

The Effects of Using Authentic Materials on Students' Achievement towards English Reading Comprehension among Narathiwat Technical College Students

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ABSTRACT : *The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of using authentic materials on students' achievement towards English reading comprehension among Narathiwat technical college students. The participants of this study were 38 second year vocational students majoring in accounting group one from Narathiwat Technical College, Narathiwat province, south of Thailand. The instruments used in this study were pre-test and post-test. The findings indicated that there was a significant difference in the mean score between pre-test and post-test. The results from paired sample t-test showed that students' mean scores post-test is significantly higher than pre-test. This study has crucial pedagogical implication to Ministry of Education, Teacher Training Division and English supervisors because serious planning and implementations were required to improve students' English reading comprehension of students in Thailand especially Narathiwat province by encouraging the English teachers to use authentic materials in teaching English reading class.*

KEYWORDS: *Authentic materials, achievement, reading comprehension, Narathiwat Technical College*

I. INTRODUCTION

English is generally accepted as an international language. It is one of the most useful languages used by people as a medium to communicate with other countries all over the world. English language teaching and learning is vital for the development of the country and its people. According to Thai students, English is one of the most difficult subject compared to other subjects in curriculum. In the process of teaching and learning, the four language skills are performed: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. One of the most useful skills used by second language learners is reading skills. In Thailand, English language teaching is a challenging task because of students' lack of interest in the English language (Ulla, 2018). It causes teaching and learning English in Thailand is not satisfactory. In relation to this, Thai students are weak in English reading skills which regarded as one of the most important skills in the process of learning English. At the same time, English become very important for Thailand since Thailand has joined to be a member of ASEAN. According to McArthur (2003) and Kachru (2005) regarded English as an Asian language. Thailand, is one of the ASEAN countries which need to improve the learners' ability of English in order to compete with the other nations. English has been accepted by the most people in the world (Crystal, 2003) and it is also regarded as a prestigious language. As Wilkins and Urbanovic (2014) mentioned that many families prefer to send their children to study overseas where they can practice English because they believe that by having high proficiency in English can offer them a better job.

Reading is regarded as one of the most important language skills for academic success and professional development (Dorkchandra, 2010). Regarding this, the Thai government tries to support English language education at all levels but Thai students' level of English is much lower than their regional neighbours such as Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore (Noom-ura, 2013). The weaknesses of reading comprehension are caused by both students and teachers. This study emphasizes on reading comprehension among Narathiwat Technical College students. The uniqueness of students in this province is language because the majority of them have to learn four languages; namely Thai, Malay, Arabic, and English. They belief that English is least important for them and they learn English just to pass examination (Jehdo, 2009). One among reasons is Thai English teachers prefer to use conventional methods that is chalk and talk make students not interested to learn

English. With the reasons, the researcher tries to use different method of teaching from depending on textbook to using authentic materials to see the effects of using authentic materials on students' achievement towards English reading comprehension among Narathiwat Technical College students.

The area of this study is particular at Narathiwat Technical College which is the biggest college in Narathiwat, southern part of Thailand and it promotes success in both areas of academics and career development. The uniqueness of students in this province is language. Majority of the students have to learn four languages; Thai, Malay, Arabic, and English. They believe that among these four languages, English is the least important to them because they do not use in their daily life (Jehdo, 2009). Students who come to study in this college think to be expert in working skills causes students get low mark for English subject. With the reasons, Thai English teachers try to find various methods of teaching in order to attract students' participation. Therefore, this study tends to introduce a new technique which based on schema theory, by integrating authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension among Narathiwat Technical College students.

Problem Statement

English in Thailand has been taught as a foreign language (EFL) because Thai people do not use English as an official language and most of English classes are using Thai language as a medium of instruction. It causes teaching and learning English in Thailand is not satisfactory. According to the latest results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which was conducted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2015) administered every three years among 72 countries (the next results will be announced on December 3, 2019), Thailand was ranked 60 in English reading proficiency as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1
Results of Programme for International Student Assessment in 2015

R	Country Names	Reading Mean Score
0	OECD average	493
1	Singapore	535
32	Vietnam	487
50	Malaysia	431
60	Thailand	409
67	Indonesia	397

Source: <http://www.businessinsider.my/pisa-worldwide-ranking-of-math-science-reading-skills-2016-12/?r=DE&IR=T#4efXSmxpD2TvJM1Y.97>

Table 1 shows the results of PISA in 2015 among 72 participating countries. These results show only some of the ASEAN member countries participated in PISA 2015. Thailand was ranked 60 out of the 72 countries. Based on the pressing problems elaborated above, researches were conducted mostly to find out the problem in teaching and learning EFL in Thailand (Chomthong, 2014; Hayikaleng, 2011; Jehdo, 2009; Tamrackitkun, 2010). However, few researchers worked on ways to help students to improve their levels of English, especially reading skills. Therefore, the researcher would like to integrate authentic materials in teaching English reading comprehension in order to examine the effects of using authentic materials in comprehending reading texts.

Due to the importance of English and the countless problems faced in learning and teaching English in Thailand as elaborate above, this study aims to investigate the effects of using authentic materials on students' achievement towards English reading comprehension among Narathiwat Technical College students.

Research Questions

1. How do students perform in answering pre-test and post-test?
2. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores between the pre-test and the post-test?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review

Piaget (1952) defined schema as an organized pattern of thinking used to define experiences as a scheme (Piaget, 1952). Cognitive scientists use the term schema to explain how prior knowledge is used to understand, establish and store new information in human minds (Gillani, 2010; Vacca & Vacca, 2005; Zhang, 2010). Everybody has stored information in individual brain and ready to process after getting new information. In regarding to this, the teacher should choose authentic materials which are familiar with the learners in order to help them understand easily. This mental framework is constructed based on our daily experiences and routines. Schema theorists postulate that schema or background knowledge helps in the processing and organizing of new information for future understanding (Robinson, Katayama & Chun, 1996). In other words, when learners read authentic materials which given by the teacher there will be a process of connecting background knowledge with new information in order to construct meaning and comprehend the text. However, if the information received does not conform to the existing schema, the information cannot be processed accordingly. Authentic materials refer to the use of photographs, video selections, texts and other resources that are not arranged for pedagogical purposes (Richards, 2001). There are various type of authentic materials that can be used in the classroom including textbooks and online teaching tools but the most common are newspapers, magazines, TV programs, movies, songs and literature. They can all aid and enhance English lessons. The following figure shows the process of using the schema theory.

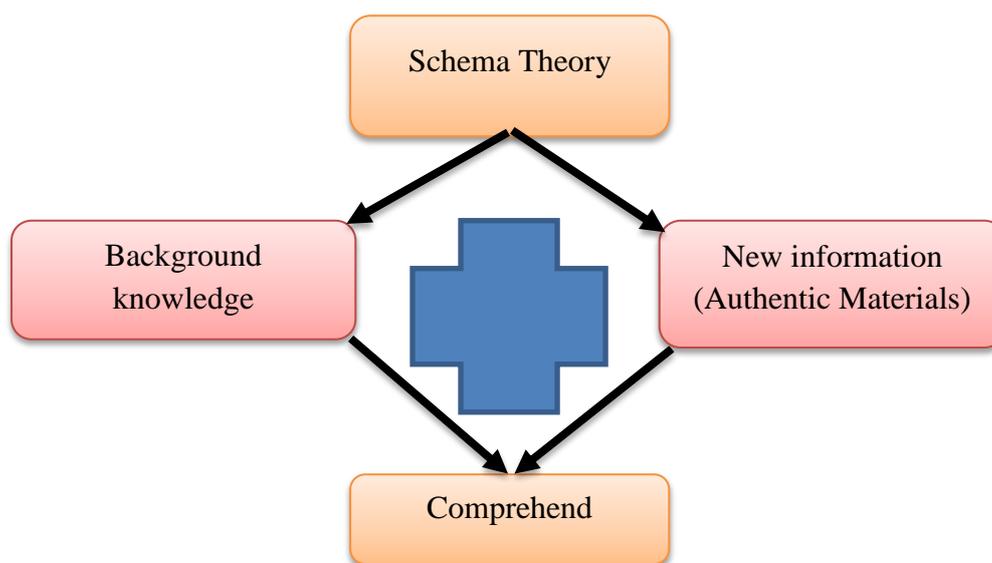


Figure 1. The Schema Theory (Piaget, 1952)

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework which is used in the study. The schema theorists believe that everybody has stored background knowledge in individual mind. When individual receive new information (authentic materials) then will construct the meaning and comprehend. In other words, the researcher has applied authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension which can help to process greater amounts of input to activate schema and these inputs are integrated with existing information within the long term memory to construct meaning. By using authentic materials, students are able to understand the lesson and build self-confidence. It motivates students to be involved in all activities prepared by the teachers.

Many teachers introduce authentic English materials into their lessons. They confirmed that using authentic materials to teach the English language can make the learning process even more engaging, imaginative and motivating for students. It can also be useful to attract responses from learners. They will learn abbreviations when looking handwritten notes, and hear the true tone, see body language presented by authentic

materials. Using authentic materials are helpful because some students who do not know the meaning of things can witness with authentic materials. English teachers might also consider using authentic materials to improve students' reading comprehension. Some studies indicate that the use of authentic materials help students to understand the texts easily (Belaid, 2015; Hatimah, Rofiq & Andayani, 2013; Khoshbakht & Gorjian, 2017; & Marzban & Davaji, 2015) as can be seen from previous available literatures.

Belaid (2015) conducted the study on using authentic materials in the foreign language classrooms: Teacher attitudes and perceptions in Libyan universities. The participants were 15 Libyans EFL teachers with different teaching expertise, ranged between 2 to 25 years within the academic context. The results revealed that most EFL teachers have positive attitudes on using authentic materials in their language classes. Their reasons said that by using authentic materials would positively reflect on learners' language proficiency.

Hatimah, Rofiq and Andayani (2013) studied the effects of using authentic materials on tenth grade students' comprehension ability, at MA Islamiyah Shafi'iyah Sumberanyar-Paiton. The use of authentic materials is helpful in teaching reading since they are related to the actual situations in the reading passages. The samples of the study were 48 tenth grade students. The aim of the study was to investigate the effects of using authentic materials on students' reading comprehension. The findings showed that using authentic materials had significant effect on students' reading comprehension ability.

Khoshbakht and Gorjian, (2017) conducted their study to investigate the effect of authentic-based and non-authentic-based materials on improving reading comprehension of the Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The samples were 50 Iranian EFL learners studying English in Pooya Language Institute in Abadan. The results indicated that the performance of the participants in authentic group was improved in terms of reading comprehension compared to non-authentic group.

Marzban and Davaji (2015) investigated the effect of authentic texts on motivation and reading comprehension of EFL students at intermediate level of proficiency. Participants were 24 language learners from language teaching institutes. The results revealed that using authentic texts has positive effect on the reading comprehension of intermediate students. Besides, authentic materials also increased students' motivations. In other words, using authentic materials can improve reading comprehension as well as motivate students in learning EFL.

Literature has also shown a strong impact between reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge of learners (Guo, 2012; & Jusoh, 2016). Without knowledge of vocabulary, readers might not be able to understand the underlying meanings in the passage. It is proposed that using authentic materials can also improve vocabulary. As a result, the students would be able to comprehend the reading text easily as mentioned by previous researchers.

Guo (2012) investigated the impact of authentic materials as the main source of extensive reading. The participants of the study were 50 English major students from a five-year college in Taiwan. The results indicated that there is a strong relationship between using authentic materials and vocabulary development. In other words, using authentic materials provide vocabulary which can be enhanced students' overall English ability.

Jusoh (2016) analyzed the effectiveness of using authentic reading materials to improve students' vocabulary acquisition. This study used quasi-experimental method with 60 students from diploma program at Kolej Profesional MARA, Bandar Penawar, Kota Tinggi Johor, Malaysia. The findings showed that authentic materials were able to improve students' vocabulary acquisition.

Based on these research findings, it can be concluded that authentic materials are important to connect the background knowledge and new information to help learners in understanding the reading text. This process is concerned to the schema theory which mentioned earlier. Therefore, in a reading class, the teacher plays an important role in bridging the gap between reading text and students' understanding. In this research, the researcher uses authentic materials to enhance students' ability in learning English reading class in order to comprehending the reading texts.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section provides details on participants, instruments, procedures employed in current research to answer the research question.

Participants

This is a quantitative study using descriptive research design. The participants of the study consist of 38 second year vocational students majoring in accounting from Narathiwat Technical Collage, Narathiwat district, southern part of Thailand.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were six reading comprehension passages. Each passage consists of six multiple choice questions, all together are 36 items.

Procedure

The students took 90 minutes to answer all the questions. The total marks for pre-test and post-test questions were converted into percentages. Paired samples t-test was used to analyse the data obtained from the comprehension test. Prior to that, the two English teachers from Narathiwat Technical College who have more than five years of experience in teaching English were asked to verify and make sure that the questions and the passages are suitable for the students. The researchers asked permission from the principle of the college to conduct the research. The two English teachers distributed the questions and did the correction based on scale given. The total marks for pre-test and post-test questions were converted into percentages. Paired samples t-test was used to analyse the data obtained from the comprehension test.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part reports the finding from data collection based on research questions.

Research question 1. How do students perform in answering pre-test and post-test?

Table 2

Statistics	Pre-test	Post-test
N Valid	38	38
Missing	0	0
Mean	24.1579	31.4211
Std. Deviation	1.10347	1.40716

The results show students' mean score for pre-test is 24.1579 (SD 1.10347) which is at a lower level compared to post-test. While students' mean score for post-test is 31.4211 (SD 1.40716). The findings indicate that students are able to answer pre-test but at lower level compared to the post-test as given in Table 2. It happens because after pre-test the teacher give intervention by integrating authentic materials to teach English reading class. Learning by using authentic materials attract the students to pay more attention on the lesson. As a result, it can improve students' ability in answering comprehension questions. These findings are in line with Belaid (2015), Hatimah, Rofiq and Andayani (2013), Khoshbakht and Gorjian (2017) and Marzban and Davaji (2015) who stressed that the use of authentic materials help students to understand the texts easily.

Research question 2. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores between the pre-test and the post-test?

Table 3

Paired sample t-test comparing pre-test and post-test							
Questions	N	Mean	SD	Mean Different	t-value	df	p-value
Pre-test	38	24.1579	1.10347				
Post-test		31.4211	1.40716	-7.26311	-30.570	37	.000

Level of significance is at $p < 0.05$

The findings in Table 3 showed that there is a significant difference in the mean score between pre-test and post-test ($t = -30.570$, mean difference = -7.26311 , $df = 37$, $p = .000$). The results also reveal that the students' mean score for post-test is significantly higher than pre-test. To be good in comprehending the reading text the students need to have vocabulary knowledge in order to understand the reading text and later on able to comprehend the text easily. This study supports previous studies by Guo (2012) and Jusoh (2016) who mentioned that students comprehend the text better if they have vocabulary knowledge. Integrating authentic materials provide a lots of vocabulary. As a result, students are able to answer the reading comprehension questions well.

V. CONCLUSION

Current study has revealed that the use of authentic materials is one way to enhance students' reading comprehension. However, teachers should have different pedagogy in teaching English in order to attract students to pay attention on the English lesson. Reading comprehension requires vocabulary in order to understand the reading text and applying authentic materials in reading class is helpful which has been explained by schema theory. As such, teachers should take all these into account while teaching reading comprehension. This study has implications on the teaching of reading comprehension in the English language (EFL) classroom. The findings of this study also serve as a guide to the Ministry of Education, in particular to the Teacher Training Division and English supervisors to encourage the English teachers to use authentic materials in teaching English reading class in order to improve reading comprehension as well as provides a lots of vocabulary knowledge in learning English and also able to attract the students to pay more attention on the lesson.

Suggestion

In this study, the researcher used only a small sample of 38 students. Future research should engage larger samples which include technical college from different provinces in Thailand to obtain more conclusive findings which can resemble a larger population. In relation to this, the Thai English teachers in the three southern provinces of Thailand might use various types of methodologies in teaching English reading class in order to develop reading skill among vocational students in the future.

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