

ABSTRACT

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Key Words : Second language reading; reading difficulties; secondary school

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Thesis title: A study of the reading difficulties of second-year EFL learners at Public Secondary School of Kayrala Manatuto Timor -Leste

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The aim of the research is to identify the difficulties experienced by secondary students in Timor-Leste when they read texts in English. The study also attempts to identify the causes of the students' reading difficulties. 200 students and two of their English teachers participated in the study. A questionnaire was used to gather information about the students' reading experience and habits. Based on the questionnaire results, ten students were selected to participate in focus group discussions about their reading difficulties. Five of the students were assigned to a 'challenged' reader focus group, while five were assigned to a 'coping' reader group. Two English teachers (the only two English teachers at the school) participated in semi-structured, in-depth, interviews about aspects of their students' reading difficulties. The teachers were also asked about their approaches to teaching reading, the types of materials used and the resources that were available to support reading at the school. The results show that many of the students find reading in English particularly difficult. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge and a lack of reading strategies are the main contributors. The single most serious difficulty reported by both students and teachers was the pronunciation of the words of the reading texts. This finding suggests that the students are accustomed to reading texts aloud rather than silently and may not have progressed beyond a sub-vocalizing phase. The teacher interviews confirmed that the majority of the students adopt a 'bottom up' approach to reading, in spite of the teachers' efforts to introduce 'top-down' reading strategies.