L2 Reading Difficulties
Faced by Malaysian Students in a Korean University

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말레이시아 학생들의 L2 읽기 문제:
한국 대학의 사례를 중심으로

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Abstract The current study investigates how Malaysian ESL learners' L2 (English) speaking fluency is reflected in advanced L2 reading and what difficulties they encounter in reading comprehension. Nine Malaysian students attending a Korean university participated in qualitative research using in−depth and semi−structured interviews. The data revealed that L2 was a very familiar language, and their speaking fluency in L2 reduced the anxiety of L2 reading in general. However, it did not play a significant role in reading at an advanced level. Their difficulties in reading were mainly due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge. However, insufficient background knowledge and interest also frustrated their reading tasks. These factors lowered their reading comprehension, causing inaccurate interpretations or discouraging their endeavors to find messages from the given text. Thus, these findings should be carefully addressed in reading classes for Korean L2 learners as well as international students.

Key Words : Malaysian ESL students, Language policy, Literacy, Reading comprehension, Vocabulary knowledge

요 약 본 연구는 말레이시아 대학생들의 인식을 통해 그들의 유창한 L2 구두 능력이 고급 수준의 텍스트를 읽는데 어떻게 반영되는지와 독해 과정에서는 어떠한 어려움을 보이는지를 조사했다. 연구의 참여자는 한국 대학에 재학 중인 9명의 말레이시아 학생들로서 반 구조화 형식의 심층 면접에 참여했다. 수집된 자료는 학생들이 L2를 매우 익숙한 언어로 받아들이고 있고, 그에 따른 학생들의 유창한 구두 능력이 일반적 수준의 L2 읽기에 대한 부담감을 덜어주는 효과가 있다는 점을 보여주었다. 그러나 그들의 구두 능력이 고급 수준의 텍스트를 읽고 이해하는 데는 큰 영향을 주지 못했다. 학생들이 언급한 읽기의 어려움은 주로 어휘 지식의 부족에서 기인했으나, 배경지식과 흥미의 부족 또한 읽기 능력을 방해하는 요소로 작용했다. 이러한 요소들은 텍스트에 대한 부정확한 이해를 유발하고, 텍스트에 담긴 속뜻을 찾으려는 의지를 상실시킴으로써 학생들의 독해능력을 저하시키는 것으로 나타났다. 이 결과물은 국제학생뿐만 아니라 한국 학생들의 읽기 수업에도 적용되어 중요하게 다루어질 필요가 있다.

주제어 : 말레이시아인 ESL 학습자, 언어정책, 문해력, 독해, 어휘력

1. Introduction

English is extensively spoken and used in Malaysia as a second language (L2) of the country. Many people in Malaysia are able to communicate in L2 (English), although there are some localized forms in the use of words, commonly known as Malaysian English or Malaysian Standard English. It is no longer the official language of independent Malaysia, but it still serves as the language of business, politics, the media, jurisdiction, higher education, and other such domains[1].

By adopting a bilingual system of education, Malaysia has created an environment to help its ESL learners engage in L2 learning. L2 is taught as a compulsory subject at all levels in every Malaysian school[1]. Although the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, is the language of instruction in public universities, L2 is the language of instruction in private higher education, including tertiary institutions. Moreover, English is widely available for daily exposure and easy acquisition through the mass media released in L2[2]. Bilingualism and multilingualism in L1, L2 and other ethnic languages are common, but L2 holds a very strong position in inter-ethnic communication.

According to the Education First English Proficiency Index in 2011, Malaysia was ranked first for English proficiency among Asian countries where English is not L1. Recently, L2 was given more importance by the Malaysian government, which is eager to benefit from globalization[3]. Malaysians likewise recognize the importance of having a good command of L2, not only to communicate in everyday situations, but also to get better achievements in higher education and the workplace. Thus, students are aware of the necessity to build L2 proficiency for future benefits and are encouraged to acquire better L2 in the educational system.

However, studies show that the extrinsic motivation among Malaysian learners does not necessarily entail better performance in L2 literacy[4]. Students' level of literacy attainment in L2 does not appear to be sufficient when they are in university. Students are found not to be prepared for the reading demands imposed on them at university[5]. Also, a large number of university students are reported to have anxiety about expressing themselves in L2 speaking and writing[6]. The low achievement in literacy has been an important issue not only for educators, but also the Malaysian government in that students do not display reasonable L2 literacy after 11 years of L2 learning in school[7].

From the perspective of Korean EFL learners, the view that bilingual or multilingual Malaysian students feel dissatisfaction with L2 proficiency might seem exaggerated. In general, compared to Korean students, Malaysian students are equipped with easier access to L2 use and are more fluent in speaking in English-medium classes. Bringing this issue into the context of research in Korea, very few studies have been conducted on Malaysian students' L2 learning in Korea, despite their increasing numbers. Considering this, their limited literacy needs to be clarified in the EFL context for pedagogical purposes. Exploring the diversity of L2 learning demonstrated by Malaysian students will benefit many language educators and policy makers in understanding their own characteristics of learning and in developing better educational programs based on the new knowledge.

Hence, this study aims to explore whether the speaking fluency of Malaysian ESL learners applies to L2 reading comprehension at an advanced level. Also, their difficulties in L2 reading are examined with respect to the learning process and attitudes. The findings of this study will enhance insight into Malaysian students' learning experiences in L2 classrooms in EFL settings. This will ultimately contribute to education policies and curriculums, which can

help international students studying in Korean universities. Thus, the following two research questions are posed for this study:

1) Does the speaking fluency of Malaysian ESL learners affect advanced L2 reading?
2) How do Malaysian ESL learners perceive difficulties in advanced L2 reading in an EFL context?

2. Background

2.1 Policies of L2 Education in Malaysia

English was introduced in Malaysia when the country was colonized by the British more than two centuries ago[8]. Malaysian English, which was the same as British English in the early 20th century, was the most important language until the country's independence. Prior to independence, English played a dominant role in administration, government, education, and commerce[9]. English-medium instruction was conducted in primary and secondary schools, and English became the lingua franca for business communication purposes[10].

Malaysia's language policy in has changed since its independence. In 1957, Bahasa Malaysia was declared the national and official language to unite the different races in Malaysia and create a national identity. English became 'an important L2', given its global significance. English is still the official language in administration and has been retained as a compulsory subject. The National Education Policy introduced in 1961 implemented bilingual language education in schools, which aimed at establishing a balance between national and international needs and challenges manifested through linguistic educational politics[11].

Two distinct school systems, namely national schools and 'national type' English schools, were operated until 1970. The policy gradually converted L2 language schools to national schools where Bahasa Malaysia-medium instruction was to be facilitated. As a result, L2 as the language of instruction began to be phased out, and the switch between the two languages led to a decline in the amount of L2 exposure for Malaysian learners in school[10].

Subsequently, the government decided to reform the language policy to reflect the need for communicating with and understanding other cultures in Malaysian society. By 1983, all national schools adopted Bahasa Malaysia-medium instruction. Also, new curricula for primary and secondary schools were launched. The Primary Schools Curriculum was initiated in 1983, and the integrated Secondary Schools Curriculum in 1989. Both were planned to be fully implemented by 2000 with the objectives of extending learners' L2 proficiency to fulfill their needs in everyday life, for knowledge acquisition, and in future workplaces[10].

In 2003, a new wave of change influenced L2 education as mathematics and science-related subjects were taught in L2. This move was in response to the growing demand by governments and industries for scientific and technological advancements that were mostly available in English[12]. The intention of the plan was to enable Malaysian universities to compete more effectively on the global stage and produce a skilled workforce that can be employable to further the economic development of the nation[12]. It emphasized two important roles of L2 as the language of technology and as a global language for international communication[13]. However, the government abandoned the policy in 2009 due to the failure to improve science and mathematics achievements among students.

Recently, the Tenth Malaysian Plan for 2011 to 2015 was introduced as a move into the era of globalization. The program still puts an emphasis on the importance of the national language and L2, but entails the major objective that

Malaysians are to enhance L2 proficiency to prepare for competitiveness and capacity at national and international levels. Its terms of reference were the promotion of L2 learning in a meaningful way by encouraging learners to build four L2 skills for a variety of purposes and in a range of contexts[14].

Under the powerful influence of the government, the role of L2 programs in Malaysia has been confined to a means of acquiring knowledge, but limited resources in Bahasa Malaysia in certain fields has provided more opportunities for using L2 in most aspects of teaching and learning[12]. Also, more measures were revised to create national prosperity and competitiveness in the modern global economy, and therefore L2 has reemerged as an important language for international communication beyond inter-ethnic communication. With the firm establishment of Bahasa Malaysia as the national and official language, English as L2 is no longer seen as a threat to national unity[15].

2.2 Challenges of L2 Literacy Among Malaysian Students

Extensive empirical studies indicate a general tendency of disappointment among Malaysian students and educators regarding the teaching and learning of L2[7, 16]. In particular, limited L2 literacy has been widely discussed since the lack of competence in L2 continues in tertiary education after the minimal formal learning of 11 years, excluding preschool years. When making the transition from secondary schools to university, Malaysian students are expected to have literacy abilities to meet the academic demands of the university, but have been found to be limited in their ability to appropriately respond to an academic text[7, 17].

Many researchers agree that reading is a powerful method to improve language proficiency[18]. Reading comprehension does not simply involve decoding individual words, but building up a mental representation of text, which requires consolidation across a large spectrum of information, from language competence to background knowledge concerning the text. Successful comprehension, therefore, requires active engagement with the content and coordination of skills at many levels to extract and construct meaning[19].

Given that L2 literacy is crucial to expand learners' knowledge and to realize social and economic advancement as well, their concern triggered considerable research to find the inhibiting factors of L2 reading comprehension among Malaysian students. Chen et al.[20] and many other researchers note that learners face reading difficulties mainly due to three reasons: lack of vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, and interest/motivation.

According to Nor, Mozlan, and Rajab[21], the lack of vocabulary was indicated as the biggest challenge for learners' L2 reading by the ESL teachers who participated in their study. Razak and Yunus[22] highlight the importance of well-developed vocabulary knowledge in L2 reading. Their research shows that not using a dictionary for unfamiliar words affected secondary students' reading comprehension. Qian[23] validates the roles of the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension in academic settings. He maintains that the more words a learner knows, the more likely it is that she or he will have a greater depth of knowledge with these words. This, in turn, plays an integral role in academic reading. In the same vein, Embi and Mohd Amin[24] and Misbah et al.[25] assert that a wide range of vocabulary helps learners improve meaningful reading, and this facilitates confidence and motivation to practice the language more.

Cognitively, reading comprehension is understood as the processing of textual information related to new information to

established schemata, including prior knowledge and topic knowledge[26]. A study by Chen et al.[20] reveals that students' lack of background knowledge is another critical obstacle to reading comprehension since students hardly make a connection to the text they are reading. When reading content area materials such as textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and journal articles, readers should consider that those materials may require them to bring their background knowledge to the new text. Thus, academic reading involves a more complex process and strategies to construct meaning from a text.

Inference is the result of the interaction between the reader's background knowledge and a text. It is a very important reading strategy using the reader's own knowledge along with information from the text to draw their own conclusions[27]. It will help them make predictions, identify underlying themes, and use information to create meaning from the text[28].

Learners' motivation and interest are regarded as important factors affecting L2 reading comprehension. Raman and Mohamed[29] affirm that a learner's academic achievement depends on their level of motivation in learning. Raza[30]'s study supports the argument that motivation has a strong influence on students' L2 learning process by stimulating the curiosity of learners in getting knowledge. In addition to these factors, the influence of L1 and the economic status of the family are mentioned as causing students to have difficulties with L2 literacy[25].

3. Method

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted at D. University in Korea with three male and six female Malaysian students. The participants, who volunteered for research interviews, took the elective L2 class 'Reading Current Issues' from the author. They were at the high intermediate or advanced level of L2 speaking fluency across a spectrum of majors and ESL experiences, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. List of Interview Participants

ID	Sex	Age	Major	ESL (yrs)
A	F	20	Korean Literature	16
B	F	24	Dance	24
C	F	20	Business	16
D	M	22	Communication	17
E	M	21	Software	17
F	F	20	International Studies	18
G	M	21	Communication	17
H	F	22	Business	18
I	F	23	App. Computer	18

3.2 Procedure and Data Collection

'Reading Current Issues' was a two-credit advanced L2 reading course in the general education curriculum. The text was composed of articles from news magazines and newspapers and content extracted from best-selling books covering various topics such as politics, economy, society, and culture. The lecture style was very participatory and student-centered. In the one-hour, 50-minute class, the instructor's lecture took about 40 minutes and mainly explained the importance of the topic and its background information. The lecture included observations on grammar and vocabulary to help read the given text.

Afterwards, the instructor assigned group activities and asked students to find the main idea of the paragraph or to answer questions regarding selected parts that needed to be read carefully. Group activities mainly focused on the process by which students analyzed the text to find the correct meaning and the author's intention. In this process, students were allowed to search for related online resources and vocabulary for help.

The lectures were conducted in a mixture of English and Korean for both Korean and international students, taking into account the difficulty of the text content. In group activities, further clarifications were made for international students in English so that the lectures were not missed for students with insufficient Korean language skills.

This study followed a qualitative research approach employing the use of in-depth and semi-structured interviews as the primary method. Each participant who agreed to an interview was asked to carefully read the interview questions in advance. The interviews were conducted individually in a relaxed environment from June 10, 2019 to January 5, 2020 and varied in length from 40 to 50 minutes. The in-depth and open-ended interviews were conducted in a conversational style and tape-recorded with the permission of the participants.

Each interview was transcribed, and data analysis began immediately after completing the interviews The analysis of the interviews was done using discourse analysis. Computer files were created for individual participants using Excel. The themes and categories emerged from each transcript were compared with data files from other participants to refine them. The themes were synthesized into a core set of categories, and explanations for those themes were developed thereafter.

4. Results and Discussions

In the individual interviews, participants explained their proficiency in L2 and other languages since they were from linguistically diverse countries. Furthermore, they specifically discussed the advantages of their L2 reading activities and their problems with them, especially at the advanced level.

4.1 Malaysian Students' Language Proficiency

Nine Malaysian students participating in this study were exposed to at least four languages. They were able to speak four or five languages, even if their proficiency in each language varied from 'professional' to 'beginner'. The proficiency levels were evaluated by themselves according to a scale ranging from 100% (professional) to 10% (low beginner). All students except F, whose mother tongue was Cantonese, spoke Chinese as their mother tongue. Their L2 proficiency levels ranged from 100% to 70%, but those of Bahasa Malaysia ranged from 90% to 20%. Also, their Korean language skills ranged from 90% to 60% (Table 2).

Table 2. Proficiency Levels of Each Language Evaluated by Participants

ID	Chinese (%)	English (%)	Malay (%)	Korean (%)	Cant. (%)
A	100	70	80	80	
B	100	90	90	90	90
C	90	80	70	70	
D	90	70	70	70	
E	90	80	20	60	
F	70	80	20	60	80
G	100	80	20	70	
H	100	80	80	70	
I	100	100	30	70	30

Whereas Students B and D replied that their Bahasa Malaysia and L2 proficiency levels were equal, the rest of the students (n=7) had better proficiency in L2 than in Bahasa Malaysia. Regarding the speaking fluency of L2, most of the participants showed advanced competence or above, and even Students A and D, whose L2 proficiency levels were 70% (high intermediate) faced no difficulties in everyday communication.

B: I speak Chinese the most often and I think in Chinese too. Even though I am equally fluent in Chinese, English and Cantonese, Chinese feels the most 'natural' to me because it was my

mother tongue that was spoken during the first few years of my life.

A: I usually speak Chinese at home and in school, and speak English when I am outside, like in shopping malls, restaurants or public areas. In general, I have no problem speaking English, but I sometimes make grammatical errors and hesitate when I need to speak more professionally.

I: English is the language I mainly use to communicate with friends in Malaysia. Though I was brought up speaking Chinese, I am most comfortable speaking English.

4.2 Malaysian Students' Perception of the Effect of L2 Speaking Proficiency on Advanced Reading

The students answered the question about whether their L2 speaking fluency contributed to L2 reading comprehension along the same lines. According to the students, their fluency in the language helped L2 reading in general. Student A maintained that since L2 was not recognized as a foreign language by them, the familiar structure of L2 sentences reduced the resistance to L2 reading, and naturally had a positive effect on it. On the other hand, their speaking competence in L2 did not play a key role in dealing with advanced text materials containing professional or high quality content.

C: My English proficiency does have an effect when I read business reports and papers related to my major. It helps me understand the content faster. However, I still have to use a dictionary sometimes.

A: Reading English materials is not a big issue because English is not a foreign language for me. But my English is not up to an advanced level, so I should improve it to read newspaper and magazines.

G: I can understand it around 70%. For the other 30%, I might need to check a dictionary.

H: I am fluent in English. And I understand advanced-level texts perfectly. But speaking fluent English might not help improve reading comprehension at the advanced level very much.

E: My English helped a little, maybe 20%. Although I can speak English pretty well, there are still many words I do not know. So, advanced-level reading is a different matter because the content is difficult and new.

As discussed above, students perceived that familiarity with L2 speaking did not always maintain leverage for L2 reading. This illustrates the feature of reading skills that encompass several key aspects that help readers interpret and find meaning in texts. The key aspects are the processes of integrating literacy skills, including comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and strategies, with prior knowledge and experiences.

4.3 Malaysian Students' Difficulties in Advanced L2 Reading

Like many other EFL learners, Malaysian students encountered difficulties in L2 reading, especially at the advanced level. Their comments and opinions demonstrated the difficulties of L2 reading, which were largely attributed to a lack of vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, and motivation or interest in reading.

4.3.1 Vocabulary

The biggest problem that most of the students mentioned was the lack of vocabulary knowledge. Texts dealing with various subject areas contained diverse vocabularies or terminologies and required further understanding. These were the major concern for Students E, G, and C. In addition, Student D explained that the more unfamiliar vocabulary words there were, the more difficult it was to infer their meaning using contextual clues.

E: I think I am not good at reading advanced-level texts because I am actually very lacking in vocabulary. For example, I have a hard time reading newspapers that contain a large number of high-level vocabulary words.

G: Vocabulary was the most difficult part. Without knowing the meaning of each word, it was hard to get the whole paragraph.

C: English grammar was easier to grasp when reading, but the variety of vocabulary caused difficulties in understanding advanced English texts.

D: I could understand what the sentences meant overall, but there were some specific words I did not understand. Advanced-level texts had much more difficult words I could not even guess the meaning of.

Therefore, these students emphasized the importance of vocabulary knowledge for L2 reading for Malaysian L2 learners. Student B argued that lack of vocabulary knowledge caused Malaysian learners to have difficulties in L2 reading and was a major obstacle for reading fluency.

B: I believe typical Malaysians have a limited range of vocabulary, which can be the most critical factor that affects the understanding of English texts.

As L2 readers rely heavily on vocabulary knowledge and the lack of that knowledge is the main and the largest obstacle for L2 readers to overcome[31]. Therefore, vocabulary knowledge plays an essential role in acquiring more advanced-level reading skills. Most of all, the difficulties associated with reading comprehension of advanced-level texts appeared with the complexity of the language used. Their L2 speaking fluency did not contribute to L2 reading enough because there are important differences between the language used in

everyday conversation and the language used in school[32].

Academic language includes specific linguistic features such as unfamiliar vocabulary, complex grammatical constructions, and different text organization to describe complex relationships of the content. However, Malaysian learners' displayed limited awareness of vocabulary to understand specialized articles and books, and it caused failure to guess the meaning of unknown words using contextual clues. This may possibly reflect that the open-ended vocabulary system is perceived to be the cause of difficulty by L2 learners. That is, unlike syntax and phonology, vocabulary does not have rules the learners may follow to acquire and develop their knowledge[31].

4.3.2 Background Knowledge

In addition to the vocabulary problem, non-linguistic factors also frustrated the reading task of the Malaysian L2 learners. Above all, the lack of background knowledge on the text was a challenge for reading comprehension. Students F and H pointed out that it was another important factor that they often struggled with in decoding the message of a written text more accurately.

F: The class was difficult when the topic was a new topic that I had not seen before. I knew the words in the sentences, but I could not explain what they meant.

H: Memorizing the meaning of the vocabulary is not enough for understanding high-level texts. Having some knowledge about the topic or issue is critical in clearly understanding the text.

By the same token, Student I evaluated background knowledge as crucial for meaningful comprehension. According to her, when interpreted without background knowledge, the given text was often understood ambiguously or incorrectly. This was considered to demonstrate

the aspect of advanced L2 reading that requires multifaceted skills.

I: Sometimes I could not interpret passages with different words. <u>My interpretations were very ambiguous or totally wrong.</u> I realized that reading English texts needs more reading and thinking.

Students faced difficulties while reading L2 texts of specific topics without the necessary background knowledge. The role of background knowledge in their comprehension might be more conspicuous when reading higher-level texts in the subject areas. If L2 learners have little background knowledge of the subject, they might get confused or give up on their reading.

On the other hand, when L2 learners activate their background knowledge, they can improve accuracy in translation and comprehension. Background knowledge helps readers choose the most appropriate meaning among multiple meanings of words or sentences. Texts do not necessarily carry all meanings, so readers bring knowledge and information to the printed text. Therefore, a reader's failure or inability to make sense of a text is caused by the lack of appropriate background knowledge that can easily fit the content of the text[33].

4.3.3 Motivational Factors and Others

Other challenges in comprehending L2 texts were mentioned. Insufficient motivational factors such as interest in reading resulted in poor performance in L2 reading comprehension. Student C claimed that she found it difficult to pay attention to texts that did not attract her interest. Moreover, Student D said that a lack of interest obstructed his class engagement and learning.

C: I usually do not read a lot, so <u>reading books and magazines with unfamiliar topics was not easy for me</u>. Some topics were interesting, but science articles and philosophical content were difficult to focus on.
D: <u>Without interest in the text, I could not concentrate on reading</u> Because the content of the reading was not simple and easy, I had to keep concentrating. But it was hard.

By contrast, Student F noted that motivational factors worked effectively to overcome less interesting reading tasks, and to promote class engagement. From her point of view, classroom activities and the instructor's explanation of the background knowledge could stimulate students' interest and motivation despite having little interest in L2 reading. Moreover, she took a rather resolute stance that L2 learners at the tertiary level should not relinquish opportunities to develop reading skills due to their lack of interest in particular topics.

F: Previously, I took a class called 'Reading The New York Times and Writing,' and I hoped to read more books and magazines written in English. <u>Difficult words and content distracted me</u> sometimes, but as I read more, I got more interested in the content. So, I think <u>attitude can change many difficulties into motivation, at least for university students.</u>

Different views on challenging factors were given in terms of the influence of the mother tongue in L2 reading. It involved the gap between the two languages in the way of thinking, language structure, culture, and so on. Student H suggested that reading skills were affected by her mother tongue, Chinese. The problem became more apparent when translating semantically complex texts, such as metaphors or idioms.

H: It is a problem for me to convey the meaning to others when reading literature. This

is because <u>*the structure of English and my*</u> <u>*mother tongue are different,*</u> *and* <u>*this results in*</u> <u>*misunderstanding the content.*</u> *In particular, there are many expressions that have an unclear meaning if they are translated in Chinese.*

Beyond decoding each word in a sentence, reading L2 texts involves several aspects of predicting, making connections, inferring, and summarizing to understand a given text[34]. As a consequence, reading a text requires a great deal of concentration to find its message, as well as to give an account of what has been read. This depends on the learner's background knowledge and contextual understanding of the topic, which enable them to attain meaningful comprehension. After all, reading, as a receptive and productive skill, requires L2 learners to pay attention to these features to improve their ability to comprehend.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study investigated the difficulties in L2 reading encountered by Malaysian students. Based on the premise that they have relatively easier access to using L2 than EFL learners, two research questions were posed on whether their speaking fluency contributed to L2 reading and what difficulties they had in comprehending advanced-level texts. Based on the data collected from in-depth interviews, the following conclusions were drawn.

The nine Malaysian students who participated in the study spoke at least four languages, including L1 and L2, and their proficiency in L2 was self-evaluated and ranged from 100% (professional, n=1), to 90 and 80% (advanced, n=6), and 70% (high intermediate, n=2). They all responded that they had no problems using L2 in their daily life, and that they had no difficulty reading L2 texts in general. In response to the

question of whether their speaking fluency was helpful for L2 reading, they answered that it helped somewhat in that familiarity with L2 relieved anxiety. L2 was not recognized as a foreign language since they were frequently exposed to L2 texts in normal educational and social environments.

Nevertheless, they explained that their fluency was not very helpful in reading advanced L2 texts. Their main difficulty was a lack of vocabulary knowledge. Lack of a high-level vocabulary beyond the range of the language used in everyday life was pointed out as the main factor. In particular, texts covering a variety of topics required them to understand a wide range of vocabulary and terms, so they needed to memorize new vocabulary as EFL learners did.

Also, students said that another challenge that discouraged L2 reading was the lack of background knowledge. If there was insufficient background knowledge, the interpretation of the text was unclear or incorrect. Students highlighted that the more advanced the text was, the more specialized it was, and that when they had no basic knowledge related to the subject, the overall comprehension was lower. Also, it was difficult for them to understand complex contents without background knowledge, so it was considered to be a factor that impeded the understanding of expressions such as metaphors and idioms.

In addition, it was pointed out that lack of interest or motivation lowered the level of immersion in L2 reading and learning. Also, the influence of the mother tongue was presented as undermining L2 reading. Since L1 and L2 do not always correspond linguistically and culturally, this difference might cause awkward interpretations. Hence, successful, and meaningful reading will result from the reader's sufficient understanding of an L2-speaking culture interacting with his/her lexical knowledge and prior knowledge.

Therefore, two important implications can be found in this study. First, in reading advanced-level texts in L2, more emphasis should be placed on the processes of building vocabulary knowledge, motivational factors, multifaceted background knowledge, and reading strategies. In other words, the key is to connect the linguistic understanding of the vocabulary and sentence structure with the learner's own prior knowledge, which will thereby derive a comprehensive understanding of the text. These factors should be carefully addressed in reading classes for Korean L2 learners as well as international students.

Furthermore, it is necessary to develop a separate curriculum that is optimized for international students who grew up in an ESL environment and have L2 communication skills. Recently, an increasing number of international students are taking classes with Korean students in Korean universities. L2 courses are often provided for each level, but not some elective courses such as advanced reading. Effective and dynamic education will be possible if a separate curriculum is provided to international students, reflecting their learning abilities and characteristics. It is necessary for them to increase immersion in the class by conducting more discussions and effective assignments, and to create an environment where they can solve problems themselves.

Although efforts were made to invite Malaysian participants to investigate their L2 learning experience in Korea, there were two major limitations related to the participants. The nine participants might not reveal more extensive aspects of Malaysian L2 learners. Additionally, they were from the researcher's class, so further study applied to more students from different backgrounds could reflect different views and draw more objective findings. Future research will address these limitations and broaden the outcomes and implications of the present study.

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