language Institute in Iran, Isfahan, whose first language is Persian. The sample consisted of 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> semester students from four randomly selected classes. Since two groups were required, individuals were assigned to two cohorts of different reading proficiency, named High group and Low group. This classification was based on ranking examinees' reading scores from the highest to the lowest. Also, the number of both male and female participants who took part in the study was equal.

### **Materials**

Three instruments were used to answer the questions of the study: the reading section of a sample TOEFL, in order to make sure participants were at the desired level of reading proficiency, and also to find out if reading proficiency was affected by reading anxiety; FLRAS (Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale). It was originally developed by Saito, et al. in 1999. Saito et al. (1999), in order to measure participants' level of anxiety; and MAQ (Metacognitive Awareness Questionnaire). The reading strategies included in the questionnaire were taken from a study conducted by Oranpattanachai (2010), in order to find out about the metacognitive strategies students usually use when reading. Both FLRAS and MAQ were translated into Persian in order to prevent learners' misunderstanding. The translation copies were validated by 2 professional translators as well.

### **Procedure**

#### **Pilot Study**

A month prior to the main research data collection, the translated MAQ, translated FLARS, and TOEFL were piloted to 24 language learners from a language learning institute, from 2 different levels of language proficiency. They all agreed that all items contained in the questionnaires were explicit and comprehensible to them.

#### **Test administration**

Both questionnaires and the reading module of TOEFL were stapled together. They were handed out among students at the same time. They were required to spend 70 minutes on the reading section and 15 minutes on the questionnaires.

First, the learners were asked to go through the reading section, and based on their performance in this part, they were supposed to answer FLRAS and MAQ in which they could find some items related to the reading task, but it was insisted by the researcher and the invigilator that these three parts are not related to each other; however, it is possible to find some relation and they needed to answer the questionnaires from their learning experience.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative analysis was implemented to address the research questions. The responses obtained from 60 students were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15 for statistical analysis. Scores obtained from the FLRAS and TOEFL were used to approach the question one of the study which was about the correlation between learners' anxiety level and reading performance. Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis was run to obtain the correlation between reading anxiety and reading performance score on one side and the correlation between reading anxiety and reading strategy usage on the other side. Scores gained from the FLRAS and MAQ were used to answer the second question of study. The Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient indicates the degree that quantitative variables are linearly related in a sample (Green, Salkind, & Akey, 2000, p. 234, cited in Zhao, 2009). Question three and four regarding strategy usage and anxiety level differences across gender were answered by conducting an Independent-sample Test, a T-test, and a Point Biserial Correlation. T-test was run to compare the means obtained from the mentioned scores. In order to find out if the differences between the obtained means were significant, Independent-sample test was performed. Considering sex as the nominal dichotomous variable, Point Biserial Correlation was run to compute the correlation between gender and learners' level of anxiety on the one hand, and the correlation between gender and reading strategy usage on the other hand.

### **Results**

#### **Research Question One**

In order to answer the first question, a Pearson Product-Moment correlation was run. Before this calculation, the assumption of normal distribution was first examined through histograms and KSZ table.

As it is shown above in the Table.1 and Figure1, Histogram of FLRAS below, the FLRAS scores were normally distributed.

Table 1. *Results of the KSV Test*

	Reading	FLRAS	MAQ
N	60	60	60
Normal Parameters <sup>ab</sup>			
Mean	23.1167	51.3667	101.4667
Std. Deviation	7.93425	8.77780	11.38460
Most Extreme Differences Absolute	.075	.062	.096
Positive	.075	.062	.096
Negative	-.075	-.061	-.068
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	.583	.479	.747
Asymp. Sig. (1-tailed)	.886	.976	.632

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

Before reporting the descriptive statistics, the internal consistency of the two instruments, the FLRAS and the MAQ, were examined and reported. Table 2 gives the Cronbach's Alpha and number of items in each of the instruments. Both the FLRAS and the MAQ have good internal consistency as indicated by the Cronbach's Alpha. The FLRAS had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.811 and the MAQ had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.871. According to Dörnyei (2003), an instrument with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.8 or more is considered as a very reliable instrument.

Table 2

*Cronbach's Alpha of the Two Instruments*

Instrument	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale	20	0.811
Metacognitive Awareness Strategy	29	0.871

In Table 3, 4, and 5 descriptive statistics of FLRAS and Reading Performance of either groups, the Low and the High, are shown. The reading performance score had a mean of 23.1167 (SD = 7.93425). The highest reading performance score was 44 of 50 and the lowest was 7.

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation between the foreign language reading anxiety and foreign language reading performance was negatively significant (see Table 6),  $r =$

-0.383,  $p < .01$ . According to Green, Salkind & Akey, (2000), as cited in Zhao (2009), the cutoff of 0.1, 0.3, 0.5 as small, medium and large correlation (as cited in Zhao 2009), should be a medium negative correlation between the foreign language reading anxiety and foreign language reading performance. Participants who experienced lower level of foreign language reading anxiety may have performed better in foreign language reading.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statics of FLRAS, MAQ, Reading Performance Scores of Both Groups*

		FLRAS	MAQ	Reading
N	Valid	60	60	60
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		51.3667	10.4667	23.1167
Median		50.5000	101.0000	22.5000
Mode		46.00 <sup>a</sup>	103.00	14.00
Std. Deviation		8.77780	11.38460	7.93425
Variance		77.050	129.609	62.952
Skewness		.056	.135	.374
Std. Error of Skewness		.309	.309	.309
Kurtosis		-.417	1.131	-.022
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.608	.608	.608
Range		38.00	64.00	37.00
Minimum		31.00	72.00	7.00
Maximum		69.00	136.00	44.00

Table 4

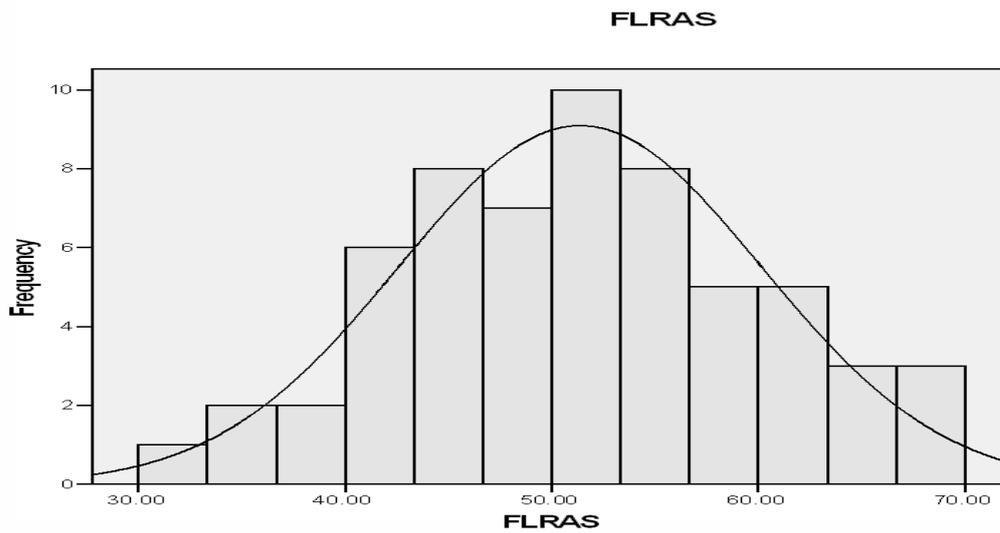
*Descriptive Statistics of FLRAS, MAQ, Reading Performance Scores of Low Group (A)*

		FLRAS	MAQ	Reading
N	Valid	30	30	30
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		16.9000	52.9667	99.1333
Std. Error of Mean		.74795	1.59272	2.14355
Median		18.0000	52.5000	100.5000
Mode		14.00	56.00	95.00
Std. Deviation		4.09668	8.72366	11.74068
Variance		16.783	76.102	137.844
Range		15.00	38.00	47.00
Minimum		7.00	31.00	72.00
Maximum		22.00	69.00	119.00

Table 5

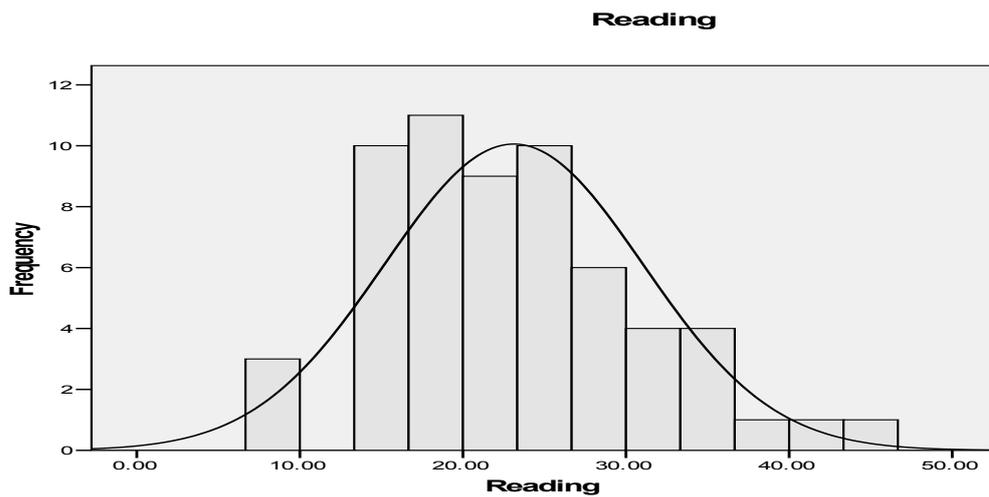
*Descriptive Statistics of FLRAS, MAQ, Reading Performance Scores of High Group(B)*

		FLRAS	MAQ	Reading
N	Valid	30	30	30
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		29.3333	49.7667	103.8000
Std. Error of Mean		1.02198	1.58490	1.95431
Median		28.0000	49.0000	103.0000
Mode		24.00	46.00	103.00
Std. Deviation		5.59762	8.68087	10.70417
Variance		31.333	75.375	114.579
Range		21.00	31.00	53.00
Minimum		23.00	35.00	83.00
Maximum		44.00	66.00	136.00



Mean = 51.3667  
 Std. Dev = 8.77780  
 N = 60

Figure1. *Histogram of FLRAS*



Mean = 23.1167  
 Std.Dev = 7.93425  
 N=60

Figure2. *Histogram of Reading Performance*

Table 6

*The Result of the Pearson Correlation between Reading Comprehension and FLRAS Scores*

	Reading score	FLRAS Score
Reading Score	1	-0.383**
Pearson Correlation Sig (1-tailed)	60	0.001
N		60
FLRAS Score	-0.383**	1
Pearson Correlation Sig ( 1-tailed)	0.001	
N	60	60

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

### Research Question Two

The Pearson Product-Moment correlation between the foreign language reading anxiety and foreign language reading performance was not significant (see Table 7),  $r = -0.389$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . According to the cutoff of 0.1, 0.3, 0.5 as small, medium and large correlation (Green, Salkind & Akey, 2000 cited in Zhao 2009), there was a medium negative correlation between the foreign language reading anxiety and the learners' preferred reading strategies. It can be concluded that subjects' level of anxiety may affect the strategies used by learners to comprehend the text completely, so students with lower foreign language reading anxiety may perform better at understanding and comprehending the text.

Table 7

*The Result of the Pearson Correlation between Metacognitive Reading Strategies and Foreign Language Reading Anxiety*

	MAQ Score	FLRAS Score
MAQ Score	1	-0.389**
Pearson Correlation Sig (1-tailed)		0.588
N	60	60
FLRAS Score	-0.389**	1
Pearson Correlation Sig (1-tailed)	0.588	
N	60	60

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

### Research Question Three and Four

In order to answer these two questions of the study, Point Biserial Correlation was computed, gender is considered to be a dichotomous variable for which the observation may take the value of 1 or 0. In the following Table (8) the calculation of  $rpb$  is computed to show gender,

as the nominal dichotomous variable, to FLRAS scores and to MAQ scores. The boys had a better performance in Reading, FLRAS, and MAQ than girls on the mean (24.7667 versus 21.4667, 49.4333 versus 53.3000, 101.6000 versus 101.3333), but no correlation between sex and reading performance ( $r_{pb} = -0.210$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ), sex and FLRAS ( $r_{pb} = 0.222$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ) sex and MAQ ( $r_{pb} = -0.012$ ,  $p \leq 0.05$ ) could have been discovered.

As it can be seen in the Table.8, there is a difference between the mean scores of male and female participants' reading and FLRAS. So the Independent Sample Test was used to find out whether these differences were significant (Table. 9)

Table 8

*The Result of Point Biserial Correlation between Gender, Reading, FLRAS, and MAQ*

	Reading	FLRAS	MAQ
Gender	-0.210	0.222	-0.012
$r_{pb}$ Sig. (1-tailed)	0.108	0.088	0.929
N	60	60	60

As seen in Table 9, two different t-values for our data, one with the assumption that the variances in the two groups are equal and the other with the assumption that the variances are not equal, were computed. To determine which t-value we have to use, we look at the result of the Levene's test for equality of variances. The test assumed that there were no differences between the variances and they are equal. That is to say, if the significance reported for Levene's test is smaller than 0.05, the variances are unequal, but if it is larger, they are equal. Here, the significance value for Levene's test in Reading test is 0.108, in FLRAS is 0.088, and in MAQ is 0.929. All are greater than 0.05 and cannot be significant.

The same process was conducted to find out if using top-down strategies differed across gender (Table 12).

Descriptive statistics of both male and female participants are shown in Table 9. Table 10 shows that there is a little difference between the mean scores of male and female participants' bottom-up strategy use (3.6651 vs. 3.5603). As a result, the Independent Sample Test was run to see whether this difference was significant (Table 11).

It is brought out by the independent sample test that the difference between the frequency of strategy use of male readers ( $M = 3.0792$ ,  $SD = 0.42483$ ) and that of female readers ( $M=3.3208$ ,  $SD =0.50181$ ) was significant ( $t = -2.013$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p = 0.049$ ). It can be concluded that the girls were better at applying bottom-up strategies than boys were.

Table 9

*Independent Sample Test, comparing male and female students' FLRAS, MAQ and Reading Comprehension Mean Score*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig (1-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								A	B
FLRAS									
Equal Variances assumed	2.706	.105	-1.735	58	.088	-3.87	2.229	.59471	-8.33
Equal Variances Not assumed				54.991	.088	-3.87	2.229	.59991	-8.33
MAQ									
Equal Variances assumed	.258	.614	.090	58	.929	.26667	2.965	6.201	-5.67
Equal Variances Not assumed				57.971	.929	.266667	2.965	6.201	5.67
Reading									
Equal Variances assumed	.216	.644	1.633	58	.108	3.300	2.020	7.344	-.744
Equal Variances Not assumed				57.997	.108	3.300	2.020	7.344	-.744

Table 10

*Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Means of Learners' Bottom-up Strategy Score in Different Gender*

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Bottom-up Strategy				
Male	30	3.0792	0.42483	0.7756
Female	30	3.3208	0.50181	0.9162

Table 11

*Independent Sample Test, comparing male and female students' Bottom-up Scores*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means		
	F	Sig	t	df	Sig(1-tailed)
Bottom-up					
Equal Variance assumed	.280	.599	-2.013	58	0.049
Equal Variances not assumed	.280	.599	-2.013	56.462	0.049

Table 12

*Descriptive Statistics for Comparing the Means of Learners' Top-down Strategy Score in Different Gender*

Top-down Strategy	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	30	3.6651	0.52051	0.9503
Female	30	3.5603	0.46400	0.8471

As it is illustrated in Table 13, the independent sample test reveals that the difference between male readers' top-down strategy use ( $M = 3.6651$ ,  $SD = 0.52051$ ) and that of female readers ( $M = 3.5603$ ,  $SD = 0.46400$ ) was not significant ( $t = 0.823$ ,  $df = 58$ ,  $p = 0.414$ ).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the male and the female readers were similar at employing top-down strategies.

Table 13

*Independent Sample Test, comparing male and female students' Top-down Scores*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-test for Equality of Means		
	<i>F</i>	Sig	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig( 1-tailed)
Top-down Equal Variances assumed	.054	.817	0.823	58	0.414
Equal Variances not assumed	.054	.817	0.823	57.250	0.414

## Discussion

As to the first question involving the relationship between foreign language reading anxiety and reading performance, a negative relationship is observed between the two variables. That is, the less the learners experience reading anxiety, the better they comprehend the text. The results may be interpreted that low-anxious subjects who were mostly from High group were confident enough to deal with the reading texts. Their self-confidence can be because of either their proficiency or employing more strategies. One of the plausible explanations could be associated with participants' reading - related experience. It means that by this time they have gained a lot of experiences in solving problems. Low-anxious participants in the present study seemed to have developed reading through their more exposure to foreign language texts. However, highly- anxious participants in other studies had limited or little experience. The results are in agreement with a large body of research

showing a negative relationship between anxiety and proficiency/performance (e.g., Aida, 1994; Bailey, 1983; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b; Phillips, 1992). These findings are in agreement with Sellers (2000) who found a negative relationship between reading anxiety and L2 reading comprehension. But in this study some students from the United States who were reading a text in Spanish were examined. It was found that highly anxious readers were more distracted by interfering thoughts which on the one hand made them not to focus on the task, and on the other hand affected their comprehension of the reading passage. The results indicated that more highly anxious students tend to recall less passage content than the students with lower anxiety.

Elkhafaifi (2005) investigated that advanced learners have experienced lower language anxiety than beginners or intermediate students. His study was conducted between a large population, 233 graduate and undergraduate students. The difference between Elkhafaifi (2005) and the present study can be on the number of participants. As it is maintained in Elkhafaifi's work (2005), more learners from different cultural backgrounds have participated in the study. Other studies among learners of French (Gardner, Smythe, & Burnet, 1977) found that as students proceeded to higher level classes, the foreign language anxiety level was attenuated. Aida (1994) has confirmed consistent result in support of negative effects of reading anxiety on reading performance which has indicated the fact that as experience and proficiency increase, anxiety is deadened in a consistent manner. Readers with higher proficiency use more strategies (Phakiti, 2003a) and they employ strategies which are more global (Koda, 2005). The present study is different from Koda's (2005) study based on the types of strategies which were investigated. A negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and proficiency level was also reported by Hussein (2005) who found that there was a small but statistically significant negative correlation between anxiety and the students' year in school. This finding supports those of MacIntyre & Gardner (1991a) who suggested that "as experience and proficiency increase, anxiety declines in a fairly consistent manner" (p. 111).

Also it supports the findings of Ipek (2008) who has found the negative correlation between reading proficiency and reading anxiety. She conducted a study with total of 670 participants from four proficiency levels, from beginners to intermediate. In her study, she showed that learners with limited proficiency are apt to experience foreign language reading more. The proficiency levels of participants in Ipek (2008) were totally different from those of the present study. The advanced English learners formed 50% of the population needed to conduct the study. In addition, it was Song (2010), who has decided on anxiety as a

detrimental affective variable which can hinder reading processing and reading comprehension, in spite of the Korean readers who were enrolled in the study forming the discrepancy between her study and the present one in which Persian speakers enrolled. In her study, lower reading comprehension scores were reported by highly anxious Korean readers. That is, the more anxiety the subjects experience, the less successful they would be in reading comprehension activities.

However, in Casado and Dereshiwsky's (2001) research, the anxiety level of first and second semester university students speaking Spanish as a foreign language were compared, and it was found that students' level of language anxiety and their exposure to language learning had a positive correlation. They found out that the more subjects were exposed to language learning, the more they would suffer from language learning anxiety. Also, the present study is not in line with what was conducted among Japanese learners which have shown that when entering higher levels of language learning, students would experience much more foreign language anxiety (Kitano, 2001). According to Cheng (2002), no correlation has been shown in writing anxiety differences among freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. It can be concluded that if the same study had conducted on reading, the same result as those of the present study could have earned.

In relation to foreign language anxiety, course level is one of the background variables which is widely studied. There are some studies showing that foreign language anxiety levels do not change across course level like Coulombe (2000) who conducted a study in which it was reported that the anxiety levels did not vary across course levels and just 13% of the participants reported feeling some anxiety. The reason could be what we call it negative experience which can be assumed as the best predictor of foreign language anxiety levels.

Among these researcher Barghchi (2006) and Brantmeier (2005) also conducted surveys which indicated that there was no significant relationship between reading anxiety and reading proficiency.

With regard to the second question, a negative correlation was uncovered between FL reading anxiety and reading strategy use. Among affective variables, reading anxiety appeared to affect subjects' reading style and preference for certain types of strategies. Obviously highly anxious readers were acting poorly in applying strategies. There are few studies conducted on the relationship between reading anxiety and learners' reading strategy use. The findings are in agreement with those of Barghchi (2005) who unearthed that learners with a high degree of anxiety have more difficulty with efficient use of reading strategies. More to the point, their concentration was affected by anxiety and it made them ready to give

up trying once a problem emerges in their reading. In general, they use fewer strategies than more confident readers, and get easily bored when they encounter a long sentence that needs rigorous processing. Also it is in a direct line with that of Song (2010), who uncovered that reading anxiety can affect learners' reading processing in terms of their strategy use and cognitive interference. The results showed that highly anxious students are more into using local strategies while less anxious students tend to employ global strategies and background knowledge strategies. It is noteworthy to say that researches exploring the effectiveness of strategies found that, low proficient readers may use few strategies, but the point is that they may use them inappropriately or they are using detrimental strategies (Cohen, 1994).

As to the third research questions involving any differences in the anxiety level among male and female learners, no correlation was observed between gender and reading anxiety. The results are in agreement with those of Matsuda & Gobel (2004) who investigated language anxiety in 252 university students majoring in English and found no significant effect of gender on students' anxiety. Also Shi & Liu (2006) found that foreign language classroom anxiety did not differ across gender. This result conforms to Aida (1994) who found no gender difference in foreign language classroom anxiety among learners of Japanese. Considering gender, Ipek (2008) observed that the level of FL reading anxiety experienced by male and female participants differed in terms of their language proficiency level. On the other hand, Abdel-Khalek & Alansari (2004) found that females had higher mean anxiety scores than did their male counterparts in all 10 countries where their study were conducted. However, significant differences were found in 7 out of the 10 countries. Also, in their study, Campbell & Shaw (1994) revealed a significant interaction between gender and foreign language anxiety: Male students were more anxious in using a foreign language in the classroom than their female counterparts after a certain amount of instruction in that foreign language. AbuRabia's study (2004) identified gender as a predictor of language anxiety, female students showed higher anxiety level than male students. Elkhafaifi's study (2005) indicated similar findings with females being more anxious than males.

As far as Question four of the research is concerned, metacognitive awareness strategy use was not differed across gender divide. But, Yazdanpanah (2007) found that males were more into using metacognitive strategies in comparison to females. Although, the difference was not significant, the findings of the study suggest that males and females perform differently on different items. Females scored higher on identifying main idea, guessing meaning from context, and text coherence questions. Conversely, males outperformed

females in reading for specific information, identifying referential information, and matching titles with paragraph. However, guessing meaning from context, and text coherence in favor of the females are cases which were affected by learners' gender

In a study on gender differences on cognitive and metacognitive strategy use in L2 reading of university students, Phakiti (2003b) found no significant difference between the reading performance of males and females and their cognitive strategy use. Zoubir-Shaw & Oxford (1995), looking at gender differences in L2 learning strategy, has observed that unknown words are important factors which are mainly reported by male participants as factors which hinder their mental process; nevertheless, females reported using guessing meaning from context more significantly than males. Bacon (1992) has examined the strategies males and females use while listening to authentic listening passages in Spanish. The male participants in the study used significantly more translation strategy (bottom-up processing) especially when listening to a more difficult text. Nonetheless, female participants reported using more inferring or guessing the meaning from context strategies (top-down processing). In another study by Ehrman & Oxford (1989), it was discovered that in the case of lacking sufficient information about context, females changed their preferences and reading style to guess the meaning of unknown words. Examining self-reports of males and females on their attitudes, beliefs, strategies, and experience in language learning, Bacon & Finnemann (1992) reported that the women in the study utilized a significantly larger number of global/synthetic strategies than the males. Conversely, men employed more decoding/analytic strategies than women.

### **Suggestions for Future Research and Limitations of the Study**

Based on the findings of this study, suggestions for future study are offered in foreign language reading anxiety and the findings should be added to the currently available literature on this area. Moreover, possible limitations and shortcomings of this study are also acknowledged.

All participants in this study came from the same language learning institute, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings. For future research, it is suggested to select students from more than one institute and it is essential to run future studies with larger samples and populations and then examine if the findings of this study will still hold good for those learners.

As mentioned, in the study, a research on reading anxiety was carried out. Further research should be done on writing anxiety, speaking anxiety, listening anxiety, and test anxiety in four skills. Bottom-up and top-down strategies were analyzed and their relation with gender and anxiety were discovered.

Bottom-up and top-down strategies were analyzed and their relation with gender and anxiety were discovered. Based on what Pang (2008) believed, one of the effective ways to sharpen reading is to make readers strategic readers. As a result, for further studies, it is plausible to cover some other reading strategies such as global reading strategies, problem-solving strategies, and supporting reading strategies which are available in Mokhtari & Sheorey questionnaire (2002).

It can be a good idea to explore the construct of anxiety among language teachers. As mentioned before, it is quite likely that teachers who are anxious will affect their students' emotional state negatively. There are quite few studies done in this area such as Bekleyen (2009) & Bekleyen (2007).

The study was administrated in the middle of the academic semester. It is probable that different results will have been obtained if future studies are administered either at the beginning or at the end of the semester.

Finally, some variables, for instance the type and the length of the reading passages, were not included in the data analysis. This could form a limitation of the study because the above-mentioned variables are also related to students' anxiety level. As a result, different results might be arrived at if the length of the passages is longer or shorter. Also the reading passages of different types, such as narrative, argumentative, or expository rather than scientific ones can create a climate for completely different results.

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## **Are vowels important to second language readers of English?**

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### **Abstract**

Second language readers of English, like their first language counterparts, are bound to decipher text represented as combinations of consonants and vowels. While the content carried by consonants is known to be crucial for matters related to lexical and semantic relevance, which form a sizeable component of reading, the role of vowels is sketched precariously; and these may be employed by individuals differently. The complexity of the situation is probably increased when a reader whose first language does not contain vowel representations as extensively as in English encounters the script of the latter. In this context, the current study aims to trace the relative importance of vowels to second language readers of native Dravidian languages in reading English. Thirty one participants, divided into three groups, read passages with varied proportions of vowels (completely unvowelized, partially unvowelized, and

vowelized). They are scored for word identification, reading comprehension and reading time in terms of number of words identified, score on a reading comprehension checklist derived from the story and the time taken to complete oral reading in seconds, respectively. The numerical data is treated with the independent *t*-test. Their comparisons reveal that second language readers of English cannot do away with vowels as they are relevant across the three measures. The role of vowels is discussed on the lines of the factors contributing to each of these measures in ESL readers.

**Key words:** word identification, reading comprehension, reading time, vowel, ESL

### **Introduction**

The process of reading a script encompasses a whole gamut of skills, each with specific roles in attaining success in the actualization of the complete process. A reader may be required to recognize the graphic symbols, chunk them in accordance with the language rules utilizing the available paralinguistic cues, identify the lexical information, and extract relevant information through analysis of the identified elements (see Rumelhart & McClelland, 1981; Grainger & Jacobs, 1993; Perfetti, Dyke, & Hart, 2001 etc.). The essential information, in any case, is the orthographic representation itself, which forms a basis for the previously enlisted tasks.

This orthographic representation, in most languages of the world, comprises two varieties of graphemes namely, consonants and vowels. These two forms of graphemic encoding have been researched elaborately in an attempt to derive their roles and delineate them on the basis of their significance to the reading process. Consonants have been acknowledged as having a superior hand in this regard. Consonants form the larger chunk of letters in most languages. They carry information related to lexical and morphological significance. Consequently, they are mainly responsible for the distinctiveness across lexical labels in a language (Nespor, Pena, & Mehler, 2003). More importantly, consonants not only possess these traits, but they also transfer these resources actively to support reading. Even at the most peripheral levels in reading, consonants are better identified when in an initial position in a word than vowels, which are more recognizable in subsequent positions (Acha & Perea, 2010). In fact, delaying the appearance of an onset-consonant in a word for a very short duration of 30 milliseconds has been meted out with a greater

increase in the time for which individuals gaze the word than when an onset-vowel is held back (Lee, Rayner, & Pollatsek, 2001). There appears to be an inclination towards consonants to probably drive lexical selection.

The predominance of consonants in lexical selection has been accredited through measures relating to the activation of accurate words on presentation in script. Priming experiments, where the nature of the primes has been altered in ways to elicit reactions to consonants and vowels differently, present a strong case in point. For instance, New, Araujo, & Nazzi (2008) found that adult readers took a shorter time to decide on lexical accuracy when targets were preceded by primes which comprised either the entire target or consonants of the target, contrary to primes containing only vowels. Similar effects have also been demonstrated through evoked potential measures by Carreiras, Dunabeitia, and Molinaro (2009). Consonant similarity has been found to override the influence of vowel similarity with a target in reducing gaze fixation to a target when primes are presented for 30 milliseconds (Lee, 1999). The study also reversed the stimulus pattern and presented words with missing consonants and vowels during reading to measure fixation times on them. The dominance of consonants in lexical selection was evidenced in that words with consonants ejected had longer fixation times.

The effects of consonants do not stem at the level of lexical selection. Semantics is also influenced indirectly by consonants. Perea & Gomez (2010) interestingly found that semantic associative priming may also receive additional support from the orthographic display of the primes. When associative primes were modified such that a letter was removed, facilitation of associate targets was better if the omitted segment was a vowel instead of a consonant. Thus, consonants may be considered as being highly important to the development of a reading lexicon with its adjuncts.

Although less remarkably, vowels do have a role to play in reading. They are central to the formation of syllables, necessary for reading aloud in particular and are a connecting link between consonants. Its perennial presence is recognized as vowels carry the intonation pattern of a sentence and add to the syntactic information (Cutler, Sebastian-Galles, Soler-Vilageliu, & Ooijen, 2000). Also, the time taken for reading is markedly extended in the absence of vowels (Ashby, Treiman, Kessler, & Rayner, 2006). A study by Frost (1995) illustrated the deft nature of the function of vowels in reading. The lexical decision times for words with missing vowels were not affected while word naming latencies were slower. Navon & Shimron (1981) studied lexical

decision in Hebrew and found that skilled readers did not require vowels per se to speed up the responses, but their absence could not be neglected. Therefore, vowels are by-and-large responsible in making reading easier while consonants define lexicality.

If vowels are to provide supplementary information alone, it may be interesting to know their role in situations where reading is not necessarily supported by a native-like usage of the language in its spoken form, as may be with second language readers of English. This becomes important because language in a spoken form may tune the system better to appreciate the phonological variations that are depicted in script. These phonological variations are more in the case of vowels, particularly in English (Kessler & Treiman, 2001), and hence, may create greater difficulties for a non-native English reader. In such a scenario, if the role of vowels in eventual reading performance could be measured, second language readers would be better placed to appreciate vowel information based on its functional relevance, when it has been documented that lexical activation does not require vowel ambiguities to be resolved thoroughly (Shimron, 1993; Frost, 1998). In other words, it is the consonants that carry most of the phonological information that may be required for further meaning related dealing, and the prioritization of phonology over orthography in assisting word recognition (Pollatsek, Lesch, Morris, & Rayner, 1992) by native readers also presents a strong argument to consider vowels less vigorously in an act of reading. Hence, determining the essence of vowels for second language readers becomes a valid question.

English is a language that uses consonants and vowels as graphemic entities that correspond rather flexibly with the sounds of the language, rendering the representation complex. To read text in English, a reader has to use the consonant and vowel representations skilfully. With vowels and consonants also fulfilling different roles in the reading process, for a non-native reader of English, the script of a native or mother language is bound to influence reading in English. A native reader of a script with limited vowel representation—say, Kannada, Arabic, Hindi, and Telugu—may find it strategically different to decode the patterns in English where every completed syllable has a unique graphemic representation for the vowel in it. Ryan & Meara (1991) found that an over reliance on consonant segments made it difficult for Arabic speakers to detect missing vowels in English words and also prolonged the process of reading in terms of time in comparison with native and non-Arabic, non-

native speakers of English. Thus, accounting for the influence of a native language becomes pertinent in this context. To complicate matters, Abu-Rabia (1996, 1999) found that primary and secondary school-going native Arabic children used vowels to perform better on word recognition and reading comprehension in Arabic, implying that in spite of Arabic being consonant guided, vowels have certain functions that are redundant and may be indispensable to reading.

Collectively, current research evidences point towards a primary role for consonants in reading while simultaneously proposing an auxiliary, yet distinct role for vowels. However, most studies have employed single words in their experiments, which may not necessarily reflect the actual utility of vowels in a practical reading situation. It remains to be unveiled whether these supporting roles of vowels are specific to certain sub-processes or outcomes of reading or their measures. If demarcated, this may have implications to second language reading where performance could be modulated with unambiguous focus on aspects of orthographic input that are more beneficial to certain tasks than others. To explore these possibilities, it was postulated that vowels may differentially influence various aspects of reading such as, word identification, reading comprehension and reading time in second language readers. The present study attempted to decipher the use of vowels to second language readers of English through a simple task of reading a passage with, partially without, and completely without vowels. While the first and third conditions would compare against each other on an all or none basis, the second condition would aid in an appraisal of the degree of impact caused by vowels.

This paper aims to achieve the following objectives: (1) to evaluate the effect of vowels on word identification in second language readers of English, (2) to evaluate the effect of vowels on reading comprehension in second language readers of English, and (3) to evaluate the effect of vowels on reading time in second language readers of English.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A total of 34 typical individuals (17 males and 17 females) aged between 20 to 25 years participated in the study. All the participants were native Indian multilinguals with English as their medium of instruction from at least Class I. They were native speakers of Dravidian languages (Kannada/Malayalam/Telugu/Tamil). The

participants were randomly divided into three groups. Groups I, II and III had 12 (F = 6, M = 6), 11 (F = 6, M = 5) and 11 (F = 5, M = 6) participants, respectively. The participants had to meet an additional criterion of not having prior knowledge of the story on which the test stimuli were based. This was ascertained either during or after the task based on the information given by the participants. Three participants were rejected in this process and the groups eventually comprised 10 (F = 5, M = 5), 11 (F = 6, M = 5) and 10 (F = 5, M = 5) participants, respectively.

### **Test stimuli**

A story titled “The Donkey and the Dog” from a story book of Navneet Publications (India) Limited (F1503) was taken for the study (Appendix 1). The story comprised 250 words (1016 graphemes) with 654 consonants and 362 vowels (C:V = 1.8066298). It was designated as ‘Passage P<sub>0</sub>’ (vowelized). The passage was edited in two forms. In the first form (Passage P<sub>1</sub> – completely unvowelized), all the vowels were omitted (Appendix 2). The passage had 654 consonants and zero vowels (i.e. 654 graphemes). In the second form (Passage P<sub>2</sub> – partially unvowelized), the vowels were removed from every alternate word, thereby retaining 125 words as they were (Appendix 3). This passage had 654 consonants and 177 vowels (C:V = 3.6949152) (i.e. 831 graphemes). The title of the story was deleted to avoid its influence on the measures of reading performance. The passages were formatted in the ‘Times New Roman’ style with a font size of 20 and 1.15 line spacing, and these formed the test stimuli. The passages P<sub>0</sub>, P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> were the stimulus for groups I, II and III, respectively.

### **Task**

The participants were told that they would be shown a passage in English that had to be read correctly as quickly as possible. The participants of groups II and III were informed about the removal of vowels in the passage. They were asked to try and read all the words completely, filling in the missing vowels as far as possible. The addition of extra consonants was prohibited. No assistance to reading was provided by the investigators. Once the passage was read, the participants were asked to describe the passage in their own words. At the end, they were asked to provide a suitable title to the passage. All the samples were recorded using a JXD Voice Recorder. The audio

files were transferred to a laptop for playback on the Cool Edit Pro software. The samples were then analyzed.

### Analyses

The samples of each participant were analysed for three measures namely, Word Identification (WI - number of words correctly read), Reading Comprehension (RC – content construed from the passage) and Reading Time (RT - total time taken to complete reading the assigned passage). WI scores were calculated by assigning a score of 1 to every accurately read word and deducting a score of 1 for every additional word that was not present in P<sub>0</sub>. Words that were partially correct were also not scored. RC scores were calculated on the basis of the description of the passages and title given by the participants. In order to score the descriptions objectively, a set of 11 questions fetching a total score of 10 (Appendix 4) were prepared that covered every sentence of the story. The description of each participant was written in English and answers to those questions were searched. The answers were then marked on the basis of the scores assigned to each question and totalled to arrive at the RC score. RT was estimated by calculating the time between the start of reading to its termination. These sets of scores of each participant for the three groups were tabulated and subjected to statistical analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software.

### Results

The raw scores were descriptively analyzed to arrive at the mean and standard deviation (SD) values on measures of WI, RC and RT across groups I, II and III who read passages P<sub>0</sub>, P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub>, respectively (Table 1).

*Table 1*

*Mean and SD values of reading performance measures across groups (passages)*

Reading Performance Measure	I (P <sub>0</sub> )	II (P <sub>1</sub> )	III (P <sub>2</sub> )
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
WI	246 (3)	198 (21)	234 (10)
RC	8.13 (0.83)	5.54 (1.99)	6.95 (1.68)
RT	95 (9)	285 (81)	134 (36)

The independent t-test was then run to compare these measures of WI, RC and RT across the groups (passages), pair-wise. Statistically significant differences were seen between all pairs for WI and RT scores, while the RC scores were different only between groups I and II at ' $p < 0.005$ ' (Table 2).

Table 2

Pair-wise comparison between I, II and III groups (i.e. passages) on WI, RC and RT

Groups (passages)	WI	RC	RT
I (P <sub>0</sub> ) - II (P <sub>1</sub> )	+	+	+
I (P <sub>0</sub> ) - III (P <sub>2</sub> )	+	-	+
II (P <sub>1</sub> ) - III (P <sub>2</sub> )	+	-	+

Note. '+': statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.005$ ), '-': no significant difference

## Discussion

### Comparison between P<sub>0</sub> (vowelized) and P<sub>1</sub> (completely unvowelized) passages

The results vividly pointed to the presence of a substantial difference in the scores of all the three parameters between vowelized and completely unvowelized passages. These findings may account for a definite role of vowels in all of word identification, reading comprehension and reading duration. It emphasizes the importance of vowels in the lexical, semantic and cognitive levels of reading, evidenced through an increase in the number of words correctly recognized, an enhancement in the understanding of the text, and a marked reduction in the time taken to read the passage, respectively.

The findings of the study compare affirmatively only with that of Abu-Rabia (1996, 1999) while generically contradicting the cumulative impression of a whole bunch of studies supporting lesser or no role of vowels, mainly at the lexical level (e.g.: Nespor et al., 2003; New et al., 2008). It is necessary to note at this point that the tasks on which vowel or consonant relevance were measured in these studies estimating their relative importance were primed lexical decision, single word recognition, error detection, and the like. Hence, these findings may not necessitate a like-for-like comparison. Instead, a closer view of the mean scores would indicate that although vowels are found to be an essential part of the text in word identification, the removal of it does not prevent word recognition in totality. The score on WI in P<sub>1</sub> (where only consonants that comprised approximately 64 percent of the graphemes of the original passage were present) at about 80 percent of the total number of words in the passage P<sub>0</sub> reveal that consonants alone may relatively suffice in identifying words

to a certain extent and vowels play a role when the demand is for a superior outcome (say about 98 % as is the case here).

The performance on reading time where the unvowelized passage recruits three times the duration required to read the vowelized passage finds greater support from literature (Ashby et al., 2006). Even studies that have used single words as stimuli have found that the time required to read an unvowelized entity is much longer than usual (Frost, 1995). This highlights the importance of ensuring orthographic clarity in representation to facilitate faster reading, even if it means eliminating only the lesser representative of content, the vowel.

Like RT, reading comprehension does not point to a single stage in the process of reading. It is an eventual outcome of the entire stream of events and hence may be influenced by any or all of the stages consumed in it. Considering this perspective, even with little literature investigating this global effect of vowels, an inference may certainly be drawn that vowels contribute significantly to this holistic measure as the scores illustrate. RC at approximately 50 % in the unvowelized condition, in spite of the utilization of additional time and almost 80 % of the words identified, was clearly below par considering that almost 64 % of the graphemes from the original passage were still present despite the removal of all vowels. On introduction of all the vowels, it shot up by about 30 % rendering a decent score.

Together, the roles of vowels in propelling reading comprehension and curtailing the time required for reading may be emphatically acknowledged considering the comparison between vowelized and completely unvowelized passages. With reference to word identification, eminence to vowels may be attributed parsimoniously.

### **Comparison between P<sub>0</sub> (vowelized) and P<sub>2</sub> (partially unvowelized) passages**

The results presented a slightly different picture from the comparison between P<sub>0</sub> and P<sub>1</sub>. Only the measures of WI and RT exhibited statistically significant differences between the vowelized and partially vowelized passages. RC did not seem to differ between the two passages. The statistical outcome per se may be indicative of the presence of vowel related effects on WI and RT, and the absence of the same with reference to RC although the mean score on all the three measures proceeded to get better with complete vowel inclusion. As in the previous comparison, the appraisal of these differences and similarities may require a deeper inspection of the data.

The decrement in word identification score in P<sub>2</sub> was miniscule in absolute terms, being about four percent worse than the vowelized passage. This difference is apparently much lesser than that between the number of vowels in the two passages (zero in P<sub>2</sub> and 177 in P<sub>0</sub>). Thus, it may not be incorrect to assume that partial presentation of vowels do not hamper word identification profoundly. On the other hand, the separation between RT values, with an increase of about 40 percent, corresponds slightly better with the statistical finding as well as the absolute difference between the two passages in terms of vowels. The finding confirms the importance of vowels in the ease of reading. An absolute reduction in the RC score from 8.13 to 6.95 (roughly around 1) did not merit any statistical qualification of difference, implying that partial introduction of vowels does not necessarily result in improved comprehension. These findings substantiate the existing research position on vowels' effects on the duration of reading (Ashby et al., 2006), but provide a scope for interesting postulations on their relative effects on WI and RT, one a preliminary stage and another a concluding result in the course of reading.

### **Comparison between P<sub>1</sub> (completely unvowelized) and P<sub>2</sub> (partially unvowelized) passages**

This comparison reveals that the two passages differ in terms of word identification and reading time. WI and RT exhibit an unmistakable enhancement of scores in their respective directions with an increase in the input from vowels in the passages. With reference to WI, the participants recognized over 90 percent of the words through the partially vowelized passage when the unvowelized passage recorded a score just under 80 %. Considering that the participants identified almost four-fifth of the words without any vowel in P<sub>1</sub>, an improvement beyond 90 % with P<sub>2</sub> may be noteworthy. In terms of RT, P<sub>2</sub> was read in less than half the time it took for P<sub>1</sub> to be read. The difference visibly elucidates that the contribution of vowels to reading is essential to perform more accurately and rapidly.

With no statistically significant difference observed on reading comprehension, the findings tilted towards an all or none effect. However, such a conclusion may be premature considering the pattern of movement of the mean scores across P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub>. The mean score of RC on the completely unvowelized passage fares poorer in relationship with that of the partially unvowelized passage by just under 15%. Although it does not suffice to elicit a statistically significant difference, a trend that

suggests the occupation of vowels in a gradual manner does surface. Also, the fact that RC did not show a significant difference in spite of more than 90 % of the words being identified by the participants is suggestive of comprehension and identification processes operating independently to a certain extent.

### **General discussion and implications to ESL readers**

In sum, the pattern of scores across the three passages on WI, RC and RT are indicative of vowels being useful to reading for ESL readers. However, the extent of the effects of vowels on the measures differs. Among the three, it is reading time that most definitely appears to be affected by the removal of vowels, both complete and partial, in ESL readers. Orthographic irregularities such as these do cause significant changes in the time taken to decipher a text. Hence, incorporation of vowels in texts read by ESL readers becomes necessary to reduce the cognitive load on them. Word identification, from a statistical perspective mirrors reading time. However, the descriptive accounts delineate a supporting role for vowels, such that, only readers who require identifying almost all the words in a passage (beyond 80% here) would need the assistance of vowels. Even when partially available, the passage can cope with the available vowels and perform fairly well. The effect of vowels on reading comprehension is pronounced when comparison is made between the completely unvowelized and vowelized passages. This alone suffices to support the idea that vowels are crucial to the understanding of text for ESL readers.

Thus, second language readers, who may have to read English under the influence of a native language script or speech, cannot do away with vowels during reading. Vowels not only reduce the burden on a reader by facilitating faster completion of the task, but also enhance both identification of small meaningful units (word) and comprehension of the entire text.

### **Conclusions**

The study discloses the impact vowels have on reading in readers of English as second language by demonstrating their comparative effects through increments in word identification, reading comprehension and reading time on inclusion of vowels. Vowels bear some information regarding the lexical, semantic, and cognitive facets of reading, although the degree of their impact on each of these aspects varies, making vowels important to second language readers of English.

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## **Appendix 1**

A dog and a donkey worked for a potter. The dog guarded the master's pottery and house which stood close to each other in a big compound. The donkey carried heavy loads for the master. The donkey felt very jealous of the dog. He thought, "What an easy and comfortable life the dog lives! His only duty is to stroll about in the compound and bark at strangers. And yet, the master pats him lovingly and gives him nice food to eat. And look at poor me! I slog all through the day under heavy loads. And what do I get from the master? Hard blows on my back and wretched leftovers for my belly. This is very unfair. Very, very unfair, of course." One day the donkey

was thinking, "I must try the dog's tricks to please the master. When the master comes home, he barks a little to welcome him. He runs to him wagging his tail. He raises his front legs and puts them on the master's body." Just then, the donkey saw the master entering the house. So he brayed a little to welcome him. Then he ran to him wagging his tail. He raised his front legs to rest them on the master's body. The donkey's unusual behaviour frightened the master. He thought the donkey had gone crazy. He picked up a big stick and rained heavy blows on the donkey. Poor donkey! He tried to please the master and received hard blows in return.

### **Appendix 2**

dg nd dnky wrkd fr pptr. Th dg grdd th mstr's ptry nd hs whch std cls t ch thr n bg cmpnd. Th dnky crrd hvy lds fr th mstr. Th dnky flt vry jls f th dg. H thght, "Wht n sy nd cmfrtbl lf th dg lvs! Hs nly dty s t strll bt n th cmpnd nd brk t strngs. nd yt, th mstr pts hm lvngly nd gvs hm nc fd t t. nd lk t pr m! slg ll thrgh th dy ndr hvy lds. nd wht d gt frm th mstr? Hrd blws n my bck nd wrtchd lftvrs fr my bllly. Ths s vry nfr. Vry, vry nfr, f crs." n dy th dnky ws thnkng, "mst try th dg's trcks t pls th mstr. Whn th mstr cms hm, h brks lttl t wlcm hm. H rns t hm wggng hs tl. H rss hs frnt lgs nd pts thm n th mstr's bdy." Jst thn, th dnky sw th mstr ntrng th hs. S h bryd lttl t wlcm hm. Thn h rn t hm wggng hs tl. H rsd hs frnt lgs t rst thm n th mstr's bdy. Th dnky's nsl bhvr fightnd th mstr. H thght th dnky hd gn crzy. H pckd p bg stck nd rnd hvy blws n th dnky. Pr dnky! H trd t pls th mstr nd revd hrd blws n rtn.

### **Appendix 3**

A dg and donkey wrkd for potter. Th dg grdd the mstr's pottery nd house whch stood cls to ch other n a bg compound. Th donkey crrd heavy lds for th master. Th donkey flt very jls of th dog. H thought, "Wht an sy and cmfrtbl life th dog lvs! His nly duty s to strll about n the cmpnd and brk at strngs. And yt, the mstr pts hm lovingly nd gives hm nice fd to t. And lk at pr me! slog ll through th day ndr heavy lds. And wht do get frm the mstr? Hard blws on my back nd wretched lftvrs for my belly. Ths is vry unfair. Vry, vry nfr, of crs." One dy the dnky was thnkng, "I mst try th dg's trcks to pls the mstr. When th master cms home, h barks little t welcome hm. He rns to hm wagging hs tail. H raises hs front lgs and pts them n the mstr's body." Jst then, th donkey sw the mstr entering th house. S he bryd a lttl to wlcm him. Thn he rn to hm wagging hs tail. H raised hs front lgs to rst them n the mstr's body. Th donkey's

nsi behaviour frghtnd the mstr. He thght the dnky had gn crazy. H picked p a bg stick nd rained hvy blws n the dnky. Poor dnky! He trd to pls the mstr and rcvd hard blws in rtn.

#### Appendix 4

S. No	Question	Score
1	Who were the characters in the passage?	1.5
2	What did the dog do?	1.0
3	What did the donkey do?	0.5
4	What did the donkey feel?	0.5
5	What did the donkey think about his condition?	1.0
6	What did the donkey think he should do?	1.0
7	What did the donkey see as he was thinking?	0.5
8	What did the donkey do to the master?	1.0
9	What did the master think about the donkey?	0.5
10	What did the master do to the donkey?	0.5
11	Did the participants understand the gist of the story?	2.0
TOTAL SCORE		10.0

## **Learn by yourself together: Getting Thai students in the door for self-access language learning**

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### **Abstract**

In Thailand, Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) by opening and developing Self-Access Centers (SACs) has been increasingly employed to improve English language learning. It has become for many universities an explicit internationalization strategy. This is of particular importance and urgency in the context of the coming integration of member countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, otherwise dubbed as the *ASEAN Community 2015*. Learning English is widely acknowledged as a key to opportunity in this new integration. Self-directed learning strategies like the use of SACs to learn English are popular but problematic in the Thai context. This paper highlights the discord between hierarchical expectations and collectivistic needs of Thai students and the virtues that self-directed learning espouses. With these theoretical underpinnings in mind, this action research project documents the opening stages of a SAC in a regional university of Thailand, and its implementation with a General Education English program. Student attitudes towards the SAC were surveyed. The results will reflect the contradictions at the crux between Thai culture and self-directed learning as expressed in the literature. It is believed that the development of SACs in universities can be an effective strategy for meeting English language needs that ASEAN will demand, but it is also argued that creative and culture-specific applications are crucial to their effectiveness. This paper is intended for higher education administrators and educators working in General Education.

**Keywords:** Collectivism, Hierarchy, Internationalization, Self-Access Centers (SAC), Self-directed learning, Self-Access Language Learning (SALL).

## **Introduction**

In South East Asia, regional construction of the economic corridors, newly developed transportation routes crisscrossing the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) are well under way, as is the creation of the highly anticipated ASEAN Community, which is set to launch in 2015. The significance of these developments, in terms of economics and connectivity, cannot be understated. And Thailand, for all intents and purposes, is at the very center of it all. ASEAN officially declared in Article 34 of the *ASEAN Charter* (2008) that English is the official medium of communication. English has become increasingly important in Thailand, expressly for the purpose of ASEAN economic integration set to launch in 2015 (Lavankura, 2013). Thailand has extraordinary human capital and capacity evidenced by its rich culture, history, and ingenuity, which gives it a competitive advantage in the ASEAN Community, but one area where it is perennially weak, is English language competence (Prapphal, 2008).

In fact, the integration of English into social and political life is not new. English has been used officially for diplomatic and business communication in the region at administrative levels for a long time (Baker, 2008), but only now is it becoming more real to people at large as new pan-regional super highways are near completion, forcing locals who are not normally involved in international affairs to cope and adapt to more foreigners coming through their communities than ever before. Foley (2005) says there is awareness that English is important “in the international context of globalization and technology, not only for people in academic and business environments, but also people from all walks of life” (p. 226). As 2015 approaches, school administrations are scrambling to catch up with language policy by developing fast-track language learning strategies to better develop Thailand’s human capacity.

## **Language curriculum reform**

Until recently, English has been considered a *choice* for Thai students. Those who were interested in language learning, or those who had aspirations to travel, work, or migrate abroad chose to take on the challenge to acquire a second or foreign language. Now, English is a *necessity* for tertiary programs (Hayes, 2010). Foley (2005) describes a paradigm shift from English as an elective to a compulsory subject in

Thailand. He notes that “English is now placed at the forefront of national development” (p. 226). In fact, many schools are moving to wholly transform their curricular programs to employ English as the medium of instruction (Mok, 2007) even though Thai students largely do not speak English. This has put enormous pressures on language and subject teachers alike and has made for complicated lesson plans taught in Thai with translated PowerPoint slides and English language textbooks with Thai language supplements. English is now a General Education requirement for entire university populations. Despite increased efforts and attention to language development nation-wide, there has been a continuous decline in student English language performance in Thailand (Prapphal, 2008; Hayes, 2010).

Much attention and criticism has fallen on Thai teachers of English (Atagi, 2002; Punthumasen, 2007; Baker, 2008), particularly those in the provinces outside of Bangkok. According to one academic, Somwung Pitiyanuwat, in an interview with the Bangkok Post (Johnson & Trivitayakhun, Jan. 19, 2010), “the problem is not that we lack enough teacher graduates; the problem is that many of the teacher-graduates lack the required standards to teach” (p. 1) In the same interview, Pitiyanuwat proposes that private international schools volunteer their professional teachers to spend their vacation days going to up-country public schools to do “*mutual* [my italics] teacher-to-teacher training” (p. 3). The aim he says would be that “the two teachers, acting as *equals* [my italics], to co-teach, co-prepare and co-evaluate the teaching processes” (p. 3). The suggestion that teacher-to-teacher training between urban and wealthy international school staff and rural government school staff would be “mutual” or “equal” is difficult to envision; and moreover, seeing that as a solution to build students’ English is even more difficult.

Hayes (2010) says that there is a “mismatch between socio-cultural expectations of teachers and student roles and new forms of English language pedagogy.” He highlights the issue that there is a “profound lack of research and understanding for the socio-economic context of English Language Teaching (ELT) prior to curriculum reform” (p. 306). Hallinger (2010) notes that many Asian countries have been experimenting with a wide range of imported educational reform ideas that fail to fit with the local culture of teaching and learning. There are clear calls for creative language teaching and learning strategies that take into account the socio-cultural as well as budgetary challenges universities face. One increasingly popular idea is self-directed learning by way of opening new and innovative Self-Access Centers (SACs)

or labs for learning English on campuses around the country (Foley, 2005; Gardner & Miller, 2011) where students can individually and on their own time learn, practice, and hone their language skills. In other words, in order to deal with large class sizes and budget constraints and also meet the integrative challenges of ASEAN 2015, students are being asked to learn English by themselves.

### **Self-Access Centers (SACs)**

An SAC is a place where students are generally free and are expected to self-select their learning mediums and work individually (Sheerin, 1991; Aston, 1993) to develop their proficiency in English. In a self-access system, students need to be “responsible, diligent, and motivated. They have to be able to decide effectively what to learn and how to learn from a very wide choice, which is at their disposal” (Detaramani & Cham, 1999, p. 125). In time, it is expected that students would improve their potential in their classes and in their professional future. The distinct abilities and perceived needs of students need to be considered carefully when setting up as SAC. Students in Southeast Asia tend to depend very much on their teachers for guidance, so activities that favour individualized learning are often at odds with local sensibilities (Detaramani & Cham, 1999).

Self-directed learning is not exactly a new idea (Gardner & Miller, 1994; Gremmo & Riley, 1995) nor is the idea of opening SACs (Sheerin, 1991; Aston, 1993; Miller & Rogerson-Revell, 1993). In this region, however, it is a rather radical and problematic one for a variety of societal and cultural reasons, making this an incredible demand of Thai students, and likewise for people of other countries with similar cultural orientations.

### **Self-Directed Learning and Culture**

Chiarelott (2006) identifies five characteristics that differentiate self-directed learning from teacher-directed learning:

- 1) Students have a “need to exercise control over their own lives,” whereas teacher-directed learning sees students as “essentially dependent” (p. 121).
- 2) Self-directed learners grow and achieve with experience and self-discovery. Teacher-directed learning sees the teacher’s experience as more valuable than the student’s.

- 3) Self-directed learning sees the student as highly individualistic and self-motivated. Teacher-directed learning sees common characteristics in students, so they can be easily grouped.
- 4) Self-directed learning thinks of prescribed subject matter as stifling and that a need to create and personalize learning as key. Teacher-directed learning understands learning experiences as organized under respective disciplines.
- 5) Self-directed learning believes that there are internal incentives: “native curiosity, the need for self-esteem, the challenge of power, the satisfaction of accomplishments” (p. 122). Teacher-directed learning believes that students need external incentives to learn.

When reviewing these five characteristics of self-directed learning and teacher-directed learning, anyone who has taught in Thailand will recognize that the descriptions of self-directed learning do not generally apply to Thai students, and the descriptions of teacher-directed learning does. Andersen (2012) cites Hofstede’s famous index of cultural dimensions, listing Thailand as one of the least individualistic cultures in the world with a High Power Distance (HPD) hierarchical system. The Power Distance Index (PDI) is a scale by which different cultures are oriented to different levels of inequality in their society (Covey, 2007; Hofstede, 2011; Andersen, 2012). Some cultures are more egalitarian, or have a Low Power Distance (LPD), while others such as Thai culture have a High Power Distance (HPD), and so they are more accepting and expecting of authority and behave accordingly. HPD will manifest itself in the ways people communicate with others depending on wealth, social or professional rank, or age. The classroom itself is also an HPD environment, where the students accept and expect the authority of the teacher (Hallinger & Kantamara, 2000).

Education in Thailand has traditionally been teacher-directed and largely remains so despite government efforts to shift educational standards towards student-centered approaches (Bunnag, 2000; Hallinger & Lee, 2011). As previously indicated, Self-Access Language Learning (SALL) has garnered a lot of interest from government and education administrations for both its budgetary advantages (Miller & Rogerson-Revell, 1993) and student-centered approach. SALL is a “more learner-centered, reflective and less prescriptive approach to language teaching with learners taking more responsibility for their own learning” (Morrison, 2008, p. 124). The cultural crux here is that Thai students are of a HPD cultural dimension, which does not center

attention as much on the junior as it does on the senior person in the teacher-student dyad. Thai students can generally be thought to have what Bown (2006) calls an “external locus of learning” (p. 647), where students see their teachers as the ones responsible for their learning, which is in direct contrast with assumptions about SALL and self-directed learning.

To emphasize this point further, Bown (2006) goes on to say that the locus of learning is about “who bears the responsibility for learning and with the nature of learning itself” (p. 647). It is not only that Thai students are generally not self-motivated learn English (Nonkukhetkhong, Baldauf Jr, & Moni, 2006), but in fact, the act of learning itself is outside of their personal responsibility. The locus of learning, the person who bears responsibility, is external; it is the responsibility of the teacher to impart knowledge onto them. This kind of cultural behavior is not restricted to Thai classrooms, but it is played out in all parts of Thai life (Covey, 2007): teacher-directed, parent-directed, monk-directed, anyone-senior-to-me directed. Respect for seniors and authority is deeply woven into the fabric of Thai culture, and frankly, Thai seniors are often suspicious of junior autonomy, and unprompted self-expression is largely discouraged (Andersen, 2012). According to Sampson (2012), the same hierarchical expectations are clear in Japanese schools, and likewise, “university students—without the externally imposed structure provided them in their secondary education—lack an ability to regulate their own studies” (p. 318).

### ***Ajarn and Sanuk***

In Thailand, the word for teacher is *ajarn*, which is not only a word but an honorific. An *ajarn* holds a privileged position in Thai society (Foley, 2005; Baker, 2008; Ferguson, 2011). Teachers not only enjoy the respect of Thai people, but it is also the *ajarn's* responsibility to project an image of dignity and proper Thai etiquette to students and the public in general. With this in mind, it is intensely difficult for one to inhabit both spaces of a student-centered teacher and of an *ajarn* at the same time (Ferguson, 2011).

“There is no necessary, logical connection between autonomous learning and self-access” says Morrison (2008), “and no evidence that a self-access mode of learning will, in itself, help to develop learner autonomy” (p. 126). Therefore, in an SAC with the intended and deliberate absence of authority, very little is likely to happen at all. This is not meant as a criticism of Thai culture, but it is an observation that is not

often taken seriously enough when discussing practical and practiceable reforms (Kiritikara, 2001; Kosonen, 2009; Hallinger, Lu, & Showanasai, 2010; Johnson & Trivitayakhun, 2010).

Another important point to consider is that Thai culture puts a premium on fun (Worthington, 2009); the Thai word is *sanuk*, where people actively seek out activities that are pleasurable rather than serious. It should be said that the concept of *sanuk* is not a casual or flippant idea in Thailand. Nearly everything one does is judged by whether or not it is fun (Tan, 2005). One of the greatest praises an English teacher can receive from Thai students is: *sawn sanuk* (fun teaching). The hard truth is that, at least for most people, learning a language is hard work, especially if they have to do it by themselves.

In her teaching experience in north-east Thailand, Worthington (2009) observed that every teaching strategy must fulfill three criteria in order to be successful: 1) active, 2) useful, and 3) fun. I agree that these three criteria are crucial, but when considering a self-access program, a fourth one must be added to the strategy; it must also be collaborative in order to draw on the collectivistic cultural dimension. Thai students will not go to the SAC to learn English. Thai students are going to go because their friends are going.

Gardner and Miller (2011) warn that even though SAC managers must work out a place-specific orientation towards self-directed learning and learner autonomy, staff must “beware of operating from too limited a set of beliefs” (p. 88). To reiterate, if initiating and implementing a SALL strategy in a Thai context, issues of meta-cognitive learning and development (White, 1995; Wichadee, 2011) and of clear learning outcomes and strategies for self-instruction (Brown, 2006) are integral; however, they are not of primary concern. The first challenge is to get the students in the door in the first place. For the SAC to work in the Thai context, the scope of beliefs needs to be widened from a focus purely on language learning to a greater sense of community, culture, and collaboration.

### **Case example and methodology**

The purpose of this study is to provide a real example of the complexities inherent in trying to introduce a self-directed learning model to a cultural group not accustomed to self-directed learning. Before continuing to describe the project further, it is necessary to disclaim that there is no intention in this paper of stereotyping or

generalizing all Thai students as dependent learners. There is a very conscious generalizing tone throughout this paper in reference to Thai students, and this is for the reason that administrators and educators (for whom this paper is intended) must work, at least to some extent, in generalizations. Yet, it must be stated clearly that there are many exceptions to every rule, and so the experiences detailed in this paper are certainly not reflective of all students neither of all schools in Thailand.

The SAC of inquiry was a newly built center on a university campus in northern Thailand. The university is located in a mid-sized city with very little tourism. This is important because Thailand's economy thrives on its tourism industry, which brings many resources and development to those places where tourists go (McCaskill, 2008). There is a real lack of English in this particular area, unlike more popular tourist destinations such as Bangkok, Phuket, or Chiang Mai, where multilingual information and services are readily available. If students only study English in the classroom, their motivation severely wanes and very few will ever develop fluency (Hayes, 2010). Since the location of this study was not benefitted with access to many international people, other strategies were necessary to create an engaging context for student language learning.

The campus itself has a population of approximately 17,000 students. The SAC was one of a list of explicit internationalization strategies employed by the university administration to enhance the language abilities of Thai students in preparation for ASEAN 2015. This SAC could accommodate approximately 150 students at any time. It was already well-equipped with the latest technologies, and budgets were sufficiently allocated for bringing in materials. There was also trained staff to work at developing home-made materials to supplement many of the resources already in hand. To put it into simple economic terms, there was a lot of supply. However, the immediate challenge for the initiative was also abundantly clear: little demand. Money and man-power alone would not translate into a thriving and productive SAC (Foskett & Lumby, 2003), and despite the greater geo-political shifts as stated in the introduction, one will not find many Thai students eager use the center. Even with a modern design and atmosphere, plentiful resources, and helpful staff, the SAC remained largely empty.

This research project employs an action research model that is highly participatory. Reason and Bradbury (2001) say that action research “seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the

pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (p. 1). The design of this of this project was to (1) conduct an exploratory poll to see what kinds of activities would draw student to a SAC to practice English. Based on the results of that poll, (2) an activity was devised to meet the expectation of the students. Following the activity, a (3) follow-up survey was taken to get participant feedback, and (4) a discussion group was convened to provide more depth and understanding of student experiences in the hope that by working together through trial and error, opportunities and designs for effective self-directed learning would present themselves. These steps are described in the following sections.

### **1. An exploratory poll**

Six-hundred ninety-nine students from every faculty (12 faculties from three discipline clusters; i.e., Science and Technology, Medical Sciences, and Social Sciences) were polled about their attitudes towards English and SALL. Firstly, they were asked about their self-perception of ability, and unanimously, all students said they must improve their English skills. This clearly shows that there is a widely, if not a wholly held belief that English is important, consistent with attitudes described in Foley (2005). However, when asked for what purposes they needed to improve English, they answered the following: for overall development (26.4%), for communication (33.1%), for daily life (28.6%), for academic purposes (5.0%), and for work or career (7.1%).

These results are informative and incredible for two reasons. The first three responses in this list, which were categorized from an open-form question, are entirely vague. Specifically for points 2 and 3 (for communication and for daily life), there are few if any opportunities for day-to-day communication in English in this area of Thailand, suggesting that, because of the vagueness, they did not have clear ideas about why English is important. The second point is that responses 4 and 5 (for academic purposes and for work or career) are the precise reasons and rationale for setting up the SAC on campus in the first place, and they are precisely the least motivating reasons for students to learn English: lots of supply and little demand.

The students were asked about what kinds of activities or resources the SAC could provide that they would like. The top three responses in order of popularity were the following: contests and events (such as karaoke competitions, debate clubs, and

speech contests); activities with foreigners (conversation partners and/or activities with native speakers); and computer-assisted language learning programs (in free computer labs).

The first two most popular answers (contests and events and activities with foreigners) are not individual or solitary activities. These activities are collaborative and fun in nature, as opposed to the self-directed learning, training, and practice for which the computer-assisted language learning programs are designed.

## **2. Activity**

The SAC organized a conversation partner program activity, which was explicitly organized not only to help students with their English skills, but to give them more exposure to international people, drawing on the student demand for activities with foreigners. International students from Australia and Malaysia, who were on campus as a part of exchange programs or enrolled in international graduate programs, volunteered their time to be English language conversation partners during designated times during the day. The program ran for two weeks as a pilot project. The conversation activities were first organized in high traffic spaces on campus to make the program visible to the largest number of students as possible and later relocated to the SAC. Seats were set in one-on-one face-to-face interview-style arrangements. I was not totally prepared, but then later not surprised about what happened next.

Thai students, shy but inquisitive, would look on at an international student sitting alone opposite an empty chair. A curious Thai student looking on would want to speak to the international student, so she would tug at the arm of a friend to go for support. That friend would then tug at another and she to another, and finally a group of friends would timidly approach the international student and collectively say "... hi." Once all were engaged, the one-on-one chairs were quickly re-arranged to make collectivistic conversation circles (and notably, not one-on-one unsupported chats). After not too long, friends followed more friends to form a constellation of conversations around the public space. They morphed from timid and rehearsed small-talk to improvised and authentic talking, joke-telling, and gossip.

## **3. Follow-up survey**

A follow up survey to the conversation program was distributed and 1276 students responded. Students were asked a number of questions regarding awareness of and

participation with the SAC, but also about their experiences with the international students. (All of the participants had participated in the conversation program at some point.) Three notable results are reported here. Firstly students were asked: Do you think that speaking with a native speaker of English is a good and fun way to improve your English skills? 81% of students answered in the positive, while 19% of students answered in the negative. Secondly, the students were asked: How much is shyness a problem for you to use English with a native speaker of English? Again, 80% responded in the positive, affirming that students perceive themselves as very shy about speaking English. Thirdly, they were asked: To what extent did speaking with an international student improve your confidence to speak English? Significantly in the positive again, 83% said that it improved their confidence.

#### **4. Discussion Group**

Twenty students who participated in the conversation voluntarily were convened to add extra perspective and reflection to specific questions regarding the conversation activity and wider questions regarding self-directed learning in general. The discussion group was not designed to be limited to 20 participants, but these volunteers were actively sought out as they were observed as active and consistent participants in the conversation activities, so their perspective were highly valued. The session lasted approximately 30 minutes.

When asked about their general thoughts about the conversation activity, students said that it was fun. They made friends. One student noted: “I have three Australian friends on Facebook. We chat online.” Other students said the same and said they can practice their English with these foreigners because they are now friends. This seemed to be okay. Another issue commonly raised about Thai students is that they are debilitated by shyness around international people. The students agreed with this general point, but one student said: “If we are friends, I am not shy anymore.” I asked about this issue with regards to talking with their international teachers, which was met with mostly silence. One student said: “Talking with *ajarn* is serious.”

#### **Discussion**

As indicated earlier, Thai students want to learn English and have a wide-spread belief that English is important and beneficial. The questions of *why* and *how* to learn English appear harder to grasp for individual students and beyond the aims of this

paper. SALL ought not to be considered as a replacement for good language teaching, nor should it be applied solely with self-directed learners in mind. Moreover, it is unreasonable to believe that SALL participation will automatically translate into higher scores in general English language proficiency tests (Shi-long, 2009). Specific objectives can be set through collaboration with lecturers, which can then be tested, but in terms of general language proficiency, the students' improvements will be largely qualitative due to the difficulties of knowing individual student goals and their variety of self-selection (Morrison, 2005). Qualitative results are not the kind that administrations like (Morrison, 2005; Gardner and Miller, 2011), but for many Thai students, increased interaction with international people and exposure to English is intensely profound and does a great deal to improve student confidence, which should not be overlooked.

While this paper focuses solely on northern Thailand, it is my understanding that educators and administrators working in other countries with similar cultural persuasions will see parallels in their own contexts to which they may consider the conclusions made here. In Hong Kong, for example, Lai and Hampy-Lyons (2001) explain that:

Students are often criticized for being passive and dependent. However, this is not a fair comment when their learning environments are confined to teacher-centered classrooms. Enthusiasm for creative and independent learning is often dampened in the traditional classroom, which cannot amply provide students with sufficient opportunities to acquire or to exercise the learning skills for autonomy...there is a need to provide other ways for students to learn more actively. Self-access learning comes as one of the more desirable alternatives. (p. 64)

Moreover, Khodadady & Ashrafborji (2013) found in their study in Japan that making friends was the main reason Japanese students wanted to learn English. They found that Japanese students were motivated to learn English for personal reasons over instrumental or integrative motivations like job preparedness or global changes.

With regards to the follow up survey to the conversation program described above, it should also be noted that participation among students varied; some students were very active and others very passive, which is a result of both high pro-activity of some students and of overcrowding and therefore less accessibility. This was an inescapable problem when trying to cater to such large numbers of a General Education program.

These circumstances will certainly have an influence over the results obtained; however, the fact that the results are overwhelmingly positive is significant. Beyond the activity itself, friendships were made between the Thai and international students, Facebook friends were added online, and the conversations shifted to the SAC in the days and weeks after.

Students are unburdened by authority and hierarchy; they are freed to simply open up and find new motivation from within to learn English by way of new friendships with international people. One international student said: “We made some really good friendships and they [the Thai students] taught us a lot,” and another commented that “I am so so happy! The students are so wonderful! Students come up to us everywhere we go and want to say hello and talk.” (More testimonials from the international students who participated in this project can be seen at the following link: <http://discover.scu.edu.au/2011/issue3/index.php/8/>).

This is the beginning of self-directed learning, but it is other-inspired. This is self-access, but it is not independent. Many will say that shyness is a Thai student’s greatest weakness and barrier to developing their language skills, but as Worthington (2009) observed and also as supported by the conversation program described above, Thai students can actually be very expressive. Shyness may not necessarily be the problem as much as fear. What tends to stand in the way of student expression in the classroom is ironically, the teacher: “Talking with *ajarn* is serious.” Fear of making a mistake, mispronouncing a word, confusing the syntax, or being misunderstood by the teacher is stifling, something repeatedly expressed by the discussion group. *Students teaching students* became a working mantra for this SAC project. Leveling the hierarchy of communication allowed for freer expression than what is allowed between a student and a teacher. To reiterate Hayes (2010), there is a mismatch between the socio-cultural expectations of a teacher and current trends in language pedagogy.

While teaching in Thailand does need to improve, the issues are not only of standards of expertise. The issues are cultural. The *ajarn* is an important symbol in Thailand, and it needs to be respected. At the same time, in order to learn English, students need to be pro-active and need to be given opportunities free of cultural restraints. For junior people, self-expression is generally discouraged in Thai society and constant deference and humility to seniors is important. This may work well for maintaining order, harmony, and familial relations in Thai society, but it does not

work well for learning a language. The appropriate response to this cultural issue is not to ignore it and ask students to suspend this part of their identity. As observed in this paper, when the relationship dynamic was leveled and made sincerely *mutual* and *equal* by providing international *student* conversation partners, students were not put at risk of breaking cultural norms, and they were largely free to express themselves despite communication difficulties. In this paper, I hope to have shown that SALL, by use of an SAC, can provide for that safe LPD space where students could be freer to use language in dynamic ways, which then may help to support not only students but teachers as well.

### **Conclusion**

An SAC can be a kind of hub on campus, a meeting place with a community of users who have an active role in its development and function. These are the conditions needed to draw on the cultural strengths that Thai students possess, and likely for other more collectivistic cultures as well. Morrison (1998) says that SAC's need to be seen as a "stepping-stone for the learner on the road to the ideal of full learner autonomy, with a medium-term goal of enabling the learner to take responsibility for her own learning" (p. 130), and then propelled to the eventual goal of independent life-long learning. Once students are in the door of the SAC, it is then up to the staff, in collaboration with the students and teachers, to stimulate language learners through fun and interactive means to realize the usefulness of English in their lives and to better prepare them for the regional and global realities ahead. The goal of learning English in order to communicate with international friends may not be as lofty as academic and professional goals, but I would argue that it is the beginning, for many Thai students, of an ASEAN Community.

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**Reading to learn: Integrated reading and writing to teach  
academic writing course**

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**Bioprofile**

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**Abstract**

This paper deals with a teaching strategy called *Reading to Learn (R2L)* in second language writing, in the field of English Education. Writing in second language (L2) is much more difficult and complicated than writing in the first language or L1. Writing in L2 has always been a *nightmare* for many students, especially in high-level writing, like tertiary level. This paper offers an alternative which can be effective to encourage students of *Academic Writing* to prepare before reading, do careful or detailed reading, prepare to write, write collaboratively, produce individual reconstruction, and finally produce an essay individually. All these are done through some stages in a continuous cycle; the cycle of R2L. *Academic Writing* course, which is offered for the fifth semester students at the Faculty of Language and Literature (FLL), Satya Wacana Christian University Salatiga, is a four-credit course which can be tiring, stressing and boring if teachers cannot manage the class well and prepare an intriguing syllabus. The writer thus wants to share her ideas in applying *Reading to*

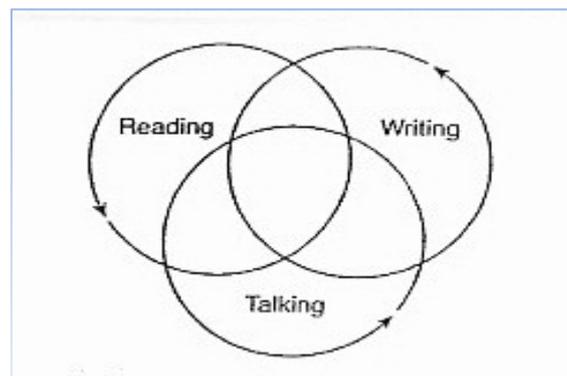
*Learn (R2L) strategy to teach Academic Writing students. The writer hopes that the ideas in this paper will inspire other lecturers of writing in second language setting, in Indonesia as well as other Asian countries.*

**Keywords: Reading to Learn (R2L), Reading, Writing, Academic Writing**

## **Introduction**

There are some quotations which describe the beautiful relationship between reading and writing. Two of them are: Reading and writing are forms of life, not just reflections of it (Geoffrey Hartman, 1996, in Kern, 2000), and Reading and writing, as recursive acts of communication, lend themselves particularly well to analysis and reflection about the process of producing and interpreting meaning through language (Kern, 2000).

According to Kern, reading and writing ought to be viewed as intertwined, integrated process from both theoretical and pedagogical perspectives (Kern, 2000). Reading and writing can act as meaning design. In literacy, the relationship of reading and writing is not linear, but overlapping. Kern describes the relationship of reading, writing, and talking in a figure as follows (Kern, 2000).



There are intersections between reading and writing, reading and talking, writing and talking, and among the three of them; that is, in the middle of the where the three circles meet. However, what will be covered in this paper is reading and writing. As described in the picture above, there is an intersection, which describes the overlapping part of reading and writing.

This is how reading and writing overlaps in details that are more specific. Reading and writing overlap when students write formal essays about what they have read (Kern, 2000). They also overlap when students use writing to: concretely represent

thoughts an interpretations of texts they have read, write their own version of a topic or a theme before reading the target text, write reflections on their own reading processes, read to improve their writing, and actively and critically read their own and their peers' writing in the editing process.

However, I believe that reading and writing can be integrated in 'harmonious arrangement', in such a way that reading, prior to writing, will help and enhance students' academic essays. This study is thus a proposal of a teaching model using *Reading to Learn* strategy to teach Academic Writing. The focus of this study is to find a common method which will relate teaching reading and writing as a unified skill. This study is particularly relevant to L2 learning, at primary, secondary, or tertiary educational level.

The central question to be answered in this paper is thus stated as the following:  
How can reading and writing be integrated to teach academic writing?

### **Significance of the study**

Theoretically, this particular learning model based on active learning and collaborative principles will hopefully give new color to the teaching of academic writing. Practically, this piece of research will hopefully give some insights for lecturers of academic writing at tertiary level, especially in implementing the TLP. Pedagogically, the R2L strategy in Academic Writing will help L2 learners in writing process as well as products, and will be beneficial and inspire other writing teachers to create better teaching-learning process.

### **Teaching Reading**

Peeping some favorite quotations on reading might be useful. William Faulkner (in Gilks, 2002) says:

Read, read, read. Read everything-trash, classics, good and bad and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it is good, you'll find out. If it's not, throw it out the window.

It means that as readers, we must read everything, but at the same time, be selective and critical as well. Another famous quotation is by Umberto Eco (1979, as cited in Kern, 2000, p.107), "Texts are lazy machineries that ask someone to do part of their job."

Reading is not simply an act of absorbing information, but a communicative act that involves creating discourse from text. The key to understanding passages is to look at them as rhetorical acts of communication, not just lists of facts. This is followed by awareness of the relationships among various sentences and an ability to follow the “discourse trail” established by the author. Tannen (1983), (as cited in Kern, 2000, p. 109) argues, “Oral discourse strategies may in fact be crucial to effective writing and reading”. In understanding a passage, this passage should be seen as rhetorical acts of communication, followed by awareness of the relationships among various sentences, and the ability to follow the discourse trail, which is established by the writer. This discourse trail might be redesigned in a dialog form, A representing writer’s contribution, and B representing a potential reader response (Widdowson, 1983).

Here is an example of how discourse strategy works (A is the writer’s contribution, while B is a potential reader’s response):

A: Stigmergy” is a new word, invented recently by Grassé to explain the nest-building behavior of termites, perhaps generalizable to other complex social activities of social animals.

B : What exactly does ‘stigmergy’ mean?

A: The word is made of Greek roots meaning ‘to incite work,’ and Grassé’s intention was to indicate that it is the product of work itself that provides both the stimulus and instructions for further work.

In written interaction, however, the writer must explicitly provide whatever contextual information to allow readers to make intended inferences. Readers, in turn, must reconstruct a context of interpretation based both on the cues provided in the text, and also their own experience and knowledge. Riley (1985), in Kern (2000, p.109) states: “We all may read the same text, but no two people ever ‘read’ the same discourse because they never bring exactly the same knowledge, expectations, and contexts to bear on the text”. Reading does not require us to submit to the writer’s discourse world, as we would do in an interpersonal communicative encounter. Readers can negotiate meaning on his/her own terms.

### **Why reading should be taught prior to writing**

According to Babatua (2008), every writer reads his own stuff, and puts his stuff to use in his own way. There are two ways to become a better writer in general: write a lot, and read a lot. There are no other steps. Beyond reading for pleasure, a good writer also reads with an eye for the writing. What we learn as readers, we use as writers. So, it can be said that over time, our writing becomes in some ways a compilation of all the things we've learned as readers, blended together in our own unique recipe.

This strengthened by Simon, et al. (2009) who mention that it is intuitively obvious, that one cannot learn to write until one has learnt to read. Kress (in Grainger, 2004) also claims that reading and writing are always socially embedded activities involving relationships, shared assumptions, and conventions as well as individual, personal acts involving imagination, creativity, and emotions.

Hedge (2014, p.13) also claims that it will be beneficial for students to be exposed to models of different text types, so that they can develop awareness of what makes a good writing. "Reading", Hedge explains, "is necessary and valuable." However, this is not enough. To be a good writer, a student needs to write a lot, too.

Inferring the thoughts above, it can be said that to write, we need to read. What we read may be unlimited. We may read and write about relationships, assumptions, conventions, as well as acts. As Faulkner says, we should read everything, and it is up to us as readers, to keep what we have read, or to discard what we do not need.

### **Teaching Writing**

In writing activity, precision is one requirement that must be fulfilled. Hedge (2003, p. 302) states that, "One of the most important facts about composing process...is that the process that creates precision is itself messy." Writing in native language is of course different from writing in a second or foreign language. Hedge further states that writing in a second language is more complicated and difficult.

Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to understand that there are many differences between L1 and L2 writing (Brown, 2001). Kern (2000) explains that L2 writing is complexified by the addition of new resources and norms (new structural elements of the new language, new rhetorical conventions, etc). Writing in second language will be more difficult\less effective than writing in native language, if

learner is less familiar with these new resources and less confident in the use (Kern, 2000).

Writing is the result of employing strategies to manage the composing process. Writing involves a number of activities. One of the most important facts about composing process is that the process that creates precision is itself messy (Hedge, 2003). It is imperative for teachers to understand that there are many differences between L1 and L2 writing (Brown, 2001). L2 writing is complexified by the addition of new resources and norms (new structural elements of the new language, new rhetorical conventions, etc). Writing in second language will be more difficult\less effective than writing in native language, if learner is less familiar with these new resources and less confident in the use (Kern, 2000).

Tribble (2012, p.13) adds that learning to write is not a question of developing a set of mechanical orthographic skills: it also involves learning a new set of cognitive and social relations. Tribble further states:

...for a variety of practical reasons, it is through the mastery of writing that the individual comes to be fully effective in intellectual organization, not only in the management of everyday affairs, but also in the expression of ideas and arguments.

From the statements above, I can conclude that writing can be powerful, and writing can be associated with control of information, as well as people, as Hedge states in his book, *Writing*.

### **R2L (Reading to Learn): One Solution for Integrated reading and writing**

Many of us may wonder what is meant by Reading to Learn (R2L). Here is the history of R2L. Originally, *Reading to Learn* was initially designed to help children of remote communities in Central Australia. David Rose worked with the people there for many years. The community leaders and the teaching assistants there addressed concern that the Aboriginal children could finish primary school without or with just a little literacy of English. There was even no standard of complete the further educational levels (Rose & Martin, 2012). Teachers reported that a minority of learners are consistently able to actively engage in classroom activities, to respond successfully to teacher's questions, and succeed in assessment tasks (Rose, 2005).

In order to fulfill this, David initiated a project called Scaffolding Reading and Writing for Indigenous Children in School. He worked with Brian Gray and Wendy Cowey. Gray had previously developed strategies for teaching indigenous children to

read in the early 1980s, and it was successful. In the program, Gray used texts that were created collaboratively by teachers and students. This program emphasized building understanding of a text, before reading it. Besides that, careful planning of teacher-learner interactions was provided with maximum supports.

At the beginning, David worked with teachers from Pitjantjatjara secondary school students. They synthesized the genre writing pedagogy, and conducted Writing Right research with these reading strategies. The results were encouraging. By the end of the project's first year, all students had been able to read at "age-appropriate" levels. One of the successful students was Craig, who reported about Goannas. (Rose, 2005)

The success of students like Craig had attracted national attention and led to many requests. David was asked to work with school programs across the country and many Australian school students have benefited from this professional learning program. This program was later known as R2L (Reading to Learn). Working with many teachers and teacher educators, David could later on develop this R2L. This methodology was later on shaped to be broad and flexible to work in any pedagogical situation.

The problem with reading was not experienced by Indigenous students only, but also by many students from all backgrounds. Teachers reported that very few students consistently responded to their classroom questions with answers that teachers can verify. Most of them rarely responded, or responded less successfully, while others hardly participated. In lower socioeconomic areas, teachers reported that only one, two or three students responded, out of 20 or 30 students. Communication breakdown was unavoidable. Rose and Martin (2012: 140) stated that this condition caused a double challenge for reading pedagogy in school. On one hand, they wanted to provide teachers with strategies that can develop students' reading and writing skills. On the other hand, they need to deliver the strategies to students with a wide range of abilities and engagement in learning.

Learning to Read: Reading to Learn, has then been developed in response to current urgent needs, particularly of Indigenous and other marginalized learners, to rapidly improve reading and writing for both educational access and success. That is how the methodology for teaching reading and writing was developed through long-term action research project with teachers in Australia (Rose, 2005). David Rose is the director of Reading to Learn, an international literacy program that trains teachers across schools and universities in Australia, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

Rose (2005) was initially thinking of how teachers can support all learners to manage such complexity (processing letter patterns, spelling system which is complex, systems of meaning that wordings realize, layers of structure in the discourse semantic stratum between sentences and texts, as well as shorter phases of meaning within each stage that are variable) when reading and writing.

Starting from teachers' frustration over their students' condition, Rose then designed *Reading to Learn* strategies, which are to be applied at any point in the reading development of sequence, as repair or part of ordinary teaching practice (Rose, 2005). This can be adjusted to any level of education, including secondary or tertiary level. Celce-Murcia defines teaching strategy as strategies are under the learner's conscious control, they are operations which the learner chooses to use to direct or check his/her own comprehension (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

### The cycle of R2L

The figure below describes the cycle of *Reading to Learn* (R2L) (Rose, 2005) with the six stages.

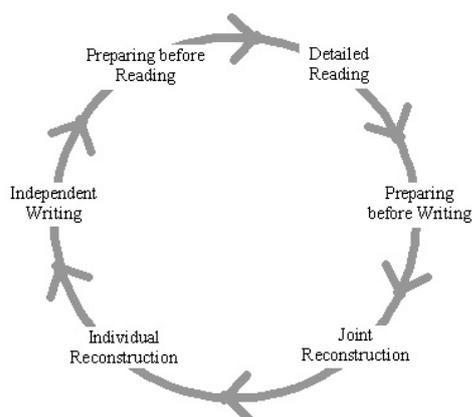


Figure 1: The cycle of Reading to Learn (Rose, 2005, p. 147)

### Three theoretical bases of R2L

*Reading to Learn* is based on three theories, which are elaborated as follows (Rose, 2005). Firstly, R2L is based on Bernstein's theory. Pedagogic discourse includes two dimensions: first is the discourse which creates specialised skills and their relationship to each other as instructional discourse, and the second is the moral discourse which creates order, relations and identity [as] regulative discourse.

The second theory is Vygotskian social learning. Learning is presumed to happen within individuals in their growth, as they master one step after another. The

Vygotskyan model claims that learning takes place in the ‘zone’ between what learners can do independently and what they can do with the support of a teacher.

The last one is Haliday’s theory of language. The notion of realisation, where meaning is realised as wording (i.e. ‘expressed/ symbolised/ manifested’), and wording is realised as sounding or lettering. The stages of R2L are discussed below.

### **Stage 1. Preparing before Reading**

In the first stage of R2L cycle, as initially designed for Aboriginal learners, *Preparing before Reading*, a story or part of it is read aloud with the class, but learners are first prepared to follow the words with understanding, by giving them the background knowledge they need to access it, by telling them what the story is about, and by summarising the sequence in which it is told.

### **Stage 2. Detailed Reading**

At this stage of the pedagogy (*Detailed Reading*), students can begin to read the wordings for themselves, but the complexity of this task is alleviated by selecting a short passage and reading it sentence-by-sentence, while providing adequate support for all learners to recognise wordings from the perspective of their meaning.

### **Stage 3. Preparing before Writing**

In this stage, students are given the general framework of genre and field within which to rewrite the text. The teacher then prepares students to imagine new texts, by drawing attention to notes, suggesting alternative wordings, and further discussing the field.

Rose gives a term to the cycle of preparing, identifying, and elaborating as scaffolding interaction cycle (Rose, 2005). This cycle formally describes the micro-interactions involved in parent-child reading (Rose, 2000a). The formal description enables teachers to carefully plan a discussion around the language features in a text, to think through which language features will be focused on at each step, how the teacher will prepare students to identify them, and how they will elaborate on them.

The scaffolding cycle systematically renovates the ‘triadic dialogue’ or ‘IRF’ (Initiation-Response-Feedback) pattern, described by Nassaji & Wells (2000), in Rose (2005), among many others as endemic to classroom discourse. However, there are

three crucial differences between the typical IRF classroom pattern and scaffolding interactions.

The first difference is, the initial scaffolding move is not simply a question eliciting a response from learners, but consistently prepares all learners to respond successfully. Secondly, the follow-up move is not simply feedback that evaluates or comments on responses, but consistently elaborates on shared knowledge about text features. Thirdly, responses are always affirmed, whereas responses that are inadequately prepared in IRF discourse are frequently negated or ignored.

Rose then suggests that IRF has evolved as the invisible central motor of classroom inequality that continually but imperceptibly differentiates learners on their ability to respond, from the first to last years of schooling. In contrast, scaffolding interactions are explicitly designed to enable all students in a class to always respond successfully.

One of the greatest difficulties teachers find in Rose's in service training is moving from "habituated IRF discourse to preparing each move", that is, from continually demanding to giving information. This is because IRF discourse is not directly taught in teacher training, but is habituated through twelve or more years of their socialization as learners in classrooms, with a minimum 12. 000 hours of intensive conditioning, that can be very hard to undo. The scaffolding interaction cycle is thus employed for supporting writing, in the form of "prepare-select-elaborate". The figure will look like the following.

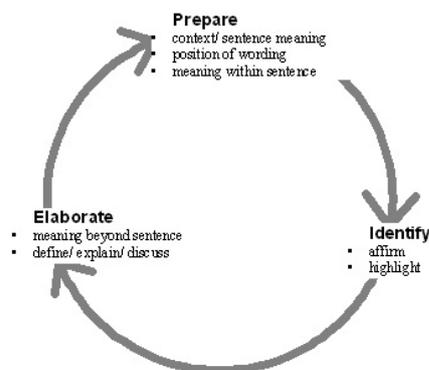


Figure 2. The scaffolding interaction cycle (Rose, 2005, p. 155)

Rose (2005) claims that three crucial differences between the typical IRF classroom pattern and scaffolding interactions. First, the initial scaffolding move is not simply "a question eliciting a response from learners", but consistently prepares all learners to respond successfully. The second one is that the follow-up move is not

simply feedback that evaluates or comments on responses, but it consistently elaborates on shared knowledge about text features. The last difference is that responses are always affirmed, but this does not happen in typical IRF classroom pattern. Responses that are inadequately prepared in IRF discourse are frequently negated or ignored.

#### **Stage 4. Joint Reconstruction**

The teacher guides the class to write a new text, with all learners taking turns to scribe/write on the class board. With story texts, joint reconstruction uses the same literate language patterns as the original passage, with new content – events, characters, settings and so on.

#### **Stage 5. Individual Reconstruction**

Learners use the text patterns or notes they have practised with the class to write a text of their own.

#### **Stage 6. Independent Writing**

This stage involves using the same text patterns again, but with individual stories, using and expanding ideas discussed with the class. As with all other stages of the curriculum cycle, some students will be able to do this activity more independently, enabling the teacher to provide support for weaker writers in the class.

Talking about reading materials, all reading texts can always be adjusted. Academic reading texts, for example, can be used for tertiary level. According to Sengupta (2002), academic reading is purposeful and critical reading of a range of lengthy academic texts for completing the study of specific major subject areas. Academic reading requires both extensive and intensive reading, careful synthesizing of materials from a number of sources, and consciously finding authorial intentions and purposes.

In line with materials selection, Brown (2001, p.313-315) points out some principles for teachers in designing interactive reading techniques. They are as follows.

1. First, he reminds teachers not to overlook the importance of specific instruction in reading skills. He further states that continuous silent reading

helps learners to develop a sense of fluency and it can become an excellent method for the learners' self-instruction.

2. The next principle that teacher needs considering is the techniques used should be intrinsically motivating. He suggests that teachers select materials relevant to the goals.
3. Thirdly, Brown (2001) claims that teachers should balance authenticity and readability. Brown says that authentic simple materials, not the simplified ones, can either be planned or located in the real world. Simplified texts, according to Brown, are really simpler than the original, and sometimes they remove so much natural redundancy, that they finally become very difficult; simplified texts may not really be simpler.

About the selection of materials, citing from Nuttall, Brown (2001) also suggests that the selected materials should be interesting, enjoyable, challenging, and appropriate for the goals. They should also be exploitable for tasks and techniques, and can be integrated with other skills. Finally, the materials should have lexical and structural difficulty that will challenge students instead of overwhelming them. Teachers definitely have to select the appropriate materials and adjust them for the students' levels.

The six stages of R2L Cycle are applicable in real life Academic Writing Class. The following are the descriptions of this design works along with the activities for the given class.

In the first stage, teachers can ask students to read a passage with argumentative mode as a model. In the following stage, detailed reading, students should start thinking of rewriting a similar text.

Next, preparing before writing, students are given the general framework of genre and field within which to rewrite the text. The teacher then prepares students to imagine new texts, by drawing attention to notes, suggesting alternative wordings, and further discussing the field.

In stage 4, the teacher guides the class to write a new text, with all learners taking turns to scribe/write on the class board. With story texts, joint reconstruction uses the same literate language patterns as the original passage, with new content – events, characters, settings and so on. The next stage is Individual reconstruction. Learners use the text patterns or notes they have practised with the class to write a text of their own.

The last stage involves using the same text patterns again, but with individual stories, using and expanding ideas discussed with the class. As with all other stages of the curriculum cycle, some students will be able to do this activity more independently, enabling the teacher to provide support for weaker writers in the class. In the appendices, I attached a tentative syllabus of Academic Writing class with four credit hours per week, applying R2L. The essays used are also attached.

## **Conclusion**

Reading and writing are interrelated. Reading prior to writing can enhance students' writing. Any model can be used to teach any subject, as long as it is adjusted with the class situation and students' needs as well. R2L was originally designed to urge indigenous Australian students to learn to write, but as Rose states, this can be adjusted and modified for any educational level.

Considering my interest in skills courses, including writing, I see the need to propose various teaching methods in those courses. This is to enrich teachers' experiences in teaching and exploring new teaching methods. Besides that, this is also important to give varieties during the teaching learning process so that students' boredom can be avoided.

I suggest that writing teachers or lecturers start adopting this strategy, that is, *Reading to Learn*. Reading and writing can be integrated as complementary and successive skills to each other. Lecturers can create a syllabus involving reading and writing at the same semester.

The results of this proposed model will hopefully give significant contributions to the teaching of writing at tertiary level, and help writing teachers widen their horizon and insight in using various teaching models.

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