

The Use of Question Words on English Reading Comprehension among Thai Students at Narathiwat Technical College

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ABSTRACT: *Many Thai English teachers prefer to use yes/no questions rather than question words while giving exercises to their students. At the same time, the ability to think critically is very important for students in 21st century. Applying critical thinking strategies in the EFL college classroom can improve students academic performance. The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of yes/no questions and question words on English reading comprehension among Thai students at Narathiwat Technical College. This study seeks to compare the scores between using Yes/No questions and question words. The participants of this study were 28 second year students group two majoring in accounting from Narathiwat Technical College. The instruments used in this study were six reading comprehension passages. Each passage consists of six multiple choice questions (four items using Yes/No questions and two items using question words). The findings from paired sample t-test indicated that students' mean scores for using Yes/No questions is significantly higher than using question words. 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 by encouraging the EFL teachers to use question words.*

KEYWORDS: *Yes/no questions, Question words, English reading comprehension, EFL*

I. INTRODUCTION

English is now regarded as a global language. We use English as a medium to communicate with other countries all over the world. People recognize that English is very important for our life. In Thailand, English has been taught as a foreign language (EFL) because Thai people do not use English as an official language. Most of the Asian countries, especially Thailand learn English as a foreign language. It means Thai students use English only in the classroom, outside the class they do not have a chance to practice English and most of their English classes are taught by using Thai language. For Thai, they believe that English is very difficult subject for them. Besides, to teach critical thinking for English subject is more difficult. With the reason, the researcher tried to apply critical thinking strategy in English reading comprehension class.

Reading is one of the four important language skills for academic success and professional development (Dorkchandra, 2010) because reading will be included in examination paper for school placement test, university entrance as well as for getting a job. On the other hand, reading is one of the important skills that should be improved among students in Narathiwat Technical College. Although Thai government has made great efforts to improve English skills in vocational and technical education, it still remain as a serious problem because of a lack of interest and poor basic principles of English among Thai vocational and technical students (Chosri & Intharaksa, 2011). As a result, the students' command in English is not satisfactory. The teaching of English skills has been deemed by many to be rather ineffective. One way to improve reading comprehension is by applying critical thinking strategy. This strategy is concerned with Bloom's theory in the level of analyzing, evaluating, and creating which categorize in higher order thinking skill.

Problem Statement

Thai students are weak in reading comprehension. The weaknesses are caused by both teachers and students. There are many factors affecting students' English reading comprehension in Thailand (Hayikaleng,

2011; Kongkert, 2013; Teemuangsai & Meesook, 2017) as they stressed that, Thai English teachers are still using conventional teaching methods such as chalk and talk, over emphasize on the grammar. In other words, the Thai English teachers using uninteresting teaching methods in classroom practices. Kongkert (2013) reported that the common technique used by teachers in teaching reading in Thailand is students are asked to read aloud, reading sentence by sentence, or section by section and then answering comprehension questions which deals with Yes/No questions rather than using question words. This method of teaching does not promote thinking skills and make students tedious. Pertaining to meeting the standard, the researcher would like to apply Bloom's Taxonomy Domain to guide the students while they learn English reading comprehension in order to train the students to involve in critical thinking.

There are serious evidence concerning the standard of English language in Thailand. According to the result of Thai English Proficiency Drop from year 2011 to 2018 Thailand cannot reach the standard of English as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1

Thai English Proficiency Drop

Year	Ranking	Countries of participation	Level
2011	42	44	Very low
2012	53	54	Very low
2013	55	60	Very low
2014	48	63	Very low
2015	62	70	Very low
2016	56	72	Very low
2017	53	80	low
2018	64	88	low

Source: <http://aec.utcc.ac.th/thai-english-proficiency-drops/>

Table 1 shows the result of Thai English Proficiency Drop from year 2011 to 2018. This result showed that Thailand was ranked in very low to low level which means Thai students have to improve the level of English seriously in order to reach the standard of worldwide English. Reading is an important skill that all people should be considered. At the same times, many schools in small towns such as Narathiwat have less reading materials and they also less opportunity to use technologies to support English reading class. Besides, Tamrackitkun (2010) stressed that, Thai English teachers are not qualified to teach English because they still use chalk and talk make students uninterested and unmotivated in learning English. Due to era of 21st century, the importance of English cannot be denied. Concerning the result of Thai English Proficiency Drop from year 2011 to 2018, the Thai government tries to support English education at all levels by encouraging Thai English teachers to use question words or involve with critical thinking skills. Therefore, the researcher adapted Bloom's Taxonomy Domain. This domain divided into two types of questions; Yes/No questions and question words. In relation to this study, would emphasis on question words which are concerned to analyzing, evaluating, and creating. The Thai English teachers should play an important role to encourage and help students in answering question words in order to train students to think critically because by integrating critical thinking into instruction would lead EFL classes to become meaningful and train students to become lifelong learners. Numerous studies had been carried out to identify problems in EFL reading comprehension in Thailand (Chomthong, 2011; Hayikaleng, 2011; Jehdo, 2009; Kongkert, 2013; Tamrackitkun, 2010). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the use of yes/no questions and question words on English reading comprehension among Thai students at Narathiwat Technical College in order to improve students' level of English reading comprehension as well as find out ways in motivating and making students interested in learning English.

Research Questions

1. How do students perform in answering Yes/No questions?
2. How do students perform in answering question words?
3. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores between the Yes/No questions and the question words?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bloom's Taxonomy Domain (1956) is one of the most acceptable taxonomies in education field. Numerous researchers adopted this theory for their purposes of study because it starts from a basic model of thinking skills to the highest level. According to Bloom (1956), intellectual skills are developed through a sequence of stages, from the basic to the complex one. Learning often develops upward through the levels, but it might be cycle backward (Mardigian, 2011). Bloom's taxonomy emphasized on six levels of thinking that students' progress while learning or acquiring knowledge. These six levels are remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. These six levels start from yes/no questions then develop to question words. The following figure shows the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy Domain.

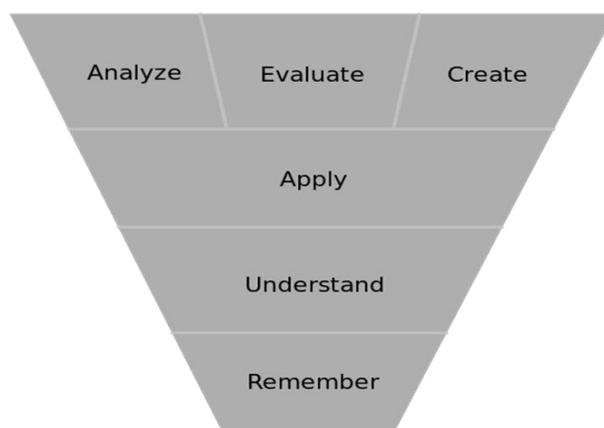


Figure 1. The Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

The teacher should encourage learners to use question words in order to create the habits of thinking. Critical thinking skill is very important to prepare young generation to face challenges in the 21st Century workforce (Dede, 2009). Question words helps students to activate their schema when individuals facing unfamiliar problems, doubts, and questions. Successful applications of the skills show capability in explaining, decision making, and problem solving. To be successful, students must master decision making, and collaborative problem solving. Teaching students to answer such questions could activate the learners to express their ideas. Students cannot understand the lesson if they are not able to read and comprehend the text. Teachers must emphasize the use of question words or critical thinking strategies and guide students to read critically. Students should be encouraged to give ideas about what they read, and relate it to their own experiences. Bloom's Taxonomy Domain is helpful to guide students in the process mentioned. Previous studies also mentioned about the important of integrating critical thinking questions in EFL classroom in order to improve reading comprehension.

Edward and Briers (2000) observed on higher order and lower order thinking skills achievement in secondary-level animal science: Does block scheduling pattern influence end-of-course learner performance? The results indicated that the students were able to answer the Yes/no questions rather than question words.

Veeravagu, Muthusamy, Marimuthu, and Subrayan (2010) conducted their study on using Bloom's taxonomy to gauge students' reading comprehension performance. This was to investigate the relationship between the yes/no questions and question words. A set of reading comprehension question with 35 multiple

choice items were tested. The result showed that students did well in the questions on yes/no questions or low level questions. In addition, the teachers should increase questions related to question words.

Abdelrahman (2014) analyzed the types and levels of questions in Grade 10 English language textbooks which are used in Jordan during the academic year 2012-2013. The purpose was to determine the distribution of the questions over the six levels of Bloom's Taxonomy 2001. The sample consisted of 655 questions from the textbooks. The results revealed that the students can answer well with yes/no questions. The researchers also encourage the EFL teachers to emphasize the use of question words.

Hayikaleng, Nair and Krishnasamy (2016) conducted their study on Thai students' L2 reading comprehension level for LOTS and HOTS questions with 60 students from a college in Pattani province, south of Thailand. The findings revealed that the participants are able to answer yes/no questions rather than question words.

In classrooms, asking questions is one of the most common techniques employed by teachers to improve their reading comprehension. Questioning is considered by teachers as an important tool used for helping students construct understanding and encourage students to think about the materials that they have learnt. However, teachers should not over emphasize on Yes/No questions because Yes/No questions only build students' confidence. Therefore, teachers need to develop their guideline questions and activities to move from Yes/No questions to question words in order to activate students' schema and enhances their comprehension beyond the text.

III. METHODOLOGY

This section provides details on participants, instruments, and 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 28 second year students majoring in accounting from Narathiwat Technical College which is located in Narathiwat province, Southern Thailand.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study were six reading comprehension passages. Each passage consists of six multiple choice questions (four questions for Yes/No questions and two questions for question words), all together are 36 items.

Procedure

The students took 90 minutes to answer all the questions. The total marks for Yes/No questions and question words were converted into percentages. Paired samples t-test was used to analyze 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 Yes/No questions and question words questions were converted into percentages. Paired samples t-test was used to analyze 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 Yes/No questions?

Table 2.
Paired sample t-test comparing Yes/No questions and question words

	Yes/No	Question words
N Valid	28	28
Missing	0	0
Mean	17.8214	6.3214
Std. Deviation	1.0559	0.4755

The results show students' mean score for Yes/No questions is 17.8214 (SD 1.0559) which is at a high level while students' mean score for question words is only 6.3214 (SD 0.4755) which is at low level. The findings indicate that students are able to answer Yes/No questions well because the answers to the Yes/No questions are directly stated in the passages. Besides that, teachers usually ask Yes/No questions to students and students are more familiar with Yes/No questions which are much easier than question words as given in Table 2. These findings are in line with Edward and Briers (2000) and Hayikaleng, Nair and Krishnasamy (2016) who stressed that teachers expose students to Yes/No questions more often than question words.

Research question 2. How do students perform in answering question words?

The results show that students' mean score for question words is 6.3214 (SD 0.4755) which is at a low level. The findings indicate that students are poor in answering question words because students are not well trained to think critically. The teachers should apply more question words in the classroom to increase students' achievement in reading comprehension as indicated in Table 2. This finding is similar to the finding of Veeravagu, Muthusamy, Marimuthu, and Subrayan (2010) and Abdelrahman (2014) who revealed that teachers should apply more question words while teaching reading comprehension in order to train students to think critically.

Research question 3. Is there a significant difference in the mean scores between the Yes/No questions and the question words?

Table 3
Paired sample t-test comparing level of significance between Yes/No questions and question words

Questions	N	Mean	SD	Mean Different	t-value	df	p-value
Pre-test	28	17.8214	1.0559	11.5000	50.632	27	.000
Post-test		6.3214	0.4755				

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 answering Yes/No questions and question words ($t = 50.632$, mean difference = 11.5000, $df = 27$, $p = .000$). The results also reveal that the students' mean score for Yes/No questions is significantly higher than question words. This study supports previous studies by Edward and Briers (2000) and Hayikaleng, Nair and Krishnasamy (2016) who stressed that students perform better for Yes/No questions because questions in textbooks and questions from teachers always deal with Yes/No questions. Therefore, textbooks and examination papers, as well as class activities, should increase the use of question words because question words promote critical thinking skills.

V. CONCLUSION

Current study has revealed that majority of English teachers prefer to use Yes/No questions rather than question words make students face problems when answering question words. However, teachers should have various teaching methods especially the questions which deal with higher order thinking skills in order to train the students in answering question words. Reading comprehension requires experience, vocabulary and background knowledge, as such, teachers should take all these into account while teaching reading

comprehension. Therefore, the English teachers should increase questions related to higher order thinking skills rather than Yes/No questions in order to create the habit of critical thinking. To be in line with the purpose of 21st century study, the English teacher should always deal with question words while teaching English 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 emphasize the use of question words rather than Yes/No questions as an important input for the teaching of English language in educational institutions in order to train the EFL students to think critically.

Suggestion

In this study, the researcher used only a small sample of 28 students. Future research should engage larger samples which include high schools 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 increase the use of question words rather than Yes/No questions in order to train students to use critical thinking and to develop reading skill in the future.

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