

## **The Untold Stories of Thai High-school Non-readers of the English Language: A Narrative Inquiry**

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to explore the untold stories of non-readers in Thailand to gain a deeper understanding of the persistent existence of non-reading. Using a qualitative design, I collected, gathered, analyzed, interpreted, and provided data results to achieve the research purpose and offered further recommendations. This study employs a narrative inquiry approach to explore the stories and experiences of non-readers, aiming to uncover new ideas and understandings about non-reading through an interactive process. In this study, I worked with participants who are non-readers. The number of participants in this study was determined based on the saturation point. The saturation point is when no new information is learned from the interviews. The results of this study highlight the complex relationship between linguistic, pedagogical, and sociocultural elements that impact the development of English literacy in Thai high school students. These findings underscore the multifaceted challenges Thai high-school non-readers face in developing English reading proficiency, pointing to the need for tailored interventions and enhanced teacher support to foster inclusive and effective learning environments. The complex interplay of educational, sociocultural, and pedagogical factors shaping the English literacy journey of Thai high-school students, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to foster inclusive and effective learning environments.

**Keywords:** Non-readers of English, Narrative Inquiry, Thai High-school

### **A. Introduction**

Non-reading has been a persistent phenomenon in Thailand despite the Thai government's efforts to promote reading. In 2001, the Ministry of Education introduced the English Program (EP) through Directive No. BEID 165/2544, allowing schools to use English as a medium of instruction for specific subjects within the Basic Core Curriculum. This policy aimed to provide intensive English language education to students from kindergarten to high school, focusing on reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills (Taladngoan, 2019). However, despite the implementation of the EP and other related programs, studies

consistently revealed that Thailand's English proficiency levels remain comparatively low, particularly in reading.

According to the English Proficiency Index (EPI) rankings, Thailand was ranked 74 out of 100 with a "very low" proficiency score in 2019 (Ruenvongsa, 2020). These results highlighted the ongoing challenges Thai students faced in learning English, especially in reading. A study by Junsiri and Panijipan (2018) investigated the English reading ability of undergraduate students in Thailand, revealing that their reading ability was low. Students struggled with reading academic texts and comprehending content, facing issues with vocabulary, grammar, and syntax, which negatively affected their reading comprehension. Further research by Rungswang and Kosashunhanan (2021) focused on Thai Gen Z undergraduates in EFL classrooms, identifying difficulties in reading English text. These students encountered problems with unfamiliar words, adjusting reading speed, inferring meanings from context, employing different reading strategies, and deducing word meanings through word roots and affixes. This evidence underscores the persistent non-reading issue among many Thai students.

This issue extends to the critical role of early reading in shaping academic trajectories and long-term outcomes for young children. Research consistently demonstrates a positive association between early reading proficiency and subsequent academic success (Young & Dolzhenko, 2022; Muroga et al., 2023). Conversely, children facing early reading difficulties were susceptible to the Matthew Effect, where initial struggles worsen over time, leading to widening gaps in reading ability and overall academic achievement (Wang et al., 2024). Therefore, Early Childhood Education (ECE) is essential for establishing a strong foundation for literacy skills.

Prioritizing investment in ECE programs as part of a multifaceted approach to address Thailand's non-reading issue is a pragmatic solution with promise for nurturing proficient and enthusiastic readers. Given the persistent issue of non-reading in Thailand, further investigation is necessary not only to identify the reading difficulties experienced by students but also to understand the underlying reasons for this recurring phenomenon. While numerous studies have explored various aspects of reading-related problems, there remains a significant gap in understanding non-reading through narrative inquiry. Exploring the narratives of non-readers, including their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards reading, could provide valuable insights.

To gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon and fill gaps in previous research, the researcher aimed to conduct an in-depth qualitative study, specifically a narrative inquiry, to explore the narratives of non-readers from a secondary school in Northeastern Thailand. Their stories about their difficulties with reading and their perceptions, experiences, and learning processes may provide a different viewpoint on how reading is seen in different

contexts. The study's new insights could inform broader educational practices, leading to better support for students who struggle with reading in other schools and educational institutions.

This study is supported by three main theoretical concepts: Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Atkinson's Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT), and the Attitude Theory by Daniel Katz. In this section, the researcher first discusses the Sociocultural Theory and then moves on to the concept of Expectancy-Value Theory, followed by Attitude Theory. This section also explains the relevance of the theories to this study and how these theories support the study.

*The Sociocultural Theory*, this theory believed that learning occurs during social interactions between individuals. It believes learning happens through social interaction and individual internalization of social behaviors. This theory highlights the importance of culture and society in the development and shaping of individuals.

*The Expectancy-Value Theory*, this theory, when it comes to learning, suggests that individuals are motivated to learn when they expect their efforts to succeed and when they value the outcomes that will result from that success. In other words, learners are more likely to be motivated when they believe they can learn and value the rewards from their learning. In connection with this, many Thai students may need help finding English vital to them for various reasons, one of which is that Thai is still widely used as a medium of communication and viewed English as a low-priority subject (Tantiwich & Sinwongsuwat, 2021).

*The Attitude Theory*, this theory offers a valuable framework for examining the persistent issue of non-reading among high school students in Thailand. Attitude Theory posits that individuals' attitudes are shaped by a combination of cognitive, affective, and behavioral components, which influence their behavior and actions within specific domains. Attitudes have been widely acknowledged as influential factors in the language learning process. Pioneering research conducted by Gardner (1985) revealed that learners with positive attitudes are more inclined to immerse themselves in the target language and actively pursue their language learning goals, propelling their success in language acquisition. In the context of this study, Attitude Theory provides a lens through which to examine students' attitudes toward reading and their contribution to the phenomenon of non-reading. The cognitive component of attitudes encompasses students' thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge about reading, including their perceptions of its importance, relevance, and self-efficacy. The affective component relates to students' emotions, feelings, and motivations associated with reading, such as their enjoyment, interest, or aversion towards the activity. The behavioral component pertains to students' reading behaviors, encompassing engagement, effort, and reading frequency.

Thus, the primary objective of this narrative inquiry was to explore non-readers' narratives, experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward reading, including the challenges they face and how they occur. It sought answers to the following questions:

1. What were the early experiences of Thai high-school non-readers with reading in English?
2. What were the challenges with English reading of Thai high-school non-readers during elementary & high school years?
3. What themes could emerge based on the experiences of Thai high-school non-readers?

## **B. Methods**

This study aimed to explore the untold stories of non-readers in Thailand to gain a deeper understanding of the persistent existence of non-reading. Using a qualitative design, I collected, gathered, analyzed, interpreted, and provided data results to achieve the research purpose and offered further recommendations (Creswell, 2018). This study employs a narrative inquiry approach to explore the stories and experiences of non-readers, aiming to uncover new ideas and understandings about non-reading through an interactive process (Barkhuizen, & Consoli, 2021). I chose narrative inquiry to investigate Thailand's ongoing non-reading issue. By employing narrative inquiry in the study of non-reading in Thailand, I aimed to gain a profound understanding of non-readers' experiences and stories and how these shape their relationship with reading. Through narrative interviews, I engaged in conversations with participants, encouraging them to share their stories, experiences, and perspectives on reading (Rutakumwa et al., 2019). Using narrative interviews, I could provide a space for non-readers to reflect on their experiences and articulate the motivations, challenges, and perceptions that influence their relationship with reading.

In this study, I worked with participants who are non-readers. The number of participants in this study was determined based on the saturation point. The saturation point is when no new information is learned from the interviews. As one interviews more and more participants, one stops finding new themes, ideas, opinions, or patterns. This means that the researchers have reached an end where they understand the phenomenon they are studying, and no further data collection is necessary (Dworkin, 2012). Initially, the intention was to enlist 3 participants for the semi-structured interviews. However, recognizing the potential attrition rate inherent in such studies, where participants may withdraw for various reasons, the target was expanded to 5 participants to mitigate the risk of falling below the minimum required sample size due to dropout. Furthermore, the participants in this study were not my former students to avoid predetermined biases in the data collection and analysis. To ensure the suitability of selected participants in this study, I verified that they possess relevant experiences and stories related to the focus of the research, which in this case is non-reading among Thai high school students (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

As a previous English teacher in Thailand, I observed that many Thai students are non-readers due to several factors. Firstly, they had difficulty pronouncing even the most straightforward Consonant-Vowel-Consonant words when prompted to read. Secondly, they struggled to follow activities involving reading, such as dialogues, as they needed help to read the provided material. Lastly, even when I spoke vocabulary words slowly and clearly and asked them to write them down from a text I provided, they needed help recognizing the correct words.

I conducted the following procedures to confirm my observations and validate the non-reader status to ensure that the participant selection was suitable for this study. Firstly, contacted their current English teachers, inquired if they share the same experience handling these students, and confirmed that they are non-readers. Secondly, I asked the students to take an online reading test involving a matching-type task. Participants were presented with a set of picture-word pairs and asked to match each picture with its corresponding written word and read the words afterward.

Participants in the study shall qualify for inclusion if they meet the following criteria 1) they must be Thai high-school students between the ages of 13 to 18 years old; 2) they should have encountered reading difficulties in English throughout their entire educational journey; 3) they should have successfully completed an online reading assessment to confirm their difficulties with reading; 4) they should originate from Thailand's northeastern region; 5) they must not be native English speakers; 6) they must be marginalized and underrepresented individuals who struggle with English reading and they must have stories about their challenges and experiences to tell as marginalized and underrepresented groups.

Participants in the study should be considered ineligible for inclusion if they meet any of the following criteria 1) participants with severe medical or psychological conditions that may impede their ability to participate in the study; 2) participants with a learning disability that affects areas of study other than reading in English; 3) participants demonstrating an exceptionally high level of proficiency in English; 4) participants whose English reading difficulties are not deemed significant enough for the study's objectives; 5) participants who have relocated from the northeastern region of Thailand and no longer maintain residency there; 6) Participants who fail to adhere to study instructions or do not complete mandatory tasks, including undertaking the online reading test and participating in interviews, as well as complying with consent and assent forms; 7) participants are the former students of the researcher.

This study was conducted at a Thai Secondary School located in the northeastern region of Thailand. This is a rural district with a predominantly agricultural economy, and this

secondary school is a significant institution that plays a critical role in providing education to the youth in the area.

The steps in the data collection were explained in 3 phases:

*Phase 1: Permission and Schedule Setting*

I asked permission from the Program Adviser of West Visayas State University - Distance Education, where I was currently enrolled for thesis writing, to proceed with the study. Second, I secured a letter of permission from the Director of the school to conduct an in-depth study and talked about the feasibility of conducting this study. Additionally, I conducted community consultations involving various key stakeholders, such as the school Director, teachers of the participants, parents, and the participants themselves. After it was approved, I then set the interview schedule with the participants.

*Phase 2: Conducting the Semi-Structured Interview*

In this study, I utilized a semi-structured interview as the primary method to gather data. A semi-structured interview involves a respectful verbal exchange between the interviewer and the participant, where the interviewer elicits information. Each participant in this study was interviewed twice to verify the initial data. In the first interview, I followed the interview protocol. I then transcribed the recorded interview and let the participants check the accuracy of the data. The questions were initially asked in English and later translated into Thai by a bilingual expert to ensure the participants could express themselves fluently. The interview was conducted online using Google Meet, and the video recording was shared with the bilingual expert, who is proficient in both Thai and English. Additionally, the participants in this study received information regarding their interview schedule, to secure a stable internet connection. They were also advised to utilize financial assistance for their internet connection during the interview. The gathered data was transcribed accurately from Thai to English, including timestamps for easy reference to specific interview parts. After transcription, the data underwent proofreading and editing, to enhance clarity and accuracy. Recording the interview and transcribing the data from Thai to English are crucial steps as they capture the interactive nature of the interview (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

*Phase 3: Data Analysis*

In this study, I utilized narrative analysis to understand how research participants shape their personal experiences into narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative analysis is a qualitative data analysis method commonly employed in narrative inquiry.

Upon completing the interviews, I engaged a bilingual expert proficient in Thai and English to transcribe the recordings and analyze the interview transcripts. Subsequently, I reviewed the transcriptions to identify emerging themes and underlying threads that reveal participants' experiences (Riessman, 2008). I also examined any inconsistencies in the data to gain a deeper understanding of how different factors intersect to shape human experiences. As the themes were identified, I conducted further analysis to determine the most significant ones, common among multiple participants and representative of the overall data.

The final stage of narrative-thematic analysis involved interpreting and deriving meaning from the data. This stage was not necessarily separate but can occur simultaneously with the coding and categorizing stages. Interpretation entails studying the categories and their corresponding codes to determine whether any overarching themes or theories shed light on understanding non-reading persistence in Thailand (Riessman, 2008).

To ensure a focused data analysis, I continuously reflected on the research purpose (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I conducted multiple readings of the interview transcripts to familiarize myself with the data and isolate critical aspects relevant to the study's purpose. By emphasizing key themes, I was able to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the research data while remaining attentive to the possibility of multiple realities and the fluid nature of reality over time (Mapfeka, 2019). To highlight the unique experiences of each participant, I presented their stories individually while analyzing the emerging themes and seeking patterns and relationships between their narratives. I also sought feedback from participants to ensure the validity of my interpretation and the reliability of my findings (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Finally, I reported my findings, explained the data analysis procedure, and presented my conclusions. I supported my findings with quotations and interview examples to effectively communicate my research to others. Through this comprehensive approach, I aimed to offer valuable insights into the experiences of non-readers while underscoring the significance of narrative inquiry and the distinctive stories shared by each participant.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **Analysis and Interpretation of the Data Obtained from the Thai Students' Experiences Through Their Stories**

#### **Alice's Story: Alice, the Struggling Reader**

Alice is a high school student who was raised in a household where English is not the primary language. Her father is an agriculturist, and her mother is employed in the

government sector. She described her initial educational encounters in which she acquired the ability to read and write, specifically focusing on letter identification and phonemic understanding. She obtained a restricted set of vocabulary words, including animal names and basic terminology like “pencil” and similar expressions. During the reading session in primary school, the teacher directed the pupils to echo her words and then mimic his movements. Alice expressed her ideas in the following manner, “About learning and recognizing the letters and sounds during elementary days, it’s not like, remembering words like animals, stuff like pencils or something like that. Too small words basically in those areas”.

When asked about some examples in how she learned the sounds and letters in the alphabet, she said: “In a small school. So, when it comes to reading it is more like the teacher reads, and then the kids read after it. That’s most of the time I remember. Yes, it’s repetition.”

Alice recounted her encounters with reading and her adeptness in reading comprehension. She stated his complete inability to read. Subsequently, she endeavored to acquire literacy autonomously through self-directed reading, although she succumbed to lethargy and discontinued her efforts after a few days. She recounted, in reading, I cannot read at all, on my own. When I found out that I cannot read correctly, I tried to learn by myself by reading books, small books, but after a couple of days I stopped doing it. I felt lazy and I don’t want to do it after (p.132 to 133).

Alice explained the method of teaching in reading comprehension in the classroom. As per her account, their rural school had a single teacher who was responsible for instructing all subjects. Whenever the pupils encountered difficulty in understanding a lesson, the teacher would interrupt, redirect their attention, and transition to a different topic. During the reading session, the teacher directed the children to echo his words. If any student encountered difficulties in keeping pace, the teacher would cease the activity. Alice also mentioned that he lacks a strategy to improve his reading comprehension abilities.

When it comes to small school in the countryside, is that the issue that there is 1 teacher who teaches everything and when the kids don’t get the lesson, the teacher pushes over and changes the topic and then changes the subject. The reading itself is that the teacher reads and we follow. If we can’t, we get dropped out. Basically, it loses out, loses out, yah (p.133).

When asked about any reading or technique used before to improve her reading comprehension. Alice said, “No.”

Alice asserted that the school provided no aid or intervention to tackle her difficulties in reading. Throughout her high school years, she regularly sought help from her friends and classmates to assist her in deciphering English terms, especially since they were studying



English as a subject. As a result, the situation had a negative effect on her self-assurance, as she felt left out because she couldn't read like her peers. She narrated, when it comes to the secondary years, I need to ask friends often, to help in reading the words in writing the words in English because now in Secondary, bigger school and there is English teaching. So, when I come to classes I often ask help from friends. It affects my self-esteem a lot because the friends can read so I feel left out from the lessons (p.133 to 134).

Alice stated that she did not receive any negative feedback from her teachers and peers. And all she wanted was that she really wants to learn how to read because she dreamed that one day she can travel to different countries around the world. She said, there is no negative feedback from teachers and peers. I think that I want to study English small, more often and I want to read more and understand how reading stuff because one day I want to travel the world and visit other countries and right now no English, that is not available (p.134).

When Alice was asked what advice, she could share with students who are struggling in English, she said that she doesn't know what to say. "I don't know what to say."

Alice's story underscores the significance of early childhood literacy development, particularly for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Raised in a household with limited English exposure, her initial vocabulary acquisition was restricted to basic terms. This highlights the potential impact of family language dynamics on a child's early linguistic foundation. Furthermore, Alice's experience with rote memorization in primary school, where the teacher dictated sounds and students echoed them, exemplifies the limitations of such methods in fostering deeper phonemic awareness and vocabulary development.

Alice's struggles with independent reading point to a critical gap in her literacy development. Her initial attempt at self-directed learning, followed by feelings of discouragement, underscores the potential challenges associated with informal learning approaches without proper guidance. This case also sheds light on the pedagogical challenges faced by single-teacher schools in rural settings. Alice's experience with a teacher who readily abandoned difficult lessons highlights the potential risk of missed learning opportunities and incomplete knowledge acquisition due to disconnected instruction. Furthermore, the lack of targeted reading comprehension strategies and reliance on peer assistance in high school suggest a need for interventions that promote independent comprehension skills and prevent negative self-esteem associated with constant reliance on others. While Alice received no negative feedback from teachers, the absence of targeted intervention to address her specific needs signifies a missed opportunity to support her progress.

Despite her challenges, Alice expresses a strong intrinsic motivation to improve her reading skills. Her desire to travel the world and access information in different languages highlights the role of reading as a tool for personal growth and future opportunities. Alice's case underscores the importance of early literacy intervention, culturally sensitive teaching approaches, and targeted strategies to support students navigating English language acquisition amidst diverse backgrounds. It also highlights the crucial role of intrinsic motivation in overcoming learning obstacles. Further research could explore effective intervention strategies specifically designed to address the needs of students like Alice, ensuring equitable access to literacy skills and the gateway they provide to lifelong learning.

### **Max's Story: Learning English Opens Doors to the World**

Max is a 14-year-old student now attending secondary school in Thailand. According to him, his father is the sole individual in the family who possesses the ability to communicate in the English language. Max explained that in his early years of primary education, he was capable of articulating individual letter sounds, but he struggled with the ability to combine them and read them as complete words. He remembered that at school, he used the Thai language to practice writing letters and learning their corresponding sounds.

I am 14-year-old and yes, my dad speaks English. During elementary, I can understand in how to understand the letters and say the letters but I cannot mix the words. Basically, when it comes to English classes, I write Thai in front of the letters itself (p. 135).

Max narrated that his proficiency in reading comprehension during his elementary years was only average. He let the teacher first say the words and then he would just repeat the words. He also added that his teacher helped him always. One way of helping him was that the teacher would write words on a piece of paper and let him read the words written on the paper. Then after, the teacher would close the paper and so they would just memorize the words and sentences. Max narrated, It's about average. Proficiency is about average. I can, a little bit not very much. I let the teacher say these words, and I repeat them after the teacher. My teacher helps me all the time, in English. My teacher will write in a paper, and let me read inside the paper first. But then the teacher will close the paper, and so kids will memorize how to read the words or the sentences that are in the letters (p.136 to 137).

Max informed us that throughout his primary years, he had a slow reading speed and an average level of reading accuracy. Additionally, he expressed his belief that acquiring proficiency in the English language is not significant, and hence, he did not prioritize investing much effort into learning it. Additionally, he discussed his approach to reading, wherein he attempted to increase his reading speed. However, as he accelerated, his reading precision diminished. The individual stated, I can read it but slow speed, really slow and

when it comes to the accuracy of reading itself, it's average. When I was young, I thought that English was not important in life that's why I did not pay attention in classes often. My reading technique in elementary was I tried often to read faster, but when I tried to speed it up, the accuracy is worst (p.136).

Max remembered that he was not provided with any assistance in improving his reading accuracy. He received assistance on the correct spelling of terms. He received instruction on proper pronunciation in order to learn how to spell words accurately. However, he said that despite being instructed on the pronunciation of the word, he still lacked comprehension of its meaning. He recounted, no, that is no help in the accuracy of the reading, only help in how to spell the words. They keep teaching how to pronounce it correctly. The teacher pronounces it and I read after it, it does help to pronounce correctly, two words correctly at least. It doesn't include more time to understand the word. I didn't understand it right away but after that (p.137).

When questioned about the impact of his reading challenges during elementary school on his high school experience, Max responded that he now devotes more focused attention to studying the English language in high school. During his high school years, he had the ability to comprehend English text, if not with complete fluency. However, he encounters challenges when it comes to reading. He expressed his lack of confidence in reading aloud in front of the class, believing that this had a negative impact on his academic performance, resulting in low test results. He recounted, when it comes to M1, I have more boost to the English by myself and was able to understand English and talk about English more when it comes to elementary. So basically, M1 has a big change. Ahh, Last year M1 right? I tried to understand English more so I studied English a lot, so that's why it helps me when it comes to material. I can read English but not fluently. When it comes to reading English, I am not confident enough to read in class. I think that because I am not confident enough to read the words, even if it is a mistake, because of that I think it might affect because I did not try enough that's why my English in the test is not good (p.137 to 138).

Max stated that he did not receive negative comments from his teachers, but he did receive a fair amount from his peers. However, while he is in class and encounters difficulty reading, his professors provide assistance by guiding him in pronouncing the words. Consequently, he imitates the teacher's pronunciation, aiding in the memorization of the words.

There's no instance. Only friends that they have funny laugh, just that. When it comes to that, no negative feedback from teachers or anything, but if I cannot read my teachers will help me to read those words out and I follow the words after. It helps me in memorizing how those words are pronounced (p.138).

When Max was queried about guidance for pupils grappling with reading difficulties, he emphasized the necessity for students to exert significant effort in acquiring proficiency in the English language, as doing so will provide them with several opportunities. In addition, he imparted his method to students by transcribing in Thai the correct pronunciation of words along with their corresponding meanings. The individual stated, the advice I give is as a student, they should learn English more because I now find that English is a language that can open the gates of everything. Write how to pronounce in Thai and the meaning of it after that. That is my advice for students struggling in reading (p.139).

Born into a non-English speaking household, Max initially struggled with phoneme awareness and vocabulary development. He could identify and produce individual sounds but lacked the ability to blend them into words. This highlights the impact of family language dynamics on early L2 learning. Hence, it suggests that exposure to the target language within the family unit significantly influences a child's initial language acquisition. Max's experience underscores the need for exploring strategies to bridge the gap between home and school language environments.

Max's attempt to learn letters and sounds by associating them with Thai script demonstrates a creative, self-directed learning strategy. While it likely aided him in basic letter recognition, it possibly hindered his grasp of phoneme blending. This highlights the potential benefits and limitations of adopting L1 strategies for L2 acquisition. Despite achieving average reading proficiency, Max's reliance on rote memorization limited his comprehension development. The practice of teachers reading aloud followed by student repetition, while seemingly efficient, failed to foster deeper understanding. A positive aspect of Max's early instruction was the focus on linking pronunciation with spelling. This approach likely solidified the foundation for his future vocabulary development.

Max's narrative reveals a missed opportunity for early intervention. The absence of constructive feedback from teachers and peers, despite his evident struggles, could have hampered his progress. This underscores the importance of implementing formative assessment strategies alongside culturally sensitive feedback mechanisms to identify and address learner difficulties promptly. Max's experience shifted significantly during his high school years. His growing realization of the value of English as a key to unlocking opportunities fueled his motivation to learn. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in fostering language learning success.

### **Ning's Story: The Adventures of Learning English Language**

Ning, a 15-year-old adolescent, is currently enrolled as a Grade 9 student in Thailand. No one in her family speaks the English language. Both of her parents are engaged in

agricultural pursuits. When questioned about her experiences in primary school about reading, specifically in acquiring sounds and letters, she explained that she was not able to pronounce all of the letters she learned. She mentioned that she could only pronounce a small number of letters in the alphabet, whereas the majority of them she was unable to pronounce. When questioned about her acquisition of the alphabet throughout her elementary education, she responded that she no longer has the memory. This is the statement she made: I'm 15 and enrolled in Grade 9. No member of the family speaks English. My parents are both farmers. I find the stuff at an early stage and I can only pronounce only some letters. I can only say some letters, most of them I can't. Yes, I can't remember how I learned to pronounce (p.140).

Ning was requested to share her encounters on her level of expertise in reading comprehension. She responded affirmatively, stating that she possesses a limited ability to read. When questioned about her reading speed and skill, she clarified that she is capable of reading just a limited number of words and lacks significant proficiency. Regarding her reading accuracy, she expressed uncertainty and elaborated that she lacks the confidence to read English. When questioned about the methods she employed to enhance her reading abilities, Ning simply stated that she possesses a genuine enthusiasm for acquiring proficiency in the English language. However, she perceives a lack of dedication on the part of her teachers in imparting knowledge compared to her own want to master the language. She expressed; I can read English a little. I can read some words but the proficiency is not that. My accuracy isn't there and I don't really have the courage to read in English. I am interested in studying English in the long run. But the issue is when I go to school that isn't you know, they won't push it as hard as students want to learn (p.141).

The researcher asked Ning about some strategies that she employed for her to improve her reading speed and accuracy. She stated that she possesses the ability to recall the letters, the teacher's pronunciation, the words, and the instructional methods used in the class. When questioned about the challenges she faced in reading during elementary school and the measures taken to help her, she explained that she struggled with learning due to a lack of connection with her foreign teachers, which resulted in a complete lack of understanding. When questioned about her Thai professors, she also revealed that she had no sense of connection with them whatsoever. According to her, the teachers merely impart knowledge without providing answers or making additional efforts to ensure comprehension of the course. She narrated, when it comes to learning English, in the class I remember the letters, how the teacher pronounced it, how they teach and I remember the words. Yes, I remember the words on how the teachers pronounce it. I have the issue by the learning itself. Sometimes when the foreign teachers come to teach, there isn't connection between the teachers and students and sometimes when they teach, I don't understand at all. And sometimes when I ask but some teachers don't help me. There isn't connection also between

Thai teachers as well. So basically, they just teach and when we ask questions and nothing came back (p.141 to 142).

Ning disclosed that her instructors solely focused on teaching grammar, neglecting instruction in spoken English. This event has had an impact on her current status as a secondary level student. She additionally disclosed that she did not receive any assistance from her teachers when encountering challenges in learning English. Indeed, when she presents her English reading in front of the class and struggles to complete the task, the teacher just allows her to return to her seat without providing any form of constructive criticism or praise. When asked for tips to share with the students, she simply said “no”. She has expressed her desire for schools to commence English instruction as early as Grade 1 in order to enhance language acquisition among learners. This is her aspiration for her companions and for her own personal fulfillment. She finds it exceedingly challenging to acquire proficiency in the English language.

It is an issue when I was in Grade 6 teachers taught grammar only, not in speaking. When I can't remember English, it does affect me and in Secondary there is no English to it and the issue is being continuously started to higher grade. There is no help from the teachers. Even if I ask but no help or intervention from the lecturer themselves. When the teacher read English in front of the class and when I couldn't they just let me go back to my seat, no negative feedback. I want small English to be taught in school and I want kids in grade 1 to be emphasized and more English for my friends and myself (p.142 to 143).

Ning hails from a non-English speaking household, highlighting the crucial role of early childhood education in establishing a foundation for ESL learners. It suggests that limited exposure to English in the home environment can impede vocabulary development and phonemic awareness. Ning's struggle to pronounce letters and blend sounds aligns with these findings, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to bridge the gap between home and school language environments. Despite these initial hurdles, Ning exhibits an average reading proficiency, a testament to her perseverance and potentially effective instructional strategies employed at some point in her educational journey. However, her limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties necessitate further investigation into the specific approaches used to foster her reading comprehension.

Ning's case exemplifies the detrimental effects of disengaged teachers on student motivation. Her reported lack of commitment from instructors demonstrates a correlation between teacher enthusiasm and student learning outcomes. This highlights the need for professional development programs that equip educators with engaging pedagogical techniques to spark student interest in language learning. Furthermore, Ning's struggle to connect with both foreign and local teachers underscore the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices. The absence of constructive feedback from teachers and peers

further exacerbates Ning’s challenges. Without timely and targeted feedback, Ning is left to navigate the complexities of English alone, potentially leading to frustration and diminished learning potential.

Ning’s strong desire for schools to implement English instruction as early as Grade 1 resonates with advocating for early language acquisition initiatives. This approach allows students to build a strong foundation in phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension during critical developmental stages. Early exposure equips them with the necessary tools for future success in language learning.

### Summary of the Participants’ Narratives in Learning English Language

Table 1 represents the summary of the participants’ experiences as Thai students learning the English language.

From the relevant data extracted based on the transcript of the informants, the categories were identified, the sub-themes were articulated and finally the themes were formulated. The themes that emerged are the following:

**Theme 1:** Charting Early Childhood Foundations Amid Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Overcoming Challenges in Language Acquisition and Instruction

**Theme 2:** Navigating English Learning Challenges: Thai Students’ Journey through Literacy, Burnout, and Confidence Struggles

**Theme 3:** Reading’s Role in Lifelong Growth from Personal Enrichment to Early Language Foundations

**Table 1. Summary of the Participants’ Narratives as Thai students in Learning English Language**

Informants	Relevant Data Extract	Categories	Sub-Themes	Themes
Alice, Max, Ning	Born into a non-English speaking home	Family dynamics	Exploring the Impact of Linguistic, Cultural, and Personal Backgrounds on Family Dynamics in Non-English-Speaking Homes	Theme 1: Charting Early Childhood Foundations
Alice, Max, Ning	Acquired a limited number of vocabulary words, can produce sounds but can’t blend them	Early language development	Challenges in Phoneme and Vocabulary Acquisition: Early Language Development and Limited Lexicon	Amid Linguistic and Cultural Diversity: Overcoming Challenges in Language
Max	Wrote Thai in front of the letters in order to learn letters and sounds	Learning technique	Adopting Phonetic Study Strategies Using Thai Script to Master Letters and Sounds	
Max, Ning	Average reading	Reading level	Navigating Moderate Reading	

	proficiency		Proficiency: Achieving Average Skill Levels	Acquisition and Instruction
Max	The teacher will close the paper and so they just memorize the words and sentences	Rote memorization	Stagnant Comprehension: Rote Memorization and Limited Instruction Yielding No Development	
Alice, Max	Teacher reads, and then the kids read after it	Repetition		
Ning	Teachers teach grammar only	Limited learning		
Max, Ning	Taught how to spell words by teaching learners how to pronounce properly	Reinforcement of spelling skills	Fostering Language Foundations Integrating Pronunciation with Spelling Skills	
Max	Even students were taught how to pronounce the words, they still didn't understand the meaning of the word	Language teaching challenge	Addressing Pronunciation Without Enhancing Vocabulary Comprehension	
Alice	Cannot read at all	Literacy skills challenge	Overcoming Literacy Barriers and Navigating Challenges in Reading Skills	Theme 2: Navigating English Learning Challenges:
Alice	Tried to learn by himself & felt lazy and I don't want to do it after	Informal learning	Combatting Burnout and Inefficiency, Challenges of Self-Directed, Informal Learning	Thai
Alice	There is only one (1) teacher who teaches everything	Pedagogical challenges	Teacher Burnout Risk, Pedagogical Challenges in Sole Instruction Roles	Students' Journey through Literacy, Burnout, and Confidence Struggles
Alice	When the kids don't get the lesson, the teacher pushed over and change the topic and then change the subject	Incomplete learning	Missed Opportunities, Incomplete Learning Due to Lesson Disconnection	
Ning	Interested in learning English but the teachers are not committed to teach	Limited learning progress	Diminished Enthusiasm, Limited Progress Due to Lack of Teacher Commitment	
Ning	Didn't find connection from foreign & local teachers	Reduced engagement	Struggles in Learning, Reduced Engagement from Disconnect Between Foreign and Local Teachers	
Alice	No reading technique	Limited comprehension	Text Analysis Struggles, Limited Comprehension Without Reading Techniques	
Alice	In secondary years, still having reading difficulties, need to ask friends often, to help in reading & writing the words in English	Persistent reading difficulties	Reliance on Peer Assistance: Persistent Reading Challenges in Secondary Years	
Alice, Max,	Affects self-esteem a lot, no confidence	Low self-esteem	Struggling with Self-Worth, Low Confidence and Negative Self-Image	
Max, Ning	Affects academic life, got low scores	Academic consequences	Weak Academic Confidence, Impacting Academic Performance and Scores	
Alice, Max, Ning	No negative feedback received from teachers and	Hinder learner's progress	Lost Learning Potential, Hindered Progress and Frustration from	



Ning	peers, no intervention When teachers are asked, there were no answers	Frustration & disengagement	Lack of Feedback and Intervention	
Alice	I want to read more and understand how reading stuff because one day I want to travel the world and visit other countries	Intrinsic motivation	Embracing Reading for Personal Enrichment: Motivated by Intrinsic Value and Future Opportunities	Theme 3: Reading's Role in Lifelong Growth from Personal Enrichment to Early Language Foundations
Max	Put much effort in learning English because it opens many doors.	Perceived value of English		
Ning	Schools to teach English to learners as early as Grade 1 for them to better learn the language	Early language acquisition	Establishing Language Foundations: Early English Acquisition Initiatives	

Through these narratives, the theme of navigating English learning challenges among Thai students is vividly illustrated. Their stories emphasize the critical need for more effective, supportive, and connected educational practices to foster genuine literacy and confidence. Thai students face scholastic, cultural, and linguistic challenges when learning English. These limitations influence language proficiency and communication. The students struggle with phonetics, semantics, and sentence structure due to structural differences between the two languages. Thai is more tonal than English, making intonation and pronunciation difficult. Due to limited access to authentic English language situations outside the classroom, many Thai students miss out on immersion language learning. Lack of exposure can slow language learning and fluency.

Thai English language instructors may not speak enough English, which can hinder students' language acquisition and lower instruction quality. This shows how important qualified instructors are for language learning. Thai students who have had setbacks or poor assessments may also lack enthusiasm and self-confidence in their English competence. Insufficient motivation might limit language learning and engagement. Cultivating a solid motivation to learn English is essential for achieving proficiency and engagement in the language. With sufficient motivation, students can actively engage in English language learning activities, which can hinder their progress and limit their language development (Sha'ar & Boonsuk, 2021).

Comprehensive solutions are needed, including curriculum reform, teacher training, improved exposure to authentic English language contexts, and activities to boost student enthusiasm and confidence in language acquisition. By overcoming these hurdles, getting proper assistance and resources, and fighting for communicative language instruction, Thai students can learn English.

In the tapestry of early education, a compelling theme emerges: Reading's Role in Lifelong Growth from Personal Enrichment to Early Language Foundation. This theme, rich with the stories of nonreaders, unfolds through several subthemes, each revealing the transformative power of reading.

The journey begins with Embracing Reading for Personal Enrichment: Motivated by Intrinsic Value and Future Opportunities. Alice's aspirations capture the essence of this subtheme: "I think that I want to study English more often and I want to read more and understand how reading works because one day I want to travel the world and visit other countries and right now, without English, that is not available." Max echoes this sentiment, advising, "The advice I give as a student is that they should learn English more because I now find that English is a language that can open the gates to everything." These reflections underscore the intrinsic value that reading holds for personal growth and future opportunities. For these Thai students, English is not merely a subject but a key to global exploration and cultural connection (Pennycook, 2017). Their dreams of traveling the world highlight the belief that fluency in English can unlock a wealth of experiences. Reading, particularly in English, is seen not only as a means to intellectual growth but also as a gateway to broader perspectives and personal fulfillment.

This theme is further enriched by the example of engaging with literature like Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice." Through reading such classic works, students are not only captivated by the plot but also delve into deeper themes such as social class and gender roles. As they analyze and discuss these themes, they develop critical thinking skills and explore their own values. This introspective journey, sparked by literary characters, empowers students to chart a course of self-discovery, illustrating how reading transcends mere consumption to become a powerful tool for personal growth and a wider worldview.

The theme continues with Establishing Language Foundations: Early English Acquisition Initiatives. Ning articulates this need: "I want more English to be taught in school and I want kids in grade 1 to be emphasized and more English for my friends and for myself." Her words highlight the crucial role that early English acquisition plays in fostering lifelong growth. Reading is recognized as a potent instrument for language acquisition, cognitive development, cultural comprehension, and personal advancement. By emphasizing early English education, Thai students can enhance their language skills, broaden their cultural understanding, and support their holistic development. This subtheme underscores the multifaceted ways in which reading can augment the English language acquisition experiences of Thai pupils, contributing to their overall growth and development.

Through these narratives, the theme of reading's role in lifelong growth becomes vividly clear. The stories of Alice, Max, and Ning illustrate the profound impact that reading can have on personal enrichment and early language foundation. Reading not only opens doors

to future opportunities but also fosters intellectual and personal growth, highlighting its vital role in the educational journeys of these Thai students (Weiss & Johnson, 2023).

In line with this, through consistent reading, Thai students are naturally exposed to new words and grammatical structures in context. This absorption helps them build a strong foundation in the English language. Reading often requires analyzing information, drawing conclusions, and forming opinions (Koechlin & Zwaan, 2001). This strengthens critical thinking skills that benefit students in all areas of study. Reading literature and other materials written by English speakers provides a window into different cultures and ways of life. This encourages cultural sensitivity and appreciation for diversity. Successfully navigating challenging texts can boost students' confidence in their English abilities. This confidence can motivate them to explore the language further (Yudhana, 2021; Maipoka & Soontornwipast, 2021).

In summary, the diverse advantages of engaging in reading activities for the purpose of ongoing personal growth emphasize the need of integrating English literature into the language acquisition endeavors of Thai students. Through the adoption of reading as a means of acquiring language skills, fostering cultural comprehension, cultivating critical thinking abilities, and facilitating personal development, students have the potential to augment their proficiency in the English language, thereby imbuing their lives with significant and meaningful experiences.

#### **D. Conclusions**

The results of this study highlight the complex relationship between linguistic, pedagogical, and sociocultural elements that impact the development of English literacy in Thai high school students. Furthermore, the study unveils an interconnection between language, teaching methods, and cultural background in shaping English literacy development. These findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach to English language teaching that considers linguistic aspects and pedagogical methods and fosters a positive learning environment.

These findings underscore the multifaceted challenges Thai high-school non-readers face in developing English reading proficiency, pointing to the need for tailored interventions and enhanced teacher support to foster inclusive and effective learning environments. These findings emphasize the need for multifaceted support, including targeted interventions and improved teacher responsiveness, to create an inclusive and effective learning environment for all students.

Engaging with diverse written materials offers students opportunities for acquiring knowledge and information, laying the groundwork for continuous personal development and lifelong learning. These themes collectively underscore the complex interplay of educational, sociocultural, and pedagogical factors shaping the English literacy journey of Thai high-school students, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to foster inclusive and effective learning environments.

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