

English Reading Skill and Strategy Development through Supplementary Exercises for Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this research were to: 1) study the students' reading problems in terms of reading strategies prior to the implementation of the supplementary exercises, and 2) compare the students' learning achievement in terms of reading skills and strategies before and after implementing the supplementary exercises. The research sample, selected through a purposive sampling technique, comprised 275 third-year students enrolled in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Thepsatri Rajabhat University and failed in Reading Exit Exam in the 2nd semester of 2016 Academic Year. The instruments of the study consisted of pre-and post-tests, Reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises, and structured interview. The quantitative data were analysed by means, standard deviation, percentage, and t-test whereas the content analysis was conducted to analyse the qualitative data. The study revealed that the students' reading problems were classified into two main issues: the confusion of using each reading strategy and less frequency usage. The comparison of the results before and after implementing the reading supplementary exercises showed statistically significant differences at the .01 level. Most of the students obtained better results after learning through the supplementary exercises and could employ each reading strategy with more confidence when retaking the examination.

Keywords: Development, english reading skills and strategies, supplementary exercises

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the English language has a significant influence on all people around the world. Smith (1976) stated since English has become the major lingua franca of the world, many people need to use English for scientific, technical, and commercial

purposes. Parisutthiman (2000, p.22) mentioned, “People can use the English language to connect to other people without boundaries, pass information along to others, purchase a wide range of products and services online”. Today’s world has been developing very fast and becoming increasingly globalised, creating a world of communication without boundaries (Sutthisan, 2010). Therefore, people in many countries use English as a second language, and some other countries use English as a foreign language for international communication.

Thailand is also one of the many countries that has considered this language as an essential means for worldwide communication. English is thus specified in Thai Education systems. According to Suphat (2014), Thai Ministry of Education has particularly developed educational policies in terms of studying the English language up to present since prior to 1893. The government is working towards the extension of basic education from 8 to 12 years. That is to say, English has to be taught to students from Grades one to twelve in schools. Panichying (1997, p. 56) added, “The Thai government fully realises the fact that it is necessary that everyone learns English”. In this regard, teachers need to improve students’ all four English skills-reading, writing, listening, and speaking so that they can communicate with other people effectively and proficiently in order to develop not only themselves but also their own country. Wiromrat (2009, p. 2)

said, “teachers who train students to use language learning strategies can help them become better language learners”. Similarly, the learner needs to be a willing learner, and to give the necessary time, effort, and social collaboration to the task for high achievement (Long & Richards, 1987).

Reading is one of the most important English skills because students have to read texts and understand the information. It is also reacting to a written text as a piece of communication (Wallace, 1992). Snow, Burns, and Griffin (1998) indicated that reading is one of the most challenging skills in the educational system. Importantly, in the second language learning, reading serves as the primary source of new information about all sorts of topics (Li, 2010). In addition, Hiebert et al. (1985) asserted that teaching reading strategies is a cornerstone in developing learners’ comprehension. Even though reading is perceived as a crucial skill emphasised in all educational institutions, many students still have problems in reading skills; they do not know how to use the reading skills and strategies properly. Chen (2015, p. 1) also stated that “most learners have reading problems because they lack the specific strategies necessary for efficient reading”. Beatrice and Linda (1996) suggested that reading skills are important, so students need to improve their reading ability continuously. To enhance students’ reading skills, reading strategies are crucial to take into account. Galloway and Labarca (1990) noted that readers’ tactics were the strategies or techniques

they used for achieving comprehension, as well as for storing, retrieving and collecting information for planning, regulation, or assessment. The students' lack of reading comprehension skills will obviously affect the students' success in school (Anugakul, 2015). In addition, for any students who wish to develop reading abilities and success in reading, they have to practice reading and using techniques. Slaght and Harben (2009, p. 11) suggested that "the more the students read, the better they will read". O' Malley, Anna, Gloria, Rocco, and Lisa (1985) asserted that good learners who were able to apply the strategies perfectly could have considerable effects on facilitating the development of second language skills.

As the instructors at Thepsatri Rajabhat University, the researchers were interested in reading strategies on the account that a large number of students at this university had problems in reading skills. They needed to improve their reading skills and strategies in order to become more successful in their reading, so this research aimed to develop their reading skills and strategies through Reading Supplementary Exercises. Due to the importance of reading skill, as mentioned earlier, the students who can read effectively will apparently have an advantage over the others. Thus, the results of this research will be useful for students' reading skill enhancement.

PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The purposes of this research were to: 1) study the students' reading problems in

terms of reading strategies prior to the implementation of the supplementary exercises, and 2) compare the students' learning achievement in terms of reading skills and strategies before and after implementing the supplementary exercises to the students.

METHODS

This study was an experimental research, conducted with a group of undergraduate students, aiming to develop their reading skills and strategies, comprising context clues, topics and main ideas, skimming, scanning, and making inferences after implementing the supplementary exercises.

The students' problems related to reading skills and strategies were initially studied by employing the pretest and structured interview. The results were then used to develop the English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises and manage the learning plans for experiments in this study.

Sample

The participants consisted of 275 third year students majoring in Thai, Chinese, Japanese, English of Arts, English Education, English (English programme), Music Studies, Fine Arts, Law, Public Administration, Local Government, and Social Studies, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Thepsatri Rajabhat University, who had failed in the Reading Exit Exam in the 2nd semester of 2016 Academic Year.

Research Instrument

The instrument of the study consisted of:

- 1) A pre- and post-test comprised 50 multiple choice items with regards to five reading strategies including context clues, topics and main ideas, skimming, scanning, and making inferences. The test contents were validated by three language experts and piloted with another group of students with a reliability of 0.85.
- 2) Reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises consisted of 5 lessons; context clues, topics and main ideas, skimming, scanning, and making inference. Each lesson comprised a lesson plan for instructors, contents, and exercises after the chapter so that the students could practice more outside the classroom. The reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises were developed from the students' pre-test results and interview. They were composed by English lecturers in the English Department, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Thepsatri Rajabhat University. The contents were tested for accuracy and appropriateness by 3 language experts. The contents and exercises then were improved according to their advice to make the text more reliable and suitable before using with the experimental sample.
- 3) Structured interview was administered with the 10 students who passed the test with the highest scores and 10 students

who failed the test with the lowest scores, before and after implementing English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed by means, standard deviation, percentage, and T-test whereas the content analysis was conducted to analyse the qualitative data obtained from the interview.

1. Percentages were used to find out how well the students did in their pre- and post-tests. The test score results were divided into 4 levels and graded in the following criteria: 90% or above referred to as 'excellent', 70-89% as 'good', 50-69% as 'fair', and below 50% as 'need improvement'.
2. Paired sample dependent t-test was employed to analyse the students' reading skills before and after the implementation of the reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises.

Research Framework

The independent variables of this research were the English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises and the dependent variable was the learning achievement of the students' English reading skills and strategies. The experiment took seven weeks altogether; the first week was testing and interviewing the students to study their problems of the English reading skills and strategies. From Weeks two to six, the students were studying by using the English

reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises of 5 topics including context clues, topics and main ideas, skimming, scanning,

and making inferences. Then, the post-test was taken by the students in Week seven.

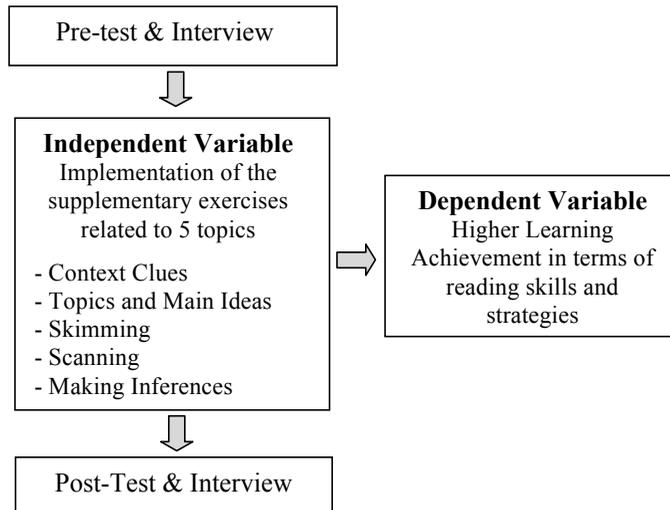


Figure 1. Research framework

RESULTS

Students' Problems in Reading Skills and Strategies

Surprisingly, all of the students' pre-tests scores were lower than 50%. It is reasonable to say that they did not soundly comprehend the texts in the test. Consequently, interview was conducted in order to find out what reading problems they had. Based on the results of the students' interview prior to studying through supplementary exercises, it was concluded that the two major problem issues that made students' reading ability somewhat low were as follows:

1) Not only many students had limited knowledge in terms of English reading strategies, they also got confused when

they had to use the reading strategies. Besides, some of them did not feel interested in using the strategies when they read.

2) In many students' perspectives, they thought that reading in English, including using the strategies, was so difficult to understand that they got bored when studying and eventually did not pay much attention in the class.

After gaining results from the interview, the researchers made an attempt to make the English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises more attractive and easy to understand so that the students could use these materials to review the lessons by themselves after class.

A comparison of the Students' Learning Achievement in terms of Reading Skills and Strategies

A comparison of students' leaning achievement before and after implementing

English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Students' learning achievement in term of reading skills and strategies

Number of Students	Pre-test		Post-test		t-test	Sig
	x	SD	x	SD		
275	11.83	4.46	12.68	4.63	-9.31	000*

Table 1 illustrates the comparison of the results of the Learning Achievement before and after implementing English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises obtained by the third year students who failed in Reading Exit Exam. Overall, the students' post-test mean scores (12.68) were higher than the pre-test mean scores (11.83).

There was a significant difference between the pre- and post- tests at the .01 level. It is fair to say that the students' learning achievement in terms of reading skills and strategies after the implementation of the supplementary exercises was apparently higher.

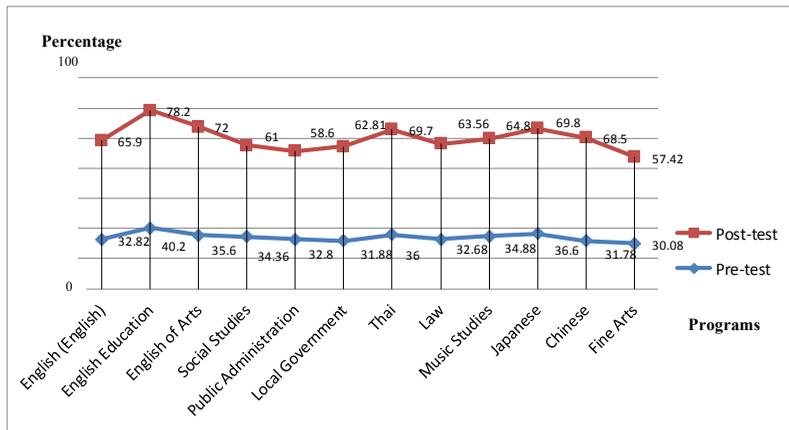


Figure 2. Comparison of Learning Achievement before and after studying English reading skills and strategies through English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises

Figure 2 shows the comparison of students' learning achievement before and after studying English reading skills and strategies through English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises. From the data, it was found that the average rate of the learning achievement of the students after learning through English reading skills and strategies supplement exercises was higher than the prior scores, or before studying through the supplement exercises. Overall, all the third year students who had failed in the Exit Exam got the pre-test scores lower than 50%, and the students from Fine Arts programme obtained the lowest

score with only 30.08% in comparison to those of other programmes in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. However, after studying English reading skills and strategies through English reading skills and strategies supplement exercises, their scores were significantly higher. About 57.42% of the students who passed the post-test after learning using supplementary exercises. The number of students (78.2%) who passed the post-tests from English Education programme was the highest of all the number of students in any other programmes.

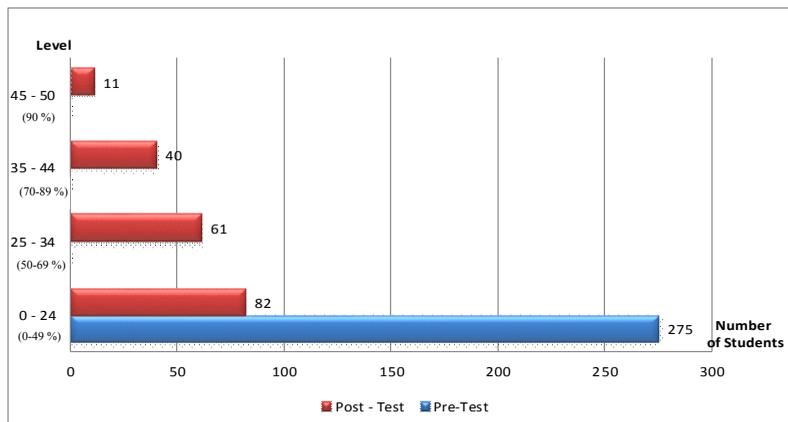


Figure 3. Results of Learning Achievement before and after learning English reading skills and strategies through English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises

Figure 3 displays the results of the pre-test and post-test on the English reading skills and strategies before and after implementing English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises. The results revealed that most of the third year students passed the test after studying using English reading skills and strategies

supplementary exercises. In terms of their English reading scores, 11 students (4%) obtained excellent post-test scores, 40 students (14.55%) had good scores, and 61 students (22.18%) had fair scores. In other words, 190 students (70.55%) passed the post-tests. However, 82 students (29.82%) still failed the post-tests so this warrants

them to improve their English reading skills and strategies.

Last but not least, 10 students who got the highest post-test scores were selected for the interview regarding the reading strategies taught in the lessons. All of them understood how to use each strategy better, which made them comprehend the texts in the post-tests more clearly. Notwithstanding, only one strategy that was rather difficult for them, i.e. Context Clues, as this strategy requires more knowledge in terms of vocabulary.

DISCUSSION

From the results of students' learning achievement, before and after implementing English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises in relation to contextual clues, topics and main ideas, skimming, scanning, and making inferences, the students' post-test scores were found to be significantly higher than the pre-test score at .01 level. This is paralleled with the research results of Nonghang, Changhan, and Sillaninman (2012), who indicated that using supplementary reading books for students could discipline achievement tests, and the results of their research are relatively similar to this study. That is, all the Matthayom three students enhanced their reading skills after using the supplementary reading books. However, their material did not emphasise reading strategies, which were considered as essential to students' reading comprehension.

To support that reading materials help improve students' reading skills, Kongna

(2007) conducted a study with Prathom Six students from Luangporchaem Wattakong Aunsorn School, Nakhon Pathom. The research illustrated that their English reading ability was better after they had used English reading supplementary materials. Their reading ability after using the constructed materials was significantly higher than before using the constructed materials at the 0.05 level. Also, the students' opinions towards the constructed materials were highly positive. His study results were obviously consistent with this research; nonetheless, the materials used to improve the students did not focus on reading strategies. It can be said that this present study may be used as guidance for those who are interested in creating a reading material emphasising on reading strategies for their students. In addition, Hsu (2007) studied the English reading strategy use of four-year technical college students in Taiwan. According to the results, the most often used category was metacognitive strategy category, and this was followed by social affective strategy category. Besides, he also found that effective learners tended to use specific kinds of strategies and that they use strategies more frequently than ineffective learners.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

According to the research findings, the suggestions on developing the third year students' reading skills and strategies were that the instructors should provide them learning opportunities that include a

variety of activities. This means the teaching approach should be interesting and easy for them to understand because it would motivate students' participation. Besides, before preparing any supplementary exercises, the instructors should examine the learners first so that they can determine the students' learning ability and this will then guide the instructors to adjust the contexts to suit the learners' ability. In other words, the students will gain more knowledge and be ready to apply the English reading skills and strategies in their education and daily lives.

More areas with regards to reading skills and strategies should be studied in greater details. Each of the five categories of English reading skills and strategies in this study is very board and could be further divided into several sub-categories. It would be useful, therefore, to explore more reading strategies such as patterns of organisation, using reference words, word formation, etc.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of this study indicated that the third year students improved their English reading effectiveness after learning through English reading skills and strategies supplementary exercises. The results of the pre- and post-tests showed that their English reading skills and strategies were significantly different. Moreover, the number of students who did not pass the test before studying through the supplementary exercises was obviously decreased. Prior to the implementation, 275 students from 12 programmes, including English (English

program), English Education, English of Arts, Social Studies, Public Administration, Local Government, Thai, Law, Music Studies, Chinese, Japanese, and Fine Arts, did not pass the pre-test. However, after they had learned through the supplementary exercises, 70.55% of these students passed the exams. On the other hand, only 29.82% of the students still failed the post-tests. After the experiment, it was found that there were many possible factors for this failure. The students may not have been fully willing to participate. They may have felt limited by time, individual indifferences, ignorance, or apprehension regarding their potential to succeed. These factors may have affected their ability and/or willingness to do the English reading skill and strategy test; hence, the results have affected the outcome of the test.

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