Enhancing the Reading Comprehension Skills by Using the Reading Strategies Instruction Approach for First Year Nursing Program Students

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Abstract

This research was conducted in order to investigate the students' achievement in reading comprehension by using the Reading Strategies Instruction approach. The samples of the study were 79 first year nursing students at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University who enrolled in semester 1, academic year 2017. The instruments used in this study consisted of eight reading strategies instruction lesson plan, reading exercises or worksheets, and reading test. The subjects took the pre-test then learned through eight reading strategies instruction lesson plans. After that, students took the post-test. The results indicated that all of the students got the scores in the post-test higher than the pre-test. As a result, the finding of the study indicated that Reading Strategies Instruction approach could help the 79 first year nursing students at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University to improve their reading comprehension.

Keywords: reading comprehension skills, reading strategies

1. Background of the Problem

English is a compulsory subject for all Thai students. In Thailand, teaching English aims to develop four language skills - reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Of the four skills, reading has been recognized as the most significant skill to master in order to ensure success in learning (Alderson, 1984). Jakpin (1992) said that "among the four skills students will have a chance to use, reading is the most. People who are proficient in reading English will benefit greatly from their reading." Also, Paulton and Bruder (1982) and Deboer (1997: 14-16) stated in their studies that reading is the most necessary and important skill to which students should pay more attention to. Moreover, Pett (1982: 23) pointed out that of all the four language skills, the skill that students always retain is reading.

Students, especially in higher education level, use written texts to search for information and acquire new knowledge. Without adequate reading comprehension skills, students can struggle in many subject areas (Best et al., 2005). Good reading skills could help learners achieve success not only in English learning but also in other content-based classes where English reading proficiency is required such as in the fields of business, medicine, engineering, and communication technology. Reading has played a vital role in the development of language skills and even in academic success for decades, as learners broaden their knowledge of cultures and the world (Cochran, 1993).

However, although reading seems to be the most important academic skill, English instruction in the Thai curriculum has been concentrated in the language structure. The focus on reading instruction has been inadequate and the development of advanced reading skills and strategies has not been established. Consequently, the reading ability of Thai students is mostly below the standard criteria of 50 percent according to the results of university entrance examinations in English language during the years 2002-2005 (Punthamasen, 2007). According to The International Institute for Management Development (IMD) report (2013-2014) the English proficiency of the Thai population continue to decrease based on the average of Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores. In addition, the average scores for the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) in the English language according to the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), Ministry of Education (2014) were below 50 percent, equivalent to 22.54, 16.19, 30.49, 28.71, 30.35, and 27.46, respectively from 2009 to 2014 for both 9th grade and 12th grade students (O-NET report, 2009-2014). All the reports revealed that English proficiency levels of Thais is below the global average as a result of the literacy skills in the English language, especially in terms of reading.

Teaching and learning of English language to NPRU Faculty of Nursing students indicates a problem in reading due to lack of background knowledge, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. Strategic reading methods can help students improve comprehension and can help students achieve not only their academic needs, but more importantly their life goals. Reading strategies refer to a planned or established way of reading. Reading strategies function to monitor and regulate reading strategies (Devine, 1983; Flavell, 1979). These include "checking the outcome of any attempt to solve a problem, planning one's next move, monitoring the effectiveness of any attempted action, testing, revising, and evaluating

one's strategies for learning (Baker et al., 1984).   Therefore, the researchers are interested in studying English reading comprehension of NPRU Faculty of Nursing students using Reading Strategies Instruction approach focusing on the following strategies - identify or infer topic and main idea, note details, identify pronoun references, use definition and example clues to understand the meaning of technical terms, use context to build meaning of unfamiliar words, use information to guess what might follow, and distinguish fact or false details in the text.

2. Objective

To develop the reading comprehension skills of the first-year nursing students by using the Reading Strategies Instruction approach.

3. Literature Review

Reading is a highly strategic process during which readers are constantly constructing meaning using a variety of strategies, such as activating background knowledge, monitoring and clarifying, making predictions, drawing inferences, asking questions and summarizing. In reading, strategies are very important. Strategies are used in combination to solve problems, to think about text and to check understanding (Harvey et al., 2000). Strategies are situational and are used intentionally by readers (McEwan, 2004).

According to Lien (2011), reading strategies are "techniques or conscious actions taken to improve understanding and solve difficulties encountered in reading'. Being a strategic reader assists the reader in comprehending what is read and overcoming ones reading difficulties (Carrell, 1991). Reading strategies benefit those readers who employ them effectively and appropriately, considerable previous researches have proven the positive correlation between reading strategy use and reading comprehension (Song, 1998; Darabie, 2000; Al-Nujaidi, 2003; Aengpongpaow, 2008; Saengpakdeejit, 2009).

Novice and struggling readers seem to lack awareness of thinking about what is and is not making sense as they read. They are often unaware of when they do not understand what they are reading. They are focused so much on reading the words that they cannot think about how the words connect to create meaning (Roit, 2000). As an educator one goal to an effective reading is to set the students on the path to becoming lifelong readers—readers who approach reading with enthusiasm and who view it as a pleasure as well as a powerful tool for learning and for taking charge of their lives.

Students are faced with ever increasing demands to read and read well. McNamara et al (2011) stress the importance of teaching reading as a process and that strategy instruction has been found to impact students' appreciation of reading as a process, the goal of which is to understand what is being read. Many opportunities to read independently allow students to begin to coordinate the strategies they have learned: to adjust, modify, or change strategies and skills until they are able to make sense of text. The higher order thinking of strategic readers also enhances their reading experience and responses to literature and informational text. And once students take ownership of the process, they take it one step

further—they take what they know, apply it to the unknown and become creative thinkers who value reading more. However, comprehension problems often happen when students face with textbook material (McNamara, 2001; Best et al., 2008). Reading problems come from different sources such as word decoding, sentence comprehension level and ability to understand the genre of text, lack of the requisite knowledge and lack of appropriate reading strategies (McNamara, 2009).

Teachers view a reflective method as one of the teaching strategies in reading classes. As Lorcher (2015) said that reflective teaching as a strategy on reading opens the doors of learning. In addition, reading using reflection is an important skill to boost students' metacognition and understanding (Cadieux et al, 2012). In reflective teaching method, they need to appreciate that what is a problem for one student may not be a problem for another, an unknown word for one student may be a familiar one to another. Students may come up with different visualizations or connections based on their own personal experiences. Strategy instruction helps students understand that interpretations of text can and should vary across readers and they must respect different interpretations of the text.

The researches mentioned above discussed the reading difficulties and problems that the students encountered in trying to understand what they are reading. The students' poor reading comprehension skills came from different sources and it was proven in the previous research studies that using reading strategies appropriately helped to address the problems and improve students' comprehension level. Furthermore, the researchers' reflections on the effectiveness of teaching resulted in the development of strategic classroom practices and methods that benefit the learners. In the light of these findings, the researchers used the Reading Strategies Instruction approach to investigate whether it could yield the same result to the subjects of the study.

4. Methodology

Prior to conducting the study, the researchers underwent an intensive classroom research training program with Assistant Professor Jitirat Sanglertuthai, Ph.D. and Darin Portangtam, Ph.D., experts in the field of classroom research. The researchers learned the nature and purpose of classroom research and most importantly the systematic way or process on how to conduct the study such as (1) identifying an issue or problem; (2) thinking and planning an appropriate action to address the concern; (3) carrying out the action; (4) observing the apparent outcomes of the action; (5) reflecting on the outcomes and other possibilities; and (6) repeating these steps again.

The population of this study was 79 first year nursing students at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University in the first semester of academic year 2017. They were assigned into four groups according to their Student ID number, each group consisting of 20 students except the second group which had 19 students. The research study was conducted on a pretest-posttest design. The samples took a pre-test to assess their reading comprehension before they studied Reading Strategies Instruction approach lesson plan. The eight lesson plans and reading exercises module were constructed by one of the researchers. The researchers selected the topics which were the reading strategies most commonly used in reading

comprehension. The topics were mainly derived from text books and the internet. The activities for each lesson plan were devised with contents which students are more familiar with to make students participate and learn more effectively. After the implementation of the Reading Strategies Instruction approach lesson plans, they took the post-test to compare and evaluate the level of their understanding and improvement.

In twelve weeks with 24 teaching hours, 2 hours per week (excluding pre-test and post-test sessions), the four groups were taught the following reading strategies - identify or infer topic and main idea, note details, identify pronoun references, use definition and example clues to understand the meaning of technical terms, use context to build meaning of unfamiliar words, use information to guess what might follow, and distinguish fact or false details in the text.

The steps for implementing the study planned as follows:

Step 1: Administration of the pre-test. Students take a multiple-choice test to know the achievement and improvement level in reading before and after using the reading exercises module designed for the research. One of the researchers developed and constructed the reading test by acquiring ideas and following the pattern of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC). The test consists of a 100-question reading test with four multiple choices which had only one correct answer per question. The test questions focus on the different reading strategies in the lesson plans.

Step 2: Teaching and discussion. Lecturers discuss the reading strategies according to the level of difficulty starting from the simplest to the most complex using the lesson plans based on the Reading Strategies Instruction approach.

Step 3: Answering of reading exercises module - the students perform reading activities to learn the various reading strategies.

Step 4: Reflection. Lecturers consider the results of the students' reading exercises to identify the problems and difficulties encountered by students in performing the reading activities and evaluate the strategy for modification.

Step 5: Re-teaching. Lecturers adjust the delivery of content by addressing the students' learning styles, learning rate and or readiness. The re-teaching method to be used is the "Controlled Practice" method. This method is done by modeling and directly guiding the students and differentiating the content of the lesson with the end result of students meeting or exceeding the set standard of learning.

Step 6: Re-assessing. Students perform reading activities and answer another set of reading exercises module. Then they provide oral explanations to demonstrate their learning and understanding.

Step 7: Administration of the post-test. Students take the post-test to compare and evaluate their level of understanding and improvement.

The data collection was presented in two sections. Section 1 used the lecturers' observations journals recorded. The journal contained 3 columns according to the purposes of data analysis: (1) the problem that students encountered, (2) the method used to address the problem, and (3) the results after using the intervention. Section 2 analyzed the comparative results of the reading pretest and post test scores by arithmetic mean.

5. Results and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of difference in reading comprehension scores as measured by the pretest and post test administered to the first-year nursing students prior to the instruction of the reading strategies instruction approach and after the instruction of the reading strategies instruction approach.

Table 1 Reading Class Observation

PROBLEM	METHOD/STRATEGY	RESULTS
TOPIC AND MAIN IDEA 1. Students had difficulty in identifying the topic and main idea for passages without titles or pictures. 2. Students encountered in identifying the main idea of the text in long passages due to lack of background knowledge or vocabulary.	Students were asked to use the reading strategies in the following order: - Skimming the passage to look for a word/phrase that has been constantly or repeatedly mentioned throughout the passage. - Reading the first or the last paragraph of the passage. Then look for the answer that has the same idea. - Explaining unfamiliar word or story to enhance knowledge and vocabulary.	80% of the students were able to identify the topic and the main idea of the reading passages easily by using the strategies. For more complex passages, the second strategy was proven to be more effective; however, it was time consuming before the students could finish the passage and choose the correct answer. The scores that the students got in practice exercise 2 were higher than the scores in practice exercise 1.
NOTING DETAILS 1. Students failed to identify the specific details from a reading passage. They got mixed-up with the meaning of "wh- questions" such as *which, how often, how long, why,* and *how.*	- The lecturer clarified the meaning of each "wh-question" and gave clues as to the possible answers for each. - Sample wh-questions with answer choices were given to check students' understanding. - Aside from understanding the meaning of "wh-question" and knowing the possible answer for each; the lecturer asked the students to identify keyword/s in	80% of the students were able to identify the correct answer from the given choices.

PROBLEM	METHOD/STRATEGY	RESULTS
	the question which could help find the answer in the passage through scanning technique.	
PRONOUN REFERENCE 1. Students could not accurately identify the noun being referred to by the pronoun especially if the sentence contains several nouns or in a long passage. 2. Students have some problems in identifying the types of pronouns.	- Conducted a review about the types of pronouns, the gender and number of pronoun to give the students an idea of what noun the pronoun refers to. - Provided sample sentence and exercises to check students 'understanding which they were asked to read short passages and identify the nouns being referred to.	The students were able to identify the correct nouns that the pronouns referred to easily. Most of them got perfect scores in the exercise given.
CONTEXTUAL MEANING 1. Students had a hard time understanding the meaning of unfamiliar words. 2. Students had difficulty in using context clues to figure out a word's meaning and cannot define unfamiliar words independently.	- Defined contextual meaning and demonstrate on how to read the surrounding words in the passage in which unfamiliar words appear. - Advised students to take notes or reflect on unfamiliar words and practice questions with contextual meaning words were given. - Applied technique "what the students know/understand versus what the students don't know or understand".	Based on the evaluation, students could analyze and answer questions with contextual meaning and can identify them in the passage. Despite several practice exercises, few students were able to identify the correct meaning of unfamiliar words. This reading skill is considered to be one of the most difficult skills to master. It requires the ability to relate and analyze the text. Background knowledge could also be useful in mastering the skill which the first-year students were lacking of.
MAKING INFERENCES 1. Students were not able to guess or make conclusion to answer the inference questions.	- Giving simple and short passage as example and guided the students in gathering the facts	Students were able to understand and answer the inference questions, but it took

PROBLEM	METHOD/STRATEGY	RESULTS
2. Students were passively reading instead of being actively engaged in the text and poor in making guesses based on the information provided in the text.	stated in the passage by formulating and answering "wh-questions." Based on these facts, the students were asked to make a guess or a conclusion. Then, students were also asked to use keywords / synonyms to identify and understand the facts in the passage and relate them with the possible outcome. - Demonstrated strategies on ways to approach questions with making inferences.	time before they were able to gather and analyze the facts stated in the reading text.
DEFINITION AND EXAMPLE CLUES 1. Students were confused about things or ideas that related to the new word in the sentence or in the passage.	- Explaining the context clues found within a context to understand the meanings of new or unfamiliar words.	Students can positively identify hints found within a sentence, paragraph, or passage that a reader can use to understand the meanings of new or unfamiliar words.
ANSWERING "NOT" QUESTIONS 1. Students had difficulty or confusion on answering the negative questions as the answer was not literally in the passage.	1. Discussing strategies in answering negative questions and explaining ways to draw a conclusion that was supported by facts presented in the passage. 2. Introducing the elimination technique to answer this kind of question. Students would eliminate the answer choices that were found in the text so what would be left was the answer that was not mentioned in the passage which was the correct answer.	80% of the students got a high score in their exercises and can orally answer the questions presented in class.

Table 1 indicated the problems encountered by the first-year nursing students in their reading class such as: difficulty in identifying the pronoun, confusion about things or ideas that are related to the new word, having a hard time in using context clues to figure out word meaning, doubts in understanding how to make an inference, issues on answering negative questions. The lecturers' methods and observations revealed that the students' reading comprehension significantly improved after using the reading strategies instruction approach. It was determined that students who used reading strategies while reading demonstrated strong reading comprehension skills. The mentioned methods and strategies are effective in improving students' reading comprehension skills.

Table 2 Results from Reading Achievement Test (Pre-test and Post-test)

Reading Achievement Test	N	Min	Max	X
Pre-test	79	14	32	19.90
Post-test	79	23	58	37.61

Table 2 showed that the minimum score of the pre-test was 14 and the maximum score was 32. The minimum score of the post-test was 23 and the maximum score was 56. After the students were taught by using the Reading Strategies Instruction approach, their scores had got higher. This indicated that the Reading Strategies Instruction approach could help the students to read and understand reading text.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The data analysis showed that all of the students got the scores in the post-test higher than the pre-test. As a result, the finding of the study indicated that Reading Strategies Instruction approach could help the 79 first year nursing students at Nakhon Pathom Rajabhat University to improve their reading comprehension. However, this study was quite limited due to the number of subjects considered. To make the study more generalized, it is recommended that a similar study should be carried with students at other levels. Another recommendation is to identify a different strategy to use while reading to measure the difference in results. For further study, should use different English skill (listening, writing, speaking) based on students' background, needs, and interests.

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