

Development of English Reading Comprehension Ability, Problem Solving Skills and Ethics by Integrating Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy for Undergraduates

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Abstract

Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand has been the leading institute for teaching for more than 123 years. Moving the university into 21st century, the president of the university emphasizes that the undergraduates in College of Teacher Education achieve competence in English and meet the standard of Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education. However, the second-year Elementary Education Program students' average English score tested by the university is lower than the criteria. Their average pre-test scores in English reading comprehension ability and problem solving skills of English for Elementary Teachers course don't meet the criteria. Moreover, they have the ideas that some wrong conduct can be done. The researcher decides to integrate His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy into English for Elementary Teachers course. The purposes of this research are to 1) compare their English reading comprehension ability before and after the experiment, 2) compare their problem solving skills before and after the experiment, 3) explore their ethics after the experiment, and 4) investigate their satisfaction of the instruction integrated by Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy. The subject is a class of the second year undergraduates taking English for Elementary Teachers course in the first semester of the academic year 2014. The results show that the integration of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy improves their English reading comprehension ability and problem solving skills, enhances their ethics, and promotes their satisfaction. This finding will be useful for instructing English reading comprehension for students in Basic Education and Higher Education.

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1. Introduction

The undergraduates studying in Elementary Education Program, the new curriculum developed in 2013, at Phranakhon Rajabhat University got a teacher license from the Teachers Council of Thailand after they graduated. Then they were able to teach elementary students, the most important age of all. They had high responsibility for teaching them to possess core knowledge and necessary skills, especially English skills. This was because English played the important role in communication with people around the world, especially people in ASEAN countries included Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia, and Brunei. All the countries in the ASEAN community agreed to use English as the medium of communication. So English became the second language of the countries in the ASEAN community (ASEAN Department 2014). English preparation for the undergraduates was essential since it was a policy of Phranakhon Rajabhat University to develop their English to communicate in the real world and to meet the learning domains of Thai Qualifications Framework for Higher Education, including Ethical and Moral Development, Knowledge, Cognitive Skills, Interpersonal Skills and Responsibility, and Analytical and Communication Skills.

Communication skills meant that undergraduates could communicate effectively in Thai language and in English. Development of the English communicative competence for the students was one of the university strategies. After the researcher took responsibility to teach the English for Elementary Teachers course to the undergraduates in the Elementary Education Program in the first semester of the academic year 2014, it was found that their English reading comprehension, problem solving and ethics needed to be improved. Their average English score evaluated by the university was quite lower than the criteria. Moreover, their average pre-test scores in English reading comprehension ability and intellectual ability focused on the problem solving skills did not meet the criteria. According to the details obtained by the interview, their ethics also needed to be improved because of their pessimism.

This research was focused on English reading skill because the undergraduates in the Elementary Education Program gave information while interviewing with the researcher that they had obstacles to reading. That was the reason why they did not gain high English achievement. Reading was essential for the undergraduates to use inside and outside the classroom. According to a research result conducted by Prathuangsook (2006), it was found that all the four skills, reading was the most used in the higher education level since undergraduates needed to read academic articles, textbooks, assignments, researches, and PowerPoint presentations as parts of their study. They also read outside the classroom which was the element of reading in the future. Ditzhazy and Maylone (2004) cited that reading helped youngsters relax, developed a richer authentic intellectual capacity and enhanced honesty when readers said that reading was fun and enrichment.

To develop their English reading comprehension, problem solving skills and ethics together, the integration of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy into the instruction was used. The integration method of the instruction with Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy helped people of all levels have guidelines to solve their problems (Ratthapong 2011), develop undergraduates' English reading comprehension (Parichart 2011),

contribute the students' desirable characteristics such as virtue and ethics (Saranya, Komwat and Chatira 2009), and support learners' higher level of living behavior (Kannika 2010). Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy was the theory developed by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand. It emphasized that people followed the middle path included moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity which were needed two conditions to make good decision and to do any activities for happiness in their daily lives. The first condition was knowledge, including prudent and appropriate knowledge, and the second one was integrity, including honesty, diligence, wisdom, sharing, and perseverance. The middle path was a way of thorough thinking, appropriate conducting themselves in the world full of luxurious temptations by using and consuming products without extravagance, stinginess, and impact on the expense of oneself or others, careful considering of outcomes that might happen after such action, and preparing to cope with various influence situations changing in the future (King Bhumibol Adulyadej cited from The Chaipattana Foundation 2007).

2. Research Objectives

The purposes of the research were to 1) compare the undergraduates' English reading comprehension ability before and after the experiment, 2) compare their problem solving skills before and after the experiment, 3) explore their ethics after the experiment, and 4) investigate their satisfaction of the instruction integrated Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

3. The sample

The sample, selected by purposive sampling method, was 36 second year undergraduates in the Elementary Education Program who studied the English for Elementary Teachers course in the first semester of the academic year 2014 at Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Thailand.

4. Data Analysis

The research statistics were mean, standard deviation, and dependent t-test. A software package, SPSS statistics, was used for data analysis.

5. Research instruments

The instruments, based on the integration of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, were 1) lesson plans, 2) The pretest and posttest of English reading comprehension ability, 3) The pretest and posttest of problem solving skills, 4) the ethical evaluation form, and 5) the undergraduate satisfaction questionnaire of the instruction.

6. The Research Results and Discussions

6.1. English Reading Comprehension Ability

After the undergraduates learned English reading through the instruction integrated Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, their English reading comprehension ability was higher than before learning through it. The details were shown in the table 1.

Table 1: The comparison between pretest of reading comprehension ability and posttest of English reading comprehension ability

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Posttest - Pretest	5.61	1.49	.25	5.10	6.12	22.47	35	.000

Table 1 above showed that there was a significant difference between the pretest of English reading comprehension ability and posttest of English reading comprehension ability. This indicated that the undergraduates' English reading comprehension ability after learning through the integration of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy was significantly higher than before learning through it at the statistical level of .05.

6.2. Problem Solving Skills

When the students learned the short story, entitled "The Necklace", based on Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, they were enhanced conveying their own ideas about ways of solving problems in the characters' situations and in their own situations. The research result revealed that their problem solving skills after the experiment was higher than before learning through it. The details were shown in the table 2.

Table 2: The comparison between the pretest of the problem solving skills and the posttest of the problem solving skills

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Posttest - Pretest	6.00	1.54	.25	5.48	6.52	23.23	35	.000

Table 2 above showed that there was a significant difference between the pretest of the problem solving skills and the posttest of the problem solving skills. This revealed that the students' problem solving skills after learning through the integration of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy was higher than before learning through it at the significantly statistical level of .05.

6.3. Ethics

The ethics of the undergraduates were observed while they were doing activities in the classroom. They were evaluated when they expressed their ideas, discussed with their friends, worked in groups and did the assignments. Their ethics were found at a good level after the experiment. The details were shown in the table 3.

Table 3: The results of the ethic level after the undergraduates learned through the integration of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

Evaluation List	Mean	S.D.	Result of Ethic Level
1. The Aspect of Reasonableness			
1.1 Solving problems based on the principles	4.19	0.92	Good
1.2 Describing the causes of the problems	4.25	0.55	Good
1.3 Predicting some effects of the problems	4.33	0.76	Good
1.4 Solving all problems reasonably	4.08	0.55	Good
Total of the Reasonableness Aspect	4.21	0.70	Good
2. The Aspect of the Self-Immunity			
2.1 Solving problems based on help and cooperation	4.14	0.83	Good
2.2 Solving problems based on generosity	4.36	0.64	Good
2.3 Solving problems based on honesty	4.28	0.51	Good
2.4 Solving problems based on goodness	4.42	0.69	Good
Total of the Self-Immunity Aspect	4.30	0.66	Good
3. The Aspect of the Moderation			
3.1 Solving problems based on sufficiency	4.39	0.55	Good
3.2 Solving problems based on public consideration	4.55	0.56	Very Good
3.3 Solving problems by using sources and environment economically	4.30	0.86	Good
3.4 Applying the technology to support their problem solving effectively	4.44	0.69	Good
Total of the Moderation Aspect	4.42	0.67	Good
4. The Aspect of Morality			
4.1 Doing their assignments honestly	4.25	0.81	Good
4.2 Doing their assignments patiently	4.61	0.55	Very Good
4.3 Endeavoring to achieve their assignments	4.42	0.73	Good
4.4 Doing the assignments through perseverance	4.47	0.65	Good
Total of the Morality aspect	4.44	0.68	Good
5. The Aspect of Knowledge			
5.1 Identifying appropriate ways to solve problems	4.22	0.83	Good
5.2 Describing steps of problem solving thoroughly	4.11	0.75	Good
5.3 Solving problems thoroughly	4.05	0.79	Good
5.4 Solving problems based on morality	4.66	0.48	Very Good
Total of the Knowledge aspect	4.26	0.71	Good
Total of all aspects	4.35	0.68	Good

Table 3 indicated that the undergraduates' ethics after learning through the instruction integrated Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy was at a good level with the mean of 4.35. Considering the evaluation list in each aspect, they performed their most ethic in

the aspect of morality at a good level with the mean of 4.44. When all of the items under each aspect were considered, they showed their most ethic in the item of solving problems based on morality under the aspect of the Knowledge at a very good level with the mean of 4.66.

6.4. Student Satisfaction

The undergraduates expressed their satisfaction of the instruction integrated Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy as the details shown in the table 4.

Table 4: The results of Student Satisfaction of the instruction integrated Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy

Evaluation List	Mean	S.D.	Result of Satisfaction Level
1. The Aspect of the Contents			
1.1 Vocabularies and expressions learned from the instruction	4.86	0.35	Highest
1.2 Grammar obtained from the instruction	4.19	0.62	High
1.3 The story used for the instruction	4.67	0.54	Highest
1.4 The contents based on the Philosophy	4.61	0.49	Highest
Total of the Content Aspect	4.58	0.50	Highest
2. The Aspect of the Instruction			
2.1 Developing English reading comprehension.	4.25	0.55	High
2.2 Enhancing problem solving skills.	4.72	0.45	Highest
2.3 Promoting morality	4.92	0.28	Highest
2.4 Using the Instruction to integrate the Philosophy	4.58	0.50	Highest
2.5 Having the opportunity to express opinions	4.69	0.47	Highest
2.6 Answering questions to the students	4.39	0.49	High
2.7 Allocated time used for the instruction	4.17	0.74	High
Total of the Instruction Aspect	4.53	0.50	Highest
3. The Aspect of the Teaching Materials			
3.1 Appropriateness with the contents	4.50	0.66	Highest
3.2 Relation to the contents	4.47	0.61	High
3.3 Modernity of the teaching materials	4.06	0.63	High
3.4 Interest of the teaching materials	4.33	0.59	High
Total of the Teaching Material Aspect	4.34	0.62	High
4. The Aspect of the Evaluation			
4.1 Ethic evaluation method	4.22	0.64	High
4.2 Feedback to the students	4.67	0.48	Highest
4.3 Reading evaluation	4.19	0.58	High
4.4 Problem solving evaluation	4.31	0.53	High
4.5 Allocated time for doing the tests	4.28	0.66	High
Total of the Evaluation Aspect	4.33	0.58	High
Total of all Aspects	4.45	0.55	High

Table 4 showed that the student satisfaction of the instruction integrated Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy was at a high level with the mean of 4.45. When the evaluation list was considered in each aspect, it was found that they had the most satisfaction of the Contents at a highest level with the mean of 4.58. The item of Promoting Morality under the aspect of the Instruction was found the most satisfaction at a highest level with the mean of 4.92.

7. Discussion of findings:

There were some interesting findings obtained from the undergraduates while the researcher conducted the research in the classroom. The research results could be discussed about the reasons why the instruction integrated Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy developed English reading comprehension, problem solving skills and ethics as follow:

7.1. The undergraduates had the highest level of satisfaction of the Promoting Morality because the story chosen to teach them contained many moralities such as the effects of lies, extravagance, dissatisfaction with the situation in life and greed. They gave information in the questionnaire that the story was excellent because it contained a lot of ethics found in the real world. They really enjoyed reading it because they wanted to know what was going to happen to the woman who borrowed the diamond necklace from her friend. Furthermore, it taught them to accept their mistakes, to be satisfied with the situation in life despite being poor, and to have sufficiency.

7.2. The undergraduates had a good level of ethics because they had to carry out all the activities based on the principles of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy which focused on three pillars and two conditions. The three pillars included moderation, reasonableness, and self-immunity. The two conditions were knowledge condition, including prudent and appropriate knowledge, and integrity condition, including honesty, diligence, wisdom, sharing and perseverance.

7.3. Their English reading ability and problem solving skills were higher after they learned through the integration of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy because it contained cause and effect that enhanced their reading comprehension ability and problem solving skills.

8. Suggestions

This research had beneficial suggestions as follows:

8.1. Teachers of English who want to integrate Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy into the English for Elementary Teachers course should select short stories containing Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy in order to encourage students to analyze problems or situations with the Philosophy. They should include reasonableness, moderation, and self-immunity for sufficient protection based on knowledge condition (prudent and appropriate condition) and integrity condition (honesty, diligence, wisdom, sharing, and perseverance)

8.2. The length of the short story should be appropriate for allocated time for the instruction in the classroom. Teachers should divide the story into parts as a scaffold to help students who have low learning achievement in English.

8.3. Teachers should ask undergraduates to explain which concepts of Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy they use to solve problems. That is the crucial activity because they express their own opinions with principles instead of with their opinions.

8.4. Teachers should not say which solutions are wrong or bad, but they should encourage the students to give more solutions and accept the positive ones.

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