USING READING ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE STUDENT – TEACHER INTERACTION TOWARD READING COMPREHENSION IN EFL CLASSROOMS

PANTIPA BOONLA

Lecturer The Department of Western Languages, Burapha University
E-mail: pantipa@buu.ac.th

Abstract- The objectives of the study are to investigate collaboration and interaction in terms of question and answer activities and to explore learner perception toward reading comprehension activities. The samples consist of 47 students who registered in an English for Humanities and Social Sciences course during the summer semester. The independent variable is reading comprehension worksheets; the dependent variable is participation among teacher and learner and peer- to- peer discussions. Data were analyzed using reading comprehension worksheets, examination papers, and questionnaires The results of the study are as follows: 1) group work participation effectiveness in learners' motivation and satisfaction in their learning, 2) the students having group work behavior at a good level for every component, 3) reading strategies being brought into group discussions, and 4) the students being able to explain the main idea of the passages among their friends. To sum up, reading comprehension worksheets have an effect on group work and create participation among teachers and learners.

Key words- Interaction, reading comprehension, teacher role, student role, classroom environment.

I. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

English is a language that is used to communicate as a medium. It helps people who speak in different languages and have different cultures to communicate effectively. Nowadays in Thailand, English plays an important role in different areas, such as the tourist industry, domestic and international businesses and every day usage. For these reasons, teaching and learning foreign language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening) are now an integral part of teaching and learning curriculums. According to Ministry of Education 2001, in the present global society, learning foreign languages is very important and essential to daily life, as foreign languages serve as an important tool for communication, education, seeking knowledge, livelihood and creating an understanding of cultures and visions of the world community. Foreign languages enable learners to be aware of the diversity of cultures and viewpoints in the world community, and are conducive to friendship and cooperation with various countries (Ministry of Education 2001: page 252)

Because the English language has become an essential subject for basic education in Thailand, it has been incorporated into the basic education core curriculum. Learning a foreign language involves learning the four main skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. All of these skills are equally important, but this research will focus on reading skill. This is because reading skill can be called the foundation skill. In other words, the more you read, the more you can learn other skills. Rebecca J. Baier (2005) indicates that "Without adequate reading comprehension skills, students can struggle in many subject areas."

1. *What is Learned in Foreign Languages*

The learning area for foreign languages is aimed at enabling learners to acquire a favorable attitude toward foreign languages, the ability to use foreign languages for communicating in various situations, seeking knowledge, engaging in a livelihood and pursuing further education at higher levels. Learners will thus have knowledge and understanding of stories and the cultural diversity of the world community, and will be able to creatively convey Thai concepts and culture to the global society. The main contents include:

- Language for Communication: use of foreign languages for listening, speaking, reading and writing, exchanging data and information, expressing feelings and opinions, interpreting, presenting data, concepts and views on various matters, and creating interpersonal relationships appropriately
- Language and Culture: use of foreign languages harmoniously with cultures of native speakers; relationships, similarities and differences between languages and cultures of native speakers; languages and cultures of native speakers and Thai culture; and appropriate application
- Language and Relationship with Other Learning Areas: use of foreign languages to link knowledge with other learning areas, forming the basis for further development, seeking knowledge and broadening learners' world views
- Language and relationship with Community and the World: use of foreign languages in various situations, both in the classroom and the outside community and the global society, forming a basic tool for further education, livelihood and exchange of learning with the global society. (Ministry of Education 2001: page 252)

Hedge (2003) states that any reading component of an English language course may include a set of learning goals for:

- the ability to read a wide range of texts in English. This is the long-range goal most teachers seek to develop through independent readers outside EFL/ESL classroom.
- building a knowledge of language that will facilitate reading ability
- building schematic knowledge.
- the ability to adapt reading style according to reading purpose (e.g., skimming, and scanning)
- developing an awareness of the structure of written texts in English

(cited in Hesham S. A.,The Reading MatrixVol. 5, No. 2, September 2005) (https://www.academia.edu/506420/Research_paper_Alyousef_H._S._Teaching_reading_comprehension_to_ESL_EFL_learners?auto=download; accessed 29th March 2016)

In the experience of this researcher, many problems occur in the EFL classroom. This study will focus on the most common issues, such as reading comprehension problems and the interaction among learners and with their teachers.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching Approach

This approach focuses on how to improve learners' communicative competence. Richards and Rodgers (2001, cited in Hong Thi Nguyen: 2014: page 94) pointed out that "in communicative language teaching classes, tasks and activities are designed to enable learners to achieve communicative objectives by participating in communicative processes such as exchanging information, negotiation of meaning, and interaction." Communicative tasks were designed; there are six basic components. According to Nunan (1989, cited in Servet CELIK: page 188), these six elements include (1) learning goals; (2) linguistic input; (3) classroom activities; (4) the teacher's role; (5) the role of the students; and (6) the setting in which the activity is situated (p.49), as illustrated in Figure 1.

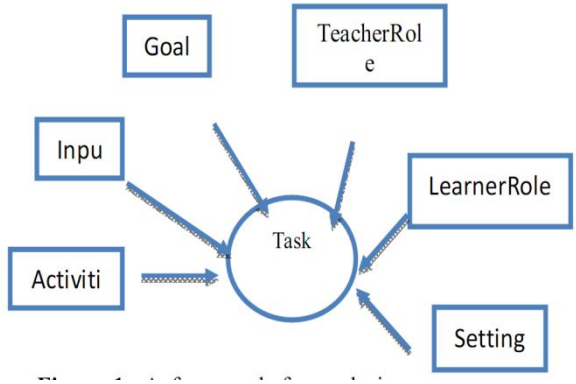


Figure 1: A framework for analyzing communicative tasks (adapted from Nunan, 1989; cited Servet CELIK : page 188)

2.2 Teacher and Student Roles in the Language Classroom

A teacher's role involves more than simply standing in front of a classroom and lecturing. In fact, even though a teacher spends the majority of the day in the classroom, an effective teacher understands that teaching involves wearing multiple hats to ensure that the school day runs smoothly and all students receive a quality education. Teachers set the tone of their classrooms, build a warm environment, mentor and nurture students, become role models, and listen and look for signs of trouble. Littlewood, 1981 (cited in Hong Thi Nguyen :2014: page 96) pointed out that "while students are involved in communicative activities such as pair work or group work, teachers should act as observers who walk around the class to give students guidance to start their discussions, give students advice when necessary, and help them to solve disagreements with pairs or groups."

While providing input activities is a responsibility of the teacher, language learners have also certain responsibilities, if they wish to accomplish their language learning goals. Breen & Candlin (1980: p.110; cited in Servet CELIK : page 190) point out that "The role of the learner as negotiator—between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning—emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way."

Bushra Ni'ma Rashid (2014: p.205) also provided that "the interaction between group members in a classroom moves between the two poles of this continuum consisting of instructional options. Pedagogic discourse occurs when the teacher and the students act out institutional roles, the tasks are concerned with the transmission and reception of information controlled by the teacher and there is a focus on knowledge as a product and on accuracy."

Richards (2001: cited in Hong Thi Nguyen :2014: page 96) explained that "Students' independence is considered important in student-centered learning approaches. Students are expected to interact with each other, rather than with teachers."

Therefore, the role of teacher and students should be equal inside language classroom, which usually provides a forum for classroom discussion and participation.

2.3 Reading Comprehension

Improving reading proficiency is imperative for students and is beneficial to their daily reading as well as in examinations. Researchers always

emphasize the importance of classroom teaching and teachers' guidance of reading practice.

Hesham Suleiman Alyousef (2006: p.63) explained that "Most important of all, specific attention is given to interactive approaches to reading, which argue that reading comprehension is a combination of identification and interpretation skills."
Paran (1996; cited in Hesham Suleiman Alyousef 2006: p.69) believes interactive reading models enable SL readers to be "less reliant on top-down processing" and enable them to achieve "greater reliance on bottom-up strategies as they become more proficient" (p. 29). It seems that teachers can use a balanced approach to teaching reading by incorporating both top-down and bottom-up processes, provided they are given flexibility in choosing the reading tasks.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

3.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research were to:
1. investigate collaboration and interaction in terms of question and answer activities
2. explore learner perception toward reading comprehension activities.

3.2 Research Methodologies

a. Data Collection

The study focused on language learners' collaboration and interaction in the language classroom using reading comprehension worksheets as teaching tools. This study explored an under-researched area - student and teacher interaction - on English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' reading fluency and perception. The study was held in academic year 2015. Participants comprised 60 students enrolled in a four year university. They were university students who registered in an English for Humanities and Social Sciences course. This subject was served for non-major, general education students. Reading comprehension worksheets, exam paper and learners' perception questions regarding teaching and learning management were used as research instruments.

b. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was divided into two parts: before and after the midterm examination. In the first section of the study, lessons were conducted in traditional ways for seven weeks. In other words, the teacher was the controller of the learning environment. The teacher read and translated text into the students' mother tongue. The midterm examination paper was used as a placement test in order to compare students' performance before the research instrument was given.

Learners' perception questionnaires were distributed in the other seven weeks in order to explore their perception of their knowledge before and after they got involved in the research. This questionnaire was divided into three sections: self-evaluation for their group work, group work evaluation and evaluation of the benefits of working in groups.

Then, reading comprehension worksheets were introduced to the students. There were ten to fifteen questions in each worksheet. Students were asked to divide into groups and do the worksheets.

At the end of the semester, students took the final examination. Then, the researcher compared students' scores both before and after doing the worksheets.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results from the language classroom action research indicated that there were many problems affecting the quality of English teaching and learning at the beginning of the research. These problems included: lack capability of group work; interaction among students and their teacher; and students' abilities and attitudes. However, there were many improvements in reading comprehension after the research, such as more discussion and more participation among students and teacher, and reading skills improvement.

4.1 Problems at the Beginning of the Research

At the beginning of research, the most common aspects from the questionnaires were that the classroom atmosphere was not comfortable, even though, there were many activities designed to arouse the students' interest. In other words, they didn't know what they discussed among their group members. They felt uncomfortable because some of them had reading comprehension problems. Moreover, individual learner differences can be discussed in terms of learners' contribution to language learning and the classroom dynamic. There has been considerable research in exploring the unique relationship between what learners bring to language classrooms and the rate and ways in which they learn.

4.2 Improvement in Reading Progress after the Research

This study provided some insight into how the integration of reading activities into language learning contexts can contribute to the development of students' communication skills. It emerged that reading activities or worksheets can be useful tools to motivate students by encouraging them to interact with each other and express their ideas freely. The use of activities during the reading process also gave students the opportunity to foster their critical thinking skills by thinking about the content and

expressing their views. The findings highlighted that reading activities or worksheets gave the students opportunities to learn through communication.

Therefore, the students enjoyed using worksheets in their reading sections and stated that activities assisted them in interacting with each other more effectively. Moreover, most of the students responded in their questionnaires that they were encouraged to interact with one another while they were doing reading exercises.

CONCLUSION

Above all, the discussion throughout this paper has placed English language teaching-learning practices within a broader socio-cultural context, essentially entailing the pedagogic characteristics of an EFL/ESL classroom. Although not all the issues presented and discussed in this paper might be of interest to ELT professionals and experts, the classroom factors investigated and described above undoubtedly have a significant impact on what we plan to implement in EFL/ESL teaching-learning contexts and how we maximize the learning outcome. Analysis and investigation of some EFL/ESL classroom factors, thus, led to the realization that teachers' thoughtful observation and proper conceptualization of those factors can ensure effective English language teaching-learning practices.

However, it should be considered that some students might be cautious about such practices in the classroom and practices like blogging might increase student anxiety and discourage them from writing regularly. Peer feedback might increase some students' writing anxiety and negatively affect their motivation.

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