

***Multiple Reading Program:
An Assessment on Reading Comprehension Ability of Thai University Students***

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Abstract

In order to develop English reading comprehension abilities, we have to understand how our students learn, pre-assessment and ongoing assessments are essential. This provides feedback for both the teachers and the students for students learning improvement. The implementation of a student-centered teaching and learning should also be established. This means building a good rapport between the student and the teacher. Regardless of Individual differences, learners are expected to understand the same concepts, principles and skills. To cope up with the different students learning style, our methods should vary as to meet their needs. By changing and fitting the techniques of instruction to suit students' level, teachers are able to adjust the lesson content. The Multiple Reading Program (MRP) includes students learning styles, emotional intelligence and personality assessment integrated with reading skills. The research findings provide practical information about developing English reading comprehension abilities using MRP. This study compared the English reading comprehension ability of Thai university students before and after using MRP.

Keywords: multiple reading, learning styles, individual differences

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Introduction

In the classroom, we meet students with different needs, experiences, abilities, language proficiency, background knowledge, readiness to learn and learning styles. Thus, not all students learn in the same way. Some are dependent, others are independent. Regardless of Individual differences, learners are expected to understand the same concepts, principles and skills. To cope up with the different students learning style, teachers must have various teaching strategies and methods. One strategy to enhance learners reading, writing, listening and speaking comprehension is Multiple Reading Program (MRP). The program includes students learning styles, emotional intelligence and personality assessment integrated with reading skills. This study aims to compare the English reading comprehension ability of Thai university students before and after using MRP.

Reading is the basic foundation on which academic skills of an individual are built, and that has been verified by various studies time and again. Reading as defined by Wikipedia is a complex cognitive process of decoding symbols in order to construct or derive meaning (reading comprehension). It is a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas. Most of the subjects we are taught in school are based on a simple concept - Read, Synthesize, Analyze and Process information. While there is no doubt about the fact that reading is a priceless activity, it has been observed that its importance has been deteriorating rapidly. One of the most prominent causes for this is the technology boom, owing to which we end up spending most of our time in front of the television or computer screen (Naik, 2012).

English teachers teach reading comprehension in schools by asking questions following reading or just by assigning skill sheets as practice like looking for the main idea, sequencing, following directions, noting details, and cause and effect relationships. Unfortunately, most teachers failed to differentiate teaching and testing reading comprehension. Durkin (1978) as mentioned by Cooter and Reutzel (2005) suggested that effective comprehension instruction includes helping, assisting, defining, demonstrating, modeling, describing, explaining, providing feedback, thinking aloud, and guiding students through learning activities which is often not found during the teaching sessions. Research has shown that reading comprehension improves when teachers provide explicit comprehension strategy instruction.

Reading fluency involves the ability to read text smoothly and at a reasonable rate. When fluent readers read aloud, they do so effortlessly with speed, accuracy, and proper expression as though they are speaking. Fluent readers are able to focus their attention on the ideas in the text and comprehend the author's message. On the other hand, less fluent readers struggle along through text in a very labored, word-by-word way. They must focus most of their attention on decoding the words, so comprehension suffers. Comprehension can be virtually ignored when readers must devote most of their mental energies on decoding. Thus, fluency is important because it provides a kind of bridge between word recognition and reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000; Rasinski, 1985; Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993).

Methodology

The study was conducted at Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna (RMUTL), Phitsanulok Campus, from November to December 2014. The participants were Thai students under the Faculty of Business Administration and Liberal Arts (BALA), RMUTL, Phitsanulok, Campus. At the time of study, 40 (volunteer) students enlisted to participate in the study. There were 4 males and 26 females, from ages 20 to 21. This study aims to compare the English reading comprehension abilities of Thai English learners before and after using Multiple Reading Program.

The respondents underwent six (6) face-to-face sessions. Other activities were done online (facebook). An English reading comprehension test was administered before and after the course. A quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design was used in this study. According to Moore (2008), a quasi-experimental study is a type of evaluation which aims to determine whether a program or intervention has the intended effect on a study's participant. The reading comprehension questions were gathered from free TOEIC® Practice Tests. The Learning Styles adopted from brainbox was also used as bases in teaching the lessons. The pre-test and post-test were collected, tabulated and recorded to analyze the data.

Research Findings and Discussion

The research revealed that the learners' pretest and posttest scores on English reading comprehension ability were 45.56% and 65.31% respectively. The learners' English reading comprehension ability after learning with Multiple Reading Program was significantly higher at .05 level.

The result of the study from the Multiple Reading Program showed that students' mean scores increased. This resulted from the differentiated instruction in teaching reading comprehension. Willoughby (2005) stated that no two students enter classroom with identical abilities, experiences and needs, learning style, language proficiency, background knowledge, readiness to learn, and other factors can vary widely within a single class group. Regardless of their individual differences, however, students are expected to master the same concepts, principles and skills to help all students succeed in their learning is an enormous challenge that requires innovative thinking.

The participants' learning styles showed that 90% are visual, 6% are kinesthetic and 3% are auditory learners. Visual learners are those who learn best through seeing things. Kinesthetic learners are those who learn best through experiencing or doing things and auditory learners are those that learn best through hearing things.

Hannum (2005), discussed five different theories with regards to individual differences among students and the role these differences play in learning: 1) Ausubel believes that individual learning is based upon what the individual already knows; the key individual difference variable is one's cognitive structure or a mental map of existing knowledge. 2) To Bandura, instruction must be based on modeling, self-regulation, and self-efficacy. He believed that instruction should be altered to account for individual differences. Instructors should develop environments that create and encourage self-efficacy within individual learners, which is most effectively done by direct encouragement of students and providing opportunities for students to

experience mastery or success in particular learning tasks. 3) According to Gagne, the level of pre-requisite skills acquired by students may differ by student; therefore, instruction must meet the needs of the individual learner. 4) Skinner would propose that individual differences among students come from the fact that each student comes from different environments in which their learning behavior has been shaped and reinforced in various ways. Therefore, what may be considered a positive reinforcer for one student (or group of students) may not promote positive learning behavior for others. 5) Vygotsky believes that the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the prime determinant of individual differences and development among students. He defines the Zone of Proximal Development as the discrepancy between the child's capacity to solve problems independently and the child's ability to solve problems with assistance.

According to Cook (2012) we need to figure out how each student best learns and adapt our instruction. Many traditional educators may find it difficult to change their teaching styles, but it is essential so that all learners receive the same opportunity to learn.

Delivery of instruction in the past often followed a "one size fits all" approach. In contrast, differentiation is individually student centered, with a focus on utilizing appropriate instructional and assessment tools that are fair, flexible, challenging, and engage students in the curriculum in meaningful ways. Teaching ESL to university students is no different than teaching the elementary and high school students. For this, not all students learn in the same way. This is why teachers must differentiate their teachings. The Multiple Reading Program is set to use students learning styles, promote differentiated instruction and help develop students to improve their comprehension skills. As educators we have to find out what are the needs of our students. If, we do not understand how our students learn, then we have no acceptable ways of figuring out how to teach them.

Conclusion

In order to develop English reading comprehension abilities, we have to understand how our students learn, pre-assessment and ongoing assessments are essential. This provides feedback for both the teachers and the students for students learning improvement. The implementation of a student-centered teaching and learning should also be established. This means building a good rapport between the student and the teacher. As students understand things differently, our methods should vary as to meet their needs. As the Multiple Reading Program is an eclectic approach, it focuses on the reading skills acquisition based on the learning abilities of every individual student. By changing and fitting the techniques of instruction to suit students' level, teachers are able to adjust the lesson content. This encourages critical thinking in students, and gives them a chance to come forward and demonstrate what they have learned. It also creates a sense of equality among students. MRP provides ample opportunity for students to aim and attain academic success with ease. The research findings provide practical information about developing English reading comprehension abilities using Multiple Reading Program. The limitation of this study is its small sample size and the course time given. It should be compared with other reading strategies to provide effective methods in teaching reading.

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