

Using Reader's Theater to Develop Reading Fluency among Thai EFL Students

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Abstract

Reading fluency is a crucial factor for becoming a successful reader as it strongly correlates with comprehension. Fluency in reading is characterized by reading rate, accuracy, phrasing, and prosodic features. Reader's Theater (RT) is one of the instructional methods that has been reported to help improve fluency as well as incentivize readers. The study aims to investigate the effect of RT on the reading fluency of Thai EFL university students. During the RT intervention, 38 first-year students read two scripts of the same story, and gave a performance for each. A Fluency Rubric was used to assess their reading performances. Scores gained from the rubric were to indicate their improvement from the first to the second performance. The data revealed that the students' fluency improved over the six weeks of the RT intervention. Particularly, Phrasing is the area in which the students improved the most. The results also suggested that the students regarded RT as a fun activity and agreed that they became more confident in reading.

Keywords: Reader's Theater, reading fluency, L2 reading, reading instruction

การใช้ Reader's Theater เพื่อพัฒนาความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่าน ของนักเรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

ปัญญา เล็กวิไล

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บทคัดย่อ

ความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่าน เป็นปัจจัยสำคัญต่อการเป็นผู้อ่านที่ประสบความสำเร็จ เนื่องจากมีความสัมพันธ์อย่างใกล้ชิดกับความเข้าใจในการอ่าน ความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่านประกอบไปด้วย ความรวดเร็วในการอ่าน ความถูกต้องของการอ่าน การเว้นวรรคตอนในการอ่าน และน้ำเสียงในการอ่าน Reader's Theater (RT) เป็นเครื่องมือในการสอนที่มีผู้พบว่าสามารถช่วยพัฒนาความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่าน รวมทั้งสร้างแรงจูงใจให้ผู้อ่านได้ งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์ในการศึกษาผลของ RT ต่อความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่านของนักศึกษาชาวไทยระดับมหาวิทยาลัย โดยให้นักศึกษาจำนวน 38 คน อ่านบทละครสองบทจากเรื่องเดียวกัน และแสดงการอ่านออกเสียงของแต่ละบทละคร เกณฑ์การให้คะแนนความคล่องแคล่วเป็นเครื่องมือที่ใช้วัดผลการอ่าน โดยคะแนนที่เพิ่มขึ้นจะเป็นสิ่งชี้วัดพัฒนาการของการอ่านครั้งที่หนึ่งจนถึงครั้งที่สอง ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่านของนักศึกษาพัฒนาขึ้นในช่วง 6 สัปดาห์ของการใช้ RT โดยเฉพาะในด้านการเว้นวรรคตอนในการอ่าน ผลการศึกษายังพบว่า นักศึกษามีความเห็นที่ RT เป็นกิจกรรมที่สนุกสนานและสร้างความมั่นใจในการอ่าน

คำสำคัญ: ริดเดอร์ เธียเตอร์, ความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่าน, การอ่านในภาษาที่สอง, การสอนการอ่าน

Introduction

The role of the English language has long been recognized among Thai educators as the important lingua franca. The purpose of learning English has extended beyond mere communication; it is an essential skill for business success and educational advancement. Over the past decade, English has been incorporated into the core curriculum, and is recognized as the most important foreign language that constitutes basic learning content (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2008).

With the growing number of international schools and the public schools' English Programs throughout the nation, where English is made a compulsory subject, it is apparent that Thai students have been learning English as early as the primary level (Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai, 2012). However, according to the recent results of English tests administered by National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS) in 2011 (as cited in Kitjaroonchai & Kitjaroonchai, 2012), Thai students from grade 6 to grade 12 exhibited very low mean scores demonstrating a twist of their English proficiency despite learning the language since an early age.

A growing number of Thai educators have started to consider the effectiveness of the English language instruction as well as cultural factors that may contribute to pedagogical challenges. In terms of the English instruction, Biyaem (as cited in Rajeevnath, 2015) mentioned that the number of students per class, which is usually around 50-60, is responsible for the ineffectiveness of learning, let alone the inadequate technology and resources available to them. According to Wongsorthorn, Hiranburana & Chinnawong as well as Foley (as cited in Rajeevnath, 2015), traditional instruction is also inauthentic since it is characterized by separated grammar lessons that usually consist of decontextualized sentences. In addition, being a highly collectivist and hierarchy-driven society is a cultural factor that affects the proficiency of the English instruction (Rajeevnath, 2015). As the country promotes the Thai language as part of its proud identity, the fact that the English proficiency of the majority is low is not regarded as serious. Due to social hierarchy, students are usually discouraged from asking questions to teachers since the latter are superior, and doing so would be considered inappropriate.

Given that the effectiveness of English instruction in Thai EFL context is constantly investigated, a number of studies address problems of the reading skills among Thai EFL learners. Reading English has been a struggle for many students since the early stages of learning English. Poor reading skills render some students frustrated not only in studying English but also other subjects, especially science and engineering, of which the source materials are mostly written in English (Oranpattanachai, 2010; Chawwang, 2008). Despite several reading strategies that have been proposed by researchers in an attempt to help learners cope with reading difficulties (e.g. Noicharoen, 2012; Siriphanich & Laohawiriyanon, 2010; Chawwang, 2008), the root of the problem may be the fact that reading is not culturally significant for Thais.

When it comes to reading in L2, inadequate reading habits usually lead to inadequate exposure to vocabulary and sentence structures. According to Aebersold (2001), reading in L2 requires practice as the more frequently the reader sees the word, the faster and shorter time he will recognize it.

That being said, ease of lexical access and effortlessness in word recognition characterize reading fluency. Despite having been neglected in teaching instruction, reading fluency has been brought into the spotlight since the National Reading Panel of the United States issued the five essential reading components, namely 1) *Phonemic awareness*: the knowledge of individual sounds that create words, 2) *Phonics*: the understanding of the relationship between symbols (letters) and spoken sounds to decode words, 3) *Vocabulary*: the knowledge of words, their meaning and context, 4) *Fluency*: the ability to read at an appropriate rate, phrasing, accuracy, and expression, and 5) *Comprehension*: the understanding of meaning of the text, acquired by reading strategies (National Reading Panel, 2000; Tindall & Nisbet, 2010).

Considering fluency as a bridge that connects word recognition to comprehension, fluency has triggered interest among educators and researchers. Quite a number of studies agree that fluency in reading is a key to becoming a successful and competent reader (Rasinski & Padak, 2000; Taguchi, Takayasu-Mass & Gorsuch, 2004; Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006).

Concerning EFL reading instruction in Thailand, English is administered from the first grade. Despite phonemic/phonics awareness, and the ability to accurately read

aloud various types of texts being identified as one of a learner's qualities (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2008), fluency in reading is still absent from the core curriculum. Currently, there are few empirical studies investigating reading fluency among Thai EFL learners (e.g. Tamrackitkun, 2010). Given this, fluency is seemingly an unfamiliar concept to educators in Thailand. Inasmuch as traditional reading instruction puts a lot of emphasis on strategies to help learners tackle the comprehension of the text, it does not provide much opportunity for learners to revisit the text, nor to read extensively outside of the classroom. According to Singtui (as cited in Siriphanich & Laohawiriyanon, 2010; Chawwang, 2008), given that reading skills are a struggle for many Thai EFL learners due to lack of reading in itself and their low motivation to read fluency instruction needs to be given attention and developed hand in hand with other instructional methods.

Among several instructional strategies used to develop learners' fluency, readers' theater (RT) has garnered popularity among instructors and researchers. RT requires students to read a script in a group. Much like staged plays, students have to interpret their characters and the situations in a script, and then perform to an audience. However, RT does not require props, costumes or stage productions, and performers do not need to memorize the lines but read aloud holding the script. In order to deliver an effective staged play-like performance, students need to rehearse by re-reading the script several times until they become fluent.

Research objectives

This study aims to investigate the effect of Reader's Theater upon reading fluency. Alongside other traditional reading strategies already implemented, RT may help incentivize students and improve their reading fluency which has not been brought to the attention of the instructors within the Thai EFL context. Accordingly, the following research questions are stated below:

- 1) To what extent does Reader's Theater improve reading fluency?
- 2) To what extent does Reader's Theater affect the motivation to read in English?

Reading Process

The nature of reading involves both linguistic knowledge of the language of the targeted text and the background knowledge of the reader (Lekwilai, 2014). The ways the reader interacts with the text can be “bottom-up” and “top-down”. Bottom-up is the process in which the reader uses his/her linguistic knowledge such as word-decoding and syntactic structures to understand the text. On the other hand, the top-down process is when the reader brings his/her background knowledge (schema) to help build expectations and predictions in order to understand the text. According to Aebersold and Field (as cited in Lekwilai, 2014), both bottom-up and top-down processes occur simultaneously or interchangeably as the reader is dealing with different types of texts.

As mentioned earlier, fluency is one of the important elements of reading. The definition of fluency will be discussed in the following section.

Defining fluency and its relationship with comprehension

Fluency in reading is observed by automaticity in word recognition and automaticity at the text level of a reader. Fluent readers exhibit word recognition skills by reading with appropriate speed and correctly recognizing words. At the same time, they move beyond the word to the text level by reading with appropriate phrasing and, in the case of oral reading, appropriate expressions.

As stated by Logan (1997), speed, effortlessness, autonomy, and unconsciousness constitute automaticity in any activity. In the very case of reading, appropriate reading speed reduces the time the reader takes to react to the text, hence it does not intervene in the comprehension process. Reading should be done with ease and effortlessness so that the comprehension process is not interfered with by a sense of frustration. Furthermore, reading should be done automatically and without much attention and conscious awareness in the process.

Since the ultimate goal of reading is to comprehend what is read, reading fluency must foster comprehension. A number of researchers agree that fluency has a strong correlation with comprehension (Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006; Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005; Nation, 2009; Hook & Jones, 2004; Taguchi, Takayasu-Mass & Gorsuch, 2004; Rasinski & Padak, 2000). It is argued that automaticity in word recognition alone may

not be sufficient to guarantee comprehension. Some readers who read quickly and correctly but do not exhibit knowledge of phrase or sentence boundaries may not understand the text as a whole. According to Hudson, Lane & Pullen (2005), poor phrasing ability affects comprehension while readers are dealing with larger units of words since they do not see the relationship between each word. In addition, expression or prosodic features are signals that readers understand what is being read. As stated by Rasinski (2004, p.14), “[the] embedding of prosody shows that the reader is trying to make sense of or comprehend the text”.

To sum up, reading fluency is characterized by reading speed and accuracy (word-level automaticity), as well as phrasing and prosody (text-level automaticity). Fluency in reading, most importantly, must contribute to overall comprehension of the text.

Implementing fluency in reading instruction

Despite the fact that, as the aforementioned illustrates, fluency is closely related to comprehension, it is often dismissed by instructors. Much of traditional reading instruction focuses on word identification strategies to foster only comprehension. While reading skills of students are usually measured by *how well* they comprehend the text, which is mostly determined by comprehensive test scores, instructors often fail to diagnose *how* they process comprehension by considering the ease and the amount of time spent in reading.

Reading fluency can be achieved through a substantial amount of practice. A reader needs frequent and repeated reading, ideally with texts within his or her level of readability. Through such repeated practice, the reader should be able to read faster as words become familiar and can be decoded on sight. As soon as most words in the text of a certain level are automatically decoded, the reader moves on to the text of a higher level and the process repeats. In the following section, an example of activity that promotes fluency will be discussed.

Repeated Reading

Repeated Reading (RR) was first developed by Jay Samuels (1979), based on his own automaticity theory. The technique of RR requires a reader to read a short passage

aloud or silently several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. The technique is then repeated again with a different passage. The reader can either read with the guidance of an instructor or with peers, and his or her reading speed and accuracy are recorded. The number of words read in one minute of reading are counted as words per minute (WPM), and the number of words read correctly are counted as correct words per minute (CWPM).

Even though RR is regarded as a decent tool to increase reading speed and improve accuracy (Tyler & Chard, 2000), some current research on fluency instruction states that RR might not be the only instructional tool to develop all areas of fluency. For instance, Hudson et al. (2005) suggested RR as one instructional method to focus on reading rate and accuracy, but not on phrasing and prosody. Nation (2009) also stated that by using RR as a sole reading strategy, some instructors may focus only on students' gained reading rate. At the same time, students may be pressured to improve their reading rate to an extent that comprehension is ironically overlooked and the joy of reading is lost. By the same token, focusing on accuracy alone can have a negative impact on one's reading rate. For instance, Samuels (1979) pointed out that if students are required to re-read a text with 100 per cent word accuracy so that they can move on to a new text, it can impede their reading rate since the fear of making a mistake slows their reading.

In addition, the fact that RR requires re-reading the same text many times may seem to be a mundane activity to students. Given that Rasinski (2004) emphasizes improving reading rate and accuracy alongside expressive oral performance, and also that Nation (2009) described a need for enjoyment and fun while reading, it is interesting to explore Reader's Theater (RT). The method is another form of repeated reading that allows students to practice through performance, and it provides excitement and meaningful context of re-reading the same text.

Reader's Theater (RT)

RT is another method of repeated reading that allows students to practice through performance. Not only does RT help improve reading rate and accuracy, it is an effective way to increase prosody (Cullard, 2008; Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006; Hudson

et al., 2005). In terms of comprehension, RT encourages students to be engaged in negotiating the meaning of the text, exchanging their interpretation of the text, and generating responses to the text through performance (Liu, 2000). Above all, RT is an incentivized activity (Alspach, 2010; Haws, 2008; Martinez, Roser & Strecker, 1998) that persuades students to enjoy re-reading the same text several times and creates motivation and confidence in readers (McKay, 2008; Rinehart, 1999). By performing a reading to an audience, readers automatically feel motivated to be fluent in order to deliver the message and entertain the audience at the same time.

Basically, RT requires students to read a play script out loud. Each student is assigned the role of a character in the script and brings the character to life. RT works in a similar way to a staged play, except that it does not require props, costumes, or stage productions. Students do not need to memorize the lines or act them out. They simply hold the script and read in front of an audience. To perform for their audience in a comprehensive and entertaining way, students need to practice reading their parts in the script several times to make sure that they read fluently enough to be understood by the audience. They also should be able to read with appropriate expressions to visualize the unseen props, settings and actions, and to make their performance entertaining with the emotions and feelings of the characters.

RT is suitable for students of all ages and of all levels of proficiency. Scripts for RT are also varied. They can be actual play scripts with simplified language to suit students' instructional level. They can also be selections of children's literature that are rich in dialogue (Hudson et al., 2005), or they could even be scripts created by the instructor. Most importantly, students need a model to illustrate what fluent reading should sound like so that they have a set goal in mind while they practice reading on their own or with peers. For this matter, the instructor may read the script aloud while introducing the script, or use any available audio scripts.

Here are the procedures for how to conduct RT in the classroom:

1. *Text selection*: instructor chooses a script at student's instructional level.
2. *Modeling*: instructor reads the script for students to demonstrate what fluent reading should be like. If an audio version of the script is available, the instructor can play it.

3. *Discussion*: discuss the plot, characters, settings, etc. with students. Vocabulary and sentence structures can be discussed as well to ensure comprehension.
4. *Assign roles*: divide students into groups and assign roles to them. When students are familiar with RT, the instructor may let them choose their roles.
5. *Practice*: students practice the role with their peers, and sometimes practice by themselves.
6. *Feedback and comment*: after practice, instructor gives feedback and comments for improvement.
7. *Perform*: students stand in front of the class and perform the script. (Lekwilai, 2014)

All in all, fluency is crucial in reading since it contributes to comprehension which is the goal of reading. A substantial amount of reading practice is the key to achieving reading fluency. While Repeated Reading (RR) is arguably an adequate method to improve fluency since it requires a reader re-read the text several times, the fact that RR focuses mostly on reading rate and its lack of legitimate reason to re-read the same text may cause shortfalls to the method itself.

Reader's Theater (RT), a similar method to RR, becomes an alternative method of repeated reading practice. It encourages reading speed as well as other areas of fluency, and creates purposeful repeated reading. Despite being a popular instructional method among researchers and instructors (e.g. Alspach, 2010; Haws, 2008; Martinez et. al., 1998; Liu, 2000), study of RT in Thai EFL classrooms is relatively scarce. In addition, the 2008 Basic Education Core Curriculum of Thailand did not address the need for administering reading fluency within reading instruction (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2008). RT is, therefore, an interesting method to pioneer reading fluency in the curriculum.

Research methodology

Research design:

A mixed-method design was used in this study in order to investigate the effect of RT on the participants' reading fluency and motivation. The mixed-method design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative data was

obtained by the scores from Fluency Rubric which the research adapted from Zutell & Rasinski (1991), and a self-reflection form which was designed by the researcher. This set of data was aimed to measure gained fluency of the participants after they had performed the RT scripts. The qualitative data was obtained from an open-ended question in a self-reflection form, and was used as an insight into the participants' motivation. The design was incorporated with Reader's Theater intervention over the six-week period.

The participants:

Participants in the six-week study included 38 first year students of a university in the north of Thailand who enrolled in the Intensive English course. Of all 2,300 students who enrolled in the course, these 38 students were selected because they were in the section where the researcher was the instructor. Among the group, 31 are female and 7 are male. One of the female students is blind. All participants were Chinese Language Teaching majors.

Like all students enrolled in the Intensive English course, their English test scores from O-NET (Ordinary National Education Test) were lower than 40%, and the optional IELTS and TOEFL (IBT) scores were lower than 4.5 and 53, respectively. Based on CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) levels, their level of English competence was lower than B1. Given this situation, these students were considered low-proficiency English learners. Their English proficiency levels were the major reason why they were selected in the study, regardless of being at the tertiary-level of education. While most research on RT in L1 settings (e.g. Hook & Jones, 2004; Tyler & Chad, 2000) focusing on elementary to 4th grade students, these educational levels may not be applicable to EFL contexts. Therefore, the selection of the participants in this study is primarily based on English proficiency rather than level of education.

The Intensive English course required meeting 3 hours per day for 6 six weeks. Apart from the main course book, all students of Intensive English were required to read the graded reader version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as the external reading activity. The book is listed as Stage 3 in the Oxford Bookworm Series, which is at level B1 on

CEFR. This external reading book was adapted into a series of Reader's Theater scripts which is the main research instrument.

The instruments:

The script:

The script for the Reader's Theater activity was the adapted version of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The book contains 10,245 words and is divided into 17 chapters. Each chapter of the book was transformed into the format of a play script, without changing any wording from the original text. All the characters from the story remained the same, with additional narrator parts. All 17 scripts were fairly equal in length. The scripts were also made in Braille for the blind student.

The rubric:

The Fluency Rubric (modified from J. Zutell & Rasinski's "Multidimensional Fluency Scale (1991), see Table 1) is used as the main assessment of RT performances. The rubric is 16 points in total, with 4 points maximum given to 4 criteria, ranging from the lowest, 1 point, to the highest, 4 points. Each criterion is based on the components of fluency:

1. Expression and Volume: considers volume of voice and prosodic features as appropriate while reading
2. Phrasing: considers how the reader pays attention to punctuation and how effective pauses are used after reading meaningful groups of words
3. Accuracy and Smoothness: considers words that are read correctly, smoothly and with confidence
4. Pace: considers appropriate and natural reading rate as suitable with the characters and the situations in the scripts.

Self-reflection:

At the end of RT intervention, participants were required to fill out the self-reflection form (see Table 2) in order to reflect on their reading as well as their feedback on RT activities. The questions were divided into 3 parts. The first part consisted of questions that allow the participants to rate their oral reading during the group

performance, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “disagree”, “agree” and “strongly agree”. The second part consisted of yes-no questions to reflect whether they read the scripts at home, whether they understood the story and their assigned parts, and whether their oral fluency had improved. The final part was an open-ended question asking their opinion about the RT activity. The questions in the self-reflection form were in Thai to ensure that they understood the questions and that they answered the open-ended questions as expressively as they could. Participants filled out the self-reflection form anonymously.

Table 1 Fluency Scale

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Expression and Volume	Reads in a quiet voice as if to get words out. The reading does not sound natural like talking to a friend.	Reads in a quiet voice. The reading sounds natural in part of the text, but the reader does not always sound like they are talking to a friend.	Reads with volume and expression. However, sometimes the reader slips into expressionless reading and does not sound like they are talking to a friend.	Reads with varied volume and expression. The reader sounds like they are talking to a friend with their voice matching the interpretation of the passage.
Phrasing	Reads word-by-word in a monotone voice.	Reads in two or three word phrases, not adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation.	Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid-sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness. There is reasonable stress and intonation.	Reads with good phrasing; adhering to punctuation, stress and intonation.
Accuracy and Smoothness	Frequently hesitates while reading, sounds out words, and repeats words or phrases. The reader makes multiple attempts to read the same passage.	Reads with extended pauses or hesitations. The reader has many “rough spots.”	Reads with occasional breaks in rhythm. The reader has difficulty with specific words and/or sentence structures.	Reads smoothly with some breaks, but self-corrects with difficult words and/or sentence structures.
Pace	Reads slowly and laboriously.	Reads moderately slowly.	Reads fast and slow throughout reading.	Reads at a conversational pace throughout the reading.

Table 2 Student Self-reflection Form

ข้อคิดเห็นหลังการอ่านหน้าชั้นเรียน Reflection from performance	1 ไม่เห็นด้วย อย่างยิ่ง Strongly disagree	2 ไม่เห็นด้วย Disagree	3 เห็นด้วย Agree	4 เห็นด้วยอย่างยิ่ง Strongly agree
1. ฉันอ่านเสียงดังพอที่เพื่อนทั้งห้องได้ยิน I read loudly enough that the whole class could hear.				
2. ฉันอ่านเสียงดัง แม้ว่าไม่แน่ใจว่าคำบางคำอ่านอย่างไร I read loudly though wasn't sure how to pronounce certain words.				
3. ฉันอ่านด้วยน้ำเสียง และแสดงอารมณ์อย่างเหมาะสมกับนิสัยของตัวละครของฉัน I read with expressions that are suitable for my characters.				
4. ฉันอ่านด้วยน้ำเสียง และแสดงอารมณ์อย่างเหมาะสมกับสถานการณ์ในเรื่อง I read with expressions that are suitable for the situations.				
5. ฉันอ่านอย่างรวดเร็ว และไม่ติดขัด I read fast and smoothly.				
6. ฉันอ่านคำเป็นกลุ่มภายในประโยค ไม่ได้อ่านทีละคำ I read groups of words rather than individual words.				
7. ฉันเว้นช่วงการอ่านเมื่อจบแต่ละประโยค I made pauses after the end of each sentence.				
8. ฉันอ่านออกเสียงแต่ละคำได้อย่างถูกต้อง ตามที่อาจารย์บอก I pronounced words correctly as told by the teacher.				

9. ฉันอ่านบทละครนอกเหนือจากเวลาที่อาจารย์ให้อ่านในห้องเรียน
 I read the script outside of class time.

ใช่ yes

ไม่ใช่ no (ข้ามไปข้อ 14)
 go to no.14

10.ฉันฝึกอ่านบทละครกับเพื่อนในกลุ่มนอกเวลาเรียน
 I practiced the script with peers outside of class time.

ใช่ yes

ไม่ใช่
 no

11. ฉันฝึกอ่านบทละครคนเดียวนอกเวลาเรียน
 I practiced the script alone outside of class time.

ใช่ yes

ไม่ใช่
 no

12. ฉันฝึกอ่านบทละครคนเดียวทุกวัน
 I practiced the script alone every day.

ใช่ yes

ไม่ใช่ ฉันอ่านสัปดาห์ละ วัน
 no I read days per week

13. เมื่อฉันฝึกอ่านคนเดียว ฉันอ่านเฉพาะส่วนที่เป็นบทของฉัน
 When I practiced the script alone, I only read my part.

ใช่ yes

ไม่ใช่ no

14. ฉันเข้าใจเนื้อเรื่องของบทละครที่ฉันอ่าน
 I understood the story of the script.

ใช่ yes

ไม่ใช่ no

15. ฉันเข้าใจความหมายในส่วนที่เป็นบทของฉัน
 I understood my reading parts.

ใช่ yes

ไม่ใช่ no

16. ฉันคิดว่ากิจกรรมอ่านบทละครทำให้ฉันอ่านภาษาอังกฤษคล่องขึ้น
 I think this activity helps me read in English more fluently.

ใช่ yes

ไม่ใช่ no

Data collection

The data collection process took place from the first week until the last week of the Intensive English class (June 30 – August 7, 2015). The data from the Fluency Rubric was collected twice: after the first script performance on the third week, and after the second performance on the sixth week. The data from the Self-Reflection was collected after the second performance on the sixth week. The following are the details of the data collection process: (Also, see *Figure 1* below)

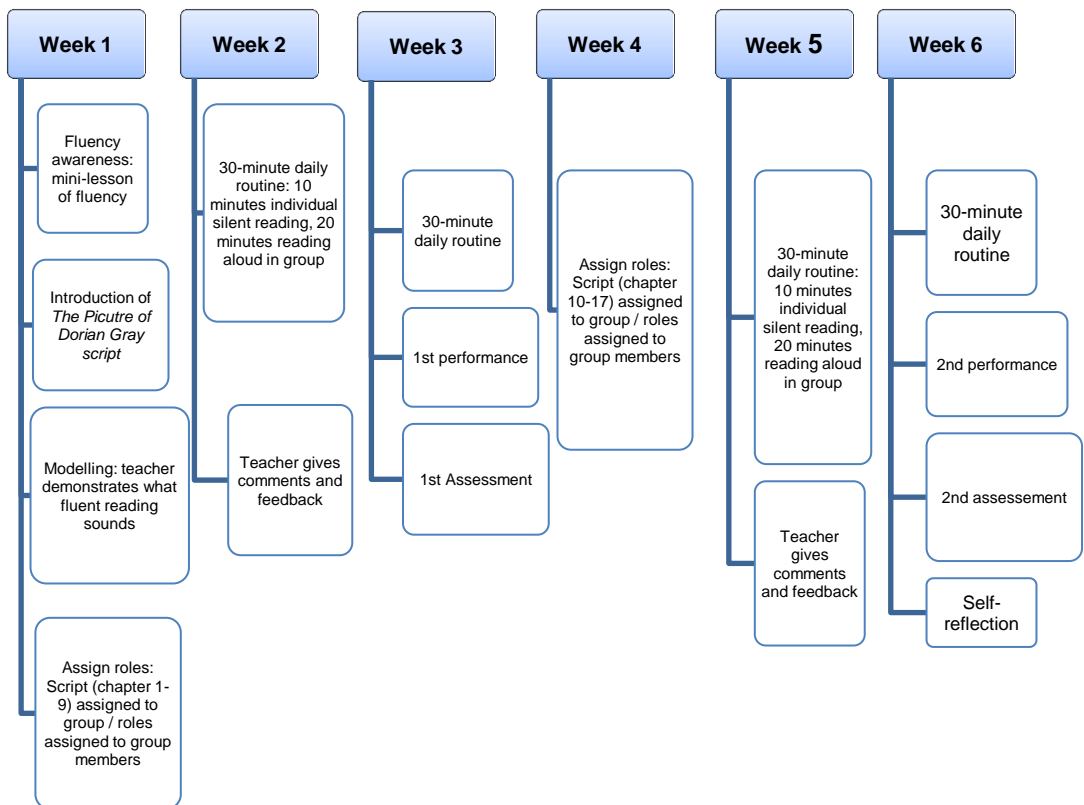


Figure 1 Model of RT Intervention

Week 1: Introduction of reading fluency and first RT script

During the first week, the instructor spent 30 minutes of class conducting a mini-lesson on reading fluency, as well as modeling a fluent reading using an excerpt from *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. By the end of the first week, participants were introduced to the scripts that had been adapted from the book. The instructor asked the students to get

into groups of 4-6, so that each group could be assigned a script to read. There were 9 groups in total, and each was assigned a different script, from chapters 1 to 9.

Week 2-3: The 30-minute reading routine, first performance and assessment

From the second through the third week, the instructor spared 30 minutes of each class meeting for RT activity. At the beginning of the second week, each group of participants assigned roles to each member. From then on, RT became a daily routine where individual students spent 10 minutes reading the assigned part silently, and another 20 minutes reading aloud with the group members. Participants were also encouraged to rotate the roles with other group members. The instructor constantly observed during this stage and provided feedback on their oral reading. Mini-lessons on pronunciation were sometimes provided as necessary. The characters and the storyline of the script were also discussed with the groups to encourage expressive reading. At the end of the third week, all groups performed the script in front of the class and the instructor used the rubric to assess each individual participant. The order of performance was chronological to the storyline of the book, and the plot was discussed after the end of each group's performance. The instructor used the Fluency Rubric to assess an individual group member as they were performing the script.

Week 4: Introduction of second RT script

A new series of the script, chapters 10-17, was introduced and assigned to each group of participants at the end of the fourth week. The number of groups and the members remained the same as in the previous week.

Week 5-6: The 30-minute reading routine, second performance, assessment and reflection

The data collection process was repeated for the second and third week. At the end of the sixth week, when the participants performed the second reading, they were asked to fill in the self-reflection form.

Data analysis

Quantitative data:

There were two sets of quantitative data:

The first set of collected data was the scores from the Fluency rubric earned by each participant from the first and the second performances. The scores were analyzed regarding two criteria:

1) *Overall fluency*: The total score of 16 points from the first and the second performances were compared in order to see the gained fluency of the participants. The scores were converted into a graph in order to allow visual interpretation.

2) *Specific area of fluency*: The score of each area of fluency which constituted 4 points each on the rubric was considered. The sum of each fluency area from the first and the second performances were compared in order to see which specific area of fluency had improved the most. The score of the specific area was analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2010 in order to find the mean and the standard deviation.

The second set of collected data was the participants' response in the self-reflection form. The response of the first two parts of the self-reflection was analyzed by counting the number of positive responses (“strongly agree”, “agree”, and “yes”) and negative responses (“strongly disagree”, “disagree”, and “no”), and converting these responses into percentages.

Qualitative data:

This set of data was obtained from an open-ended question at the end of the self-reflection form. It was analyzed by considering the participants' view of the RT intervention in relation with their motivation to read.

During the data collection process in the first reading performance, one student was absent. Consequently, her score from the second performance was not taken into account, since there was no basis for comparison. As a result, the data presented in the following section is based on 37 participants.

Results

Overall fluency:

Data revealed significant gain of fluency among the participants from the first and the second performance as shown in Figure 2 below:

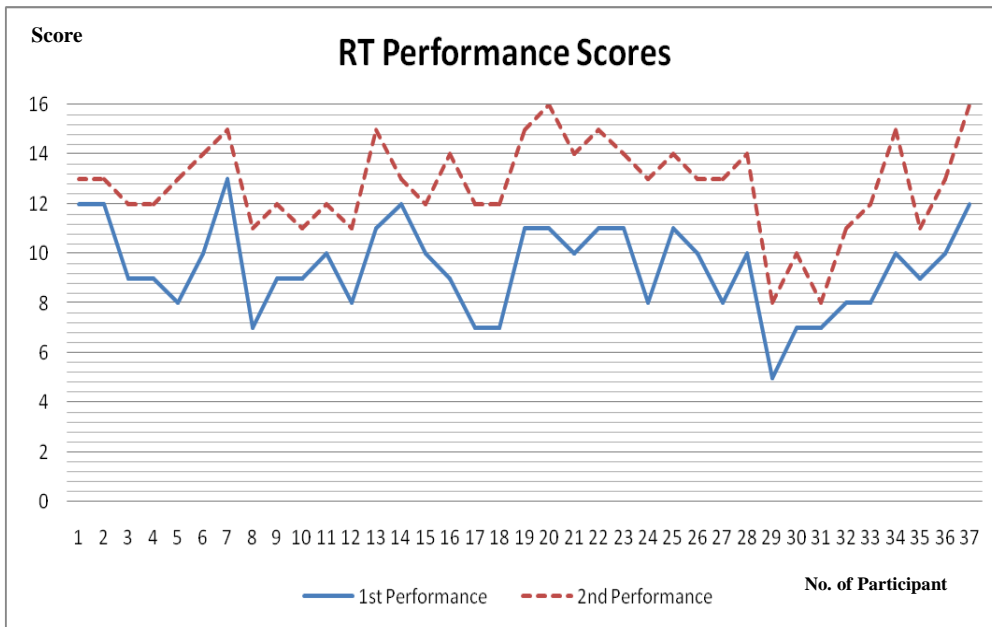


Figure 2 Scores from Fluency Rubric (1st and 2nd RT performance)

After the first performance, all 37 participants (one was absent) earned an average 9.43 out of 16 points. The lowest score was 5 and the highest was 13. By the end of the second performance, the average score increased to 12.71. The lowest score was 8, which was found in two participants. One of the two was the same student who earned the lowest score after the first performance. Two participants earned the perfect score, even though neither of the two was the student who had scored the highest at the first performance. The overall score from the first to the second performance was increased by an average of 20.5%. During the first performance, the score of the participant who earned the lowest score increased by 18.75% after the second performance, whereas the one who earned the highest score increased by 12.5%. Two participants who earned the perfect score during the second performance increased by 31.25% and 25%, respectively.

The specific area of fluency:

Regarding the four areas of fluency, all participants also gained higher scores in the second performance for every area. The data are shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3 Gain scores (1st and 2nd RT performance) by areas of fluency

Fluency Area	1 st performance		2 nd performance	
	M	SD	M	SD
1.Expression and Volume	2.19	0.74	2.97	0.82
2. Phrasing	2.43	0.55	3.45	0.60
3. Accuracy & Smoothness	2.41	0.50	3.26	0.45
4. Pace	2.41	0.60	3.03	0.49

Phrasing is particularly the area in which participants showed distinctive progress, with an average 1.02 points increase, surpassing accuracy criteria. Expression, volume and pace did not increase much. This will be discussed extensively in the discussion section.

Self-reflection:

Data from the Self-Reflection (See Table 4) of all 38 participants also suggests that participants regarded their oral reading as having progressed between the 1st performance and the 2nd performance. 73.68% answered “Agree” when they were asked whether they read loudly enough even though they were not sure whether they read correctly. 52.63% agreed that they read expressively as their characters and in an appropriate way for the situations in the story, whereas 42.11% reported “disagree”. When asked about reading speed, 50% said they agreed, while 44.74% disagreed. In terms of phrasing, the majority 64.48% agreed as well as 21.05% who strongly agreed. Only 14.47% answered “disagreed”. Regarding accuracy, 60.53% agreed that they read correctly as guided by the instructor, whereas 31.58% disagreed.

Data from the Self-Reflection also revealed that the participants were motivated to practice the script outside of class, and had a very positive attitude toward RT activity. 65.79% reported that they practiced the script at home, although without their peers. Furthermore, what the researcher found most compelling was that 100% of the participants said they felt that RT made their reading more fluent.

Table 4 Results from Self-Reflection

Question No.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1. I read loudly enough that the whole class could hear.	1(2.6%)	2(5.3%)	28(73.7%)	7(18.4%)
2. I read loudly though wasn't sure how to pronounce certain words.	0(0%)	10(26.3%)	25(65.8%)	3(7.9%)
3. I read with expressions that are suitable for my characters.	1(2.6%)	15(39.5%)	21(55.3%)	1(2.6%)
4. I read with expressions that are suitable for the situations.	1(2.6%)	17(44.7%)	19(50%)	1(2.6%)
5. I read fast and smoothly.	1(2.6%)	17(44.7%)	19(50%)	1(2.6%)
6. I read groups of words rather than individual words.	0(0%)	9(23.7%)	23(60.5%)	6(15.8%)
7. I made pauses after the end of each sentence.	0(0%)	2(5.3%)	26(68.4%)	10(26.3%)
8. I pronounced words correctly as told by the teacher.	0(0%)	12(31.6%)	23(60.5%)	3(7.9%)
	Yes		No	
9. I read the script outside of class time.	25(65.8%)		13(34.2%)	
10. I practiced the script with peers outside of class time.	3(7.9%)		22(57.9%)	
11. I practiced the script alone outside of class time.	21(55.3%)		4(10.5%)	
12. I practiced the script alone every day.	3(7.9%)		22(57.9%)	
13. When I practiced the script alone, I only read my part.	17(44.7%)		8(21.1%)	
14. I understood the story of the script.	34(89.5%)		4(10.5%)	
15. I understood my reading parts.	33(86.8%)		5(13.2%)	
16. I think this activity helps me read in English more fluently.	38(100%)		0(0%)	

In terms of comprehension, participants reported that they understood both the story as a whole and their reading parts, as evident by 89.47% and 86.84%, respectively, who answered “yes”, while those who answered “no” were only 10.53% and 13.16%, respectively.

Lastly, for the open-ended question that asked the participants about their opinion of RT, they gave overall positive comments. 30 participants said that they found RT “very entertaining”. 23 of them reported that RT helps “build confidence in oral reading”. 12 participants noted that because they read aloud with their peers, and shared the reading parts among the group members, they became more confident than when

reading individually. 4 participants reported that they were confident during the performance, even though they were not quite sure whether they read certain words correctly.

Discussion

The findings suggest that Reader's Theater is a potentially useful instructional tool to improve the reading fluency of Thai EFL learners. As evident from other studies, the reading rate among the participants of RT gained significantly (e.g. Martinez et al., 1998; Corcoran & Davis, 2005), as well as the growth in prosodic features (Keehn, Harmon & Shoho, 2008).

The data of this study also suggests that "Phrasing" is the most prominent aspect that the participants improved after the 2nd performance. Most participants admitted that they would not have paid attention to the punctuation or pauses while reading aloud. After the instructor emphasized the importance of pauses in the process of comprehension of the text, the participants became self-aware and did not overlook the punctuation. The blind student also exhibited fairly good phrasing having read the script in Braille. She stated that she had not been aware of the functions of the punctuation in oral reading until she participated in RT.

Interestingly, "Expression and Volume" seems to be the area of fluency where most participants did not improve much. Although the majority of the participants who are shy readers have improved in terms of volume, expression (or prosody) still did not change significantly. When discussing the characters and the situations in the script, most participants exhibited good comprehension. It should therefore be assumed that comprehension should foster expression while the participants were reading aloud.

The researcher's assumption is that the participants might have understood the text, but might have not realized the importance of the prosodic features in the English language. Extra lessons on intonation may have to be integrated with RT, apart from the mini-lessons of reading fluency. However, in order to firmly explain the contradiction in this finding, further studies concerning the connection between prosody and comprehension are needed. As stated by Hudson et al. (2005, p.704), "little research has

been conducted exploring the relationship between prosody and reading comprehension, and what little research has been done has found an unclear relationship.”

Not only does RT provide meaningful reasons for learners to re-read the same text again and again, the data from the participants’ reflection revealed that the effect of RT extended beyond the goal of achieving fluency itself. It created the joy of reading and encouraged group work among the participants. This is not a surprise, however, as other studies (e.g. McKay, 2008; Rinehart, 1999) reported that RT creates motivation and confidence in readers. The fact that students have to read to an audience and want the audience to understand and be entertained by their reading makes them confident and motivated to read more. Researchers also find that students enjoy the opportunity to choose their roles in scripts, to use different voices for different characters according to their nature, mood, feelings, or the changed situations in the performance. These are the most compelling reasons that the researcher feels that RT should be integrated into the reading curriculum.

Suggestions for further study:

Insights from using RT in this study encourage the researcher to consider more studies regarding the correlation between accurate pronunciation and comprehension. Having observed the participants during the 30 minute daily routine, the majority of them were struggling with accurate pronunciation while reading aloud. Frequently, they incorrectly pronounced the words which are at their grade level. Other unknown words were often pronounced based on the spelling, which frequently resulted in incorrect pronunciation. Fossilization may have been the reason why some participants mispronounced the words they already know the meaning of. Since it is uncertain to determine whether accuracy reflects comprehension, it is a challenge for researchers to conduct more studies on this matter.

Conclusion

Fluency in reading has been the focus of many researchers in EFL/ESL settings, but for Thailand’s EFL context, fluency instructions are almost unrecognizable. Reader’s Theater is introduced as one of the techniques to build fluency for Thai EFL students. RT has been proven to help improve the oral reading fluency of the participants in this study.

The most compelling reason that English classrooms should implement RT to reading instruction is that it is incentive by design. It also motivates students to reread the same text without being discouraged. Frequent reading practice, as theories suggest, is an important method to develop fluency.

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Biodata

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