

Do Gender, Socioeconomic Status and Regional Difference Predict the Reading Comprehension of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners?¹

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Abstract

The current study examines the role of gender, socioeconomic status, and region in predicting the reading comprehension of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Based on the relevant literature, three hypotheses have been formulated, which entail three independent variables (gender, socioeconomic status, and region) and the dependent variable (reading comprehension) and were tested by employing a quantitative cross-sectional research method. The Thai Reading Evaluation and Decoding System (T-READS) test was administered to determine the participants' reading comprehension scores. Approximately 730 male and female undergraduates at a Thai university with various socioeconomic statuses and regional diversity participated in this study. By conducting linear regression analysis, we predicted the role of gender, socioeconomic status, and region in predicting learners' reading comprehension. The findings of the study revealed that gender, socioeconomic status, and region were not significant in predicting Thai university students' reading comprehension. The pedagogical implications of the findings are also discussed.

Resumen

El presente estudio examina el papel del género, el nivel socioeconómico y la región en la predicción de la comprensión lectora de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Con base en la literatura relevante, se formularon tres hipótesis, que involucran tres variables independientes (género, nivel socioeconómico y región) y la variable dependiente (comprensión lectora), y se probaron empleando un método de investigación cuantitativo transversal. Se administró la prueba del Sistema Tailandés de Evaluación y Decodificación de Lectura (T-READS) para determinar las puntuaciones de comprensión lectora de los participantes. En este estudio participaron aproximadamente 730 estudiantes universitarios, hombres y mujeres, de una universidad tailandesa con diversos niveles socioeconómicos y diversidad regional. Al realizar un análisis de regresión lineal, predijimos el papel del género, el nivel socioeconómico y la región en la predicción de la comprensión lectora de los estudiantes. Los hallazgos del estudio revelaron que el género, el nivel socioeconómico y la región no eran significativos para predecir la comprensión lectora de los estudiantes universitarios tailandeses. También se discuten las implicaciones pedagógicas de los hallazgos.

Introduction

For learners who are immersed in learning English as a second or foreign language, it is essential to develop their skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Karim & Mohamed, 2019; Karim et al., 2021). Equipping oneself with a good command of the English language stimulates both educational and professional success (Karim et al., 2022; Karim et al., 2023). Reading is linked to knowledge acquisition (Ismail et al., 2018) and reading comprehension (RC) skills are essential for readers to determine the true meaning of a given text.

Thailand, which is a core member of the Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN) and is an EFL country, necessitates the study of reading as a significant factor that promotes the communicative ability of its students in English—an official *lingua franca* in ASEAN (Baker, 2012). English is thus a compulsory subject in Thai public schools. Moreover, attaining proficiency in English is a prerequisite for Thailand to produce a globally efficient workforce (Kasemsap & Lee, 2015). In addition, both the academic success and professional development of Thais are determined by the extent to which they can communicate in English. Reading is therefore of importance since it helps learners acquire new vocabulary, achieve greater syntactic accuracy, and become familiar with various writing genres. However, there are also some pitfalls.

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The nationally and internationally conducted reading tests designed by the Education Ministry of Thailand, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicated that Thai students possess poor ability in reading due to a lack of quality teaching that might have contributed to enhancing their reading performance (Hui et al., 2020). In addition, the time allocated for English reading in the classroom, reliance on *Google Translator*, and limited ability to apply cognitive strategies in reading substantiate their low performance in reading.

The present study furthers the investigation into the effect of demographic features on Thai learners' RC skills to determine whether SES, regional differences, and gender play any role in determining the RC ability of the learners. Moreover, this study can add value to existing knowledge since a newly devised tool is employed to assess the reading performance of Thai learners.

Review of the Literature

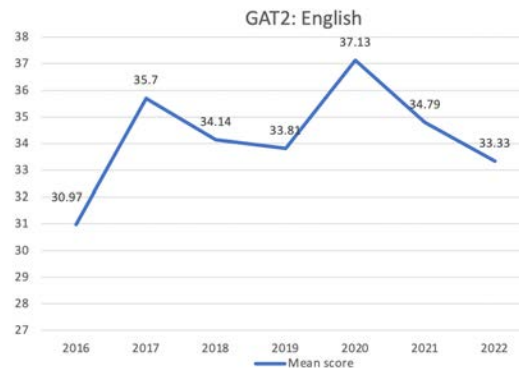
The power of RC offers readers the opportunity to extract the intended message of the text through an interactive process which involves learners in extensive reading, resulting in the enrichment of their vocabulary, general knowledge, and cultural awareness. Both academic and professional success are connected to RC (Trapman et al., 2014) and RC skills are associated with the achievement of long-term academic success (Blything et al., 2020). Good RC ability can result in better grades for students. The capacity to read and comprehend written directives or instructions or relevant textual information is essential to get professional success. Ismail et al. (2018) also identified as successful students as those who are capable of understanding and extracting the meaning of the text and responding accordingly. As can be seen, over recent decades, much attention has been given to the examination of the RC skills of English language learners. Literature related to this field suggests serious and pervasive problems (le Roux et al., 2014) that limit the learners' improvement in RC. Students' involvement in reading and their success in RC are influenced by numerous social, behavioral, and environmental factors, including parental education, and the home environment (i.e., a chaotic, peaceful, or study-friendly environment), and attention to reading. The RC ability of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners may also be affected more by demographic features (e.g., age, gender, socioeconomic status [SES], region, family history, and home literacy) than academic factors (e.g., institutional support, teachers and their style of teaching, learning materials, peer influences and relationships, the school itself, and its reading curriculum). Researchers have also argued that gender, SES, and region may or may not be significant predictors for ESL and EFL learners' RC skills (Froiland & Oros, 2014; Melby-Lervåg & Lervåg, 2014).

Previous studies also presented mixed findings pertaining to the influence of these variables on learners' RC ability. To illustrate, research showed that regional differences may positively or negatively affect learners' reading comprehension because regional differences cause a variation in infrastructure, such as school facilities, instructional equipment, language learning materials, the professional competence of the teachers, and the ethnicity of the students in developed and less-developed regions of a country (Beckman et al., 2012; Cheung & Slavin, 2005; Figueroa & Sassenrath, 1989; Hu, 2003; Skrentny, 2020). Similarly, SES, which was also found by Cummins (1979), Melby-Lervåg and Lervåg (2014) to be a key contributing factor in learners' development of second-language literacy skills, can also positively or negatively affect their RC ability (Cheng & Wu, 2017; Ismail et al., 2018; Modirhemene, 2006; Romeo et al., 2018). Likewise, gender can be either a significant or non-significant predictor for learners' RC skills (Corpas Arellano, 2013; Kaya & Yıldırım, 2018; Kusdemir & Bulut, 2018; Ngongare et al., 2020).

Worried about the mixed findings concerning the independent variables and dependent variable, the influence of regional differences, SES, and gender on ESL or EFL learners' reading comprehension was examined in the current study to determine which factors predict Thai tertiary-level students' RC. The study used the Thai Reading Evaluation and Decoding System (T-READS) to identify the reading comprehension ability of university students in Thailand since T-READS can be used in other settings to assess the actual reading performance of the learners (Appendix 2).

Prior studies have identified various issues associated with reading encountered by Thai learners. For instance, Hui et al. (2020) reported the low level of Thai students' reading ability. The result of a reading test administered by the Education Ministry of Thailand suggested the poor level of Thai students in terms of reading (Rodklai as cited in Kasemsap & Lee, 2015). In the reading performance of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015, Thailand underperformed compared to its neighbouring countries, such as Vietnam. The performance of 15-year-old Thai students (M=409) was also found to be lower than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average (M=493) (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). Thai students also failed to

achieve standard scores for the General Aptitude Test (GAT2) for English every year from 2016 to 2022. Moreover, the results from GAT2 suggested that Thai EFL students still required guidance to improve their reading performance, as can be seen in Figure 1. The analysis revealed that Thai EFL students tended to underperform in English proficiency tests.



Source: Source: The National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), 2022

Figure 1: Students' GAT2 scores for English in percentages from 2016 to 2022

Previous studies and research hypotheses

Socio-economic status and reading comprehension

The socio-economic status of the ESL learners plays a significant role in the enhancement of the second language skills (Cummins, 1979; Hu, 2003). Melby-Lervåg and Lervåg (2014) added that learners with a higher SES tend to use context-independent language at home that corresponds to the language used in schooling, and this helps in the development of the learners' literacy skills. Furthermore, SES has been identified as an antecedent of reading achievement that stands out for its comprehensiveness and attention to home factors, and thus may be a good predictor of long-term English literacy attainment (Reese et al., 2000). SES, therefore, may be a decisive factor for RC since it is linked to the education, profession, and earnings of the learners' parents. Sirin (2005) revealed that learners' academic performance mostly depends on the SES of the family. For example, as depicted by relevant prior studies, learners who are from financially secure backgrounds and have literate parents, have a better chance of getting higher scores than their counterparts (Beckman et al., 2012; Qi et al., 2006; Sirin, 2005).

As such, it can be assumed that academic success and SES are positively correlated (Calvo & Bialystok, 2014) as the more wealthy the family is, the better the quality of the resources and education provided for the children (Froiland & Oros, 2014). Moreover, Bradley and Corwyn (2002) reported a wealthy family home offers an environment that is conducive to learning and offers elevated social status. They found a stronger connection between SES and performance by observing that cognitive abilities such as memory, intellect, and language were influenced by SES. A similar study, by Powell et al. (2012), revealed that Euro-American children with parents with higher SES demonstrated better development than their African-American and Latino counterparts. Froiland et al. (2013) argued that family SES acts as a robust predictor of reading ability and Altschul (2012) suggested that SES is a potential predictor of reading comprehension achievements of learners from Mexican American families. Furthermore, Calvo and Bialystok (2014), in a study on Canadian learners, found that SES played a significant role in success in terms of academic and intellectual performance. The study demonstrated that working-class learners could not perform well in intricate tasks because of the influence of SES. Romeo et al. (2018) reported that Roma students with a poor SES profile had less RC growth in comparison to their non-Roma counterparts. Earlier, a study conducted by Cheng and Wu (2017) also indicated a similar role of SES in determining the RC of learners. However, Modirkhemene (2006) and Ismail et al. (2018) found SES to be a non-significant predictor for ESL learners' RC.

Gender and reading comprehension

There is evidence to suggest a positive correlation between gender and RC. For example, Sheorey and Mokhtari (2001) asserted that learners' gender not only had an influence on native speakers of American English but also on non-native learners. Corpas Arellano (2013), in a Spain-based study, indicated that girls outperformed boys in comprehending EFL texts. The study explained that gender differences were usually greater when the text contained implicit information. In contrast, a smaller difference was observed when

the information was explicit in the text. The study also revealed that boys had serious difficulties in dealing with implicit information. In addition, Kusdemir and Bulut (2018) also found that the students' level of RC varied significantly by gender in favor of the female students. Moreover, in a recent study, Ngongare et al. (2020) concluded that gender difference affected the RC of the learners by confirming that female students were better than male students in RC. Harper and Pelletier (2008) revealed that the development of literacy skills varied depending on the gender of the learners. The results of the Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA) suggested the existence of gender differences in children's early reading development, where female students tended to obtain higher scores than their male counterparts. However, it is evident that the variation in scores of reading performance of girls and boys is commonly seen in young children, and such differences are seldom observed in the performance of older ones (MacFarlane, 2001). It has also been claimed that girls are more likely to outperform boys on tasks that included reading processes, such as phonological and semantic skills and RC, which suggests another reason for girls' superiority in reading, according to Halper (1997) (see also Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2006; Mullis et al., 2003). To illustrate this, girls and boys tend to employ distinct techniques or strategies in RC tasks (Abu-Rabia, 2004; Chavez, 2001). Male students seem to be more analytical when compared to their female peers who seem to be more global when approaching RC tasks (Oxford, 1994). Wei (2009) noted that males tended to apply more rules whereas females adhered more to cultural differences. They added that learners, irrespective of gender, deploy various strategies, yet female learners were better able to do so more effectively. Moreover, Wassenburg et al. (2017) found that, when constructing and using sentences and words, girls were more likely to be consistent and coherent. However, a non-significant relationship between gender and RC has also been documented in the literature. For instance, Brantmeier (2003) asserted that gender had no impact on the learners' RC. Kaya and Yildirim (2018) argued that gender is a non-significant predictor for profiling the RC of the learners. They administered researcher-developed comprehension tests that focused on the deep and literal comprehension levels of the students. The study revealed that the gender of the students did not cause significant differences in reading fluency and reading comprehension. Using TERA-2, Harper and Pelletier (2008) stated that there was no significant difference in the scores obtained by girls and boys. Similarly, learners' scores on the TERA-3 test suggested no influence of gender on reading ability. The findings of Harper and Pelletier's (2008) study were congruent with Ismail et al. (2018).

Regional difference and reading comprehension

Regional difference is another significant factor that may affect the English proficiency of learners. Skrentny (2020) argued that region and ethnicity share similar characteristics with regard to ontology, the relationship of time, and boundaries. Ikegulu (2004) defined the role of ethnicity in predicting academic achievement. Variations in ethnic groups were studied in regard to learners' RC skills. Cheung and Slavin (2005) confirmed that Latino and Caribbean children tended to perform poorly in ESL reading at schools in the United States. Beckman et al. (2012) examined the role of ethnicity (e.g., Black, Hispanic, and White) in the Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) reading test. The study reported no difference in reading test scores as a result of ethnicity. Concerning ethnicity, research evidence revealed that Hispanic students scored higher in school than their Euro-American counterparts (Figueroa & Sassenrath, 1989). In addition, the researchers also revealed both positive and negative impacts of ethnicity on learners' reading achievement (Beckman et al., 2012; Cheung & Slavin, 2005). Since studies indicated both significant and non-significant correlations between ethnicity and RC skills, and region shares similar characteristics as ethnicity, we can assume that region could also affect learners' RC skills. Hu also (2003) presented clear region-oriented differences that had a significant effect on the reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills of the learners. Hu pointed out that regional difference is one of the decisive factors for learners' reading comprehension ability. This claim has been endorsed by the previous literature arguing that contextual factors, such as region, play a pivotal role in determining learners' reading comprehension abilities (Major et al., 2005; Medgyes & Niklove, 2002; Oxford, 2002). Regional differences result in the diversity of culture, which may positively or negatively affect the learners' RC skills as culturally familiar texts are comprehended more accurately than culturally unfamiliar ones. In a study that employed three different reading comprehension sub-tests: a reading sub-test including culturally familiar topics and two reading sub-tests with culturally unfamiliar topics, Yousef et al. (2014) found that students attained greater scores in culturally familiar reading tests than culturally unfamiliar ones.

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine whether regional differences, socio-economic status (SES), and gender affect the learning of English as a Second Language (ESL) and reading comprehension (Corpas Arellano, 2013; Beckman et al., 2012; Cheung & Slavin, 2005; Figueroa & Sassenrath, 1989; Hu, 2003; Ismail et al., 2018; Melby-Lervåg & Lervåg, 2014; Modirkhemene, 2006; Ngongare et al., 2021;

Romeo et al., 2018; Skrentny, 2020). Some of these studies reported the influence of the variables on ESL learners' RC while others found no significant relationships. Thus the present study aims at examining the influence of gender, socioeconomic status, and regional difference on predicting EFL learners' RC. García and Cain (2014) claimed that the existing literature presents little evidence concerning whether or not these factors positively or negatively affect the reading comprehension of the learners and, thus, necessitated research to be conducted in this regard. Consequently, Thailand, an EFL context, was selected to accomplish the study. Such study remains relatively unexplored not only in the Thai context, but also in other EFL contexts.

Concerning the correlation between the independent variables (SES, gender, and regional difference) and the dependent variable (reading comprehension), there are mixed observations documented in the previous literature. While most of the studies found a positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables, the non-significant nature of the relationship has been reported in some studies. To test this in a Thai setting, the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Gender predicts Thai EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Hypothesis 2: Socioeconomic status predicts Thai EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Hypothesis 3: Regional difference predicts Thai EFL learners' reading comprehension.

Research Methodology

Research site

Founded in 1996, King Mongkut's Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (KMITL) is a public higher education institution located in Bangkok, Thailand. It has seven faculties and four colleges with an enrollment of approximately 30,000 undergraduate and graduate students. It has provided higher education and research to advance technology, specifically in science and engineering for the sustainable development of Thailand. The institute is currently one of the best technological universities in Thailand and South-East Asia (Hui et al., 2020).

The skill of reading is perceived as essential for Thai engineering students to acquire and transfer knowledge, which, in turn, affects the nation's infrastructural prosperity and economic growth. However, tertiary students' reading comprehension ability has been identified as inadequate to facilitate knowledge acquisition, as confirmed by numerous tests of English reading comprehension ability (Hui et al., 2020). The current study was an attempt to examine the impact of gender, SES, and regional difference on the RC skills of learners.

Participants of the study

The target population of this study was 6,289 KMITL freshmen students. Convenience sampling (Patton, 2002) was chosen because the students who participated in this study were easily accessible since they all studied Foundation English. Instructors on two campuses (Bangkok and Chumphon provinces) were formally contacted to obtain permission to administer the test during scheduled classes. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, for a given population of 6,289, a sample size of 361 is satisfactory to represent a cross-section of the population within a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level. However, we increased the sample size to at least 10% of the target population, and a convenience sample of 820 was recruited.

The participants were first-year university undergraduates from nine faculties and various academic programs. They represented a cross-section of gender, SES, and region where SES was determined based on monthly family income. The commonly adopted practice for determining SES is to consider family income, parental education, and parental occupation together (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Sirin, 2005). For the current study, the researchers employed family income to determine the SES of the participants. Four groups were identified as shown in Table 1.

Range of Family Income	Number of Participants
0 – 10000	322
10001 – 25000	216
25001 – 40000	94
40001 – Above	98

Table 1: SES and participants

Moreover, the participants were members of different regions as illustrated in Table 2.

Region	Number of Participants
Central	44
Northern	465
Northeastern	92
Southern	40
Eastern	65
Western	24

Table 2: Region and participants

The participants' responses in regard to demographic information were obtained from the test. Intriguingly, although KMITL is in the central region, the participants from the northern region made up a majority. The gender of the participants is shown in Table 3.

Gender	Male	279
	Female	451

Table 3: Gender and participants

As mentioned above, the initial number of participants was 820. However, some of the participants were excluded from the study because of incomplete answers to the questions or inadequate information (i.e., not answering all the questions concerning either socioeconomic status or region). The inclusion criteria set for the study involved completing the test and supplying the required information by including all of the requested demographic data that determined their SES, gender, and place of origin to satisfy the research need. In the process, 730 participants remained who formed the final sample for the study.

Instrumentation

In Thailand, standardized testing is employed; however, the results of the tests do not provide evidence about the reading comprehension abilities of the students. There is also no English placement test to determine RC ability of each student (Hui et al., 2020). As such, the need for profiling undergraduates by adopting statistically sound and reliable testing instruments for assessing ability in RC is echoed in many studies. An instrument was developed, known as the Thai Reading Evaluation and Decoding System (T-READS), to assist in testing English reading comprehension ability. Notably, using such an instrument to measure reading comprehension ability would inform the undergraduates about their "comprehensibility profile" (Isaacs et al., 2018, p. 199) and foster awareness of their actual reading comprehension ability.

The most significant element of T-READS concerns the inclusion of cut scores (i.e., categorizing the students who scored below and above the standard) that offer more precise information about their RC skills. The cut scores have imperative significance for test-takers and test-developers, especially within the context of diagnostic tests, such as T-READS (Hui et al., 2020). By employing T-READS in universities, the cut scores reflect the detailed information of the students studying English courses. Hui et al. argued that determining the cut scores assists in placing students at a level that matched their ability.

Nevertheless, validity generalization and test utility must be considered. There is disagreement over these issues because this original test instrument was predominantly developed and administered to Malaysian students and thereby involved contextual biases. For that reason, the original Reading Evaluation and Decoding System (READS) was considered unfit for Thai students. Adapting the test instrument, rather than developing a new one explicitly for the target stakeholder is considered more suitable since using an adapted version offers higher validity within an increasingly diverse population. In the adaptation process, the original READS was adopted and only one main factor affecting student test results, contextual bias, was adapted.

It is worth mentioning that adapting a test instrument is a complex task since it involves a careful arrangement and procedure, particularly materials and test utility, for the target audience (Cassepp-Borges et al. as cited in Borsa et al., 2012). It should be noted that the adaptation maintains a cultural fit and is the groundwork for practice in diverse cultural contexts. Three individuals who specialized in English language assessment were involved in the adaptation of READS. These experts were given a paper-based test of the original READS to give opinions about biases inherent in the test instrument and ways to amend it. Other vital aspects, such as layout and the level of difficulty, were also then evaluated. The experts then considered whether the vocabulary could be applied in a Thai context and whether it was suited for the target audience. In a reading passage, for instance, Malaysia Airlines was replaced with Thai Airways, and

Hashim, a Malay name, was changed to Ekkapon to reflect Thai culture (Hui et al., 2020). Such changes ensure that the test is a test of reading comprehension rather than a test of global knowledge as cultural and background differences may lead to assessment inaccuracies. Thus, the test should not contain elements that require cultural knowledge. As an example, in a passage in the original READS, Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR) is mentioned. While Malaysian people would be familiar with it because it is form of assessment in Malaysia, Thai students have no knowledge of UPSR. Therefore, a localized Thai version was developed and employed to assess undergraduates' English reading comprehension at any level in Thai universities.

Content Validity Index (CVI) refers to the index of interrater agreement from experts. The item's relevance is calculated through a validation process of the entire scale. The Content Validity Index is the most-used approach of content validity to enable the rejection or retention of each item (Ahmad et al., 2019). As for T-READS, the test was evaluated by a panel of three experts, who were senior English teachers from Thailand. The experts rated the relevance of the T-READS items by using a 4-point scale validation form (1=not relevant; 2=somewhat relevant; 3=quite relevant; 4=highly relevant). The test was revised and finalized based on the feedback from the experts.

Validity Tests	Validity Values Thai READS	Mean Expert Proportion
S-CVI	0.97	0.97

Table 4: S-CVI for relevancy of T-READS

As shown in Table 2, the S-CVI rating is based on the S-CVI guideline suggested by Davis (1992). Furthermore, to confirm that the instrument is reliable, a pilot study was conducted (Ismail et al., 2018). A total of 624 university students took the test. Using the KR-20 coefficient in Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS) software version 22 indicated the homogeneity of the test (KR-20 = 0.91).

Reliability Tests	Reliability Values Thai READS	Number of Items	Number of respondents
KR-20	0.91	60	624

Table 5: Analysis of test reliability

The T-READS showed a high value of 0.91 in the KR-20 and 0.97 S-CVI, which suggested the homogeneity of the test, implying that the instrument was applicable in measuring the undergraduates' reading performance. In short, we perceived that in a large-scale study, it would be essential to know the technical indicators which define the quality of the educational instrument employed. The Thai version of READS employed to determine the Thai undergraduates' reading comprehension ability (Khemanuwong et al., 2018). According to Ismail et al. (2018), the content validity of the T-READS was high with 0.92 of the index of item objective congruence (IOC). Moreover, the T-READS attained test reliability with a KR-20 coefficient of 0.91.

Fundamentally, T-READS comprises three components - *the Encoder* (i.e., the test instrument), which is one of the instruments of the test to understand the reading comprehension ability of EFL learners as explained in Ismail et al. (2018); *the analyzer* or reading matrix, and, *the decoder*, which explains the reading performance of a student as illustrated in Figure 2. Firstly, 60 multiple-choice questions were administered that enabled the Encoder to measure the participants' ability in RC. As a cross-reference for the ability in RC, the Reading Matrix marks an individual to an appropriate level of "Above Standard," "Meet Standard," "Below Standard," and "Academic Warning." Lastly, the Descriptors of Reading Abilities (from Band 1 to Band 6) are used to determine what learners were (or were not) able to achieve based on the given answers.

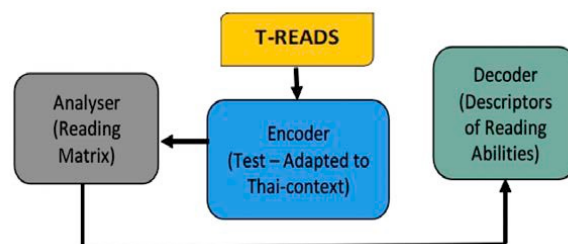


Figure 2: Components of the T-READS adaptation based on Ismail et al. (2018)

Scores	Band 1	Band 2	Band 3	Band 4	Band 5	Band 6
	0-15	16-22	23-35	36-47	48-53	54-60
Year 1 Thai Undergraduates	Academic Warning	Below Standard	Meet Standard		Above Standard	

Table 6: T-READS bands

Considering the adjustment of T-READS, which affected only the Encoder (test), the results of the Analyser (the Reading Matrix) and Decoder (the Descriptors of Reading Abilities) were employed to inform the test developers about the necessary information of the test-takers' RC abilities (Ismail et al., 2018).

According to Boopathiraj and Chellamani (2013), questions in a test should indicate a certain level of difficulty. In the T-READS test, 60 questions with three difficulty levels – easy (25%), moderate (50%), and difficult (25%) were included (Mok, 2000) with three sub-skills of reading comprehension (i.e., literal, reorganization, and inferential), based on Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension (Lim et al., 2014). Finally, the T-READS test was found to be high in the power of discrimination with 0.51 while the Malaysian READS was at 0.22. From the power of discrimination index, the T-READS could also illustrate students' abilities in each sub-skill with three levels of difficulty (i.e., low, moderate, and high).

Data collection procedure

To examine the relationship between the independent variables (gender, socioeconomic status, and region) and the dependent variable (reading comprehension), the reading comprehension score of the participants was identified first by adopting T-READS. After that, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables was examined. Before the participants took the test, a brief orientation session presenting the main purpose of the research was conducted.

In T-READS, undergraduates respond to various types of text, such as conversations, news, academic reports, and descriptive texts (Hui et al., 2020). Appendix 1 contains sample questions that indicate the nature of the questions included in the test. The test was uploaded onto the KMITL Online Test of English Proficiency website for the undergraduates to take online (see examples in Figures 3, 4, 5, 6). During the test, the procedures for using the T-READS followed the time allocation guidelines in Ismail et al.'s (2018) study, which provided 70 minutes for test-takers to complete the online test.

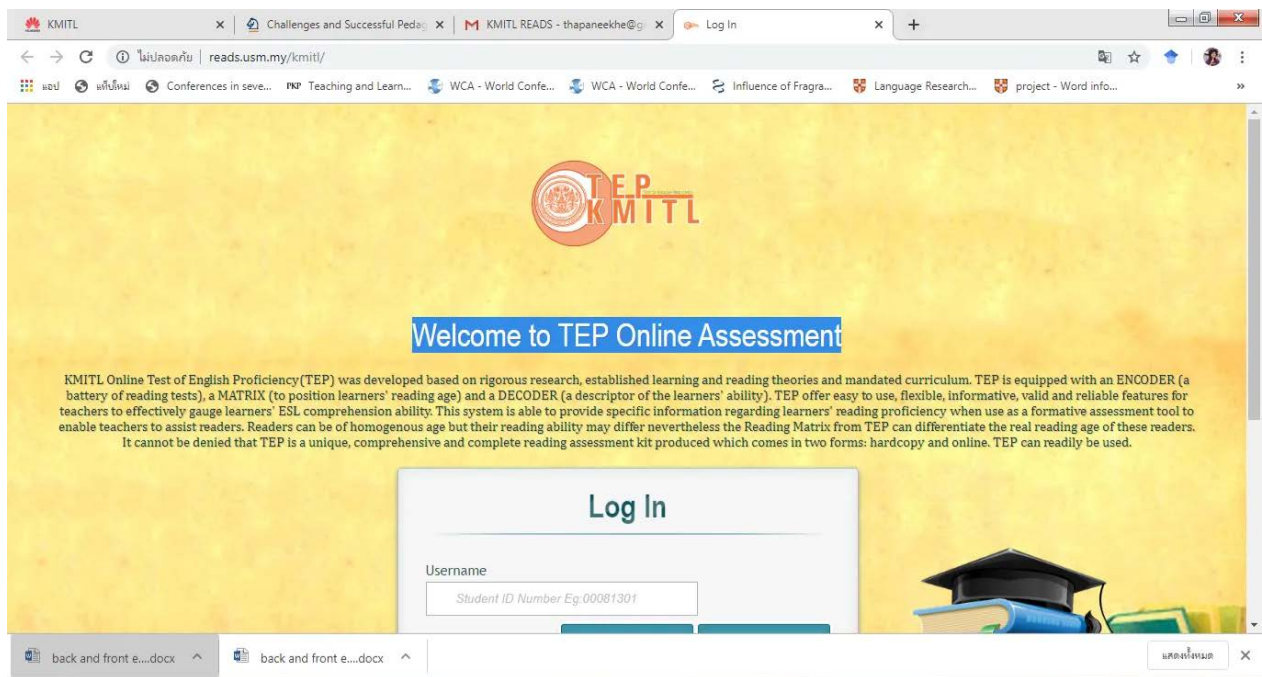


Figure 3: Approaching T-READS

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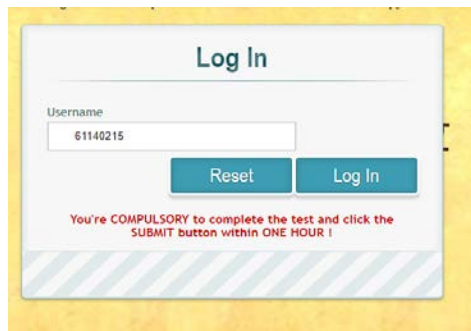


Figure 4: Login page



Figure 5: Student Menu

RESULT

The result/s for KITIYADA PANPANG.

Score	Section A	Section B	Section C	Achieved Band	Expected Band	Performance Standard	Date & Time yyyy-mm-dd & hh:mm:ss
15/60 (25%)	7/15 (47%) LL=4/6 LM=2/6 LH=1/3	4/30 (13%) ML=1/10 MM=3/15 MH=0/5	4/15 (27%) HL=2/3 HM=2/8 HH=0/4	2	6	Academic Warning	2018-08-01 12:08:04

Figure 6: Student result

Ethical considerations

At the onset of data collection, the second author applied for administrative approval from the university and the Research Ethics Committee of King Mongkut’s Institute of Technology Ladkrabang (Study Code: EC-KMITL_67_092) to gain official permission to conduct the study and sought the participants’ consent. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality and anonymity that were maintained in reporting the findings, the dissemination of the findings, the benefits of the findings, and their right to withdraw from the study prior to seeking their consent for participating in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These were accomplished to ensure that the inquiry was ethical and respectful. The test was administered to the university undergraduates following the procedures set for the application of READS as outlined by Ismail et al. (2018).

Data analysis

An exploratory process was applied for data analysis. In the first phase of the exploratory part, data sets have been summarized. Then, the data were subjected to SPSS with a particular focus on linear regression to determine the predictability of the independent variables (gender, socioeconomic status, and region) against the dependent variable (reading comprehension).

Findings

The current study employed linear regression analysis to examine the relationship between the dependent variable (READS score) and independent variables (gender, SES, and region). The analysis of the data suggested that gender was not a significant predictor in determining EFL learners’ reading comprehension as indicated by $p > .05$ ($p = .30$ related to gender in this study). This is congruent with Kaya and Yildirim’s (2018) study that reported that gender and students’ RC were not positively correlated. This finding is also consistent with that of Ismail et al. (2018) although Harper and Pelletier (2008) suggested that the learners’ ability in RC varied depending on their gender.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)												
Gender	1.984	.011		184.923	.000	1.963	2.005					
SocEcoSts	.005	.005	.038	1.029	.304	-.005	.015	.038	.038	.038	1.000	1.000
Region	.000	.002	-.003	-.075	.941	-.005	.004	-.003	-.003	-.003	1.000	1.000
	.002	.002	.032	.856	.393	-.002	.006	.031	.032	.032	1.000	1.000

a. Dependent Variable: READScore

Table 7: Coefficients

SES was also not found to be a determinant for EFL learners’ reading comprehension, indicated by $p > .05$ ($p = .941$ related to SES in this study). The findings of the current study did not concur with those of previous studies. Romeo et al. (2018) reported the predictive ability of SES in determining the RC of learners and Cheng and Wu (2017) identified the significance of SES in determining the RC of the learners. Calvo and Bialystok (2014) identified SES as a strong determinant, as indicated by $p < .05$, for the language and cognitive development of the learners. Likewise, Powell et al. (2012) and Altschul (2012) defined SES as a significant predictor of the learners’ achievement and mastery in RC. However, the findings of this study corresponded to that of Modirkhamene (2006), in that there was no relationship between SES and RC, as estimated with $p > .05$ (with $ps = .98, .07, .08$). In the same vein, Beckman et al. (2012) reported that poverty was not an influential factor for learners’ RC, as indicated by $p < .05$. Furthermore, the current study observed no predictability in regard to region for EFL learners’ reading comprehension with $p > .05$ ($p = .393$ related to the regional difference in this study).

Hypothesis Testing

The findings of the current study enable us to test the hypotheses as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Gender predicts Thai EFL learners’ reading comprehension → Rejected.

Hypothesis 2: Socioeconomic status predicts Thai EFL learners’ reading comprehension → Rejected.

Hypothesis 3: Regional difference predicts Thai EFL learners’ reading comprehension → Rejected.

Discussion

In the present study, T-READs was employed to obtain the RC scores of EFL learners. Demographic information was also collected to inform the researchers about gender, SES, and region. Data analysis was conducted to determine whether the three distinct independent variables (gender, SES, and regional difference) influenced RC. The study revealed that the distinct independent variables were not significant predictors of EFL learners’ RC. The study also revealed that gender was not a significant predictor of Thai EFL learners’ RC, reflecting the results of previous studies that indicated that the sexes shared similar features (Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004). Considering the use of reading strategies, Poole (2005) also found no significant difference between male and female students in terms of reading strategy use. Yet, some other studies suggested that female students were more likely to use reading strategies than male students (Poole, 2009). In regard to Thailand, the homogeneous nature of reading strategy use was predicted for both male and female students and the present study observed no role of gender in predicting Thai learners’ RC. Moreover, with a similar mean for both sexes - 1.9928 and 1.9978 respectively, there was no visible difference observed in their attained scores in the T-READS test. However, the level of education (first-year students at the university) might be an influential factor. As regards university students in Thailand, it can be predicted that they seem to share a common attitude towards reading for which gender has no significance in terms of their reading comprehension.

Like gender, regional differences were also identified to be insignificant predictors of RC in the current study. However, some studies reported the influence of regional variations. For instance, Major et al. (2005) reported that regional factors were key predictors of learners’ comprehension. Hu’s (2003) study identified a clear region-based difference in learners’ proficiency in reading. According to Hu, regional difference came into prominence once economic, political, cultural, and curricular factors became functional and eventually develop the constraints involved in approaches to teaching and learning English. According to these findings, Thailand may not have suffered from those economic, political, cultural, and curricular constraints that had affected English teaching and learning in other locations. For this reason, the role of regional difference was found to be insignificant in predicting Thai learners’ RC. Hu also suggested that infrastructural resources, including school facilities, instructional equipment, language learning materials, and the professional

competence of teachers, could be the product of government policies and economic development. Since we observed no impact of regional differences in the university studied, it is possible that there was homogeneity in terms of school facilities, instructional equipment, language learning materials, and professional competence of teachers. Similar means for Central, Northern, Southern, Eastern, and Western Regions in the T-READS scores (1.5227, 1.6366, 1.6087, 1.6000, 1.5692, and 1.6250 respectively). Thus, regional differences were not found to be influential to the outcome of the current study.

The SES of the parents also was shown not to be a predictor of Thai learners' RC, although Parcel and Menaghan (1990) expressed the idea that parents involved in intellectually stimulating jobs tended to provide more support and thought-provoking educational materials for their children. With diversity in SES, the limited ability of Thai parents to provide their children with supportive and stimulating materials could limit the progress of the learner. In addition, a similar mean for the participants with various SES (1.6087 (0-10000), 1.6204 (10000-25000), 1.6596 (25001-40000), and 1.6020 (40001-Above) respectively) was seen in the READS scores. Thus, due to a diversity in SES and the variation in the number of participants from different SES, the difference in SES was influential to the outcome of the study.

Future studies

The present study was limited to understanding the correlation between three demographic factors (social economic status (SES), regional difference, and gender) and Thai learners' reading comprehension ability. However, other factors might positively or negatively affect the ability of the learners to comprehend a reading test. For example, the first language of the learners could affect the development of second-language skills. Considering the time-on-task hypothesis by Porter (1990), Melby-Lervåg and Lervåg (2014) argued that the time spent learning the first language could have a significant impact on the development of second-language skills. Added to this, intrinsic motivation positively or negatively affects in building ability in RC (Becker et al., 2010). In line with this, the current study proposed future studies be dedicated to examining the RC ability in the light of these variables. T-READS can be considered as a valuable instrument for profiling the actual reading standards of the learners in Thailand, but may need to be adjusted to suit local settings elsewhere. As a result, other countries could reconsider the impact of gender, SES, and regions on developing the RC of learners. T-READS acts as an effective tool to measure the correlation of RC with any variable because to keep the track of the performance of the students on reading, the conventional system of assessment does not identify or specify the particular status of reading comprehensibility of the learners whereas T-READS is set with some certain descriptors that can define the status of reading comprehensibility of the learners.

Conclusion

The current study examined the effect of social economic status (SES), regional variations and gender on determining Thai learners' reading comprehension. Data was collected from first-year EFL undergraduates from nine faculties and various academic programs of a Thai university. These provided the demographic information which let them discover the participants' gender, SES, and regions. Then an instrument known as T-READS (Thai Reading Evaluation and Decoding System) was developed and applied to test learners' English reading ability and ascertain their scores in reading comprehension. Applying linear regression in SPSS, the researchers discovered that gender, SES, and regional differences did not play any role in determining the reading comprehension ability of the participants in the study. The participants were limited to one university which limited to possibility to make definitive conclusions on the results of each variable. Hence, a nationwide study, using the methods applied in this study to collect data from learners of different regions and educational levels would further contribute to determining the effect of SES, regional variation, and gender on the reading comprehension of Thai students.

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Appendix 1

Test Paper

Please answer all questions and press submit.

Questions 1 – 5

Read the advertisement below answer the questions that follow.

MOVING OUT SALE

7 December - 5 January 2016
discount up to

CENTURY

Stationery Shop

85 %

For more information log on to
www.century.com.my

127, Jln Maharajalela, Kuala Lumpur
(T): 03-28957332
(F): 03-29857333

1. The phrase '**moving out**' means
 - relocation
 - renovation
 - reformation
 - reconstruction

2. How long does the sale last?
 - A year
 - A week
 - A month
 - A fortnight

3. To get more information about the sale, you can do the following **except**
 - Fax
 - Phone
 - Log on to website
 - E-mail

4. Which of the following statements is **not** true?
 - Customers can call for enquiries
 - Every item is sold at a discount of 85%
 - The shop is now located at Jalan Maharajalela

59:17

- Customers can get information through website

5. What conclusion can be drawn from the advertisement? Century Stationery shop ...
- is having a promotion
 - attempts to clear stocks
 - is promoting the new shop
 - tries to attract more customers

Questions 6 – 10

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Suria and her sister, Alia, arrived early at the Pudu Raya Bus Station. They wanted to take the bus to Penang to visit their aunt because they missed her so much. They had called her earlier to inform her of their visit. They left the bus-station at nine in the morning. On the way, the bus driver made a few stops at the rest areas along the highway.

The girls reached Butterworth at three that afternoon. Then they **got on** a ferry to Penang Island. When they reached Penang, they took a trishaw to Komtar to do some shopping.

After two hours of shopping, they went to the ground floor to take a taxi to their aunt's house. Their aunt was waiting for them. Then, they sat down and had tea together.

Source: Saw, C. S. & Madhuri Yashini. (2012). Kertas Model A+ UPSR Bahasa Inggeris Year 5. Kuala Lumpur: Pustaka Seri Cahaya

6. How did Suria and Alia go to Penang?
- By car
 - By bus
 - By train
 - By flight
7. Where did the girls go after reaching Butterworth?
- Visited their aunt
 - Went to Penang by ferry
 - Took a trishaw to Komtar
 - Went to another bus station
8. The phrase '**got on**' means
- seated
 - escaped
 - boarded
 - alighted
9. Which of the following is **not** true?
- Komtar is a place for shopping
 - Komtar is located on Penang Island
 - Suria and Alia took the ferry to Penang Island
 - The bus stopped at Pudu Raya Bus Station
10. What conclusion can be drawn from the passage?

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- Suria and Alia visited a lot of places
- Suria and Alia invited them to Penang
- Suria and Alia were once from Penang
- Suria and Alia went to Penang for holiday

Questions 11 – 15

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

The moment when everyone sits up expectantly, it means it is the time for maths period and all of us wait **eagerly** for our maths teacher, Mrs Huang, to come into the class. She is very popular among us. In fact, she is my favourite teacher.

Mrs Huang has short curly hair and wears thick glasses. However, she is actually very approachable and is always ready to lend an ear to our problems. She is motherly and cares very much for us. I remember once when I fell and hurt my knee. Mrs Huang helped me to stop the bleeding and took me to the clinic. I was very grateful to her.

I used to dislike maths when I was younger because I found it far too complicated. Mrs Huang always makes maths lessons interesting and easy to understand. She is very patient in explaining maths problems to us and always makes sure everyone understands. Under her guidance, my maths has improved by leaps and bounds.

I have grown to love maths and I always score high marks in my maths tests now. It is all because of my favourite teacher.

Source:(2009, January 20). Citing Websites. Talk About Your Favourite Teacher.
Retrieved November 22, 2012, from <http://language123.blogspot.com/>

11. What does the word '**eagerly**' mean?
 - silently
 - patiently
 - excitedly
 - tediously
12. Which of the following is **not** true about Mrs Huang?
 - She is a selfish person
 - She is a maths teacher
 - She wears thin glasses
 - She has short curly hair
13. Why did the writer dislike maths when he was younger? He felt maths was ...
 - difficult
 - too easy
 - amazing
 - interesting
14. Mrs Huang would do the following in the class **except**
 - making the lessons interesting
 - teaching the students patiently
 - giving complicated maths exercise
 - making sure the students understand
15. What conclusion can be drawn from the passage?
 - Mathematic is a complicated subject
 - Mrs Huang is strict in teaching Mathematics
 - Students must not tell their problems to teachers
 - The writer is inspired by Mrs Huang to excel in maths

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Test Paper

Please answer all questions and press submit.

QUESTION 16-21

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

Facebook Dos

Do use your real name and real picture in your profile. The idea behind these sites is for friends to stay in touch and reconnect. If you use a fake name and picture, people you knew will not be able to find you.

Do look at the pictures of people who send you friend requests. Even if you don't recognize them from the photo currently on display, you may recognize the person from a different picture.

Do tag the pictures you post so that friends know when you have put their picture online. It is just common courtesy to let people know when you have put their likeness on the internet.

Do report any threats of violence or other inappropriate posts or images to Facebook and to the proper real world authorities like school officials, parents and police.

Facebook Don'ts

Don't leave the default Facebook privacy settings as set. Go in and customize your privacy. Of particular importance, limit what people can see when you poke or message them before you have added them as a friend.

Don't ever announce on your wall, or on any public wall, where you plan to go or who you plan to go with. Cyber stalkers are a real threat and if you have one, this tells them where to find you in real life.

Don't accept Facebook invites to events. If you plan to attend, send your acceptance using a private message or tell the host when you see them in person.

Don't use Facebook to bully, harass, spread rumors, challenge fights or otherwise **incite** violence. Facebook is a social utility, not an anti-social utility.

Adapted from <http://teenadvice.about.com/od/adviceexpert/a/usingfacebook.htm>

16. What name should you use in your Facebook profile?
- Real name
 - Nickname
 - Fake name
 - Fanciful name
17. Who should Facebook users report to if there are inappropriate postings?
- Parents, firemen, policemen
 - Police, officers, school authorities
 - Police, school officials, parents
 - Armed forces, school officials, parents
18. What may happen if you announce on your Facebook wall about your holiday plans? 57:47
- Stalkers will know where to look for you.
 - Robbers will know where to hunt for you.
 - Law authorities will know where to arrest you.
 - Family members will know where to search for you.
19. If you are invited to a Facebook event, a better way to accept the invitation is through ...

- Facebook wall
- Facebook tag function
- Facebook privacy setting
- Facebook private message

20. What is another word that is suitable to replace 'incite'?

- Move
- Excite
- Provoke
- Stimulate

21. Why is Facebook known as a social utility?

- It is used to spread rumours.
- It is used to report any threats
- It is used to challenge friends in a fight
- It is used to stay in touch with each other

QUESTION 22-27

Read the text below and answer the questions that follow.

AIRASIA AND TUNE LAUNCH BIG LOYALTY PROGRAMME IN THAILAND

Following its successful rollout in Malaysia and Indonesia at the end of 2011, the global loyalty programme BIG was officially launched in Thailand on Wednesday. Collaboration between AirAsia and Tune Money, BIG allows members to earn points when travelling and shopping with its partners worldwide in order to redeem the accumulated points for rewards including AirAsia and AirAsia X seats. In conjunction with the BIG launch in Thailand, new BIG members who apply online before 31 March 2012 will receive 250 free BIG Points. The offer is exclusively for applicants from Thailand.

On top of that, members can also earn double points at participating stores with this limited time offer. As a global loyalty programme, BIG membership is borderless and open to anyone aged 2 and above anywhere in the world. Each member, nicknamed 'BIG Shot', is issued with a BIG card carrying the cardholder's name and membership identification number, or BIG Shot ID. BIG enables members to earn loyalty points called 'BIG Points' when travelling and shopping with programme partners.

Tune Group Co-Founder and Group CEO of AirAsia, Tan Sri Tony Fernandes said, "I'm very excited that the BIG Card is now in Thailand so you'll be able to fly AirAsia and shop with our partners to get BIG Points and redeem them for free flights on AirAsia and other rewards. I also encourage all merchants to join this programme. This is very important to us and like AirAsia, from our humble beginnings of flying just 200,000 people to now 32 million guests a year; I believe the BIG Card is going to be the largest loyalty card in Asia. Join us now and let the people of Thailand enjoy more free flights."

22. The word 'its' in paragraph 1 refers to AirAsia and Tune launching of BIG loyalty programme in ...

- Asia and Europe
- Thailand and Malaysia
- Indonesia and Thailand
- Malaysia and Indonesia

23. Mr. Bhumirol will get the 25 free BIG points if he applies on ...

- 1 April 2012
- 14 May 2012
- 13 March 2012
- 10 December 2012

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24. Encik Halim, a Malaysian is a BIG loyalty card member. The benefits he will get are ...

- 250 free BIG points
- money from the card
- BIG points to redeem for gifts

- BIG points when travelling with Air Asia only

25. The sequence for the launching of BIG loyalty card is ...

- Malaysia after Thailand
- Thailand after Indonesia
- Indonesia after Malaysia
- Malaysia before Thailand

26. The above advertisement is about the main benefit of BIG loyalty card for ...
- Thais
 - Malaysians
 - Air Asia CEO
 - Air Asia customers
27. Tan Sri Tony Fernandes would like all merchants to join the BIG loyalty programme because ...
- he wants only AirAsia to expand
 - he wants to have the largest loyalty card in Asia
 - he wishes more Thais will get to enjoy free flights
 - he hopes that these merchants' businesses will grow like AirAsia

QUESTION 28-33

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

We often read headlines like these in the newspaper: 'Robbers make away with fifty thousand dollars from bank' or 'Tycoon loses cash and jewellery to armed robbers'. Successful robberies **make headlines** in the newspaper. Very often, robbers get away with their loot. However, there are robbers and burglars who bungle on the job. Less-than-savvy pirates lost control of a 70-foot yacht they were stealing Sunday night, setting off a chain-reaction crash of yachts inside a Davie marina. The unknown number of suspects lost control of the yacht **Hattrick** inside **Roscioli** Yachting Center, 3201 State Road 84, about 6:30 p.m. Another case was when a thief in Birmingham, England, had planned to rob a newsagent's office. He was shocked to find himself face to face with a snarling police dog. The robber thought that he had disconnected the alarm system before breaking in. The alarm bell rang loud and clear, and he did not hear it! He was hard of hearing!

There was another crook who strolled into a supermarket in Southampton, England. He filled a basket with goods, and then went up to the cashier. He gave her a ten-pound note, intending to snatch all the money in the till when she opened it. He did not know that there was only £4.37 in the till. He took the money, but he lost £5.63 in the operation!

In Dusseldorf, West Germany, a shoplifter was chased by the police over rooftops. The shoplifter clambered down a drainpipe, with the pursuers close at his heels. In desperation, he leapt from an eight-foot wall. He found himself in a prison exercise yard! Prison warders quickly put him in the lock-up. They found six watches on him.

(Adapted from the New Sunday Times, 1985)

28. The meaning of '**make headlines**' is ...
- to commit robberies
 - to get away with the loot
 - to become important news
 - to have more lines on the head
29. Why was the robber in Birmingham caught?
- He was deaf.
 - He was blind.
 - He faced the dog.
 - He disconnected the alarm.
30. How did the Southampton robber bungle in the robbery?
- He did not snatch a ten-pound note from the cashier.
 - He did not manage to get any money from the cashier.
 - He did not have a basket to fill the money that he robbed.
 - He did not find out how much money was in the cash register before he robbed.
31. Why was the man from West Germany sent to prison?
- He shoplifted six watches.
- 57:47
-
- He clambered down a drainpipe.
 - He jumped over an eight-foot wall.
 - He jumped into the prison exercise yard.
32. Who were the pursuers going after the man from Dusseldorf?
- The police
 - The shoplifter
 - The prison warders.
 - The owners of the shop

QUESTION 34 – 39

Read the conversation below and answer the questions that follow.

Three students were discussing the candidates for their school Head Prefect post.

Sue : Now that you've heard all of them speak, whom will you vote for?

Zai : I don't know yet. The second speaker was quite persuasive in his speech. I was so moved when he urged us to put the school first everything else. He really made me feel such pride for the school.

Sue : You're talking about James Lokman, aren't you? True, he has a good, clear voice. But I prefer the last speaker, Sarjit. He looks so handsome.

Jan : Surely you're not going to vote for someone simply because he's good-looking?

Sue : He was so nervous up there that I could see his **knees shaking**.

Zai : But that's understandable. Who wouldn't be? Imagine speaking to a big crowd of people who are there to size you up.

Jan : I didn't say I like him. Neither was I impressed by the soft-spoken boy who spoken immediately after James. We need someone who can command our attention.

Sue : In that case, Gan Jee Meng is your candidate. There's no one else.

Jan : At least he's got personality. When he spoke on the problems teenagers face these days, I could see he understands and cares. These are qualities we expect from a Head Prefect.

Zai : You're right. We should be sensible and not be swayed by looks and words alone. A Head Prefect should have certain qualities, integrity being first and foremost. Then comes fairness.

Zai : Besides, he should be able to speak well. You must remember that there will be many occasions when the Head Prefect has to go up and speak.

Jan : Hey, that's the bell. Come on, let's go back to class.

Adapted from Siri Kunci Peperiksaan PMR Bahasa Inggeris, Pustaka Sistem Pelajaran Sdn Bhd., 2000

34. Which speaker made Zai feel proud of his school?

- First speaker
- Second speaker
- Third speaker
- Final speaker

35. The Head Prefect should be selected based on the following characteristics **except** ...

- integrity
- soft-spoken
- good-looking
- commanding presence

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36. The phrase '**knees shaking**' means the speaker is ...

- proud
- nervous
- confident
- showing off

37. What was the issue that Gan Jee Meng brought up in his speech?

- Problems that teenagers face
- Problems of being good-looking
- Problems of making speeches in front of a crowd
- Problems of students making their presence felt in school

38. Why is it that the Head Prefect needs to be brave to give speeches?

- He has a good, clear voice
- He has to command attention
- He has many occasions to speak in public
- He has to give speeches so that people can size him up

33. The passage above is mainly about ...

- robbers who succeeded in the robbery
- robbers who did not succeed in the robbery
- robbers who made the news by avoiding prison
- robbers who made the news by bungling in robberies

39. Finally, all three friends agree that Gan Jee Meng is the best candidate for Head Prefect because ...

- he is caring
- he is sensible
- he looks handsome
- he speaks eloquently

QUESTION 40-45

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow.

My mother used to ask me what is the most important part of the body? When I was younger, I thought sound was very important to us as humans, so I said, "My ears, Mommy." She said, "No. Many people are deaf. But you keep thinking about it. I will ask you again soon." Over the years, Mother asked me a couple more times and always her answer was, "No. But you are getting smarter every year."

Then, my grandpa died. Everybody was hurt and crying. Mother looked at me when it was our turn to say our final goodbye to Grandpa. She asked me, "Do you know the most important body part yet, my dear?" She saw confusion on my face and told me, "This question is very important. It shows that you have really lived in your life. For every body part you gave me in the past, I have told you were wrong and I have given you an example why. But today is the day you need to learn this important lesson."

She looked at me. I saw her eyes well up with tears. She said, "My dear, the most important body part is your shoulder. It is because it can hold the head of a friend or a loved one when they cry. I hope that you have enough love and friends that you will always have a shoulder to cry on when you need it." Then and there I knew the most important body part is not a selfish one. It is **sympathetic** to the pain of others.

<http://www.smsppenglishpanel.net/index.php/inspirational-stories/344-the-most-important-body-part>

40. To the writer, the most important part of the body the first time his mother asked him was ...

- ears
- eyes
- heart
- shoulder

41. The correct answer was given by ...
- the writer
 - the writer's mother
 - the writer's friends
 - the writer's grandfather
42. The word '**sympathetic**' can be replaced with ...
- warm
 - callous
 - sensitive
 - vicarious
- 57:47
43. Why was there confusion on the writer's face when his mother asked him the question during his grandfather's funeral?
- He thought his grandfather would be angry.
 - He thought that it was not the right time to ask the question.
 - He thought it should be the time to say goodbye to his father.
 - He thought the question was only between his mother and him.

44. When did the writer know the answer to the question: which is the most important part of the body?
- When he grew up
 - When his father cried
 - When he became smarter
 - When his grandfather died
45. The writer realised that the most important of the body was the ...
- ears
 - eyes
 - heart
 - shoulders

Test Paper

Please answer all questions and press submit.

Questions 46 – 60

Read the passage below and answer the questions that follow

- 1 The National Green Technology Policy was launched by the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Najib Razak in July 2009. This policy serves to accelerate the national economy and promote sustainable development by seeking to promote efficient energy use. The success of the policy would improve the quality of life for Malaysians, increase national economic development by means of technology, and safeguard the integrity of the environment.
- 2 The National Green Technology and Climate Change Council; operates through five councils the Industry Committee, Human Capital Committee, Research and Innovation Committee, Promotion and Public Awareness Committee and Transportation Committee. Green Tech Malaysia serves as the focal point for green technology in Malaysia, with the explicit mission of promoting, coordinating and collaborating programmes towards the realisation of green technology in Malaysia.
- 3 The efforts of the government in promoting green technology have been admirable. Since January 2010, a total of RM1.5 billion has been made available for soft loans to interested parties with low interest rates, including approximately RM50 million for producers and RM10 million for users of green technology.
- 4 The 2013 Budget gave an additional RM2 billion for green technology projects under the Green Technology Financing Scheme (GFTS). The GFTS was established to encourage investments in green technology, a sector that was predicted to be one of the most important new drivers of economic growth in Malaysia. The country is also attempting to create an environment conducive to green technology by introducing new economic instruments, strengthening the understanding of green technology among relevant stakeholders, and promoting foreign direct investments and domestic direct investments.
- 5 Green projects have also taken off the ground in Malaysia. Putrajaya was designed as a garden city, and 38 per cent of its area is reserved for natural landscaping designs. Plans are also on the way to reduce carbon emissions in Cyberjaya by 40 per cent by 2025, particularly in its development as a Low Carbon City within the Low Carbon Cities Framework. LCCF acts as a guideline in the implementation of green townships by measuring their levels of carbon emissions.

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6 Green technology has also been applied to the construction of buildings. The Green Building Index (GBI) was developed as a joint effort between the Malaysian Institute of Architects and the Association of Consulting Engineers Malaysia in 2009. The goal of the GBI is to create an environmentally-friendly approach in the property industry. Thus, a green building operates on the premise of increasing efficiency in the use of all its resources in order to reduce negative industrial impacts on the environment. Ken Yeang, the architect responsible for introducing bioclimatic skyscrapers into Malaysian architecture, contends that green infrastructure programmes must pay close attention to water use and reuse, human interaction and vegetation. In keeping with the spirit of green technology, the government also determines the energy policies of the country, in areas of energy production, distribution, and consumption.

7 In accordance with Malaysia's Fuel Diversification Policy, the government is consistently working to intensify the development of renewable energy, particularly biomass, as a viable fuel resource in addition to oil, gas, coal and hydro. The government aims to work more closely with local universities and research institutes in green technology. Malaysia hopes to raise its ranking in environmental ratings, and eventually be a leading producer of green technology in the global market.

8 In its bid to improve the public transportation system, reduce carbon emissions and address issues of climate change, the government has been looking into green transportation. The introduction of electric vehicles could bring about a marked reduction in pollution. To this end, the Ministry of Energy, Green and Water has entrusted GreenTech Malaysia with the task of coordinating the development of the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Roadmap. The Roadmap is targeting for 100,000 electric vehicles in the country by 2020. In addition to these efforts, Malaysian and German entrepreneurs have teamed up with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment in a programme in Kelantan and Terengganu to promote sustainable eco-friendly batik production. The Clean Batik Initiative aims to be sensitive to the impact of batik production on the environment.

9 Despite bearing marvellous potential in becoming a leading global supplier in green technology components for companies that are based on green technology, Malaysia needs to step up its efforts. It needs to take into consideration the presence of green companies all over the world that are keen to explore new energy sources, which include renewable energy. To take advantage of this increasing demand, Malaysian ministries and agencies need to collaborate more closely in actively promoting Malaysia as a hub for green-tech companies. Green businesses could benefit from greater long-term support, particularly in assisting entrepreneurs to develop comprehensive business plans and cash flow projections.

10 Those in the forefront of green financing need further training in skills, knowledge and capacity in relation to the financing process flow, which encompasses development, promotions, the sourcing of viable projects and holistic risk management.

46. What is the text mainly about?

- Steps to reduce carbon emissions
- The production of eco-friendly batik
- Malaysia's efforts in Green Technology
- The National Green Technology and Climate Change Council

47. According to paragraph 1, what happened in July in 2009?

- Green Technology Financing Scheme.
- The Green Building Index (GBI) was developed.
- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Roadmap was developed.
- The Prime Minister launched the National Green Technology Policy.

48. According to paragraph 1, all the following may occur if The National Green Technology Policy succeeds **except**

- The quality of life for Malaysians will improve
- Environmental problems in Malaysia will increase
- The integrity of the environment will be safeguarded
- There will be an increase in national economic development by means of technology

49. The word "explicit" in paragraph 2 means

- Vague
- Imprecise
- Ambiguous
- Unequivocal

50. According to paragraph 3, how much in total has been made available for soft loans to interested parties with low interest rate?

- RM 2 billion
- RM 10 million
- RM 1.5 billion
- RM 50 million



51.

Malaysia takes the following steps:

- * Introduces new economic instruments
- * Strengthens the understanding of green technology among relevant stakeholders
- * Promotes foreign direct investments and domestic direct investment

Based on paragraph 4, what do you think will most probably happen?

- Bioclimatic skyscrapers cannot be built
- The country's economy will bloom
- The Green Technology Financial Scheme will be abolished
- An environment that is conducive to green technology can be created

52. Based on paragraph 5, the LCCF function is to

- design the landscape of Putrajaya and Cyberjaya
- guide the citizens on how to live in green townships.
- reduce carbon emission in the cities throughout Malaysia.
- act as a guideline in the implementation of green townships

53. Which phrase in the paragraph 6, shows that the government has taken green technology into account by determining the energy policies of the country?

- Looking into
- Take advantage of
- Taken off the ground
- In keeping with the spirit

57:28

54. In paragraph 6, a green building accredited by the Green Building Index (GBI) must

- be painted green in colour.
- use all its resources efficiently
- be built by the Malaysian Institute of Architects
- be built from materials that harm the environment

55. Based on paragraph 7, the government aims to work more closely with local universities and research institutes probably to

- identify talented green technologist
- improve green technology in Malaysia
- raise its ranking in environmental ratings
- come up with a university course on green technology

56. What is paragraph 8 mainly about?

- Vision 2020
- Green transportation
- Benefits of using electric cars
- The Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water

57. According to paragraph 8, why did Malaysian and German entrepreneurs team up with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment?

- To visit a Batik production factory
- To visit Kelantan and Terengganu
- To launch the Clean Batik Initiative
- To endorse sustainable eco-friendly batik

58. From paragraph 9, if Malaysian ministries and agencies do not collaborate more closely in actively promoting Malaysia as a hub for green-tech companies, what do you think would happen?

- Green companies all over the world will be keen on exploring new energy sources in Malaysia
- Malaysia will not have a chance to become a leading global supplier in green technology components
- Entrepreneurs will be able to develop comprehensive business plans and cash flow projections
- Malaysia will not be able to compete with green technology companies from all over the world

59. The government has taken the following steps to promote green technology **except**

- Introducing the Clean Batik Initiative
- Introducing Malaysia's Fuel Diversification Policy
- Hiring Ken Yeang to design bioclimatic skyscrapers
- Introducing the Green Technology Financing Scheme

60. From the last paragraph, what can you conclude?

- Those involved in green financing always take risks
- Those involved in green financing always get promotion
- Those involved in green financing should be provided with further training
- Those involved in green financing do not have any skills, knowledge and capacity in relation to the financing process flow

Appendix 2

Performance Standards for Academic Warning and Below Standard Students

Groups of Performers	Difficulty Level	Reading Sub-skills	Descriptors of ERCA
Band 1 Academic Warning	Literal (Low)	Identifying supporting details in texts.	Can hardly locate the supporting details. Can understand only a few words. Guess answers.
		Identifying main idea in texts.	Can hardly locate the main idea. Can understand only a few words. Guess answers.
	Literal (Medium)	Identifying supporting details in texts.	Can hardly locate the supporting details. Do not understand the texts and questions. Answer through pure guessing.
		Identifying main idea in texts.	Can hardly locate the main idea. Do not understand the texts and questions. Answer through pure guessing.
	Literal (High)	Identifying supporting details in texts.	Can hardly locate the supporting details. Do not understand the texts and questions. Answer through pure guessing.
		Identifying main idea in texts.	Can hardly locate the main idea. Do not understand the texts and questions. Answer through pure guessing.
	Reorganisation (Low)	Identifying simple cause and effect.	Can hardly read and understand cause and effect relationship. Do not understand the question and the text. Answer through pure guessing.
		Acquiring the meaning of the words by using context clues.	Can hardly acquire the meaning of the words by using context clues. Do not understand the question and the text. Answer through pure guessing.
		Extracting supporting details	Can hardly understand and extract supporting details. Do not understand the question and the text. Answer through pure guessing.
	Reorganisation (Medium)	Identifying simple cause and effect.	Can hardly read and understand cause and effect relationship. Do not understand the question and the text. Simply guess answer.
		Acquiring the meaning of the words by using context clues.	Can hardly acquire the meaning of the words by using context clues. Do not understand the question and the text. Simply guess answer.
		Extracting supporting details	Can hardly understand and extract supporting details. Do not understand the question and the text. Answer through pure guessing.
	Reorganisation (High)	Identifying simple cause and effect.	Can hardly read and understand cause and effect relationship. Do not understand the question and the text. Simply guess answer.
		Acquiring the meaning of the words by using context clues.	Can hardly acquire the meaning of the words by using context clues. Do not understand the question and the text. Simply guess answer.
		Extracting supporting details	Can hardly understand and extract supporting details. Do not understand the question and the text. Answer through pure guessing.
	Inferential (Low)	Drawing conclusions	Can hardly draw conclusions in simple texts. Do not understand the question. Guess answer.
Making inferences		Can hardly read simple texts and make inferences. Simply guess answer.	
Inferential (Medium)	Drawing conclusions	Cannot draw conclusions in simple texts. Do not understand the question. Guess answer.	
	Making Inferences	Can hardly read simple texts and make inferences. Do not understand text and question. Answer through pure guessing.	
Inferential (High)	Drawing conclusions	Can hardly draw conclusions in simple texts. Do not understand the text. Answer through pure guessing.	
	Making inferences	Can hardly read simple texts and make inferences. Cannot understand the question. Answer through pure guessing.	
Band 2 (Below Standard)	Literal (Low)	Identifying supporting details in texts.	Can somewhat locate the supporting details. Can understand only a few words and phrases. Guess answers.
		Identifying main idea in texts.	Can somewhat locate the main idea. Can understand only a few words and phrases. Guess answers.
	Literal (Medium)	Identifying supporting details in texts.	Can hardly locate the supporting details. Do not understand the texts. Guess answers.
		Identifying main idea in texts.	Can hardly locate the main idea. Do not understand the texts. Guess answers.
	Literal (High)	Identifying supporting details in texts.	Can hardly locate the supporting details. Cannot find the answer in the text. Guess answers.
		Identifying main idea in texts.	Can hardly locate the main idea. Cannot find answer stated in the text. Guess answers.
Reorganisation (Low)	Identifying simple cause and effect.	Can hardly understand cause and effect relationship. Do not understand the text. Guess answer.	

	Acquiring the meaning of the words by using context clues.	Can hardly acquire the meaning of the words by using context clues. Can find keywords in the text but not sure of the answer.
	Extracting supporting details	Can hardly extract supporting details. Answer through pure guessing.
Reorganisation (Medium)	Identifying simple cause and effect.	Can hardly understand cause and effect relationship. Do not know how to find the answer. Guess answer.
	Acquiring the meaning of the words by using context clues.	Can hardly acquire the meaning of the words by using context clues. Do not understand the given phrases. Guess answer.
	Extracting supporting details	Can hardly extract supporting details. Answer through pure guessing.
Reorganisation (High)	Identifying simple cause and effect.	Can hardly understand cause and effect relationship. Do not know how to find the answer. Guess answer.
	Acquiring the meaning of the words by using context clues.	Can hardly acquire the meaning of the words by using context clues. Do not understand the given phrases. Guess answer.
Reorganisation (High)	Extracting supporting details	Can hardly extract supporting details. Answer through pure guessing.
Inferential (Low)	Drawing conclusions	Can hardly draw conclusions in simple texts. Do not understand the distractors. Guess answer.
	Making inferences	Can hardly read simple texts and make inferences. Cannot differentiate the distractors. Guess answer.
Inferential (Medium)	Drawing conclusions	Can hardly draw conclusions in simple texts. Do not understand the question. Guess answer.
	Making inferences	Can hardly read simple texts and make inferences. Can locate the given phrase but cannot find the answer.
Inferential (High)	Drawing conclusions	Can hardly draw conclusions in simple texts. Do not understand the meaning of some words in the question. Guess answer.
	Making inferences	Can hardly read simple texts and make inferences. Cannot understand the question. Do not know how to find the answer.