

EFFECT OF STRATEGIES OF PREDICTING THE MEANING OF ENGLISH WORDS FROM CONTEXT CLUES OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS ENGLISH PROGRAM PHRANAKHON RAJABHAT UNIVERSITY, SECOND SEMESTER, ACADEMIC YEAR 2012

Malinee Lertthaisong, Ph.D

Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok, Thailand

Abstract

The purposes of this research were 1) to study the effect of strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues of first-year students English Program Phranakhon Rajabhat University, 2) to explore the opinions on the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues of first-year students English Program Phranakhon Rajabhat University. The sample in the study consisted of one classroom with 27 students selected by the purposive sampling technique. The research instruments employed for data collection included a reading comprehension test and a 5-rating scale questionnaire. The descriptive statistics employed to analyze the data were mean, standard deviation and dependent t-test.

The findings of the research were as follows:

1. There was significant difference in comprehension ability using strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues at statistically significant level .05

2. The overall students' opinion on the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues was at a high level.

Keywords: Strategies of Predicting the Meaning of Words from Context Clues

Introduction

In the global society nowadays, it cannot be denied that English language is a universal language that is broadly used and has played more importance in people's lifestyles. Communication and technology's advancement makes English language even more important due to its status as a medium for communications, learning and researching from various sources, as well as a tool for professional practice. Additionally, the information technologies have been speedily advanced; reading can help us keep pace with all the movements, advancement, and changing environment. Reading is beneficial in all aspects and occasions: in learning, working, and leisurely relaxing (Chaweeeluck Bunyakan, 2004: 22). Apart from leisure reading, we can adapt knowledge and information derived from reading into daily life including at work as reading is a great way to increase knowledge and experience: the more you read, the more knowledgeable you become.

Reading skill is one of the four skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing - and is a very important skill for living in present days because reading is a source of knowledge. Reading involves not only spelling and reading, but also comprehension process or understanding of the letters. It also helps create new ideas additional to the reader's existing experiences (Chulee Inman: 1990:5). Reading requires concentration, comprehension, prioritization, and processing data from perception in order to extract the most benefit out of it (Panchit Konchanawan and Thanikan Makhasiranon, 1999:27). Reading is not only knowing the meaning of the letter script, but also interpreting of its intended message and, at the same time, processing the read data in association with existing experiences to decide how accurate and reasonable the message is (Phaiphan Inthanin, 2003: 7, referenced from Phensri Rangsiyangkun, 1987:9).

Reading skill plays an important role in acquiring advanced knowledge. Even those who are not majored in English language cannot avoid English textbooks because English is a universal language which can be used to broadly spread the information. Reading English is used not only for learning or studying, but also for

knowledge seeking in general as well as to benefit in other aspects such as imported computer, equipment, or medication whose information has not been translated at first: these will require English reading. For this reason, ability to read and comprehend in English is an advantage as it is a tool for acquiring accurate information and widening one's point of view.

One of the obstacles in reading English does not know the meaning of words. Despite the fluent use of other skills or techniques, not knowing the meaning of words in the reading message can result in not understanding the message itself (Samut Senchaowanit, 2002:15). One of the problems that occur when reading is vocabulary; there is a great number of vocabularies in stories - if the reader knows the vocabulary well, they can read and understand quickly (Aphiradee Jariyarangsiroj, 2002:3). When students are capable of understanding the vocabulary's meaning, they are capable of reading better. Thus, words play a very important role in reading process.

Even though teachers usually provide the meaning of words in class, they cannot provide every word's meaning due to limited time available. Besides, reading does not only occur in classroom but also plays a pivotal role outside classroom. Using dictionary to look up meaning of words is a method that student can use, but keep looking up words in dictionary can cause boredom and a waste of time. This will consequently result in discontinuous reading and comprehending the read message, which may cause the reader to be down hearted. Thus, leaning new words from context clues is a good beginning (Wanlapa Bunananbut, 2004:2).

Current research and studies on English reading suggest that students' ability to read English is in unsatisfactory level due to lack of appropriate approaches or techniques to help improve comprehensive reading efficiency (Rewadi Hiran, 1994: 149). Meanwhile, Samut Senchaowanit (1997: 15) stated that one of the obstacles of Thai people in reading English is the lack of vocabulary knowledge which results in inability to process and understand the read message.

Phranakhon Rajabhat University is a public university that provides academic services to students from all regions in Thailand according to the Government's policy. Therefore, the students' background in English language vary greatly; most of the students have low command in all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing especially the reading skills required for the Reading Components Association course in which the students make average score of 67.2 due to the limited understanding in the vocabulary and inability to predict the meaning from context clues. Students solve the problem by looking up words in dictionary. However, this makes reading a boring and time-consuming activity. Moreover, the words' contextual meaning may not be suggested in the dictionary so the reading is less efficient and eventually cause students to not want to learn English. There are several methods suggested for solving student's problem in learning English such as teaching students a great number of vocabulary as the problem of limited vocabulary knowledge is a reason that directly impacts on English language academic achievement and many problems.

Thailand is a member country of ASEAN community and in the near future English language will play an even more important role in communication. The researcher considers the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues another great method to solve reading problem and increase reading efficiency. These strategies can stimulate the analytic thinking process in trying to predict the meaning of English words while reading reasonably and correctly without having to use dictionary. This method saves reading time and helps develop the ability to understand texts in English as well as create motivation to learn English and prepares students to develop the desired quality and characteristics as expected by the society.

Research Objectives

1. To study the effect of strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues of first-year students English Program, Phranakhon Rajabhat University
2. To study students' opinion towards the teaching method based on the effect of strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues of first-year students English Program, Phranakhon Rajabhat University

Research Methodology

This research is an Experimental Research using Randomized One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design.

1. Population and Representative Sample

1.1 Research Population

The population of this research is 50 undergraduate first-year students in English program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University during the second semester of academic year 2012.

1.2 Representative Sample

The representative sample is a group of 27 first-year students in English program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University during the second semester of academic year 2012 selected by purposive sampling method.

Research Tools

1. Test of Ability to predict English words' meaning from context clues used to test before and after the experiment
2. Curriculum designed by the researcher focusing on strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues which includes four plans covering three sessions per week for four weeks
3. Questionnaire on the students' opinion towards learning method based on strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues

Data Collection

1. The representative sample of 27 students studying in of first-year English Program, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Phranakhon Rajabhat University during the second semester of academic year 2012 were asked to conduct a pre-test of Ability to predict English words' meaning from context clues. They test was scored and recorded.
2. The curriculum designed by the researcher which focused on strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues was used to conduct a teaching in classroom covering four plans taught for six weeks, three sessions per week. The students were asked to do questionnaire on students' opinions towards learning method based on strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues.
3. After completion of all four teaching plans, the students were asked to do the Post-test of ability to predict English words' meaning from context clues which was the same as the pre-test. The test was scored and the result was taken to compare the ability of the first-year students English Program who had been trained strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues before and after the experiment.

Data Analysis

1. Compare the ability of first-year English Program students who had been trained the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues before and after the experiment using Dependent t-test.
2. Analyze the data derived from the questionnaire on opinion which was a full scale assessment by finding the average and standard deviation of the score levels and conduct an interpretation.

Summary

From the study of effect of strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues of first-year students English Program, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok in the second semester of academic year 2012, the result can be summarized as follows.

1. The effect of strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues of first-year students before and after the experiment was found that after the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues, the students scored better than before the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues statistically at the level of .05.

2. The average score of the first-year students' opinion towards the learning method based on strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues was 4.42 in agree level. This means that the students have good opinions towards the learning method based on strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues as they see it beneficial in helping them understand the texts better. The top three dimensions that got the highest scores are: 1st - strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from analysis of word structure and context is beneficial in improving the students' reading at the average score of 4.63; 2nd - learning activities encouraged students to use the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words at the average score of 4.59; and 3rd - learning method based on the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from analysis of word structure and context made the class enjoyable and interesting, students interacted with other students in classroom more with the average score of 4.56.

Discussion

From the study of effect of strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues of first-year students English Program, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok in the second semester of academic year 2012, the result can be discussed as follows.

1. The first-year students English Program, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok who had been taught the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues had a statistically better ability to predict the meaning of English words than before the experiment at the level of .05. This is consistent with the research of Wanlapa Bunananbut (2004), Narawadee Phannara (2008), and Thaweechai Mongkonkeha (2007) which concluded that the group trained to predict the meaning of English words from context clues improved their reading ability. Rachael (2009: Online), whose research was to study the learning of new words from context clues, also concluded that it helps students predict the meaning of new words much better.

2. The first-year students English Program, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok were satisfied by the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues as can be seen from the results of questionnaire on the students' opinion towards the learning method based on strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues. It was found that the students were satisfied by the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from context clues which helped them predict the meaning of English words more and faster. Analysis of word structure and context has a benefit on development of the students' reading ability and creates reading habit which is in line with Blachowicz & Fisher's statement that students who like to read will know a great deal of vocabulary which can be used to advance their study course. The students got to learning activities together which created a good atmosphere of classroom, made the class more enjoyable and interesting when the students interacted with other students more in classroom. The learning activities encouraged the students to practice the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words which motivated them to read more. This is consistent with the study of Sophida Yeeding (2006: 52) which studied the use of pre-reading activities to create motivation in reading English language. The study found that the students were motivated to read English language at the high level and improved their English reading skill.

From the study of the effect of strategies of predicting the meaning of English words, it was found that the first-year English Program students, Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies, Phranakhon Rajabhat University, Bangkok had an improved ability to predict the meaning of English words at the statistics level of .05. The factors that lead to such result can be concluded as the use of the strategies of predicting the meaning of English words from analysis of word structure and context clues has a benefit in improving the students' reading ability. The use of various strategies of predicting the meaning of English words and the students' opportunity to participate in learning activities cause a good atmosphere in classroom which results in a more enjoyable and interesting class that can motivate the students to read more.

Suggestions

From this study, the researcher has beneficial suggestions for further study as follows.

1. Teachers should select reading passage or articles related to actual incidents or the current environment of the students in order creates reading interests.

2. Teachers should have activities to reinforce students' interest in English reading skill such as group discussion, analytic thinking, analysis of meaning of the words, as well as achievement presentation.

Bibliography

- Chaweeluck Bunyakan. (2004) Education Innovation: **Psychology of Reading**. Bangkok: Than Akson. 2004.
- Chulee Inman. (1990) **Reading...to Improving Quality of Life**. Bangkok: Religious Affairs Press Religious Affairs Department.
- Narawadi Phannara. (2008). **Ability to Read English by Predicting the Meaning of Words from Context Clues of First-year Students Business Administration Program Sripatum University**. Sripatum Univer
- Panchit Konchanawan and Thanikan Makhasiranon. (1999). **Smart Reader: for Fast and Effective Thai Textbook Reading**. Third Edition. Bangkok: ExperNet Company, 1999.
- Phaiphan Inthanin. (2003). **Promoting Reading = Better Reading**. Chonburi: Department of Information Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Burapha University.
- Thaweechai Mongkolkeha. (2007). **Study of Strategies of Predicting the Meaning of English Words from Analysis of Word Structure and Context of First-year Students Ban Somdet Chaophraya Rajabhat University**. Ban Somdet Chaophraya Rajabhat University.