

Has the GMS Educational Policy on English Reading at the Tertiary Level Been Effectively Interpreted and Implemented?¹

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Abstract

This study explored the question of whether the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) educational policy on English reading had been effectively interpreted and implemented for suggestions leading to policy changes to develop university students' English reading proficiency. The process involved matching the policy with findings from both the students and teachers in four areas: reading strategies, favored perspectives on reading instructions, learning needs, and problems. Quantitative findings from 757 students' reading strategy questionnaires were supported by qualitative findings from in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 72 randomly-selected samples (36 teachers and 36 students; six from each GMS country), questionnaires of needs and problems, perspectives on reading instructions, including three English reading learning and teaching scenarios and a documentary study. The quantitative findings from the survey show that although most of the GMS students and teachers thought that they had used both cognitive and metacognitive strategies, the qualitative results reveal that teachers and students employed cognitive rather than metacognitive strategies on average. Among the other findings, the constructivist and direct instructions were their most favored perspectives on reading instructions. While the teachers' main problem was inadequate initiatives, the students' primary needs were lack of

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autonomous learning and unbalanced cognitive and metacognitive strategies for reading. Moreover, only the Chinese and Vietnamese policies were somewhat effectively interpreted and implemented, while the rest were not. This suggests that policy changes or modifications to serve the teachers' and students' needs should be made.

Keywords: GMS educational policy, effectively interpreted and implemented, English reading, tertiary level

Introduction

English as an international language is vitally important for upgrading human resources for country development at all levels, through educational development to improve the workforce. As the GMS nations are affiliated with ASEAN, English serves as the official working language and plays a significant role in fostering cooperation in human resource development (ADB, 1995). This contributes directly to economic growth and competitiveness, particularly for low- and lower-middle-income countries in the GMS (OECD, 2000). This is aligned with the cooperation on educational policy of the GMS countries within the ASEAN community, focusing on the university context, which was declared at the higher education meeting among the ASEAN community in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (ASEAN Secretariat, 2008). The important agenda focusing on the higher education and student/staff mobility covered six main areas of cooperation: 1) connecting initiatives related to higher education within the region, 2) developing a commonly agreed platform and operating mechanisms for sharing and managing data on mobility, 3) establishing a working group to harmonize mobility activities with respect to credit transfer and quality assurance, 4) conceptualizing a single ASEAN brand scholarship by 2025, 5) coordinating capacity building for staff involved in managing the mobility program, and 6) offering leadership development programs for ASEAN higher education leaders.

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the GMS educational policy's interpretation and implementation and its impact

on declining English proficiency among students (EF-Education First, 2022). Regarding the policy, particularly in English development, it faces many challenges, since three of the GMS nations—Vietnam, China, and Thailand—have determined the level of students' English competence in all four abilities based on the CEFR scales or IELTS bands, whereas the other three—Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar—have not. These latter three countries have not yet set an agreed national qualifications framework for English; therefore, the national framework or English qualifications of these three countries could only be inferred from ancillary evidence shown by a variety of previous studies and internationally recognized organizations like the British Council. This situation is closely relevant to the case of Cambodia, where, according to Zein and Haing (2017), "a standardized practice of English language teaching does not seem to exist in higher education institutions in Cambodia in any departments, faculties or universities."

In addition, the researchers refer to the results of the EF English Reading Proficiency Index (EF EPI) for all six countries where possible. The EF EPI is the world's largest-ranking of 111 countries and regions, conducted by EF Education First, and it assesses English language skills among 2.1 million adults using the free online EF test. The index revealed that between 2017 and 2022, most GMS students' English proficiency decreased from low to very low, except for Vietnam, which showed low to moderate ranks (EF-Education First, 2022). However, for the 2023 EF EPI, index, Vietnam (58) was still ranked at moderate proficiency while China (82) and Myanmar (90) were in a low proficiency group but Thailand (101) was in a very low one among 113 countries. There was no evidence regarding Cambodia or Laos on this list (EF-Education First, 2023).

While the GMS recognizes the importance of English reading by mandating its inclusion as a compulsory subject from primary to tertiary levels, several research findings indicate that university students still lack reading strategies (Lee, 2012; Attaprechakul, 2013). This deficiency affects comprehension among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Oxford (1990) emphasized the need to train EFL learners

in effectively applying reading strategies, enabling them to become self-directed learners and transfer their skills to new situations. Kaya (2015) revealed that using effective reading strategies enhanced students' comprehension and language skills. This is related to the study of Aghaie and Zhang (2012), which found that explicit reading strategy instruction improved students' strategy use, comprehension, and transfer. The group that received such instruction favored metacognitive over cognitive skills, enhancing cross-language application. Post-training, metacognitive strategies increased, supported by metacognitive knowledge. This training also helped improve autonomous reading habits, suggesting its potential in curriculum design to foster positive learner beliefs and metacognitive skills.

Furthermore, fostering mutual understanding between teachers and students in learning reading strategies is essential for literacy development. Educational policies should take into account students' needs and teachers' expertise in literacy and instruction to promote autonomous learning and help students transfer acquired strategies and language skills to real-life situations (Holme and Chalausaeng, 2006). The COVID-19 pandemic has further emphasized the need to improve students' reading skills, particularly with school closures and the shift to online learning in GMS countries. Policies must address the challenges in English reading proficiency for both teachers and students to adapt effectively to the demands of the digital age. This aligns with the study by Manakul, Nguyen, and Tuamsuk (2021), which highlights that digital intelligence is becoming increasingly important in the digital age as it shapes our interaction with digital environment in terms of national policies, research areas, and the educational sector.

There is a research gap in the literature regarding correlated studies of all six GMS educational policies regarding pedagogical reading strategies. Previous research has focused primarily on groups of students in each country only. The present study aims to fill this gap by examining and comparing the effective interpretation and implementation of policies across the entire GMS group.

Definitions and Theoretical Framework

Definitions

The following terms are specific definitions for this study.

GMS: The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) group is formed based on the Mekong River basin (ADB, 1995) and includes Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Yunnan province of the People's Republic of China. It also includes Guangxi province of the People's Republic of China even though it is not located on the Mekong basin (Summers, 2008). Thus, the term "GMS university students" refers to international students from the GMS countries studying in their first year in various universities either in Thailand or their own countries while "GMS university teachers" refers to the teachers teaching English reading in the GMS context.

Reading strategies are those under the cognitive and meta-cognitive reading strategies proposed by O'Malley and Chamot (1990) and Oxford (1990) which the teachers and students consciously choose or naturally engage when reading English academic texts.

Perspectives on reading instructions, Carnine and Gesten (1986) proposed the following four: the pessimist, generalist, constructivist and direct instruction, which reflect both the GMS university teachers' and students' favorite perspectives on reading instruction for improving their English reading proficiency.

Needs refers to the learning needs in improving English reading proficiency of the GMS university students identified through needs analysis covering objective and subjective needs. The objective needs analysis consists of two sub-categories—the target situation and the present situation needs analyses; while the subjective needs analysis includes three sub-categories i.e., learner-based (individual differences and learning style), strategy, and means analysis (organizational factors, material factors, participant, classroom culture) (Robinson, 1991; Brindley, 1989; White, 1988).

English reading proficiency refers to different levels of English reading proficiency based on some specific framework of reference

required, such as the Band of IELTS tests or scores of TOEFL or scales of CEFR or scales of CSE (China's Standards of English Language Ability), language proficiency scales for alignments on a global basis. Although there was no explicit mention of cognitive and metacognitive strategies in the description of B1 on the CEFR scales requiring students to be able to “read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to each his/ her field and interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension,” there is a link between English reading proficiency and cognitive and metacognitive strategies in its description. This is because in order to meet that requirement satisfactorily, the students must be able to use both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. This is clearly reflected through the definition of both reading strategies. “Cognitive strategies include making predictions, translating, summarizing, and linking with prior knowledge or experience, and applying grammar rules and guessing meaning from contexts, while meta-cognitive strategies are related to self-management or self-regulation in a given reading activity” (Zhang and Guo, 2019). That is the reason this study focuses on identifying cognitive and metacognitive reading strategies on the part of both the GMS teachers and students.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

This exploratory research aims to find some practical suggestions for the GMS educational policy improvement to enhance the university students' English reading proficiency because literacy development, including English, is essential for emergent nations. Despite recognizing its importance, GMS governments have faced challenges in maintaining English reading proficiency. Currently, there is no empirical study exploring the effectiveness and providing practical suggestions for policy improvement, particularly at the tertiary level. The present study's conceptual framework outlines the fundamental concept.

Aiming for emergent nations of the GMS group through educational development by increasing literacy comprising English as an international language for global communication and an official language for ASEAN

Identifying: 1) reading strategies, 2) perspectives on reading instructions, 3) needs, and 4) problems of both the GMS teachers and students

Analyzing each GMS educational policy and matching it with the four discovered aspects to explore the effectiveness of the policy's interpretation and implementation focusing on English proficiency of university students

Leading to some practical suggestions for policy improvement in terms of changes or modifications

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the study

Research Objectives

The two main research objectives of this study are: 1) to identify reading strategies, perspectives on reading instruction, problems, and needs of the GMS university teachers and students and GMS educational policy; and 2) to explore whether or not the GMS educational policy has been effectively interpreted and implemented.

Methodology

This study was approved by the Khon Kaen University Ethics Committee on Research with approval number: HE633162 on March 3, 2021.

The quantitative data were drawn from three sets of research tools: the English reading proficiency test, the questionnaires of reading strategies, the perspectives of reading instructions, as well as needs and problems.

The English reading proficiency tests were adapted from the standardized test known as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) materials (Hashemi and Thomas, 2011). The purposively selected passages focused on two main fields of study to serve the students studying in sciences and technology (ST) and humanities and social sciences (HUSOC). To establish the confidence value of the whole test, the statistical value of the overall score was calculated by using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Formula (.838 for ST and .861 for HUSOC) and IOC. After the participants had taken this test, their scores were used to classify the levels of their English reading proficiency to group them into three different sets: high, intermediate, and low proficiency. In collecting data, this was to compare their findings among three sets to determine whether they were the same or different in terms of their reading strategies, perspectives, needs, and problems. Thus, their test scores were mapped against the scales of the Common European Framework (CEFR) and the bands of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) to identify their reading ability.

The questionnaires, which were translated into six languages, focused on reading strategies, perspectives of reading instructions, as well as needs and problems in teaching and learning English reading. They were used to collect quantitative data from 757 students (358 from other GMS countries and 399 from Thailand). This sample was drawn from a population of 114,963 first-year university students in the academic year 2020, representing five well-established Thai universities: Chulalongkorn, Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Burapha, and Prince of Songkla University. These universities are located in the central, northern, northeastern, eastern, and southern regions of Thailand, respectively. Using the methods of quantitative data analysis, all of the quantitative data from the questionnaires were processed through the SPSS program and then presented in the forms of percent (%), mean

(\bar{x}), and standard deviation (SD). In addition, the results of the tests were calculated through the simple sum of the statistics summation of the students' raw scores. Then they were matched with the IELTS bands and the CEFR scales for grouping the students' samples into three sets based on their levels of English reading proficiency: high, intermediate, and low.

The qualitative data were derived from the in-depth semi-structured interviews emphasizing reading strategies in use, perspectives of reading instructions reflected through preferable scenarios, and needs and problems in teaching and learning English reading, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. The in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 72 purposively selected participants, consisting of 36 teachers and 36 students (six teachers and six students from each GMS country). The students were classified into three proficiency levels (high, high-intermediate, and low-intermediate) based on the results of their English reading proficiency test as no participant demonstrated a low level of English proficiency. The entire GMS student population, along with the selected samples and teachers, constituted the research environment. The sample size was determined using stratified sampling, employing the Taro Yamane Formula for calculation (Yamane, 1973).

Content analysis involves abstracting raw data into categories or themes, moving from literal content to latent meanings. This study used the method of Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) to examine educational policies in GMS countries, focusing on improving university students' English reading proficiency. It compared policies with empirical findings to assess consistency. Triangulation with three inter-coders enhances validity and credibility, and reduces research bias.

The example of content analysis was based on an excerpt of the content of the transcribed in-depth, semi-structured interview texts from one of the Vietnamese samples responding to the question, "Did you have any problem in developing your reading proficiency during the Covid-19 pandemic? If so, please give some examples." The steps of content analysis are shown in the table below.

Table 1 Example of the content analysis

Overarching theme: Problems, existing solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the educational policy change due to the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Steps of content analysis	Results of the content analysis
Theme	Problems, existing solutions, and needs in improving reading ability after the educational policy change due to the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic
Category	Problems in lacking concentration and motivation to read through online learning
Code	Lack of concentration and motivation
Condensed meaning unit	Difficulty in concentrating on reading through online learning/lacking motivation for reading or feeling too lazy to read while studying alone/ miss the classroom atmosphere with direct human interaction with teachers and friends/ prefer learning on-site to learning online
Meaning unit (Raw data)	I have difficulty concentrating on my reading through online learning. I feel like I lack the motivation to read. In other words, I feel too lazy to read while studying alone in my dormitory. I miss the classroom atmosphere with direct human interaction with teachers and friends. I prefer learning on-site to learning online if I can choose.

Findings

The findings addressed two main research objectives: 1) the reading strategies, perspectives on reading instructions, problems, and needs of GMS university teachers and students, as well as the GMS educational policy for English reading proficiency development; and 2) the effectiveness of the policy's interpretation and implementation. The findings were summarized, representing two types: relatively effective and relatively ineffective interpretation and implementation of national educational policies.

All identified findings, both quantitative and qualitative, from teachers and students were matched with corresponding GMS policies to explore their effectiveness. The presentation of findings was guided

by this matching process. Findings related to reading strategies, perspectives on reading instructions, needs, and problems were presented accordingly.

Results of Matching the GMS Teachers' and Students' Reading Strategies with Individual Policies

The first set of results was discovering the reading strategies of both teachers and students in English comprehension reading classes. The quantitative data were derived from the students' questionnaires while the qualitative data were obtained from the content analysis of the in-depth interviews of the teachers and students. These findings then were matched with the reading requirements within the policy framework of English proficiency of each country. According to the study on the educational policies of six countries in the GMS, China, Vietnam, and Thailand are the three countries with clearly-stated educational policies regarding English reading proficiency levels, whereas Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar do not have publicly-stated policies, as presented in the following table.

In particular, based on the Chinese educational policy, Chinese bachelor's degree graduates are required to have a minimum English reading proficiency of CSE Band 6, which is equivalent to B1+ on the CEFR scale. Similarly, Vietnamese bachelor's degree undergraduates in general fields, excluding English, are required to have a minimum level of B1 in English reading proficiency. Thai university students are also required to reach a minimum level of B1 in English reading proficiency according to the policy. Although there is no explicitly stated policy, based on research sources, it is assumed that Laotian students have a minimum English reading proficiency at the B1 CEFR scale. Additionally, the British Council in Myanmar suggests that undergraduate students in Myanmar are expected to reach an advanced level, equivalent to C1 on the CEFR scale. In the case of Cambodian students, there is no explicitly stated policy, but their English proficiency levels are assumed to be between B1+ and B2, based on the criteria of passing the entrance exam of recognized universities.

Table 2 The GMS educational policy on English reading instruction

The requirement of English reading proficiency / The assumption of English reading proficiency	The explicitly stated educational policy			The explicitly unstated educational policy		
	China	Vietnam	Thailand	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar
CEFR B1 “Can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to his/her field and interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension” (Council of Europe, 2001)“		√ (Dunlea et al., 2018)	√ (Commission of Higher Education, 2016: 1)		√ (Kounnavongsa, 2015; Gutierrez and Somsivilay, 2021)	
CEFR B1+ “Can grasp significant relevant information and briefly comment on the language and content of subject-related materials of medium linguistic difficulty (e.g., literary works, news reports, business documents). Can infer the writer’s mood and attitude while reading materials of medium linguistic difficulty (e.g., literary works, news reports). Can locate target information by scanning the indices of academic literature.” (Council of Europe, 2001)	√ (CSE = Band 6) (Peng et al., 2022)		√ (Zein and Haing, 2017)			
CEFR B2 “Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively. Has a broad active reading vocabulary but may experience some difficulty with low-frequency idioms.” (Council of Europe, 2001)			√ (Zein and Haing, 2017)			
CEFR C1 “Can understand in detail lengthy, complex texts, whether or not they relate to his/her own area of specialty, provided he/she can reread difficult sections” (Council of Europe, 2001)					√ (British Council in Myanmar, 2022)	

The reading strategies of both teachers and students applied in English comprehension reading classes reveal that China and Vietnam appear to have relatively effective interpretation and implementation of

their educational programmes, while Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand tend to have relatively ineffective interpretation and implementation. The results of applying reading strategies derived from the in-depth interviews of the teachers and students are presented and tabled as follows:

Table 3 The reading strategies applied by Chinese and Vietnamese teachers and students

The Use of Reading Strategies	Proportions of the qualitative data							
	China				Vietnam			
	Ts	Ss (H)	Ss (HI)	Ss (LI)	Ts	Ss (H)	Ss (HI)	Ss (LI)
Sum of Cognitive Strategies Used	Almost all of (90.42%)	Almost all of (92.85%)	The majority of (85.71%)	Most of (78.57%)	The majority of (83.42%)	The majority of (85.71%)	The majority of (78.57%)	Most of (71.42%)
1. Skimming	√	√	√		√	√	√	√
2. Scanning	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
3. Making prediction		√				√		
4. Guessing meanings	√	√	√		√		√	√
5. Taking notes				√				
6. Highlighting/Underlining	√				√	√		√
7. Monitoring by focusing on details		√	√	√		√		
Sum of Metacognitive Strategies Used	A little more than half of (52.66%)	Half of (50%)	Half of (50%)	Some of (33.33%)	Many of (69.33%)	Most of (75%)	Most of (75%)	Half of (50%)
1. Questioning				√				
2. Analyzing the texts	√		√		√		√	√
3. Evaluating	√	√			√		√	
4. Reflecting				√		√	√	√
5. Synthesizing	√				√			
6. Summarizing / Drawing conclusions	√	√	√		√	√	√	

Note: Meaning of abbreviations - Ts = teachers, Ss (H) = students with high proficiency, Ss (HI) = students with higher intermediate proficiency, Ss (LI) = students with lower intermediate proficiency

Table 4 The reading strategies applied by Cambodian and Laotian teachers and students

The Use of Reading Strategies	Proportions of the qualitative data							
	Cambodia				Lao PDR			
	Ts	Ss (H)	Ss (HI)	Ss (LI)	Ts	Ss (H)	Ss (HI)	Ss (LI)
Sum of Cognitive Strategies Used	The majority of (83.42%)	Most of (71.42%)	Most of (71.42%)	More than half of (64.28%)	The majority of (83.42%)	Most of (71.42%)	More than half of (64.28%)	Most of (78.57%)
1. Skimming	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Scanning	✓	✓	✓			✓		
3. Making predictions								
4. Guessing meanings	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Taking notes	✓	✓	✓	✓				
6. Highlighting/Underlining	✓					✓		
7. Monitoring by focusing on details			✓	✓	✓			
Sum of Metacognitive Strategies Used	A little more than half of (52.83%)	A little less than half of (41.66%)	A little less than half of (41.66%)	Some of (33.33%)	Almost half of (47%)	Few of (16.66%)	Very few of (8.33%)	Very few of (8.33%)
1. Questioning					✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Analyzing the texts	✓	✓	✓	✓				
3. Evaluating		✓	✓					
4. Reflecting	✓				✓			
5. Synthesizing								
6. Summarizing / Drawing conclusions	✓			✓	✓	✓		

Note: Meaning of abbreviations - Ts = teachers, Ss (H) = students with high proficiency, Ss (HI) = students with higher intermediate proficiency, Ss (LI) = students with lower intermediate proficiency

Table 5 The reading strategies applied by Myanmar and Thai teachers and students

The Use of Reading Strategies	Proportions of the qualitative data							
	Myanmar				Thailand			
	Ts	Ss (H)	Ss (HI)	Ss (LI)	Ts	Ss (H)	Ss (HI)	Ss (LI)
Sum of Cognitive Strategies Used	Most of (78.57%)	The majority of (85.71%)	Most of (71.42%)	More than half of (64.28%)	Most of (78.71%)	Most of (71.42%)	More than half of (64.28%)	More than half of (64.28%)
1. Skimming	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Scanning	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
3. Making predictions						✓		
4. Guessing meanings		✓			✓	✓		✓
5. Taking notes			✓		✓	✓	✓	
6. Highlighting/Underlining	✓						✓	
7. Monitoring by focusing on details	✓							
Sum of Metacognitive Strategies Used	Less than half (44.33%)	Half of (50%)	More than half of (66.66%)	A few of (16.66%)	More than half of (58.16%)	More than half of (58.33%)	Half of (50%)	Half of (50%)
1. Questioning	✓		✓				✓	
2. Analyzing the texts		✓	✓			✓		✓
3. Evaluating						✓		
4. Reflecting	✓						✓	✓
5. Synthesizing							✓	
6. Summarizing / Drawing conclusions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		

Note: Meaning of abbreviations - Ts = teachers, Ss (H) = students with high proficiency, Ss (HI) = students with higher intermediate proficiency, Ss (LI) = students with lower intermediate proficiency

The data shown in Tables 3 to 5 clearly indicate that teachers and students from China and Vietnam utilize a wide range of reading strategies, while the remaining four countries do not.

The summarized data, both quantitative and qualitative, of the GMS teachers and students are summarized and presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6 Comparison of the GMS students' and teachers' reading strategies

Samples from each GMS country	Reading strategies applied by students			Reading strategies applied by teachers		
	Cognitive Strategies (%)	Metacognitive Strategies (%)	Cognitive Strategies (Proportions)	Metacognitive Strategies (Proportions)	Cognitive Strategies (Proportions)	Metacognitive Strategies (Proportions)
	(quantitative data)		(qualitative data)		(qualitative data)	
Cambodia	96.15	91.50	Many of (69.04%)	A few of (38.88%)	The majority of (83.42%)	A little more than half of (52.83%)
China	99.60	92.05	The majority of 85.71	A little less than half of (44.44%)	Almost all of (90.42%)	A little more than half of (52.66%)
Lao PDR	76.20	57.15	Most of (71.42%)	Very few of (11.10%)	The majority of (83.42%)	Almost half of (47.00%)
Myanmar	98.95	94.70	Most of (73.80%)	A little less than half of (44.44%)	Most of (78.57%)	Less than half of (44.33%)
Thailand	98.85	73.85	Many of (66.66%)	A little more than half of (52.77%)	Most of (78.71%)	More than half of (58.16%)
Vietnam	90.00	92.30	Most of (78.56%)	Many of (66.66%)	The majority of (83.42%)	Many of (69.33%)
Means of all	93.29	83.58	Most of (74.19%)	Less than half of (43.04%)	The majority of (83.00%)	A little more than half of (54.1%)

Evidently, there was a discrepancy between the quantitative data from the questionnaire and qualitative data from the in-depth interviews about the reading strategies used by the students and between the qualitative data of their teachers as well. The students' quantitative data seemed to be extremely high while their qualitative data as well as that of their teachers seemed to be relatively moderate for the cognitive strategies, and comparatively low especially for the metacognitive strategies.

Results of Matching the GMS Teachers' and Students' Perspectives on Reading Instructions with Individual Policies

There are four perspectives on reading instructions: pessimist, generalist, constructivist, and direct instruction. The pessimist suggests social environments influence language learning success. The generalist believes in teachers' influence on student success. Constructivists think that students will progress independently in a supportive environment. Direct instruction emphasizes teachers' responsibility for effective teaching. These views were reflected in teacher and student choices, interpreted by the researcher, and approved by an English language expert (Bredo, 1997; Carnine and Gesten, 1986).

The scenario is a research instrument used to gather data from students and teachers, alongside perspective, problems, and needs analysis questionnaires. These tools, along with in-depth semi-structured interviews, aimed to capture participants' implied reading strategies and perspectives in the reading class. Scenarios facilitate decision making and are small, structured conceptual systems of plausible future contexts presented as narratives (Ramírez et al., 2015). They emphasize causal processes and decision points (Kahn and Wiener, 1967), serving as inputs for further research.

As a result, this research study provided three different scenarios for both students and teachers to choose from in terms of three imaginative stories which they might expect to happen in the future if it is feasible in their situations. To clarify the point, in Scenario A the student's success or failure in language learning solely depended on their social environments and effective teacher's instruction based on the pessimist, generalist, and direct instruction perspectives. In Scenario B, however, the student's success or failure relied on their teachers and the students themselves in accordance with the generalist and constructivist perspectives. Also, in Scenario C their success or failure was influenced predominantly by the students themselves and effective teacher's instructions according to the constructivist and direct-instruction perspectives.

The findings were matched with each GMS educational policy to identify whether or not the policy was consistent with the explored

perspectives of teachers and students. If so, it could be assumed that the policy appeared to be well interpreted, but whether it was effectively implemented was not decided yet as it needed to be confirmed by the other findings such as the reading strategies used, the identified problems, and the needs of both teachers and students.

The findings of the effectiveness of the GMS educational policy's interpretation and implementation through the GMS teachers' favorite perspectives on reading instruction via three scenarios are presented through the bar chart below.

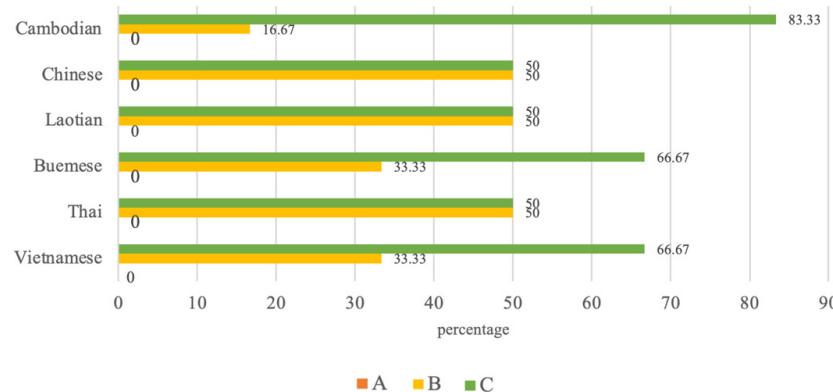


Figure 2 Summary of GMS teachers' most preferred perspectives on reading through scenarios

Obviously, the GMS teachers mostly favored Scenario C twice as much as Scenario B, which they favored moderately, while nobody chose Scenario A. It could be assumed that these GMS teachers did believe that the students' success or failure in language leaning relied exclusively on students themselves and effective teacher's instruction, and the teachers themselves based on the constructivist, direct instruction, and generalist perspectives. On the other hand, it could be inferred that they did not believe that students' learning success depended only on students themselves and the teacher's instructions.

The bar chart below illustrates the results of effectiveness of the GMS educational policy's interpretation and implementation based on GMS students' preferred perspectives on reading instruction via three scenarios.

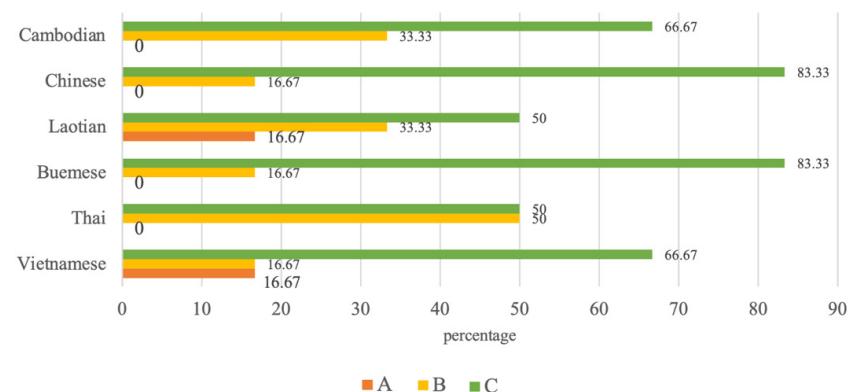


Figure 3 Summary of GMS students' most preferred perspectives on reading through scenarios

Similarly, most of the students preferred Scenario C twice as much as Scenario B while a few favored Scenario A. From this information, it could be inferred that the students and their teachers shared a similar belief that the students' success or failure in language leaning relies solely on the students and effective teacher's instruction, with the teachers themselves to some degree according to the constructivist, direct instruction, and including generalist perspectives to some extent.

Results of Matching the GMS Teachers' and Students' Problems in Teaching and Learning English Reading with Individual Policy

The findings of the teachers' and students' problems were derived from semi-structured in-depth interviews with two main pre-determined questions: "Which learning modality directly meets you and your students' needs for improving reading proficiency?" and

“Why?” The findings of the GMS teachers’ and students’ problems would reflect the effectiveness of their policy interpretation and implementation and whether or not their problems were relevant to the policy requirements. The GMS teachers’ problems in teaching and learning English reading are presented in the chart below.

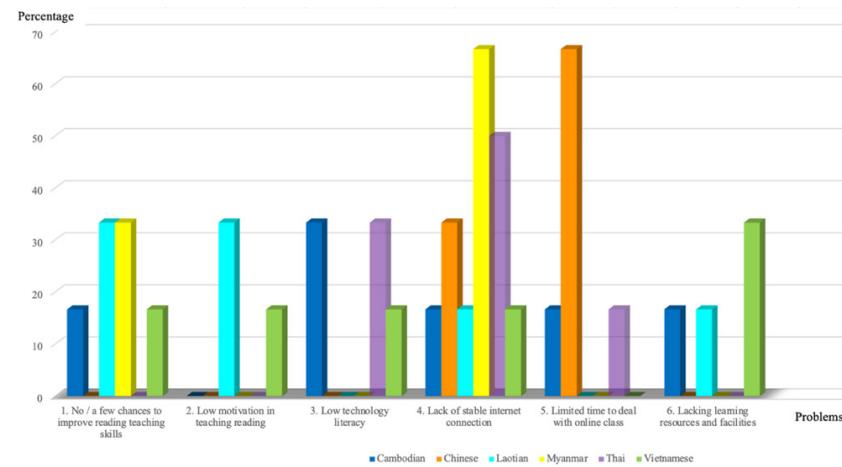


Figure 4 The GMS teachers’ problems based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews

Strikingly, two main challenges in developing their students’ English reading proficiency during the Covid-19 pandemic were the absence of reliable internet connections faced by 66.7 percent of Myanmar (66.7 percent) and Thai (50 percent) teachers, and the limited time available for online teaching and learning activities experienced by the Chinese teachers (66.7 percent). Other challenges included the lack of opportunities to improve teaching skills, specifically reading strategies during the pandemic encountered by 33.33 percent of Laotian, Myanmar, Chinese, and Thai teachers. Similar levels of problems of low motivation in teaching reading were faced by 33.33 percent of Laotian teachers as well as low technology literacy experienced by 33.33 percent of Cambodian and Thai teachers, while lack of learning resources and facilities were faced by 33.33 percent of Vietnamese

teachers.

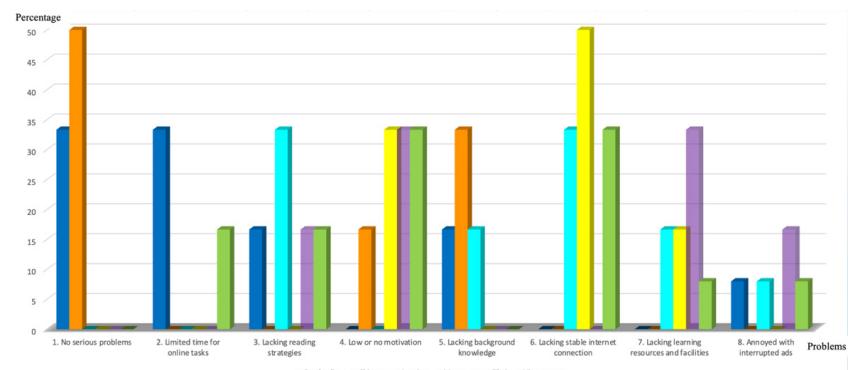


Figure 5 The GMS students’ problems based on in-depth semi-structured interviews

The major problems of the GMS students were unstable internet connections confronted by 50 percent of Myanmar students and 33.33 percent of Laotian and Vietnamese students. In addition, time constraints for overdemanding activities online were faced by 33.33 percent of Cambodian students and 16.67 percent of Chinese students, as well as lack of reading strategies faced by 33.33 percent of Laotian students and 16.67 percent from Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. The problems included lack of motivation encountered by 33.33 percent of Lao, Myanmar, Thai, and Vietnamese, and 16.67 percent of Chinese students. Lack of background knowledge was encountered by 33.33 percent of Chinese students and 16.67 percent of Cambodians and Laotians. The rest of the problems were insufficient or non-existent learning resources and facilities experienced by 33.33 percent of Thai students and 16.67 percent of Laotian and Myanmar students as well as the problem of being disturbed by unwanted advertisements during internet searching faced by 16.67 percent of Thai students. Significantly, there were no serious problems mentioned by 50 percent of Chinese students and 33.33 percent of Cambodian students, whereas no one from other GMS countries mentioned this matter.

Results of Matching the GMS Teachers' and Students' Needs in Teaching and Learning English Reading with Policy

The findings of the teachers' and students' needs were drawn from the needs analysis questionnaire as well as from the semi-structured interviews with two main pre-determined questions: "Which learning modality directly meets you and your student's needs for improving reading proficiency?" and, "Why?" The findings in the forms of the needs of the teachers and students were to prove whether or not the policy requirements met the needs of the teachers and students. This, in turn, reflected the effectiveness in their policy interpretation and implementation. The results of matching their policies and their identified needs are summarized and presented alphabetically, as follows.

Table 7 The GMS students' and teachers' needs from Cambodia, China, Lao PDR

Question relating to Reading Needs	Results from first three countries in the GMS: Cambodia, China, and Lao PDR					
	Cambodia		China		Lao PDR	
	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
1. What is your main purpose for reading in English?	-For learning (83.33%) -For pleasure (16.67%)	-For learning (66.67%) -For pleasure (33.33%)	-For learning (100%) -For pleasure (0%)	-For learning (66.67%) -For pleasure (33.33%)	-For learning (100%) -For pleasure (0%)	-For learning (66.67%) -For pleasure (33.33%)
2. What type of text do you need to read/teach most for improving your English reading proficiency?	Compiled texts for my subject matter (50%)	Compiled texts for students' subject matter (33.33%)	Authentic reading materials and compiled texts for my subject matter (33.33%)	Compiled texts for students' subject matter (33.33%)	Compiled texts for my subject matter (66.67%)	Compiled texts for students' subject matter (50%)
3. What type of texts do you feel are most difficult to read/teach?	Journal articles (50%)	Journal articles (83.33%)	Journal articles (66.67%)	Journal articles (66.67%)	Authentic reading materials (50%)	Authentic reading materials and journal articles (33.33%)

Table 7 The GMS students' and teachers' needs from Cambodia, China, Lao PDR (cont.)

Question relating to Reading Needs	Results from first three countries in the GMS: Cambodia, China, and Lao PDR					
	Cambodia		China		Lao PDR	
	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
4. Which language of instruction will be most beneficial for studying/teaching in English reading class?	An equal proportion of both languages (50%)	English only (50%)	-English only (50%) -More English than L1 (33.33%)	-More English than L1 (50%) -More English than English (83.33%)	-More English than L1 (50%) -More English than English (83.33%)	More English than L1 (50%)
5. Which reading habit do you (your students) like most?	Using mnemonics (50%).	-Reading with other people -Reading just for a short period (33.33%)	-Discussing content with others -Using mnemonics (33.33%)	-Reading with other people -Reading in a quiet place (33.33%)	-Discussing content with others (50%)	-Reading in pleasant surroundings -Discussing content with others (33.33%)
6. What makes your reading/teaching most difficult?	-Technical terms -Grammatical rules (33.33%)	Technical terms (50%)	Grammatical rules (50%)	-Grammatical rules -Background knowledge (50%)	-Grammatical rules -Background knowledge (50%)	-Technical terms -Grammatical rules (33.33%) -Sentence structure -Grammatical rules (33.33%)
7. Which technique will help to develop your (your students) reading proficiency most?	Reading with various forms of learning activities (50%)	Reading by themselves with teacher's guidance (50%)	Reading with various forms of learning activities (50%)	Reading with various forms of learning activities (33.33%)	Reading by themselves with teacher's guidance (50%)	Reading by themselves with teacher's guidance (66.67%)
8. Who/What is the most important factor for your (your students) reading proficiency development?	Myself (50%)	Students themselves (50%)	Myself (50%)	Students themselves (50%)	Myself (83.33%)	Teachers' teaching techniques (66.67%)

Table 8 The GMS students' and teachers' reading needs from Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam

Questions relating to Reading Needs	Results from the other three countries in the GMS: Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam					
	Myanmar		Thailand		Vietnam	
	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
1. What is your main purpose for reading in English?	-For learning (100%) -For pleasure (0%)	-For learning (50%) -For pleasure (50%)	-For learning (50%) -For pleasure (50%)	-For learning (50%) -For pleasure (50%)	-For learning (66.67%) -For pleasure (33.33%)	-For learning (66.67%) -For pleasure (33.33%)
2. What type of text do you need to read/teach most for improving your English reading proficiency?	Compiled texts for my subject matter (50%)	Compiled texts for my subject matter (50%)	Compiled texts for my subject matter (50%)	Compiled texts for my subject matter (50%) -Journal articles (33.33%)	Excerpted reading materials (50%)	
3. What type of texts do you feel are most difficult to read/teach?	Authentic reading materials (66.67%)	Journal articles (66.67%)	Authentic reading materials (50%)	Authentic reading materials (50%)	Excerpted reading materials (50%) -Compiled texts for students' subject matters -Journal articles (33.33%)	-Compiled texts for students' subject matters -Journal articles (33.33%)
4. Which language of instruction will be most beneficial for your studying/teaching in English reading class?	An equal proportion of both languages (66.67%)	English only (50%)	An equal proportion of both languages (66.67%)	An equal proportion of both languages (66.67%)	More English than L1 (66.67%)	More English than L1 (50%)
5. Which reading habit do you / your students like most?	-Discussing content with others -Using mnemonics (33.33%)	Discussing content with others (50%)	Reading in a quiet place (50%)	-Reading in pleasant surroundings -Reading in a quiet place (33.33%)	Reading with other people (50%)	-Reading with other people -Sub vocalizing internally when reading or studying (33.33%)
6. What makes your reading/teaching most difficult?	Sentence structures (50%)	Background knowledge (50%)	Technical terms (66.67%)	Grammatical rules (50%)	Technical terms (66.67%)	Technical terms (66.67%)

Table 8 The GMS students' and teachers' reading needs from Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam (cont.)

Questions relating to Reading Needs	Results from the other three countries in the GMS: Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam					
	Myanmar		Thailand		Vietnam	
	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)	Students (%)	Teachers (%)
7. Which technique will help to develop your reading proficiency most? / to improve your students' reading proficiency most?	Reading by themselves with teacher's guidance (50%)	-Reading by themselves with teacher's guidance (33.33%)	Integrated with other skills through audio and visual aids (66.67%)	Reading by themselves with teacher's guidance (50%)	-Integrated with other skills through audio and visual aids (33.33%)	-Reading by themselves with teacher's guidance -Reading with various forms of learning activities (50%)
8. Who/What is the most important factor your reading proficiency development? / Who/What is the most important factor for your students' reading improvement?	-All teachers -Classmates -Myself (50%)	Students themselves (50%)	Myself (50%)	Students themselves (50%)	Myself (66.67%)	Students themselves (50%)

In summary, teachers and students share similar needs regarding English reading. They read primarily for learning purposes, favoring compiled texts for their subject matter. Authentic materials pose challenges, while a balanced use of both languages as the instruction medium is preferred. Common reading habits include discussing content and reading in a quiet place, with technical terms and grammar rules as common difficulties. Independent reading with teacher guidance, coupled with multimedia aids, is valued for improving proficiency. Both groups prioritize student initiative and effective teaching techniques.

To summarize, the findings from semi-structured interviews indicate that most teachers and students received inadequate government support for effective teaching facilities and resources, enabling balanced

blended learning with access to facilities, on-site and online learning, and appropriate reading materials. Proper training for teachers in online reading strategies and for students in autonomous online learning skills was also needed. Additionally, both groups required a balance between reading for learning and pleasure, and between using their first language and English as the language of instruction, with equal proportions of compiled texts in their subjects.

Discussion

The discussion is based on the main findings which are still inconclusive within two main types—those which are related to the relatively ineffective interpretation and implementation of the GMS educational policy, as is true of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and the others with fairly effective interpretation and implementation of the policy like China and Vietnam. This discussion focuses on three sets of findings: identified reading strategies, problems and needs, and perspectives on reading instructions.

The first set is the discrepancy between the quantitative and qualitative data about the reading strategies applied by both GMS teachers and students. That is, the quantitative data in terms of both cognitive and metacognitive strategies used by the students from the questionnaire were strikingly higher than their qualitative ones and those of their teachers from the in-depth interviews. By contrast, both the students and their teachers used cognitive strategies moderately but applied the metacognitive strategies less. This difference might be explained by the possibility that the students might have *misidentified* or *overestimated* their use of strategies in responding to the questionnaire. However, the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews by both the teachers and students seemed to reflect the possibility that they used mainly basic cognitive strategies with a comparatively low level of usage of practical metacognitive strategies.

This evidence could imply an unbalanced emphasis on cognitive over metacognitive reading strategies in practice in the GMS countries.

Surprisingly, in some cases their cognitive use reached 99 to 100 percent, but metacognitive use was only 50 percent. Thus, it was apparent that metacognitive strategies were not utilized to the same extent as cognitive strategies. This might be attributed to their low English reading proficiency levels. It could also suggest there was a problem with teaching reading strategies and the limited use of metacognitive strategies. The imbalance could indicate that the GMS educational policy was ineffectively interpreted and implemented in order to reach the requirement of CEFR B1 as stated in their educational policy.

The ineffectiveness discussed above was strongly confirmed by the second set of evidence in the form of similar major problems and needs of both GMS teachers and students. For example, the teachers' main problems were the lack of reliable internet connections with limited time available for online teaching activities. This was closely linked with their needs for the right proportion of reading for learning and pleasure, and that of English and the mother tongue as the most beneficial language of instruction for studying/teaching in English reading class. Their problems and needs could imply that they mainly lacked adequate support from their respective governments to facilitate effective teaching facilities and resources, especially for teaching English reading such as suitable reading materials confirmed by Tran Vu Diem Thuy and Deerajviset (2023) and a balance of blended learning, particularly during the pandemic supported by Patanasorn and Angkana Tongpoon-z (2024). Those teachers' problems and needs were similar to those of their students in terms of unstable internet connections and time constraints for *overdemanding* online activities through the suitable combination of on-site and online modes of teaching and learning. This might have been from insufficient assistance from their governments to easily get access to learning facilities and resources with effective teaching and appropriate and up-to-date reading materials. This highlights the urgent need for effective technology to enhance learning opportunities, particularly in accessing diverse and high-quality reading materials during the pandemic. Deerajviset (2022) supports this by noting that the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the growing

importance of technology in English language teaching and learning. Emerging technologies such as YouTube, WhatsApp, and Google Classroom have gained prominence due to the pandemic and are likely to play a key role in the future of English education. From these identified needs and problems, it could be inferred that their needs were not successfully met in the actual reading classes, raising questions about the effective implementation of the policy. While the policy seemed to align with their needs, the implementation remained uncertain, as their major requirements indicated areas where they lacked support. In other words, the unclear effective implementation indicated a lack of fulfillment of their needs in the actual reading classes, highlighting the policy's potential ineffectiveness.

The last set of evidence to be discussed to reflect the rather ineffective interpretation and implementation of the GMS educational policy was the teachers' and students' perspectives on reading instructions which directly affect the students' success or failure in language learning. It was found that most of the GMS teachers and students favored Scenario C (focusing on constructivist and direct instructions perspectives) twice as much as Scenario B (focusing on generalist and constructivist perspectives), while no teacher chose Scenario A (focusing on pessimist, generalist, and direct instructions perspectives), and only a small number of students did. This data could suggest that both groups did believe that the students' success or failure in language learning depended exclusively on the students themselves and the effective teachers' instructions integrated with the teachers themselves to some degree.

These findings highlight a contradiction between the constructivist and direct instruction perspectives on reading instruction. The constructivist view emphasizes the students' role in their learning success, while the direct instruction perspective focuses on effective teaching. This suggests that teacher-led instruction is crucial for English reading success but that priority should be given to enhancing students' self-directed learning strategies and skills. Effective teaching, driven by teachers' pedagogical competence directly impacts students' issues

and needs (Zein, 2022; Win, 2022; Duong, 2020; Higher Education, Thailand, 2020; Mao, 2019; Cheewakaroon, 2011).

In sum, the interrelations among reading strategies, perspectives on reading instructions, problems and needs of teachers and students in GMS countries were consistent with the findings in each country, which closely linked with their rather ineffective interpretation and implementation of educational policies (Kaur et al. 2016; Cheewakaroon, 2011, Prapaisit de Segovia and Hardison, 2008; Zein and Haing, 2017; Tith and Chan, 2013; Saroeun, 2016; Neau, 2003; Siphong, 2008; Ministry of Education and Sport, Lao PDR., 2000; Oates, 2019). More importantly, after the findings showed that the educational policies of all of these GMS countries except Thailand are not explicitly stated, it seems unrealistic to expect it to be effectively interpreted and implemented.

To strongly confirm this claim, solid evidence in the forms of the results of the international test, that is, the EF EPI index ranking, could prove it. Recent results indicate that Vietnam has moved from low to moderate proficiency, but China has dropped from moderate to low proficiency while the other GMS countries have seen a decline from low to very low proficiency (EF-Education First, 2022). These changes might have been negative effects of the pandemic.

All of the findings with the discussion entail suggestions for several policy changes ranging from the policy makers to the users. The first thing that some GMS educational authorities urgently need to do is to explicitly state their educational policy about English development. Then, they should ensure that policies support responsive teaching by understanding student needs and providing professional development for teachers. Effective management should facilitate English reading development and prevent learning frustration. GMS university teachers also need training to adapt to modern teaching demands and incentives for effective online teaching. Collaboration with technological teaching units can enhance resources. Regular feedback is crucial for improving student and teacher performance, with a focus on tailored assignments. Distance learning should be promoted for diverse needs. Finally, GMS

university students require continuous development of academic and life skills, with teachers providing support and guidance. Encouraging self-directed learning and language acquisition through self-development is essential, alongside enhancing reading proficiency and independent study skills.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study aimed to provide suggestions for developing students' English reading proficiency through online data collection during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings recommend policy changes to enhance students' autonomous learning skills, provide innovative teaching methods, maximize learning facilities and resources, and offer flexible distance learning options. These suggestions are to improve the quality of teaching and learning through policy design. Further research is needed to explore effective training courses for online or blended learning, investigate innovative learning initiatives with ongoing assessment, address learning loss during and after the pandemic, and examine teaching methods and pedagogical practices for English reading improvement. Future studies should employ diverse methods and involve various stakeholders to gain deeper insights into participants' reading strategies and needs across different educational levels.

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