

Volume 5

January 2003

rEFLections

KMUTT Journal of Language Education

Department of Applied Linguistics
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi
Thailand

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Deadline for next issue: 31 October 2002

Editorial

rEFLections, I hope, has built a reputation as a journal providing reports on innovations in English language teaching in Thailand. This issue intends to build on this reputation. Although the articles in this volume do not examine what might be viewed as absolute innovations which have never been implemented or evaluated anywhere before, they do shed light on what might be termed contextual innovations. The papers in this issue look at the application of cutting-edge methodologies to the Thai context. Most of these methodologies originate in core ELT countries and the effectiveness of their application in periphery countries like Thailand is a far from foregone conclusion. Although it can be argued that Thailand should be creating its own teaching approaches, the reality of the power differentials in ELT between countries means that many new directions in teaching are still derived from other contexts. The transfer of approaches designed in one context to another is full of potential pitfalls. The reports in this issue of *rEFLections*, therefore, provide welcome evaluation of contextual innovations in Thailand.

The first article by Pamararat Wiriyakarun examines the use of a task-based methodology in a Thai university context. Focusing specifically at the level of materials, the paper provides useful practical examples as well as an evaluation of task-based methodology.

The next two papers both examine contextual innovations in teaching reading albeit from very different perspectives. Sorani Wongbiasaj looks at the applicability of critical discourse analysis, a burgeoning but still controversial area of applied linguistics, to the teaching of reading at the tertiary level in Thailand. In contrast, Choosri Banditvilai evaluates the effectiveness of a strategy training model to teaching reading.

The last two articles also share a theme, in this case the Internet. With the Web growing exponentially and with the Thai Ministry of Education pushing for more Internet-based teaching and learning in Thailand, articles investigating how the Internet is used and potential problems with using the Internet in education are most welcome. Kulawadee Yamkate and Niramol Uantrai examine the use of the Internet in projects at secondary schools, focusing on the problems that students encounter and suggesting potential solutions. Dararat Khampusaen, on the other hand, looks at the effects of a course homepage used to support classroom learning.

All of these articles are, I believe, important, especially for Thai teachers who may want to implement their own contextual innovations.

Richard Watson Todd
Editor

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Designing Task-Based Materials to Promote Learner Autonomy in the Classroom

Pamararat Wiriyakarun

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Abstract

Encouraging learners to become fully autonomous is an ideal rather than the reality. However, developing some degree of autonomy is essential if learners are to become effective language users. It is believed that despite a number of constraints imposed by individuals, institutions and society, the classroom is still the best place for learners to move towards autonomy.

Learner autonomy and self-directed learning

Learner autonomy has been a major concern among educators and teachers for over two decades. The terms 'autonomy' and 'self-direction' are often used interchangeably, however, they still have some distinctions: autonomy is "the ability to take charge of one's own learning", whereas, self-directed learning refers to "learning in which the learners themselves take responsibility for their own learning" (Holec, 1981: 3-4). It is now believed that in order to develop learners' responsibility for their own learning, they need to have some ideas of learning strategies, and should know how to choose their own materials and how to evaluate themselves. In the context of self-directed or autonomous learning, learners' interests can be maintained depending on whether they find the materials they use interesting and useful (Frankel, 1982; Hughes, 1982).

A scheme for increasing learner autonomy

Encouraging learners to develop autonomy is not just an ideal concept. Developing some degree of autonomy is essential if learners are to become effective language learners. Nunan (1997) argues strongly that autonomous learners are rare and fostering learner autonomy is best done in the language classroom. He outlines a scheme for gradually increasing the degree of autonomy exercised by learners in a programme of learning. The scheme consists of five levels for encouraging learner autonomy ranging from an initial level like raising learner awareness to the highest level of learners becoming fully autonomous.

Level	Learner action	Content	Process
1	Awareness	Learners are made aware of the pedagogical goals and content of the materials they are using.	Learners identify strategy implications of pedagogical tasks and identify their own preferred learning styles/strategies.
2	Involvement	Learners are involved in selecting their own goals from a range of alternatives on offer.	Learners make choices among a range of options.

3	Intervention	Learners are involved in modifying and adapting the goals and content of the learning programme.	Learners modify/adapt tasks.
4	Creation	Learners create their own goals and objectives.	Learners create their own tasks.
5	Transcendence	Learners go beyond the classroom and make links between the content of classroom learning and the world beyond.	Learners become teachers and researchers.

Besides Nunan's scheme, ten techniques suggested by Carver and Dickinson (1982) could also be used in designing materials to promote learner independence. They are self-monitoring, self-correction, variable pacing, group-work, project-work, trouble-shooting sessions, extensive reading and listening, choices of activities, use of pupil teachers and sharing objectives. These techniques can help prepare learners to move towards full autonomy.

Material types

Questions about kinds of materials to be used to enhance learner autonomy have always arisen. Should the course book be retained? Should we retain the course book but supplement it with authentic materials? Should we replace the course book with authentic materials provided by the teacher and/or the learners? Should we use teacher-made materials? These are all acceptable solutions. However, there are some things teachers should bear in mind. Only a few course books designed for promoting learner autonomy are available in the today's market. These books are for teachers to select learner training strategies from, for example, *Teaching How to Learn* (Willing, 1989), *Learning to Learn* (Ellis and Sinclair, 1989) and *The Learning Strategies Handbook* (Chamot et al., 1999). In using these books teachers need to figure out how to integrate learning skills into language lessons. Besides, authentic materials are not designed for pedagogical purposes. A large number of language teachers view authentic texts as linguistically difficult, so they are suitable for only advanced learners. If they are introduced to less advanced learners, they may cause frustration and demotivation. The last alternative, using teacher-made materials, seems to be the most effective one. Nevertheless, designing teaching materials requires both time and lots of effort.

Why task-based materials?

In a task-based syllabus, teaching is not organized around linguistic features of the language being learned but according to some other organizing principle. The content of the teaching is a series of complex and purposeful tasks that the students want or need to perform with the language they are learning. Tasks are generally defined as activities with a purpose which is related to the communication of meanings. In other words, the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose in order to achieve an outcome. Task-based approaches have been developed to provide learners with opportunities to do the tasks actively and to give an environment which promotes the natural language learning process. Examples of tasks are problem-solving, discussions, narratives and information-gap exercises. Despite the first meaning of task including such small-scale activities, some linguistic experts view it as

larger, more meaningful and more authentic units. Skehan (1998) and Watson Todd (1999) explain the characteristics of the meaning of task as follows:

- Meaning is primary.
- There is a communication problem to solve.
- There is a close relationship to the real world.
- Learning is experiential.
- There are no prespecified language points.
- There is a large amount of high quality exposure to English.
- There is thematic coherence.

We can see that for either meaning of 'task', learner-centredness is considered a key concept in task-based learning and teaching. Students are required to apply the cognitive processes of evaluation, selection, combination, modification, or supplementation (so called "higher order thinking skills") (Krahnke 1987: 57). They are provided with chances to choose their own topics to work on. They can manage how to work on their own, and they can evaluate their own work. The teacher's responsibility is to facilitate and support their learning. Similarly, learner-centredness is a basic idea behind the concept of learner autonomy. In a learner-centred classroom, students can choose what they want to learn and how they want to learn. Therefore, task-based materials can be used to promote learner autonomy.

The following are examples of teacher-made materials based on a task-based approach which were designed for the new task-based English Curriculum at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. Some of these materials were newly made but some were adapted from existing commercial materials. They were all designed for undergraduate students who took a basic English course, LNG 111: Basic English for Vocational Graduates. These students were at the pre-intermediate level, and most of them viewed themselves as incapable of learning English. The following are samples of the task-based materials.

Sample 1

Task 1: Identifying your weaknesses I

Level 1: Awareness

- Objectives:
1. To make students aware of the importance of grammar in writing.
 2. To enable students to be able to identify their own weaknesses in grammar.

- Procedures:
1. Students in pairs discuss Thai students' problems in writing English.
 2. Individual students complete a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and compare their answers with their partners.
 3. The teacher discusses the answers with the whole class and finds out the class results about their most grammatical mistakes.

Sample 2

Task 2: Identifying your weaknesses II

Level 2 & 3: Involvement and Intervention

- Objectives:
1. To involve students in making choices from a range of goals, a selection of content and a variety of tasks.
 2. To allow students opportunities to modify and adapt tasks.
 3. To develop students' attitudes towards self-direction and autonomy.

- Procedures:
1. Students read a letter (see Appendix 2) and try to find as many mistakes as they can.

2. Students circle the mistakes and compare them with a partner.
3. The teacher gives each student another handout of the same letter identifying 20 mistakes (see Appendix 3).
4. Individual students correct the mistakes.
5. The teacher hands out the answer keys (see Appendix 4) and students check their answers.
6. Students do self-evaluation (see Appendix 5), set their own goals and choose the grammar points they want to work on.
7. Students work on their own in the Self-Access Learning Centre or use other suggested sources, for example, English grammar books, English grammar software, website categories for grammar on the internet (see Appendix 6).
8. Each student take notes of what he/she has learnt and brings it, together with its original, to the next class.

Sample 3

Task 3: Eliminating your weaknesses

Level 4: Creation

Objective: To encourage students to create their own goals, content and learning tasks.

- Procedures:
1. Students brings a summary of what he/she has learnt and bring it, together with its original, to the class.
 2. Students who work on the same grammar points get together and have a group discussion concerning the forms and uses of the grammar points they have studied.
 3. Students share ideas and write a brief summary of their grammar points and create some exercises.
 4. A representative of each group reports their work to the class.

Sample 4

Task 4: Recording learning experiences

Level 5: Transcendence

Objectives:

1. To foster students in finding their own paths of learning
2. To encourage students to become researchers.

- Procedures:
1. Students are asked to keep a diary of their learning experiences.
 2. Students attend several consultation sessions to discuss their experiences and benefits with the teacher.
 3. At the end of the semester, students are required to write journals explaining what they feel about the tasks and materials and whether they think such tasks and materials could help improve their English and give reasons why or why not.

Students' perceptions of the materials

Evaluation is a very important part of material development process. Therefore, in order to evaluate the task-based materials, post-course students' journals were used to investigate students' attitudes and feelings towards these materials. From the students' journals, it was seen that the students have highly positive attitudes towards them. Some salient themes emerge from their journals.

Firstly, they were highly motivated and active in learning. For example:

"I like it because this task helps students to gain more knowledge and be more active in their learning."

"This task helps improve students' abilities in language learning. Most students seem to be more active in studying English."

Secondly, they were able to direct their own learning, choosing what they wanted to learn and how they wanted to learn. For example:

"This task trains students to be able to learn by themselves."

"This task fosters students to have more interest in self-directed learning."

"It enabled us to know more about English grammar and sentence writing. We could find our strengths and weaknesses and knew how to get rid of our weaknesses."

Thirdly, the students enjoyed searching for information from various sources, such as grammar web sites. For example:

"I have learnt a number of new ways of learning English which are exciting. That makes me want to learn more. It is really fun."

"We can learn English on the internet as there are thousands of web sites from which we can find the information we want. This task makes us know that we can learn English from a lot of resources besides coursebooks."

Finally, some said it was a new way of learning grammar which was very fun, relaxed and less boring than chalk and board. For example:

"This teaching style and techniques made me understand the lessons better than just listening to the lectures. We could use our own thought and ideas that made us understand what the teacher was saying much more deeply. We felt less tense. "

"We knew more about each grammar point. We had to do so many tasks that made us awake and not sleepy. It was better than chalk and board."

From this we can see that learner autonomy can be fostered at any level if teachers play a crucial role in helping learners to find their own paths to attain autonomy.

Conclusion

It is true that the very idea of learner autonomy is a part of the Western cultural tradition. However, this does not mean that it cannot be applied with non-western learners. What we need are sufficient training for both teachers and learners, well-chosen or well-prepared materials that could help promote learner autonomy, and, most of all, support and understanding from institutions, parents and all persons involved.

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Appendix 1

Activity 1: Work in pairs. Discuss Thai students' problems in writing English with your partner. Do you know what the most frequent grammatical mistakes of Thai students are?

Activity 2: Identify your own grammar problems in writing. Put a tick in the boxes provided.

No.	Problems	My answer	Class results
1	Tense		
2	Subject-verb Agreement		
3	Sentence Structure		
4	Article		
5	Active-Passive		
6	Preposition		
7	Adjective		
8	Adverb		
9	Singular/Plural		
10	Punctuation		

Appendix 2

Activity 3: Finding Mistakes

Prangwalai was a student of English in London, where she stayed with the Bennett family. She has now returned home. Read the letter she had written to Mr. and Mrs. Bennett. Her English has improved but there are still a lot of mistakes. How many can you find? Circle the mistakes and compare them with a partner.

825/639 Moo 1
Pracha U-thit Rd.
Bangmod, Thungkru,
Bangkok 10140,
Thailand

Friday 6 September 2001
Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bennett,

I am home now since two weeks, but I have to start work immediately, so this is the first time is possible for me to write. How are you all? Are you busy as usual? Does Andrew still work hard for the exam next month? I am miss you a lot and also all my friends from my English class. Yesterday, I've received a letter from my greece friend, Christina, and she told about some of the other students. She said that Etsuko and Yoshiko will write me from Japan. I am lucky because I made so many good friends during I was in England. It was really interesting for me to meet people from so many countries. I think that we not only improve our English (I hope this!) but we also knew people from all over the world and this is important.

My family are fine. They had a good summer holliday by the lake. We are all very exciting because my brother will get married just before Christmas and we like very much his girlfriend. They have looked for a flat near the city centre but it is no easy to find one. If they won't find one soon they will have to stay here with us.

Please can you check something for me? I can't find my red scarf. I think maybe I left it in the cupboard in my bedroom.

Please write soon. My family send best wishes to you all. I hope I can come back next year. Stay with you was a really wonderful experience for me. Thank you for all things and excuse my mistakes. I already forget so much words.

Love
Prangwalai

Appendix 3

825/639 Moo 1
Pracha U-thit Rd.
Bangmod, Thungkru,
Bangkok 10140,
Thailand

Friday 6 September 2001
Dear Mr. and Mrs. Bennett,

I (1) **am home** now (2) **since** two weeks, but I have to start work immediately, so this is the first time (3) **is** possible for me to write. How are you all? Are you busy as usual? (4) **Does** Andrew still **work** hard for the exam next month? (5) **I am miss** you a lot and also all my friends from my English class. Yesterday, (6) **I've received** a letter from my (7) **greece** friend, Christina, and she (8) **told** about some of the other students. She said that Etsuko and Yoshiko will write me from Japan. I am lucky because I made so many

good friends (9) **during** I was in England. It was really interesting for me to meet people from so many countries. I think that we not only improve our English (I hope (10) **this!**) but we also (11) **knew** people from all over the world and this is important.

My family are fine. They had a good summer (12) **holliday** by the lake. We are all very (13) **exciting** because my brother will get married just before Christmas and we like (14) **very much his girlfriend**. They have looked for a flat near the city centre but it is (15) **no** easy to find one. If they (16) **won't find** one soon they will have to stay here with us.

Please can you check something for me? I can't find my red scarf. I think maybe I left it in the cupboard in my bedroom.

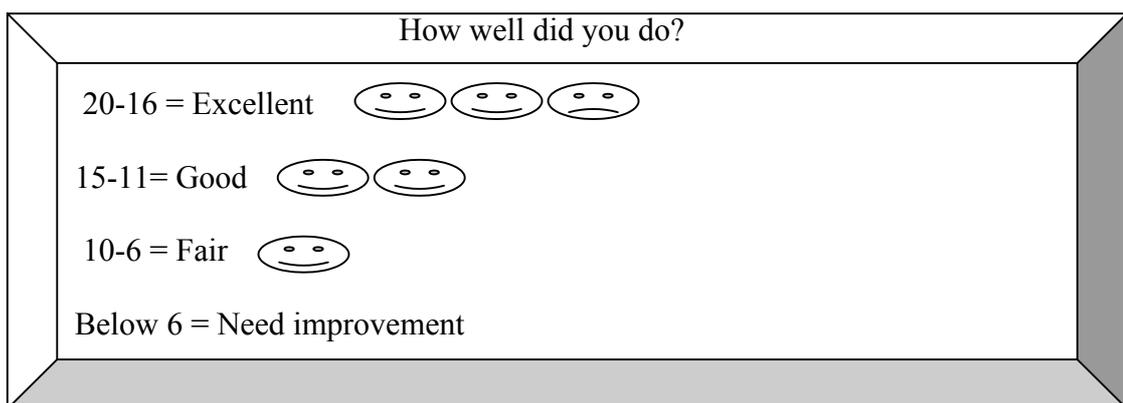
Please write soon. My family send best wishes to you all. I hope I can come back next year. (17) **Stay** with you was a really wonderful experience for me. Thank you for (18) **all things** and excuse my mistakes. (19) **I already forget** so (20) **much** words.

Love
Prangwalai

Appendix 4
Answer Keys

- | | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|
| 1) have been home | 2) for | 3) that it is |
| 4) Is Andrew still working | 5) I miss | 6) I received |
| 7) Greek | 8) told me | 9) while |
| 10) so | 11) got to know | 12) holiday |
| 13) excited | 14) his girlfriend very much | 15) not |
| 16) don't find | 17) Staying | 18) everything |
| 19) I have already forgotten | 20) many | |

Appendix 5



What kind of mistakes have you made? Discuss with a partner what your strengths and weaknesses are.

The following are grammar points of each item that you may want to practice by yourself. Choose one grammatical problem that you think needs to be solved urgently.

You can go to the SALC or use the suggested resources on the next page if you like. Then, write a summary of what you have learnt to the next class.

- If your mistakes are items # 1,2,4,5,6,18 and 19, see \implies Tense.
- If your mistakes are items # 3, see \implies Sentence Structure/ Sentence Fragment.
- If your mistakes are items # 7, see \implies Adjective.
- If your mistakes are items # 8, see \implies Reported Speech.
- If your mistakes are items # 9, see \implies Preposition.
- If your mistakes are items # 10, see \implies Discourse Marker.
- If your mistakes are items # 11 and 18, see \implies Word Selection.
- If your mistakes are items # 12, see \implies Spelling.
- If your mistakes are items # 13, see \implies Participle.
- If your mistakes are items # 14, see \implies Word Order.
- If your mistakes are items # 15, see \implies Negative Sentence
- If your mistakes are items # 16, see \implies Conditional.
- If your mistakes are items # 17, see \implies Gerund
- If your mistakes are items # 20, see \implies Adverb.

Appendix 6

Suggested Resources

- English Grammar Books
- English Grammar Software (available in the SALC)
- Grammar-List Corner in the SALC
- Web sites Categories for Grammar on the internet e.g.
 - <http://www.english-zone.com/>
 - <http://www.eslcafe.com/>
 - <http://www.netsurflerning.com/>
 - <http://www.englishlearner.com/>
 - <http://edunet.com/english/grammar/>
 - <http://www.wordcommand.com/>

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Media Literacy and Language Teaching

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Abstract

Ours is an age of media and information technology, in which the mass media drive our global politics and economy and control our perceptions. Media literacy, or the ability to "read" what is hidden in the media text (both spoken and written) is a very important skill for our learners, especially at the tertiary level, to really understand what is going on around them, and to become independent, critical thinkers in our society. This article gives an example of a newspaper report with bias and shows how a critical reading can be done to reveal the implicit side-taking perspective. It also discusses why media literacy should be incorporated into a language class and how this can be done.

Introduction

In this age we are living in, information, entertainment and education all come to us in a continual bombardment of our perceptive senses by what is now called The Media. Media has always been with us but never with such a conglomerated volume or distinctive identity. In the years before the printing press was invented, books were hand-written and stories were told from mouth to mouth, but they were not meant for mass circulation. The evolution of technology has made it possible for the public to access the same information at the same time at the flick of a switch. Now the media has encompassed all aspects of our lives. It would not be an exaggeration to say the media are now driving our global politics and economy. English-language media, in particular, have become influential not only in our language classrooms or our academic lives but also and perhaps even more in our daily perceptions, beliefs, values and judgements. Most of us, the receivers, however, do not seem to be aware of the power of the media as much as we should be.

Media literacy

The dictionary definition of media is "The main means of mass communication (especially newspapers and broadcasting) regarded collectively" (The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary, 1991, p.901) and literacy is defined as the ability to read and write (The Oxford Encyclopedic English Dictionary 1991, p.839). But when put together, "media literacy" means more than just the ability to read (or write) in terms of the mass media. Here it means the ability to "read" those media, with the word "read" in quotation marks. To "read" is to be able to read both the literal surface meaning and the implied, hidden but usually more significant agenda encoded underneath. And in order to be able to read the latter, it is important that we "develop an informed and critical understanding of the nature of mass media, the techniques used by them, and the impact of these techniques" (Duncan et al., 1989). In other words, we need to be media literate, especially regarding the agenda hidden in the message.

The hidden agenda

But what is this so called hidden agenda in the media? In order to move further, we need first to understand that, contrary to the popular belief, no media are innocent, neutral and objective, containing merely purely literal, factual information. This point should be self-evident in what is known as a tabloid newspaper. But even the more intellectually sophisticated newspaper, what we usually call a broadsheet newspaper, is not completely objective. Under the literal surface content, all media representations embody perspectives or viewpoints about the world. This is why we say that media represent rather than present reality; they are representational means rather than presentational.

Whether or not this embodying process is carried out with conscious intentions is beside the point. The point is that choices and decisions always need to be made in producing media, and in choosing one word over another or one picture over a hundred others, the chooser's perspective is represented. Viewpoints thus manifest themselves on the media page or screen through a variety of choices and decisions made by the people who produce the media (e.g. photographers, reporters, scriptwriters, editors, newspaper owners, directors, sponsors etc.).

To illustrate this point, let us take a news report in a newspaper as an example. In reporting news in a newspaper, the producers will have to make choices and decisions such as:

- What story to report?
- From whose point of view?
- Whose voice(s) should be heard?
- Whose voice(s) should be ignored?
- What words or sentence structures to use for the headline? For the body paragraphs?
- What images to accompany the news items?
- How to edit the draft?
- Where to place the news item?

All these choices and decisions, once made, constitute the embodied perspective or what is called the hidden agenda in the news. An analysis of a real news report may clarify this point.

An example

The following news report is taken from the international news page of The Bangkok Post, March 30, 2001 (p.10). The break down of paragraphs with paragraph numbers up to paragraph 10 is provided for ease of analysis.

Newspaper Report

HEADLINE: *Israel kills Palestinian teens*

SUB-HEADLINE: *Arafat slams strikes, 100-day Sharon plan*

BY-LINE: Gaza City, AFP (Agence France-Presse)

BODY: (first ten paragraphs):

1. [the lead] Israeli troops shot dead two Palestinian teenagers yesterday as fierce clashes erupted in the Gaza Strip a day after Israeli helicopter gunships blasted bases of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Force 17.

2. A third Palestinian, a member of the preventive security forces in the Gaza Strip, was also killed overnight by Israeli forces, the army and Palestinian security forces said.
3. Mr. Arafat condemned the Israeli air strikes, which killed a member of Force 17 and a woman and injured more than 60, as part of a deliberate strategy by Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon against the Palestinians.
4. "The Israeli aggression is the beginning of the 100-day Sharon plan," Mr. Arafat said, referring to Palestinian charges that the hardline Israeli leader has mapped out a plan to crack down against the six-month-old intifada, or uprising.
5. "Whatever they do, we are still here and we will stay here," he said, vowing that the intifada would continue until the Palestinian flag flies over Jerusalem as the capital of an independent state.
6. Dozens of Palestinian youths confronted Israeli troops at the Erez crossing between the northern Gaza Strip after Israel launched air raids on Wednesday in retaliation for a spate of bomb attacks in Israel, the first military strikes by Mr. Sharon's government.
7. A group of about 50 was hurling stones at Israeli forces just a few meters away, shouting: "Israelis out, Israelis out," and setting fire to Israeli flags.
8. Mohammed Salman Abu Shamla, 18, was hit by bullets in the head and the heart when Israeli troops fired live rounds and tear gas at the youths, while Mahmud Khaled Abu Shahada, 15, was shot dead with a bullet to the heart.
9. Another 13 Palestinians were injured, two of them seriously.
10. The army said it had initially fired rubber bullets and tear gas at the demonstrators throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails but used live bullets when a group of youths stormed the Israeli-controlled checkpoint at Erez.

(The Bangkok Post, March 30 2001, p.10)

The news item seems to report the "facts" about the conflict and violence between the Israelis and the Palestinians and the casualties caused by it. "Facts", "reality" and "objectivity" are what we have been taught to find, and expect to see, in a news report like this. However, a more critical reading of the report reveals at least one implicit point of view, that is sympathy for the Palestinians and condemnation of the Israelis. Such side-taking is hidden in the choices of language, both verbal and non-verbal, as well as in other elements.

Choice of words

The use of emotive words, such as *slams*, *fierce clashes*, *erupted*, *blasted*, *crack down*, *vowing*, *air strikes*, *stormed* serves to arouse the readers' emotions, thus rendering the news report more dramatic and colourful. It should be noted that most of these emotive words describe what Israel did to Palestinians, framing the former as a violent, heartless aggressor and the latter as helpless victims. This coincides with the terms

used distinctively and repeatedly to refer to the Palestinians as *teens*, *teenagers*, and *youths* both in the headline and the body of the report.

Choice of sentence structuring

The sentence structuring chosen to describe the incident here is basically the active voice, starting from the headline, which reads - *Israel kills Palestinian teens*, with *Israel* as the clear agent of the action verb *kills* and the *Palestinian teens* as the victim of the action. 'Israel' is presented as an impersonal force. Literally, the word refers to the country. Instead, it is used here to refer to Israeli soldiers involved in the action. The use of the term 'Israel', rather than 'Israeli troops' or 'Israeli soldiers' makes it seem that the entire country of Israel is somehow guilty of the killings. Further on in the ten body paragraphs, we can see more of how sentences are structured. Grouping of subjects / agents together with the action verbs they perform yields the following results:

Israelis as subject / agent

Israeli troops shot dead ...
Israeli helicopter gunships blasted ...
Israeli air strikes, which killed ... and injured ...
Israeli leader has mapped out a plan to crack down ...
Israel launched air raids ...
Israeli troops fired live rounds ...
it (the Israeli army) fired ...

Palestinians as subject / agent

Palestinian youths confronted Israeli troops.
A group of about 50 (Palestinian youths) were hurling stones ..., shouting ..., and setting fire ...
A group of youths stormed the Israeli checkpoint.

In most of these sentences, *Israel* or *Israelis* are depicted as the agent(s) of the violent actions by using the active voice construction. The choice of active / passive structure generally reflects how writers encode their mental image of reality and how they account for their experience of the world in language. The active sentence foregrounds the doer's involvement in the incident whereas the passive empathizes with the receiver of the action (Simpson, 1993). The choice of the active construction therefore implies the agency, the responsibility of the agent as well as the causality. In our case, we can say that by making *Israel* or *Israelis* the agent of these active verbs, the writer implicitly assigns responsibility of the event to Israel and hence condemnation is implied on the country as a whole.

When the passive structure is used, as in paragraph 2:

A third Palestinian ... was also killed overnight by Israeli forces ...

The writer chooses not to delete the agent phrase (introduced with *by*). In this case, the agentless passive (without the *by* phrase) would have rendered the causality and agency unclear and the condemnation considerably weakened (Fairclough, 1989, p.124-125). But the writer chooses to do the opposite, thus making the agency and responsibility even more strengthened on Israel's part.

Choice of quotes

Side-taking is also implied in the use of quotes. Of the ten paragraphs, two contain direct quotes (paragraphs 4 and 5) and one contains an indirect quote (paragraph 3) of the leader of Palestine by name. On the Israeli side, only the army, but not the leader, is indirectly quoted as a collective group. The event, we can conclude, is presented from the Palestinians' perspective rather than from that of the Israelis.

Choice of picture

Last but not least is the choice of photograph to accompany the news body. A popular belief in our culture is that "the camera never lies," therefore photographs present reality. In fact, photographs never present; rather they represent, which means they transform reality through the photographer's choices of what to photograph and how to do it as well as the editor's choice of what photograph to print on the page. They are, therefore, representations of the reporter / editor's opinions or viewpoints on the topic. For this article a picture of a boy was chosen, maybe for the same reason as the choice of the words *teens* and *youths*: children represent innocence, helplessness and vulnerability in most cultures. The picture of the boy is given a comparatively large space on the page not only to attract the readers' attention but mainly to draw their sympathy and again the blame is on the Israeli side.

The analysis of this one news item is probably sufficient to show that news reports are not objective, factual representations of reality. And this is only a small example of the hidden agenda in the media. In the news reports on various international television channels during the recent war in Afghanistan and on the conflict between the US and Iraq, we saw even more hidden agendas, both biased viewpoints and propaganda, in the attempt to gain sympathy, partnership and approval / legitimization from the various countries of the world.

Framing

Our world-views are heavily mediated. In receiving the literal meaning of the news, our views are unconsciously framed by the hidden agenda. This hidden agenda, when received repeatedly at a subliminal level, can exercise great framing power and control over the receiver's perceptions, beliefs, thoughts, opinions and social values. That is, the receivers of the news can easily and unconsciously accept the hidden agenda as their own points of view and use them in making future decisions or value judgements. To understand this point, we only have to ask ourselves how much of what we heard or saw from the media made us side with the US or the Al-Qaeda Group in the Afghanistan War. Or how much do we rely on the media in siding or not siding with minority groups in Thailand when their villages are threatened by dislocation from a dam? We have to admit that the mass media shapes what we see, think, and do. The ability to "read" the hidden agenda or to recognize the framing and the framing devices of the media is therefore a matter of life and death, or of war and peace, because we, as both national and global citizens, will be able to make unbiased, well-informed, balanced and independent decisions or judgements towards all events around us if we are empowered against the control of the media. Being informed, but powerless, is basically useless. And this is precisely what we mean by being media-literate. As Bowen (1996) puts it, "media Literacy seeks to empower citizenship, to transform citizens' passive relationship to media into an active, critical engagement capable of challenging the traditions and structures of the privatized, commercial media culture, and thereby find new avenues of citizen speech and discourse". All this, if included in

a reading class, will bring great benefits to our students as well as our global society. And this is what being “globalized” is all about.

In the classroom

The question to be raised here then is how do we, English language teachers, empower our students? The traditional way of using media material such as a newspaper report in class is for comprehension practice. Activity resource books see newspaper reports as "a medium that lends itself splendidly to strategies fostered in progressive reading programs - skimming, scanning, anticipation, the use of context, vocabulary development, inference and critique" (Fredrickson and Wedel, 1991, p. iii). This aspect of newspaper use has been made popular among English language teachers in Thailand in the past decade. In line with this traditional approach, the *Bangkok Post* report above can have various activities designed to involve learners in scanning for specific information (e.g. Where did the event take place? When? How many casualties?), in making predictions from the headline and the photograph, or in guessing meanings of words from context. General comprehension checking, note-taking and summarizing can also be done on the basis of the literal content of the report. Using newspaper reports to teach or practise these literal reading strategies is not such a bad idea and can be useful for the learners. But is that sufficient? Does teaching reading, especially at the university level, mean only enabling the learners to deal with the literal level of the text, without an awareness of the power of the language and the power of the media, an awareness that eventually will lead the learners to better understand the world around them?

In order to move beyond the literal comprehension level to the hidden agenda, media literacy should be included as one of the objectives of the language program. And that means all languages taught, including Thai, not only English. To the learners, it will be a big step forward because it will help move them "from merely recognizing and comprehending information to higher order critical thinking skills implicit in questioning, analyzing, and evaluating that information" (Considine, 1994). To the teachers, it will be more than just a step forward; it will be rather a paradigm shift because language teaching will no longer be merely the teaching of skills. It will be teaching of, and about, the language itself, i.e. pointing out to students the language's usage, its roles, its functions and its power as well as how language relates to each individual and the society as a whole. Knowledge of language, linguistics, communication, history, geography as well as knowledge of what is happening in the world will be necessary for the teachers and the learners as they analyze and discuss the media.

In a reading class using a newspaper report, teachers may proceed from the literal comprehension level by asking questions surrounding the agenda hidden in a particular news item, indirectly leading the learners through a critical analysis which will reveal what lies beneath. Some examples of such questions are:

- Who is doing the speaking? For what purpose?
- Whose viewpoint is heard? Whose is not heard?
- What and how language (i.e., words, sentence structuring, connectors, quotes, visuals) is chosen to frame the viewpoint?
- How does the camera frame the event?
- Who is benefiting from the report?

- What is our role as readers in identifying with, siding with, or questioning what we see or hear?

Media literacy, in this respect, is very close to some definitions of critical reading. Kurland (2000), for instance, explains that in critical reading, students are asked to accomplish the following goals:

- to recognize an author's purpose
- to understand tone and persuasive elements
- to recognize bias

All of these require analyzing the choices of content and language.

A media literate language classroom then will be different from a simple language skills classroom in the depth of analysis as well as in the depth of questioning and thinking. And once the learners get the grip of it, it will not be so difficult for them to take the role of analyzing and questioning the media themselves. The ability to question and analyze the media will empower the learners and enable them to become independent thinkers and critical members of our society.

Conclusion

Media literacy, or the ability to "read" what is hidden in a media text (both spoken and written), is a very important tool for our learners to better understand what is going on in our media-driven world. Idealistically, it should be incorporated in the teaching and learning of all languages, not only English. But since English language media are probably the most pervasive and the most powerful in the world now, English language media literacy has even more justification to appear in our English language classes. And now that the Office of University Affairs has recently proposed a reform in the Foundation English Language Program in Thai universities throughout the country, this may be the best time for us teachers of English to shift the paradigm and start viewing English language teaching not only as skills-based, literal comprehension activities but also as ways of equipping learners with world awareness.

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A Study of Speed Reading and Comprehension Aided by Prediction, Skimming and Scanning

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Abstract

Speed reading is a method of improving a reader's ability to read and comprehend a text quickly. To help students learn to accelerate their reading, the techniques of prediction, skimming and scanning were employed in this study. The findings show that the use of these techniques improved students' comprehension capabilities. The students in this study expressed positive attitudes towards the development of their skills, both in increasing reading speed and in motivating reading with a purpose.

Introduction

While the relevance of encouraging students to read more quickly may be questioned, observations by a number of researchers have highlighted areas where faster reading not only speeds up the examination of texts, but also assists in maintaining concentration and ultimately promotes comprehension of the text.

In 1990, Wennick Lillian wrote of the association between reading speed and concentration: Increased reading speed is usually accompanied by greater comprehension because reading faster forces the reader to skip unknown and nonessential words. The brain can concentrate better on the general meaning of the text which makes it easier to build up comprehension and retain information.

A further study stated that, when reading faster, the eyes cannot focus on every word; they must focus on groups of words at a time. This makes it much easier for the brain to reconstruct meaning (Mikulecky and Jeffries, 1998: 298). More recently, two researchers have highlighted the link between speed and physical factors associated with comprehension. Faster reading improves the reader's level of concentration because there is less cause for him/her to develop physical tension such as neck pain or a headache (Konstant, 2000). It can also improve the completeness of thought (Kurtus, 2001).

This study acknowledges that speed reading is not suitable for all texts. Poetry, complex technical materials, instruction manuals and other materials are densely constructed and are some examples where slower reading rates may be more suitable.

Before undertaking the study, a questionnaire was devised to ascertain from students the problems they were most likely to encounter when reading. The results of this survey were reinforced through teacher observation. Their major problems were as follows:

- Inadequate vocabulary to understand the text.
- Lack of reading strategies so that they read a passage word by word from start to finish.
- Attempting to aid comprehension by translating every word into Thai.
- Moving a pencil, vocalizing or following the text with their fingers while reading.

All these errors reduced the capacity of students to read faster. The objective of this study, then, was to test the link between specific speed reading techniques in the context of foreign language studies and the application of these strategies in the classroom situation.

Background to the three reading strategies

Either deliberately or subconsciously a reader will normally survey part of a text or illustration prior to actually reading the material in detail. This normal survey process is termed pre-reading. The process of pre-reading activates a number of functions in the reader. These include building an expectation and a desire or recognition of the need to read the text in more detail. Conversely, the reader may be influenced to pass over a particular text without further reading. Pre-reading efficiency is influenced by factors such as personal experience, background knowledge of the topic and other factors such as illustration and text lay out (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1988). Pre-reading may involve prediction, skimming and scanning.

Prediction

Hutchinson and Water (1987: 140) defines prediction as "a matter of using an existing knowledge of a pattern or system in order to anticipate what is likely in a novel situation". The application of prediction to a second language includes knowledge of discourse content, knowledge of the context and any knowledge available of L2 linguistic systems (Anderson and Lynch, 1988). In relation to comprehension, the readers relate what they already know to the new information. As mentioned by Vaughan and Estes (1986: 105), comprehension emerges from an integration of new understanding and prior awareness.

Making predictions about the content of a text can be aided by:

- Read the title of the text and any index or title of contents.
- Look at pictures, captions, illustrations, maps, charts or graphs. These frequently set a context for the subject matter.
- Read headings and subheadings which usually contain key words to help the reader grasp some of the content of the text.
- Examine obvious words in italics or bold print which may give further clues about the content.

Stimulating anticipation and knowledge can be helped by:

- The pre-reading phase of predicting the content of a text.
- Skim through the text, reading the beginning and end of a few paragraphs to further check interest or relevance.

To confirm key predictions, the student can:

- Read the summary, if there is one, to check initial predictions.
- Read the first paragraph to form a general idea about the context of the material.
- Look at some paragraph beginnings to form further ideas about the content of the text.
- Look at chapter summaries or questions at the end of sections to gauge areas of focus, the need for detailed reading and the likely suitability of contents.

Skimming strategies

This is the process whereby a reader reads quickly through a passage without concentrating on the details. According to McWhorter (1987: 55-63), three types of skimming may be employed to build speed.

The first type is “preview skimming”. The aim is to attain a quick impression of a text. A common method of this type of preview skimming is to read the first and last sentences of the first and last paragraph, and the first few lines of other paragraphs.

The second type of skimming is called “overview skimming”. Overview skimming is appropriate if one does not intend to read the material for the second time. It is more thorough than preview reading.

The third type of skimming is “review skimming”. The purpose of review skimming is to go back over material one has already read to review its main points. A good way to develop a general revision is to frame questions in the mind and skim with them as a reference.

McWhorter (1987) introduces the general process of skimming as a basic, step-by-step procedure which can be applied to different types of material. The procedures are as follows:

Read the title: The title contains the overall idea of the material and may give clues about the writer’s approach or attitude towards the subject. There are three major functions of titles. They intend to describe, to interest the reader and to provide an overview of the content of the article.

Read the introductory paragraph: The introductory paragraph often contains significant background information and introduces the subject of the text. There are three major functions of an introductory paragraph. It enhances interest, it provides background information, and finally it establishes a context for the subject.

Read the headings and subheadings: The headings and subheadings form an outline or list of topics covered in the material.

Read the first sentence of each paragraph: Each paragraph usually contains a topic sentence, which states the main idea.

Read the remainder of the paragraph: This strategy allow the reader to quickly glance through the paragraph and pick out words that answer who, what, when, where and how much about the main idea in the paragraph.

Read the title or legend of graphs, charts, or diagrams: The title or legend of graphs, charts, or diagrams may emphasize important events, ideas or relationships.

Read the last paragraph: The last paragraph often gives a conclusion or summary of a passage. It may contain the main points of the entire passage.

Scanning strategies

Scanning is a reading skill that allows the reader to locate specific information quickly and to reinforce comprehension. When scanning the reader has a general idea before beginning the process concerning what sort of information is being sought. The purpose of scanning is to locate specific information (Williams, 1984).

Procedures for scanning include:

- Think of a clue before starting to read. Use clue words based on the ideas you have already generated in your mind, then look for those key words in the text.
- Move your eyes across the paragraphs as quickly as possible until you find the key words (a word or words you want to find).
- Examine the information around the key words in the text and selecting the appropriate information.

Overview of research methodology

In this study, a group of undergraduate students were instructed in the three basic strategies of speed reading and comprehension, while another group of students with similar skills, age and cultural background received no instruction. The reading skills of the two groups were then compared. The students' comprehension, their ability to read an article within a time limit and their attitude towards reading were compared.

Subjects and materials

The subjects in this study were second-year undergraduate English major students. They were all Thai. Their ages ranged from 18 to 20. Both groups of students studied the same course, Reading I. Each class comprised 37 students. They were a homogeneous group because they were the same age and they had passed three compulsory foundation English courses. The first group was given no training (treatment) in reading strategies. The second group was instructed in the three reading strategies discussed above. Group 1 was called the group without treatment. Group 2 was identified as the group with treatment. To comply with class schedules, the morning class comprised Group 1 and the afternoon class made up Group 2. The instruction lasted one hour. The handouts that were used in this study were taken from various newspaper and magazine texts. The researcher selected articles with had the same level of difficulty. Comprehension questions for each exercise were composed by the author.

Research instruments

In order to evaluate if the techniques of making prediction, skimming and scanning were of benefit in overcoming the reading obstacles identified by the students, along with helping reading speed and comprehension, the two groupings of students received different treatment. The following research instruments were used:

Reading comprehension exercise: The five reading comprehension exercises which the students did while reading the passage were used as one source of data to test students reading comprehension. Each exercise had similar types of questions, which were the commonly identified wh- questions with four multiple-choice answers. The comprehension questions for each exercise aimed to test the students' abilities to use prediction, skimming and scanning strategies to understand the general idea of the reading passages. Multiple-choice answers were selected to ensure that students spent the majority of their time reading rather than writing answers. The time limit for

students to read the text and do the exercise was 15 minutes. The number of correct answers was used to measure of the level of the students' reading comprehension. The mean score provided information on students' reading abilities to comprehend the material.

The questionnaire: A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was used to obtain students' reaction towards using prediction, skimming and scanning strategies to help them improve their speed reading and comprehension. The questionnaire was distributed to the students after each experimental teaching session. There were four questions: Question 1 sought the students' opinions on the effectiveness of using the strategies. Questions 2 and 3 were concerned with students' attitudes towards prediction, skimming and scanning strategies and the problems they encountered. Question 4 asked the students to indicate whether they could finish reading the passage within the time limit.

The semi-structured interview: To provide further support, eighteen students were randomly selected for interviews at the end of the experiment. Students were asked for their opinions on whether the prediction, skimming and scanning strategies could develop their comprehension and speed reading and whether they liked the prediction, skimming and scanning strategies.

Instructional procedures

According to the class schedule, the morning class (Group 1) underwent the experiment without treatment and the afternoon class (Group 2) underwent the experiment with treatment. An example of the procedure was as follows:

Stages	Group 1	Group 2
1. Teacher pre-taught new vocabulary from the reading passage.	✓	✓
2. Teacher introduced the prediction strategy by asking students to look at pictures, read headings and make predictions about the content of the text.	×	✓
3. Teacher introduced skimming by asking students to read the title, the introduction, subheadings, italicized marginal notes and conclusion.	×	✓
4. Teacher asked the students to scan the text in order to obtain specific information.	×	✓
5. Teacher asked the students to read the article and do the exercise.	✓	✓
6. Students completed the questionnaire.	✓	✓
7. Teacher interviewed the students.	✓	✓

Note: An example of how the strategies were taught is outlined in Appendix 2.

Findings from the application of the three research instruments

Data from the reading comprehension exercises

Five reading exercises or units (see Appendix 3) were read by both groups of students in the allocated time limit of 15 minutes. To reiterate, Group 1 had received no instruction in speed reading strategies, while Group 2 had been instructed.

Comprehension was measured by the number of correct answers from each group, relating to each of the five reading units. Then the mean values obtained from the two groups were calculated for each exercise, as presented in Table 1.

Unit	1	2	3	4	5
Group 1 (control)	6.02	6.48	7.16	5.16	7.21
Group 2 (experimental)	8.89	9.00	9.08	7.94	9.28

Table 1 The mean values for the five exercises for the two groups.

From the mean-value of each exercise presented in Table 1, the mean-value of the five units of the two groups with and without treatment were calculated as follows:

Experiment	Group	Number of students	Mean	S.D.	T-value	
Unit 1	1	37	6.02	0.927556	- 12.27 (p<0.05)	*
	2	37	8.89	1.074549		
Unit 2	1	37	6.48	0.960949	-11.18 (p<0.05)	*
	2	37	9.00	0.971825		
Unit 3	1	37	7.16	0.957819	-7.94 (p<0.05)	*
	2	37	9.08	1.115008		
Unit 4	1	37	5.16	0.986394	-14.23 (p<0.05)	*
	2	37	7.94	0.664411		
Unit 5	1	37	7.21	1.003747	-9.44 (p<0.05)	*
	2	37	9.27	0.862768		

Table 2 Comparison of the mean values relating to reading comprehension.

Table 2 shows that the mean values recorded from the five units of reading is higher in Group 2 (with treatment) than the values recorded in Group 1 (without treatment). The T-tests on the mean values of the two groups show significant differences. We can posit from the results that speed reading techniques can help students comprehend texts more easily within a limited time. It should be noted that the mean values of the two groups for Unit 4 – "Do Mobile Phones Makes You Stupid?" – was lower than the mean value of other units. Students said that they did not have any background knowledge about the content of this topic, so it was quite difficult for them to understand the reading passage. Moreover, there were many technical terms in the text that they did not know, and this may have been a contributor to the lower result for this unit.

Data from the questionnaire

In the first three questions, students were asked about their attitudes towards using speed reading aided by prediction, skimming and scanning. Those from the treated group expressed favorable attitudes. Some quotes from students are as follows.

"It helps me to read faster because I don't need to read and understand every word but I try to guess the meaning from the context and ignore unknown words."

"I have some knowledge about this topic (First Aid Treatment) so it is very easy for me to read and understand the passage."

"I think that the reading passage about "Burnout" is very interesting and I want to know more information about it. Therefore, I pay more attention to read it."

"I liked the article about scuba diving because I can scuba dive, so I read it attentively to find more information."

"As I have to practice reading the article nearly every period with the time limit for 15 minutes, I think I spend less time in reading than before."

An example of the difficulties all the students found with the technical language in unit 4 is expressed in this quote:

"There is too much difficult vocabulary in this passage. (Do Mobile Phones Make You Stupid?). I don't know what it means and I can't guess the meaning from the context."

Question 4 was designed to measure the percentage of students who were able to finish each reading unit and complete the accompanying exercise with the time limit of 15 minutes. Findings are shown in Table 3.

Experiment	Group	Percentage of students who could finish within the time limit	Percentage of students who could not finish within the time limit
Unit 1	1	67.56 %	32.43 %
	2	89.18 %	10.81 %
Unit 2	1	70.27 %	29.72 %
	2	91.89 %	81.08 %
Unit 3	1	75.67 %	24.32 %
	2	100.00 %	0.00 %
Unit 4	1	59.75 %	40.54 %
	2	83.78 %	16.21 %
Unit 5	1	81.08 %	18.91 %
	2	100.00 %	0.00 %

Table 3 Comparison of reading speeds between group 1 (without treatment) and group 2 (with treatment)

Table 3 shows the students in group 2 (with treatment) could read the passages more quickly than the students in group 1 (without treatment). In all five reading units the percentage of students from group 2 completing the reading and the exercises within the time limit is higher than the percentage for group 1. We can posit that prediction, skimming and scanning can assist students' skills in reading texts within a limited time.

The data from the semi-structured interviews

The results of the semi-structured interviews showed that most students had positive attitudes towards the strategies of speed reading. Students in the treated group identified the strategies taught to them as useful strategies which enabled them to improve their reading comprehension while also developing their speed reading ability. The following are some quotes from students' attitudes towards using speed reading aided by prediction, skimming and scanning strategies:

"Pre-reading questions can activate my background knowledge of the subject. I try to assimilate the knowledge that I already know with the new knowledge in order to make sense of the text."

"Pre-reading questions can stimulate my interest in the topic and it alerts me to make predictions and to check my predictions."

"I like the pre-reading phrase when the teacher asks me to look at the picture, read the title and make predictions. I think it is a good technique and it is very interesting. It motivates me to read the article with a purpose."

"I like the way the teacher teaches us to find key words from the reading passage. Key words really help me to get the general idea of what the passage is about and the method helps me to read and understand the passage more quickly."

Discussion and practical applications

The data obtained from all three sources indicate that speed reading aided by prediction, skimming and scanning facilitated the students' abilities to comprehend the texts and to read faster. In the researcher's view, these proved in the study to be useful techniques in helping the students in the treated group to understand reading passages more quickly and easily.

It is acknowledged that the results collated from this study prove only short-term effects of the application of speed reading and comprehension techniques. Long-term sustainability could not be measured. However, there is a probability that once students are convinced of the benefits of the techniques, at least some will continue to apply and further develop their reading skills in this way.

From the qualitative data presented above, there appear to be three key factors influencing the ability to read and comprehend quickly:

1. Background knowledge

Background information about the themes of the reading passage can help the students develop understanding and give them a chance to make predictions when they read. This is an indicator that background knowledge facilitates the learning and retention of new material. As stated in Nunan (1985), "the familiarity with the content and background knowledge of the topic has an important effect on levels of comprehension".

From the reading comprehension exercise results, the mean score of Unit 3 – "First Aid Treatment" – measured from the two groups was very high because the students had some background knowledge of the content of the reading. Thus, they could read and understand the passage more quickly and easily. Irwin (1986: 102) states that, "comprehension simply cannot take place when nothing is already *known* because then there is nothing to which the readers can link the *new*". Also, it can be inferred that using prior knowledge could guide students' understanding.

Both the literature and my observations reinforce the fact that it is important for the teacher to recognize that students may need a degree of background in a topic in order to read quickly and with comprehension. Activating students' background knowledge, before reading about a specific topic, will be beneficial in the way that it puts them on the right track from the beginning.

2. Knowledge of vocabulary

The results from the questionnaire and the mean value for Unit 5 – “Do Mobile Phone Make You Stupid” - indicate that knowledge of vocabulary is also important as a factor in reading. When students are faced with difficult vocabulary, they have to struggle to understand the meaning of the sentences. This makes it more difficult for them to get the meaning from the text. Nevertheless, the study demonstrates that in order to enhance reading comprehension, teachers need to determine which words the students need to know, pre-define these words and introduce techniques that can help students develop their vocabulary. The more vocabulary the students know, the faster the students are able to read and understand the text.

3. Motivation

To help to prepare the students for the reading exercises in this study, the teacher asked questions about the main topic to focus the students' attention and to require them to make predictions about the subject matter in the text. From the study it was noted that students who made predictions and who were actively involved in the topic later paid more attention in reading the text in search of additional and specific information. The need to check their predictions motivated the students to read with a purpose and, when they had a specific purpose in reading, they found concentration easier. According to observations in the study, motivating the students to read also aided their concentration. This, in turn, made understanding easier and quicker. Butler (1986) states that motivation and concentration are important factors in comprehension.

Conclusion

Speed reading techniques, namely, prediction, skimming and scanning, helped the students in this study achieve reading comprehension within a limited time frame. This improvement was demonstrated when the reading skills of students who had received specific instruction were compared to the skills obtained from a matching group of students who had not received instruction in the techniques. The research also suggests that general background knowledge, existing or pre-taught knowledge of vocabulary and teacher-stimulated or background enthusiasm about a reading topic, influenced the students' abilities to read and understand a text quickly and easily. It may be concluded that the application of the speed reading techniques can help students to read attentively and purposefully. The positive responses recorded from those students who used these techniques may be regarded as an indicator that at least some regard the methods taught and tested as useful skills.

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Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Mr. Bart Kirby, who was willing to dedicate his time to the discussion and revision of the ambiguous points.

Appendix 1: The questionnaire

The purpose of this form is to understand your attitudes towards a study of speed reading and comprehension aided by prediction, skimming and scanning. The information obtained will be useful for improving the teaching.

Date _____ Group 1
 Unit _____ Group 2

Instructions: Please complete the information

1. Can prediction, skimming and scanning strategies help you comprehend the reading text? If yes, in what way? If not, please explain.

2. Do you like prediction, skimming and scanning strategies?

2.1 The reasons that you like these strategies.

2.2 The reasons that you don't like these strategies.

3. Problems that you encounter in making predictions, skimming and scanning.

4. Could you finish reading the passage and doing the exercise within 15 minutes?

Yes No

Appendix 2: An example of teaching procedures

Unit 5 (Burnout).

Objective: To develop students' ability to comprehend the main idea of a reading passage using prediction, skimming, and scanning strategies.

Anticipated problems:

Students will try to read every word instead of skimming for main idea and scanning for specific information.

Solutions:

Set a time limit which makes it impossible to read every word. Elicit from class a strategy which will allow them to grasp the main idea of the passage within the allowable time (skimming).

For example:

T: Is it possible to read every word of this passage in three minutes?

Ss: No

T: Well, then, how can we find the main idea of the passage without reading every word? What part should we read first?

Ss: First paragraph because that's where the main ideas are.

T: OK. What's this called?

Ss: Skimming

T: How can we find specific information?

Ss: Read questions to find key words.

T: Move your eyes across the paragraphs as quickly as possible until you find the key words. Then examine the information around the key words in the text. Then you will get the answer. What is this called?

Ss: Scanning.

Appendix 3: Sample reading comprehension exercise

Unit 5: When Work Gets To Be Too Much

1. If you hate your job, you may be in burnout - - physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion. Here's the good news.

2. What happens when motivated, committed, bright people choose a career because it promises a lifetime of satisfaction, and to give their lives meaning - - only to find several years later that the stress seems to be unrelenting? These top performers are prime candidates for burnout.

3. Burnout is physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long - term involvement in stressful and emotionally demanding situations, combined with high personal expectations for one's performance. It happens when work loses its meaning, and the ratio of stress to rewards leans heavily toward stress.

4. Some theorists contend that all jobs have three stages - - which they call the "learn - do - teach" cycle of work. In the first stage, you learn your job - - the skills, tasks, demands, and politics of a job function. This period is typically very stressful, but people handle the stress well because they are challenged and excited by the new job. They feel rewarded by seeing the results of their growing mastery of the position. The length of time they stay at this stage is determined by the complexity of the job, the knowledge they have, and the available learning and support sources.

5. Then they move into the “do” phase - - they “just do it” every day and feel a sense of satisfaction in getting the job done well. If the rewards are adequate, and stress and frustration are kept to tolerable levels, people can stay in this part of the cycle for a very long time.

6. Eventually you learn all that you can about your job. It becomes important for you to pass on your knowledge and skills to others - - to teach - - so that you can move on to something else, learn something new, and repeat the learn - do - teach cycle with all of its excitement and rewards.

7. If you are prevented from moving on to learning new things, or if stress and frustration continue at high levels, the symptoms of burnout can creep into your working life.

8. Sometimes the symptoms of burnout can be missed and attributed to other situating stresses or life changes. But close examination reveals the three sides to burnout:

9. Physical exhaustion. It is characterized by fatigue, nausea, muscle tension, changes in eating and sleeping habits, and generally a low energy level. Probably the first symptom most sufferers notice is a general malaise with no apparent cause. Sometimes people say, “I don’t know, I just get so tired by lunch or early afternoon.”

10. Emotional exhaustion. This is expressed as feeling frustrated hopeless, trapped, helpless, depressed, sad and apathetic about work. People say they feel that their “soul is dying” or report frequently feeling irritated or angry for no specific reasons. The scariest part is when they just don’t care anymore about parts of their job that were really important to them earlier in the cycle.

11. Mental exhaustion. Sufferers are dissatisfied with themselves, their jobs, and life in general, while feeling incompetent or inferior - - even though they are not any of those things. Over time, mental exhaustion causes people to see customers, clients, or colleagues as sources of irritation and problems rather than as challenges or opportunities. They also tend to believe that there is something wrong with themselves because the work that once gave them such pleasure has gone stale. Then they add self - blame to the mental exhaustion.

12. It is important to understand two things about burnout. First of all, the root cause does not lie within the person suffering from it. The biggest cause is a dysfunctional work environment that permits unrelenting levels of stress, frustration, and pressure for long periods of time, yet offers few rewards to people for putting up with all of that.

13. Second, if we subscribe to the learn - do - teach cycle theory, there is the potential that burnout can occur several times during our working lives - - as we master each new job function we are given.

14. To conquer burnout, there are two fronts for attack. First take a hard look at the work environment. chronic work overload, dead - end jobs, excessive red tape and paperwork, poor communication and feedback, lack of rewards, and absence of a support system are all major contributors to burnout.

15. Second, because we all will go throughout the learn - do - teach cycle several times during our working lives, we can employ coping strategies to counteract an unhealthy work environment:

16. Understand your personal work and stress reaction styles. If we work to understand our reactions more completely, we can learn to identify behavior patterns that are no longer working effectively. Thus, we can go about changing those patterns.

17. Reassess your values, goals and priorities. Unrealistic career goals lead to frustration and disillusionment. Most of us set vague career goals for ourselves early in our lives, and we never stop to see if they are still appropriate. We may be operating under goals that no longer make sense for us, or priorities that are not important anymore. Take a good look at what you want, where you are going, and how to get there.

18. Compartmentalize your life. Segment the different parts of your life: work, home, community, and so on. Focus on each compartment when you are in it; don't think about it when you move on to another compartment. For example, immerse yourself totally in your job when you are at work, but leave it behind when you head for home. People who let work and non - work stresses overlap tend to have higher rates of burnout.

19. Build a social support system. We need many kinds of friends and colleagues. We need people who: will listen to us vent our words, thoughts, and actions; are knowledgeable in our field and can give us honest praise and criticism when we need it; will back us no matter what; share our interests, values, views, and priorities; and provide us with a reality check when things get crazy.

20. If you think you are experiencing burnout, take heart. It does not have to be devastating; it can be growth - promoting. You can survive and come out happier, healthier, and stronger. Burnout is simply an opportunity for change, and it is up to you to take advantage of it.

Source: Leatz, Christine A. and Stolar, Mark W. 1994

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Choose the best answer.

1. This passage is about
 - a. stress
 - b. burnout
 - c. bad working conditions
 - d. overworking
2. Burnout is.....
 - a. motivation, commitment and satisfaction
 - b. dissatisfaction
 - c. physical, emotional and mental exhaustion
 - d. stress and demands
3. According to the article, which of the following statements is not true?
 - a. Burnout is caused by long-term stress and emotional demands
 - b. High personal expectation can be a cause of burnout
 - c. Stress and frustration are interrelated
 - d. When work loses its meaning, stress may increase
4. Theorists divided jobs into three stages. Which stage is considered to be the most stressful, but people handle the stress well?
 - a. Learning
 - b. Doing
 - c. Teaching
 - d. All of the three stages
5. What is usually the first symptom noticed by sufferers of burnout?
 - a. Changes in eating and sleeping habits
 - b. Sleeplessness
 - c. General malaise, with no apparent cause
 - d. Muscle tension
6. What is the most frightening symptom for people who suffer from emotional exhaustion?
 - a. They feel permanently frustrated
 - b. They feel alienated from their job
 - c. They worry about overworking
 - d. They don't care about the job that used to be important to them

7. A sufferer from mental exhaustion is usually dissatisfied with
 - a. his / her home life
 - b. bias shown by his / her boss
 - c. everything in general in his / her life
 - d. his / her working environment
8. Which of the following is not a major contributory factor to burnout?
 - a. Chronic disease
 - b. Poor communication skills
 - c. Absence of a system of support
 - d. Excessive red tape and paperwork
9. Which of the following categories are most susceptible to burnout?
 - a. People who work hard
 - b. People who work to deadlines
 - c. People who work mostly at home.
 - d. People who let work and non-work related stresses overlap
10. What is the author's attitude towards burnout?
 - a. A devastating experience
 - b. A disadvantageous experience
 - c. An opportunity for change
 - d. An opportunity for promotion

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A Study of Upper and Lower Secondary School Students' Difficulties with Language in Using the Internet for Independent Learning

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Abstract

This action research aims to examine how language influences secondary school learners' Internet use. It also compares the findings between different levels of secondary school students in terms of linguistic difficulties, learners' level of interest, and their process of learning. The subjects were five M.2 learners and four M.5 learners at Surasakmontree School. The two groups participated in a small-scale project using the Internet for retrieving information of their own interest. Follow-up questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data. The information obtained from the study indicated that lower level students had more difficulty concerning vocabulary and background knowledge. However, learners' level of interest, needs of psychological and methodological preparation and their process of learning were not much different. The findings reveal that the learners can make use of information technology with proper support from the teacher to serve their individual learning purpose.

Background of the study

According to the National Education Act of 1999 (chapter 4: section 22), educational institutes are mandated to co-operate in carrying out the following policy:

"Education shall be based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and are regarded as being most important. The teaching and learning process shall aim at enabling the learner to develop themselves at their own pace and to the best of their potentiality."

(Office of the National Education Commission, 1999: 10)

From this policy learners will receive chances and choices to learn on their own and there is a need to encourage the learners to develop themselves to be autonomous learners. To enhance the practicality of this policy, technology for education plays a vital role as shown in the excerpt below:

"Learners shall have the right to develop their capabilities for utilization of technologies for education as soon as feasible so that they shall have sufficient knowledge and skills in using these technologies for acquiring knowledge themselves on a continual lifelong basis."

(Office of the National Education Commission, 1999: 28)

As aforementioned, learners should get more support in terms of technologies from the educational institutions to gain more learning benefits so as to retrieve information for their study as well as their lifelong learning purposes. Surasakmontree School, therefore, provides Internet facilities to encourage learners to learn independently. Since the researchers have been interested in the field of resource-based learning that aims to promote learners accessing learning on their own with the teacher as a facilitator or counselor, this study was conducted to see how both lower and upper levels of secondary school learners utilized the Internet for independent learning. Banditvilai (2000) claims that the Internet provides a kind of electronic reading material that can give learners greater exposure to English and involve them more in their learning. Moreover, Gardner and Miller (1996) report that the Internet is one form of self-access learning which encourage learners to be active by increasing their control over their learning process, decreasing their dependency on the teacher, and developing their sense of responsibility. In addition, this study also aims to examine how the students deal with language difficulties or any other factors involved during their Internet use and whether there was any difference between their needs for psychological and methodological preparation.

Research procedures

There were 2 groups of subjects chosen from 57 M.2 (second year of lower secondary school equivalent to grade 8) students and 67 M.5 (second year of upper secondary school equivalent to grade 11) students based on three conditions. Firstly, they had received training in computer use offered by the school. Secondly, they were familiar with Internet use. And finally, they had good grades in English courses. Eventually, 5 subjects from M.2 and 4 subjects from M.5 level were chosen. Both groups of subjects were asked to select a topic of their interest. It came out that M.2 subjects' topic was "animal" whereas M.5 subjects were interested in "western music". Then examples of widely used search engines as well as names of websites were introduced to each group of subjects separately. After that the subjects were asked to surf at least 6 websites to get information about their topic either at the school Internet room or at their own places. After they finished surfing and gained enough information about the selected topic, they needed to summarize the main idea of the texts they had read. Then each subject was asked to fill in a questionnaire consisting of 2 main parts (see Appendix). In the first part, the subjects were asked to rate the difficulty of the site they liked most in terms of language. In the second part of the questionnaire, the subjects were asked to reveal how they dealt with difficulties of language and background knowledge as well as their primary reading strategy.

The subjects' responses to Part I of the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of mean scores which were interpreted as follows.

4.21 to 5.00	=	Extremely
3.41 to 4.20	=	A lot/Very
2.61 to 3.40	=	Fairly/Somewhat
1.81 to 2.60	=	Not much
1.00 to 1.80	=	Not at all

In Part II of the questionnaire, the subjects' responses to each item were calculated using percentages. Finally, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the subjects individually. The qualitative data from the interview were categorized under similar themes to support the data from the questionnaire.

Findings

The responses of the two groups of the subjects to the first part of the questionnaire were compared and are shown in Table 1.

What They Think about the Site	M.2 subjects	M.5 subjects
	\bar{X}	\bar{X}
1. How did you like this site?	4.00	4.00
2. How relevant is this site to your interests?	3.60	4.00
3. How difficult was this site in terms of grammar?	4.00	4.00
4. How difficult was this site in terms of content?	3.80	4.00
5. How difficult was this site in terms of vocabulary?	4.00	4.00
6. How familiar were you with the content provided in this site?	2.80	3.00
7. How attractive was this site?	3.40	3.00
8. How informative was this site?	4.60	4.00
9. How much new information did you learn from the site?	4.40	5.00
10. Would you still use the Internet for further project work?	4.60	4.00

Table 1 Results of questionnaire part I

As can be seen from the table, the answers of the two groups of the subjects are similar. Both groups indicated that the selected site was very favorable, relevant to their interest, informative and they learned a lot of new information from it. Furthermore, there is a high tendency that they would use the Internet for their independent learning in the future. They felt fairly familiar with the information provided and they rated the site as somewhat attractive. However, with respect to language, both groups had a lot of difficulty with grammar, vocabulary, and content.

To find out how the subjects solved the difficulties in their Internet use concerning grammar, vocabulary, content, background knowledge as well as their reading strategies, the responses to Part II of the questionnaire were categorized and presented in percentages. Table 2 shows how each respondent dealt with difficulties in vocabulary:

How the Respondents Dealt with Unknown Vocabulary	M. 2	M.5
• Look up in a dictionary	100%	75%
• Guess meaning from contextual clues	100%	75%
• Others (Please specify.)	80%	25%
• Ignore it	0%	0%

Table 2 How the subjects dealt with unknown vocabulary

It can be seen that all respondents' primary decision-making to deal with difficult vocabulary is looking up the meaning of unknown words from both paper-printed and online dictionaries. In addition, guessing the meaning from the context to assist them to understand the text more easily was another major consideration by all respondents. To tackle unknown words, 80 percent of M.2 respondents and 25 percent of M5 subject consulted with friends and family. The findings from the interview suggest that the students need more support concerning word-tackling techniques.

To the question of how the two groups dealt with grammar, their answers were compared and are shown in Table 3.

How the Respondents Dealt with Grammar	M. 2	M.5
• Try to understand the structure	80%	0%
• Try to guess meaning from the form	40%	75%
• Others (Please specify)	20%	25%
• Ignore it	0%	0%

Table 3 How the subjects dealt with grammar

The data reveal that the two groups of subjects were very concerned about grammar as none of them ignored it. While the majority of M.2 subjects tried to understand the structure, most M.5 subjects tried to guess the meaning from the form. A minority of both groups indicated that they asked for help from their teachers or their parents. The upper level could work out the relation between form and meaning to comprehend what they were reading more than the lower level. Both groups of respondents accepted in the interview that grammar had a great effect on their learning process.

Regarding content, the subjects' responses are presented below in Table 4.

How the Respondents Dealt with Content	M. 2	M.5
• Look for the main idea	60%	0%
• Read all the information to get the detail	60%	50%
• Just look through	20%	50%
• Others (Please specify)	20%	25%

Table 4 How the subjects dealt with content

It can be seen that most M.2 respondents dealt with content by looking for the main idea, and reading for detail whereas half of M.5 respondents looked through the text or

read for detail. Only one M.2 subject dealt with the difficulties by selecting only interesting and easy content whereas one M.5 respondent tried to find new information that interested him. The data gained indicate that the subjects needed various reading strategies to cope with difficulties with content. This point is supported in the interview as all respondents said that they would have had less difficulty if they had better reading skills.

It is then interesting to see what the subjects did if they did not have sufficient background knowledge about the text they were reading as presented in Table 5.

How the Respondents Dealt with a Lack of Background Knowledge	M. 2	M.5
• Guess from the context	100%	100%
• Guess from the graphics	60%	0%
• Others (Please specify)	40%	0%

Table 5 How the subjects dealt with a lack of background knowledge

Table 5 reveals that all respondents tackled the problem of lacking the background knowledge by guessing from the context. 60 percent of the M.2 respondents clarified that graphics could help their guessing to some extent while none of the M.5 subjects made use of graphics. The other M.2 respondents tried to find some unknown words from dictionary and skipped some unfamiliar or colloquial words. However, from the semi-structured interview, three of the M.2 respondents agreed that existing knowledge played a vital role in their interest and motivation. Only one subject said that she would continue reading and expected that she would comprehend the whole text later on. On the other hand, all M.5 respondents said that they would read the text even though they lacked prior knowledge if the text was very interesting.

Table 6 presents what strategies the two levels of subjects employed while they were reading.

The Respondents' Primary Reading Strategies	M. 2	M.5
• Skim for the main ideas	80%	50%
• Read all of it to get the details	40%	75%
• Others (Please specify)	40%	25%
• Scan for only interesting points	20%	50%

Table 6 The subjects' primary reading strategies

The results reveal that lower level subjects use skimming, reading for detail and scanning respectively. On the other hand, the strategy employed by most M5 subjects was reading for detail, while either skimming or scanning was used by half of them. Another alternative for M2 level was selecting a text with not too many difficult words. Only one respondent of each group read the text again and again until they understood it.

Being asked in the interview about their choice of primary reading strategy, all subjects varied it according to their purpose of reading.

Implications and recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that the Internet is a useful resource for both lower and upper secondary school students. This point is in agreement with the findings of research conducted by Banditvilai (2000) that the Internet gives Thai learners greater exposure to English and involve them more in their learning. Gardner and Miller (1996) also view the Internet as a resource for self-access learning since it encourages learners to be active by increasing their control over their sense of responsibility. As Sheerin (1989) reports, the most necessary language skill for independent learning is reading. This is because learners can access knowledge of the world, both about the language and about other subjects. Moreover, Gillet and Temple (2000) explain that reading has truly become the main vehicle for learning. They mean that the more learners read, the more they can find reading to enhance both enjoyment and usefulness. However, the data gained reveal that the students need support from the teacher to enable them to exploit this resource as effectively as possible. In other words, the students need both psychological preparation to gain self-confidence as well as methodological preparation to acquire the ability and techniques needed to undertake self-instruction (Dickinson, 1987).

Psychological preparation involves changing learners' attitude to persuade them that they have ability to be actively independent in their learning and to take their responsibility for learning on their own. Although the learners are highly motivated regarding Internet use and computer literate, they still need some psychological preparation to be tolerant of their own frustration due of the difficulties with language.

As revealed previously in the findings, the subjects at each level consulted a dictionary or turned to their parents or friends. Depending too much on dictionaries or human resources could demotivate them to some extent. They have to be patient about what they do not know in reading and try to tackle those problems by themselves. Therefore, teachers should train learners to be aware of their learning purposes and not to be distracted by irrelevant information. In addition, learners also have to be trained to be patient while reading an unfamiliar text. Guessing the meaning from the context clue or ignoring the word may be useful to reduce their anxiety. For this reason, it is the teachers' responsibility to increase their learners' confidence and positive attitudes towards their reading to learn.

Methodological preparation is concerned with preparing learners to undertake the actual tasks of language learning. This kind of preparation includes both strategy training and learner support or guidance for useful resources that the students can access by themselves.

Strategy training is a kind of scaffolding for learners to troubleshoot problems that occur. To be able to do this the learners need to be equipped with both learning strategies and language skills.

Learning strategies include all the strategies that encourage greater overall self-direction for learners as they use the language outside the classroom (Oxford, 1990: 10) In this situation, for instance, the learners always looked up unknown words from

printed and online dictionaries. It might be possible that they had chosen the website which is above their level and thus they should be trained to select the website which is suitable for their own level to reduce their anxiety and increase their confidence. Besides they can be trained to set definite learning objectives in order that they can ignore irrelevant information which may distract them from their main focus.

Language skills needed particularly in a situation like this study are reading strategies, vocabulary skills, dictionary skills as well as grammar and structure which can be practised outside class via the material of the students' choice. No matter where they practice, the learners should be trained to identify their own strength and weakness in each skill, and for this study particularly reading. The teacher can also encourage the students to get a study buddy to share their learning difficulties and help each other to solve the problems. For example, they may learn that they do not need to turn to the dictionary every time they come across new words if they learn to make use of collocation, affixes, context clues, visual support and knowledge of the world. In addition, they can collect a file of interesting texts that can be used to illustrate how those new words are used meaningfully in authentic texts. The ideas mentioned previously might be new to some students especially at the lower level who need more guidance and support from the teachers and the school.

Learner support or guidance can be provided in several forms such as project work proposed by Fried-Booth (1989) which offers opportunities for the students to use their language skills in a new and challenging way. Concerning leaning English via Internet, the teacher can classify and gather various useful websites which are proper for the students' level of proficiency with reference to particular skills.

The students should be reminded that they may need to have some background knowledge to retrieve information from some websites since it is a crucial factor that affects their understanding of the whole text (Gillet and Temple, 2000). Besides the problem with background knowledge, the students may need reference resources for all content-and language-related matters (Ribe and Vidal, 1993).

To sum up, with proper support and guidance both in terms of language and content, the Internet is one of the variety of resources for language learning which should be recommended to all levels of learners.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Part I: Rate selected web site for English Project Work in the space provided.

Each scale has the following meaning:

Rating scale:

- 5 – Extremely
- 4 – A lot/Very
- 3 – Fairly/Somewhat
- 2 – Not much
- 1 – Not at all

Statements	Your selected web site
1. How did you like this site?	
2. How relevant is this site to your interests?	
3. How difficult was this site in terms of grammar?	
4. How difficult was this site in terms of content?	
5. How difficult was this site in terms of vocabulary?	
6. How familiar were you with the content provided in this site?	
7. How attractive was this site?	
8. How informative was this site?	
9. How much new information did you learn from this site?	
10. How would you still use the Internet for your further project work?	

Part II: Please place a mark (/) in the boxes to clarify the way you dealt with the following issues. You can choose more than one answer. If you use any other strategies than those stated above, please write them down on Others (Please specify).

● *Unknown Vocabulary*

- Look up in a dictionary
- Guess meaning from the contextual clues
- Ignore it
- Others (Please specify)

.....

- *Grammar*
 - Try to understand the structures
 - Try to guess meaning from the form
 - Ignore it
 - Others (Please specify)
-
- *Content*
 - Just survey to see overall picture
 - Look for the main idea
 - Read all the information to get the detail
 - Others (Please specify)
-
- *Lack of Background Knowledge*
 - Guess from the context
 - Guess from the graphics
 - Others (Please specify)
-
- *Primary Reading Strategies*
 - Scan for only interesting points
 - Skim for the main ideas
 - Read all of it to get the detail
 - Others (Please specify)
-

☺Thank you very much for your co-operation☺

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Enhancing Authentic English Learning to Non-English Speaking Learners Using a Course Homepage

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this work was to study the management of an instructional media through information technology network, the course homepage, in a general English course classroom. The study secondarily focused on problems occurred and the needs and attitudes of the users towards the course homepage. From a questionnaire survey, generally the findings were positive, especially concerning the extent to which the course homepage was used. There were, however, some problems, largely practical or technical, with using a course homepage.

Introduction

The availability of the Internet and the advance of technology offer a wide range of English learning possibilities in many non-English speaking countries. As a significant means of interactive communication, the Internet automatically becomes a part of life. Since the main information language (70%) on the Internet is English (Grey, 1999), the net surfers, therefore, are naturally exposed to it. In a language classroom context, the Internet has been an interactive instructional tool that provides motion pictures, sound and texts. The nature of this instructional tool usually requires language learners to respond by creating the same types of information. At the least, they perceive the content in English. Thus English learning is interesting and meaningful. In addition, the use of the Internet in the classroom accustoms the learners to using it for their pleasure. Surfing the net has dramatically increased in popularity as an out-of class activity among learners (Muehleisen, 1997). Foundation courses in English for beginners should take advantage of the technology to establish both language skills and a positive attitude towards the subjects. Basically, the courses are organized for a large amount of students. Electronic information and the technology center (homepage), where instructors pool their core courses' web pages, can be organized under professional supervision to enrich authentic English learning to non-English speaking learners. As a consequence, a useful learning resource center for learners and good rapport among teachers can be developed.

Need

Thailand is faced with "the Internet boom" era, when the Internet is becoming perhaps the most transformative technology in history (Chaikitphinyo: 2002), reshaping business, media, entertainment, and society in astonishing ways. But for all its power, it is just now being tapped to transform education. The most outstanding point of the Internet to educators is that it is bringing us closer than we ever thought possible to make learning - of all kinds, at all levels, any time, any place, any pace - a practical reality for every man, woman, and child. The Internet, as an EFL teaching tool, is gaining popularity in many Asian countries. In Thailand, Chaikitphinyo (2000) stated that because the Internet has been interpreted into many languages, teaching through the Internet has enabled teaching and learning in various forms (e.g. E-Book, Virtual Lab and Web Based Instruction). Furthermore, a study conducted by Watchawlaam,

Khurwan and Kanokpran (2001) showed that Khon Kaen University instructors' need for necessary matter, such as hardware/software/peopleware/management, for the production of instructional media through information technology network was at the "highest" level. Moreover, concerning the instructors' need for the utilization of instructional media through technology network, it was found that the course homepage or web-based instruction was needed at the "highest level". Therefore, this article aims to study the management, effectiveness, and aptitude of learners towards the use of a course homepage in education, especially in foreign language learning.

The prospective course homepage

To construct the course homepage, a survey was conducted to determine the general needs of the prospective homepage. This is a list of points to be considered when designing a web site.

From the learners' point of view, a good web site is one that:

- runs parallel to the in-class activities and exercises
- is usable
- offers a wide range out-of-class practice
- is worthwhile to visit
- is simply accessible any time and anywhere
- is regularly updated
- isn't irritating.

From the survey above and the availability of Internet resources and personal resource, a course homepage was outlined according to the following criteria:

The course outline: to create a site that fills a need, a site that requires little extra effort, and something that non-English speakers, from different English backgrounds, may find interesting. The target course is General English for Health Sciences, a first year English course for students in the following faculties: Medicine, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Dentistry, Associated Medical Sciences, Veterinary Medicine, Nursing and Public Health. The course aims to help students to be able to use English to communicate in various social situations and to participate in an academic context.

In-class activities: to develop web-based activities which run parallel to the in-class activities. The homepage offers opportunities for learners to repeat, practice and make up things they miss in class.

Exercises: due to the limitations of in-class time (3 periods per week), learners lack time to practice the in-class exercises. The course homepage is a place that is accessible all the time. In case the institution can afford only a limited space for each course, links to other related pages are helpful. All web pages are tried out out on different browsers and other computer platforms to make sure they will work for everyone, everywhere. They are made to be uncluttered, easy to navigate and easy to read. Colour changes and font size changes are made to avoid fuzziness.

Constructing the course homepage

The instructors and course homepage constructors worked with technical staff to construct the course homepage. The ideas were mainly derived from the former.

Having surveyed the educational network, the simplest style was given to the builder, and the most useful format for the users was outlined.

Composition

Welcome page: this is the index page that learners visit before continuing to other pages. The page consists of the course outline, course objectives, and background of the course. The content section is attached to every page.

Material page: this page provides names and details of the textbook, supplementary materials, and other language learning resources (e.g. Self-Access Learning Centre), which students need to complete during the semester.

Listening practice page: this page provides the basic language and cultural skills necessary for fundamental survival tasks in both the personal and academic contexts. There is a strong focus on communication.

Speaking practice page: this page guides learners to an understanding of how English sounds are made and guides the practice of making these sounds to improve pronunciation.

Reading practice page: this page offers activities to develop vocabulary skills, text summarizing and paraphrasing skills.

Writing practice page: this page focuses on improving learners' writing. A lot of web-based activities focusing on basic writing and reading strategies aim to prepare learners to use pre-academic material. Learners should be able to expand their knowledge and basic language skills and continue to apply these skills to everyday situations on campus and in the community.

Grammar practice page: this page focuses on the basic grammatical forms and patterns in English. Learners will have many opportunities to practise applying what they have learned in both speaking and writing.

Useful links page: this page directs learners to communities, extra exercises, entertainment, etc.

Staff page: this page has photos, names and details of all the staff for the course. Learners are able to click on the e-mail address under the instructors' names to reach them.

Webboard page: this page is where comments are brought to the attention of the webmaster and staff.

Examination guidelines page: this page helps learners to better prepare themselves for quizzes, the midterm, and the final examination. As new comers to the university testing system, learners should be well-informed about the types and the language of tests. They can view old exams and try them out before the real tests.

Contact page: this page gives the name and address with the telephone number of the head coordinator of the course in case students have general questions or comments about the course.

The course homepage management

As a general English course, which requires learners to attend the class three times a week, two hours were in-class (in the form of lectures) while one was a self-learning period through the course homepage. Many advantages of the Internet allow learners to access the course homepage limitlessly, therefore the instructor and the course homepage constructor worked hard, both before and during the semester. To use the course homepage, the teacher turned on her control desktop to check student participation. The teacher used her planning period to review student assessment data and plan classroom activities. After school, students went home and logged in to their class page to finish homework and submit assignments to their teachers. At night, teachers logged in to develop and update the homepage, to view comments and to collaborate with teachers around the world.

Methodology

The participants were 130 Khon Kaen University students who were taking General English for Health Sciences I during the academic year 2002. Data about the effectiveness of the course homepage were collected using a 30-item questionnaire composed of three parts: personal data of the participant, 5-level rating scale questions and an open-ended question (see Appendix). The mean ratings for the rating scale questions were calculated, and frequent and salient points made on the open-ended question were identified.

Findings

The main finding was that 87 percent of the participants "strongly agreed" that the course homepage was a useable teaching tool that ran parallel to the in-class activities and exercises. Therefore, almost 90 percent of them had positive feelings concerning the course homepage. A large number of participants claimed that it offers a wide range of out-of-class practice. The number of participants who visited the course homepage out-of-class "frequently" was at a "high" level. The need for using information and technology in an EFL classroom is at the "highest" level. Flexibility in teaching and learning through the course homepage was "high". Moreover, presentation through the web pages was preferred to oral report and paper assignments.

However, the need for the regular updating of the course homepage was at "high level". A few students found that net surfing was "difficult". Therefore, a high number of participants needed training in surfing the Internet. A large number of the participants commented that the course homepage should be more professionally designed. Most agreed that more graphics and motion pictures should be added to the website. Insufficient language consultants on the course homepage was a problem marked at the "highest" level. Difficulty and limitations in accessing the course homepage was dramatically high. While using the course homepage, technical problems were the most irritating problem to the users.

Conclusions and discussion

The Internet has been used to promote higher order thinking skills. It provides supplementary language activities, which can provide students with additional practice

in specific areas of language learning. The advantages and disadvantages of employing the Internet in the form of the course homepage will be discussed.

Strong points of using the course homepage

Despite some critical issues in using Internet technology as an instructing tool, the course homepage worked well with several advantages:

- Reduced costs in producing documents and supplementary materials.
- Huge economies could be made by delivering news, schedule and exercises to the learners through the homepage.
- There were gains in the students' exposure to English. Most students admitted that they logged onto the course homepage out-of-class.
- The technology tools enabled active learning. Learners were aroused to read and click to choose pages.

Weak points of using the course homepage

There are some limitations, disadvantages and obstacles in using the course homepage. First, standards are needed to ensure that the course homepage modules will be compatible with the textbook, in-class activities and course objectives. In addition, conversion of the files into electronic files should be carefully checked, organized and formatted to facilitate use. Files need to be developed for multi-media, human interactivity, record management, compatibility, accessibility, reusability, and digital rights management. The web page style should be clean and simple with visual contrast. Animation is unnecessary. The complementary colour scheme, group photos and logos and styles should come together to create a unified whole.

Copyright issues have been a critical topic. Copyright laws allow for the author of a work to retain the right to copy or distribute texts on the net. However, wholesale copying without giving credit to the author is not encouraged. Generally, it does not seem to violate the copyright law, as long as the teachers do not distribute the copied work under their own names.

Evaluation for a web-based course is subjective in nature. While no one is clear whether a theory on web-based course evaluation exists, it is clear that there are several main factors in need of consideration.

Although managing a course homepage is a significant task, requiring a considerable level of skill and expertise, it is worthwhile for students, teachers and institutions. For students, it is a learning portal to connect them to world of knowledge. Students can learn online, register for scheduled classroom sessions, or collaborate with peers or experts using the target language. Instructors can eliminate time in producing exercises and can also bring authentic English use to the class. Furthermore, the institution can reduce costs in producing documents and supplementary materials

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Appendix Questionnaire regarding use of the course homepage

Sex: _____

Age: _____

Section: _____

Please tick the column that reflects your view concerning each of the statements.

	Strongly agree	Agree somewhat	No opinion	Disagree somewhat	Strongly disagree
1. The course homepage ran parallel to the in-class activities and exercises					
2. I enjoyed exploring the course homepage.					
3. The course homepage offered a wide range of out-of-class practice					
4. The course homepage was usable and worthwhile to visit.					
5. The course homepage helped review the in-class activities.					
6. In-class activities were enough to make me proficient in English.					
7. It was a waste of time to explore the course homepage without the teacher or the language consultant.					
8. The course homepage was accessible any time and anywhere					
9. I want the course homepage to be updated more often.					
10. I didn't have time to access the course homepage out-of-class.					
11. Net surfing was "difficult".					
12. I clicked to contact the teacher from the Staff Page.					
13. Accessing the course homepage was difficult.					
14. The language used in the course homepage was hard to understand.					
15. The course homepage needed professional designing.					
16. I felt more confident using the course homepage under the teacher's or the language consultant's supervision.					
17. I would like to study in the normal classroom (using in-class activities) more.					
18. Graphics and motion pictures should be added to the website.					
19. Language consultants on the course homepage were required.					
20. Technical problems always occurred while using the course homepage.					
21. I would like to have studied in the normal classroom more					
22. I visited the course homepage during out-of-class time.					
23. The course homepage helped improve my English skills.					

24. When I had questions about the contents of the course homepage, I asked the teacher in the classroom.					
25. Using the Internet in learning English is reliable.					
26. I felt free and motivated to explore the course homepage.					
27. I needed training in surfing the Internet.					
28. Information on the net was reliable.					
29. I prefer reading and doing exercises from a book to on the net.					
30. I would like to study in the computer lab more.					

General Comments

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Thank You

Miss Dararat Khampusaen was born in Sakon Nakhon, Thailand. She obtained a Bachelor's degree in English, majoring in English and minoring in Linguistics from Srinakharinwirot University. Later she enrolled in Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language program in Mahasarakham University. At present, she is a lecturer of the Foreign Language Department, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University. Her main interest is using multimedia in teaching English.