



รายงานวิจัยฉบับสมบูรณ์

การใช้ Reader's Theater เพื่อพัฒนาความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่าน
ของนักเรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

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

โดย

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งานวิจัยนี้ได้รับเงินอุดหนุนการวิจัยจากมหาวิทยาลัยแม่ฟ้าหลวง
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บทคัดย่อ

ความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่าน ถือเป็นสิ่งสำคัญในของการมีประสิทธิภาพในการอ่าน ทั้งนี้ ความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่านมีความสัมพันธ์อย่างใกล้ชิดกับความเข้าใจเนื้อเรื่องที่อ่าน ความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่านพิจารณาได้จากอัตราความเร็วในการอ่าน ความถูกต้องในการอ่านคำ การเว้นช่วงในระหว่างการอ่านอย่างเหมาะสม และการใช้น้ำเสียงที่เหมาะสมกับสถานการณ์ในเนื้อเรื่องที่อ่าน เทคนิคการอ่านซ้ำ เป็นเทคนิคที่ได้รับการยอมรับว่าช่วยพัฒนาการอ่านคล่องแคล่วได้ดี งานวิจัยนี้ ผู้วิจัยใช้ Reader's Theater ซึ่งเป็นหนึ่งในเทคนิคการอ่านซ้ำ ในการช่วยพัฒนาความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่านของนักเรียนไทยผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ ในระดับอุดมศึกษา งานวิจัยศึกษาวิธีใช้กิจกรรม Reader's Theater ในชั้นเรียนภาษาอังกฤษ โดยมีนักศึกษา 38 คน ซึ่งไม่ได้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นวิชาเอก ผลการศึกษาพบว่า Reader's Theater มีส่วนช่วยในการพัฒนาความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่านทุก ๆ ด้าน นอกจากนี้ นักศึกษากลุ่มทดลองอภิปรายว่า Reader's Theater เป็นกิจกรรมที่สนุกสนานและช่วยเสริมสร้างความมั่นใจในการอ่านออกเสียงเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ



Abstract

Fluency in reading is critical for becoming a successful and competent reader. Reading fluency strongly correlates with reading comprehension. Fluency in reading refers to appropriate reading speed, accurate word recognition, appropriate phrasing, and appropriate expression when reading orally. Repeated reading is an oral reading method that is claimed to help improve reading fluency. This study employs Reader's Theater (RT), which is another technique of repeated reading, as a tool to develop oral fluency of the Thai EFL students at the university level. During the 6 weeks of RT intervention with 38 first year, non-English major students, it is found that RT helps the participants gain all aspects of fluency. The participants also reported that RT is a fun activity and helps build confidence in reading.



Executive Summary

การใช้ Reader's Theater เพื่อพัฒนาความคล่องแคล่วในการอ่าน
ของนักเรียนไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษในฐานะภาษาต่างประเทศ

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

Panya Lekwilai

1. Research Rationale

The reading skills have been difficult for Thai EFL learners to achieve. Many students are struggling with reading mostly because they do not have adequate vocabulary to comprehend the text. Otherwise, they appear to be a slow reader, and they do not read regularly by nature. While much research in Thailand's EFL context focus on reading strategies such as skimming/scanning techniques, guessing familiar words from context, and building Metacognitive to help comprehend the text, there is absence of research concerning "fluency" in reading. Several studies in EFL/ESL instructions address the importance of reading fluency as it has a strong correlation to comprehension. Reading fluency involves speed (pace), accuracy, phrasing, and prosody (expressions). These aspects of fluency can be observed through reading aloud, and developed by repeated reading technique. Reader's Theater (RT) is one of the repeated reading methods which requires students to reread the script several time with the purpose of rehearsing before they perform the script. RT requires less props and does not requires readers to memorize the text. RT has been reported as a fun and incentive technique, and provides a meaningful reason for readers to reread the script several times. This technique has not been found in any studies concerning Thai EFL instruction.

2. Objectives

This action research aims to employ Readers' Theater as a repeated oral reading technique in order to develop students' reading fluency (speed, accuracy, phrasing and prosody).

3. Scope of Study

Due to the problems of reading deficiency among Thai EFL students, and reading fluency is often a neglected goal in reading instructions, this research aims to develop Thai EFL students' reading fluency. Reader's Theater is used as a repeated oral reading technique to help develop reading fluency. Despite the fact that most research on RT tend to have

young learners (elementary to 3 graders) as the primary target, this research focuses on Thai EFL learners at the university level (1st year).

4. Methodology and Results

4.1 Participants

The participants in this research included 38 first year students enrolled in Intensive English (1006001) course in the Summer Semester of academic year 2015. They are Thai students majoring in Chinese Language Teaching. Among these 38 students, one student is blind.

4.2 The RT Scripts

The script for Reader's Theater (RT) activity was adapted from the external reading book of the course, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The script is divided into 17 scripts, based on each chapter of the book. Without changing any wording from the original text, the script keeps all the characters from the story, with additional narrator parts. All 17 scripts were fairly equal in length.

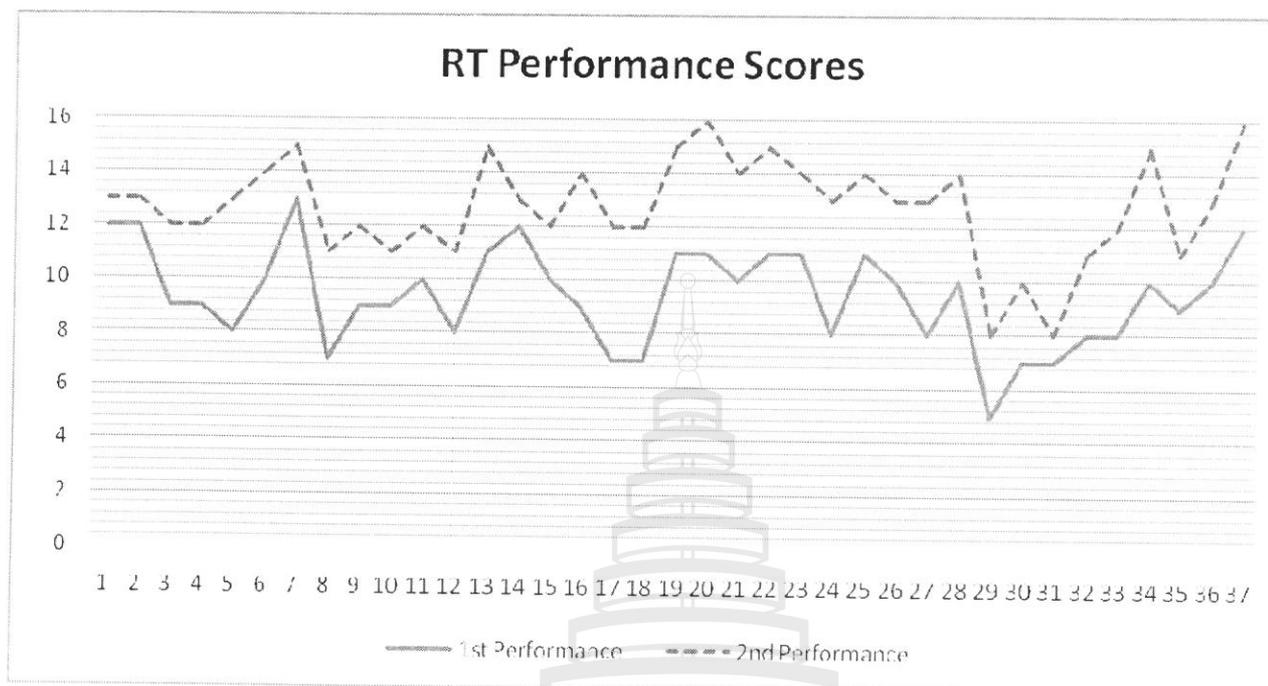
The participants are asked to perform reading the script twice: the third week and the sixth week of the course. Before each performance, the participants practice reading aloud as a group. The researcher observes the reading and give corrective feedback to ensure that the participants develop all aspects of fluency.

During the first and the second RT performances, each group of the participants are assessed by Fluency Rubric (modified from Rasinski's Creating Fluent Readers). The rubric is 16 points total, with 4 points maximum given to the four areas of fluency. The students' scores from both performances are compared in order to check their progress in reading fluency.

4.3 Findings

Findings revealed significant gain of fluency among the participants from the 1st performance and the 2nd performance. Regarding the four areas of fluency, all participants gained higher scores in the second performance for every area. Phrasing is, in particular, the area that the participants show a distinctive progress.

Graph 1: Gain scores (1st and 2nd RT performance)



Besides the results that signify the development of fluency, the participants reported that they felt motivated by RT activity, and felt more confident in reading aloud in English. Their reflections showed that RT is a fun activity that does not only help build oral fluency, but also incentivize learners to read.

4.4 Conclusion

Fluency in reading has been on the focus of many researchers in EFL/ESL settings, but for Thailand's EFL context, fluency instructions are almost unrecognizable. Reader's Theater is introduced as one of the technique to build fluency for Thai EFL students. RT has proven to help improve oral reading fluency to the participants in this study. The most empowering reason that English classrooms should implement RT to reading instruction is that it is incentive by design. It also motivates students to reread the same text without being discouraged. Frequent reading practice, as theories suggest, is an important method to develop fluency.

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

Panya Lekwilai

1. Introduction

Reading deficiency is one of the common problems among Thai EFL students. Due to the traditional reading instructions, the main focus is usually on the comprehension of the texts. Hence, instructors usually overlook the process of reading that correlates with textual comprehension of students. For example, an instructor may not notice a student reads slowly or fast (rate), pronounces the words correctly or incorrectly (accuracy), and uses appropriate intonation (prosody). Rate, accuracy and prosody are the indicators of reading fluency (Rasinski, 2006). Moreover, the reading passage may be used only once or twice before the instructor moves on to another passage. Research indicates that reading fluency (speed, accuracy, prosody) can be fostered by repeated oral reading (Samuels, 1979), and has a strong correlation with reading comprehension (e.g. Hook & Jones, 2004; Hudson et al., 2005; Logan, 1997; Rasinski&Padak, 2005). Reader's Theater (RT) is one of the techniques for repeated reading. RT provides good reasons for readers to read the same text repeatedly. Research has proven that RT is an effective tool to improve reading fluency (e.g. Martinez et al., Alspach (2010), Callard (2008), Haws (2008), Liu (2000), McKay (2008), Trainin (2006)). However, the mentioned research concerns reading fluency in L1 context. In Thailand (L2 context), there are currently few studies concerning reading fluency in English. While there is some classroom research on reading in English among Thai EFL (L2) such as Nongnart (2008) and Siriphanich (2010), research focuses on reading comprehension rather than reading fluency. There are relatively few studies in Thailand that concern repeated oral reading and use RT to improve reading fluency.

1.2 Objectives

This action research aims to employ Readers' Theater as a repeated oral reading technique in order to develop students' reading fluency (speed, accuracy, prosody).

1.3 Rationale

The study aims to implement Reader's Theater as a new instructional method to English classes. Alongside with other traditional reading strategies already implemented, RT may help improve students' reading fluency, which has not been brought to attention to the Thai EFL context.

1.4 Hypothesis

Reader's Theater can improve reading fluency among Thai EFL students in undergraduate level.

1.5 Scope of Study

- 1) Data source: Mae FahLuang University, Chiangrai
- 2) Participants: 38 first-year Non-English major students from Mae Fah Luang University, who are currently enrolling Intensive English in the summer semester of the academic year 2015.
- 3) Duration of study: 6 weeks (June 30 – August 7, 2015)

2. Review of Literature

2.1) Defining Reading Fluency

The term 'fluency' is not easy to define, and many people may define it in many different ways (Rasinski & Padak, 2000). Most instructors are more likely to relate fluency to speaking skills. They can easily assess students who speak quickly enough with appropriate intonation. Fluency is not often associated with not getting stuck with words as fluent readers. When it comes to reading fluency, it is even harder to define.

Normally, the process of reading involves word decoding and comprehension (Hook & Jones, 2004). While much traditional reading instructions focuses on word identification strategies to foster comprehension, fluent reading instruction is often dismissed by instructors. Even though word recognition is important in the reading process, word recognition skills alone are not the key to fluency. Readers need to develop word recognition skills to the point of decoding words automatically and tacitly. This means readers have to read fast enough and be able to decode words at sight, and their reading is not interrupted because their eyes are fixating on certain words for a long time.

Automaticity and Fluency

Logan (1997) described automaticity with an analogy of driving a car. A skilful driver can drive and at the same time carry on a conversation with a passenger. The driver's ability to drive is not distracted by having the conversation since driving is an activity that the driver does without thinking about it. He identified four characteristics of automaticity as *speed*, *effortlessness*, *autonomy*, and *lack of conscious awareness*. Speed is important to automaticity because it reduces time to react, and it can be increased through practice.

Effortlessness indicates automaticity as tasks can be done with ease and without interference. Automaticity in tasks is autonomous; tasks can be done without intention. Lastly, automaticity does not require conscious awareness of the involved process while doing it.

By the same token, a reader who possesses reading automaticity can identify a single word quickly at sight, effortlessly, and is not easily distracted. Though automaticity can predict comprehension, it should not be considered the sole indicator of fluency. Fluent reading involves automaticity beyond the word level. It requires the application of appropriate phrasing and prosody (stress, emphasis, pacing, and intonation) at the text level (Hook & Jones, 2004).

Definition of Fluency

At this point, we can define the elements of reading fluency as follows:

- 1) Automaticity in word recognition: the reader possesses awareness of components of words such as letter, sounds and stresses, and is able to **correctly** identify words and read **rapidly**.
- 2) Automaticity at text level: the reader reads with appropriate **phrasing** and **expression**.

These elements of fluent reading, namely accuracy, speed, appropriate phrasing and expressions, depend on the process and the manner of reading. The goal of reading is typically and naturally to comprehend the text. Though reading fluency ideally helps the reader read with ease and become engaged with the text with less effort, the outcome of reading must be comprehension. Hence, a more appropriate definition of fluency may be the one provided by Kuhn, Schwanenflugel & Meisinger (2010). In their definition, they also include the relationship between fluency and comprehension. They defined fluency as follows:

Fluency combines accuracy, automaticity, and oral reading prosody, which, taken together, facilitate the reader's construction of meaning. It is demonstrated during oral reading through ease of word recognition, appropriate pacing, phrasing, and intonation. It is a factor in both oral and silent reading that can limit or support comprehension (Kuhn, et.al, 2010).

Simply put, fluency in reading covers automaticity in word recognition. This is indicated by the reading rate and accuracy of reading, as well as automaticity at the text level, which is indicated by phrasing and expression while reading. Most importantly, fluency must contribute to overall comprehension of the text.

In the following section, the ways in which fluency correlates with comprehension will be discussed.

2.2) Relationship between fluency and comprehension

Many instructors often regard comprehension as an outcome of reading and dismiss fluency as the process that helps readers achieve such outcome. Readers who exhibit comprehension of the text are not always proficient readers if they manage to understand the text with a great deal of time and effort. They may read slowly, look up almost every word while reading, and sometimes re-read what they have previously read. These are the signals that the readers lack reading fluency. On the other hand, readers who read quickly may be able to identify words correctly and recognize appropriate phrasing, but they may not always be proficient readers if they do not comprehend what they read. Many researchers have proven fluency and comprehension to have a strong correlation (Callard, 2008; Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006; Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005; Nation, 2009; Hook & Jones, 2004; Taguchi, Takayasu-Mass & Gorsuch, 2004; Rasinski & Padak, 2000). Next, it will be discussed how each aspect of fluency correlates with comprehension.

Firstly, Nation (2009) stated that reading too slowly (at the rate of less than 100 words per minute) can have negative effects on comprehension. Slow readers usually exhibit signs of fixation (fixing their eyes on words, parts of words, or individual letters) and regression (looking back at what has already been read). These signs of slow reading affect readers' mental process on comprehension. When readers spend time laboriously deciphering words, their brains have little power left to construct an ongoing interpretation of the text (Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005).

Secondly, readers who lack phonemic awareness (ability to identify letters and sounds) usually inaccurately decode the words. When words are read inaccurately, it leads readers to misinterpret the intended meaning. For instance, the words *live* as a noun and *live* as an adjective are pronounced and mean differently. If readers are not aware of the distinguishing pronunciations of such homographic words, it is likely that they misinterpret the meaning of the words in certain contexts.

Thirdly, readers who read quickly but exhibit inappropriate phrasing may also have less comprehension of the text. Poor phrasing ability affects the reader in dealing with larger units of words and thus causes confusion when the reader cannot see the relationship of each word unit in a sentence (Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005). The signals of slow reading are, for example, reading word by word, or two or three words, and pausing randomly in the

sentences. Slow readers do not frequently pay attention to punctuations, which mark phrase or sentence boundaries.

Lastly, Kuhn & Stahl (2000, quoted in Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005) stated that when prosody is present in reading, it is evident that the reader understands what is being read. Whether or not prosody predicts comprehension or the other way around is still not fully understood (Kuhn et. al., 2010). Hudson et.al. (2005) argues that the amount of prosody indicates how much the reader understands the text.

The aforementioned illustrates that fluency is closely related to comprehension, yet most instruction emphasizes comprehension over fluency as the objective of reading. While most instructors focus on *how much* students comprehend, which is mostly measured by test scores, they often fail to diagnose *how* students process comprehension.

2.3) Repeated reading

RR was first developed by Jay Samuels (1979). It was based on his own automaticity theory (Dowhower, 1997). The technique is as simple as it sounds: a reader reads a short and meaningful passage several times until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. The technique then repeats again with a different passage (Samuels, 1979). RR requires that the reader reads with an instructor or with peers, so the latter can record reading speed and word errors.

Hudson et.al. (2005) suggested the procedure to introduce RR to the classroom. Firstly, the instructor selects a short passage at the student's present level. The student reads the passage out loud while being timed for one minute. The instructor counts how many words were read (word per minute-WPM), and how many word recognition errors were made. The instructor keeps a record for each reading session. The expectation is that the number of WPM should increase, and the number of word recognition errors should decrease over time with practice. When the goal is reached, the instructor can select higher-level passages and repeat the process. The record of reading is suggested to be in the form of a chart, so that the students can see their progress and will be motivated to improve their reading.

While RR appears to be the tool to increase reading speed and automaticity in word recognition, there are some concerns about whether or not RR actually benefits comprehension and other areas of fluency, especially phrasing and prosody. Furthermore, it is

questionable to teach each part of fluency separately or in combination. If all areas of fluency are to be combined, will RR be an effective tool?

Some current research on fluency instruction states that RR might not be the one instructional tool to develop all areas of fluency. For instance, Hudson et.al. (2005) suggest RR as one instructional method to focus on rate and accuracy, but not on prosody (sounds, inflection, expression and phrasing, as according to their definition), which is to be taught by using other instructional tools. Despite his strong support for Hudson et.al. and the use of RR instruction, Rasinski (2006) disagrees with the idea of teaching and assessing each area of fluency (rate, accuracy and prosody) discretely as Hudson et. al. asserts. Rasinski is concerned that some instructors and students focus on gained reading rate alone as the goal for fluency improvement, while comprehension is then ironically overlooked. Allington (2006) also agrees that RR is a good method to develop fluent reading in disfluent readers, but comprehension cannot be neglected.

Nation (2009) also admitted that focusing on increased reading rate alone has some disadvantages. When simply focusing on reading faster, students be pressured and become stressed. This is not ideal since students may lose enjoyment in reading.

By the same token, focusing on accuracy alone can make negative impacts on reading rate. For instance, Samuels (1979) pointed out that if students are required to re-read the text with 100 per cent word accuracy so that they can move on to a new text, it can impede their reading rate since the fear of making a mistake slows their reading.

At the end of his article, Rasinski (2006) proposed that repeated reading instructions should give way to meaningful and expressive oral performance so that improvement of prosody is brought into focus instead of using nonfictional texts and focusing exclusively on faster reading.

The debate outlined above about RR application demonstrates the controversy over its application and effectiveness. Many researchers agree that RR focuses exclusively on improving reading rate and automaticity in accurate word identification, and leaves little room for developing other areas of fluency, which should all together, lead to comprehension. In addition, the fact that RR requires re-reading the same text many times may seem to be a mundane activity to students. Given that Rasinski emphasizes on improving reading rate and accuracy alongside with expressive oral performance, and also that Nation described a need for enjoyment and fun while reading, it is interesting to explore Reader's Theater (RT). The

method is another form of repeated reading that allows students to practice through performance, and it provides excitement and meaningful context of re-reading the same text.

2.4) Reader's Theater

RT is another method of repeated reading that allows students to practice through performance. Not only does RT help improve reading rate and accuracy, it is an effective way to increase prosody (Cullard, 2008; Trainin & Andrzejczak, 2006; Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005). In terms of comprehension, RT encourages students to be engaged in negotiating the meaning of the text, exchanging their interpretation of the text, and generating responses to the text through performance (Liu, 2000). Above all, RT is an incentive activity (Alspach, 2010; Haws, 2008; Martinez, Roser & Strecker, 2002) that persuades students to enjoy re-reading the same text several times and creates motivation and confidence in readers (McKay, 2008; Rinehart, 1999). By performing reading to an audience, readers automatically feel engaged to be fluent in order to deliver the message and entertain the audience at the same time.

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

RT is suitable for students of all ages and of all levels of proficiency. Scripts for RT are also various. They can be actual play scripts with simplified language to suit students' instructional level. They can also be selections of children's literature that are rich in dialogue (Hudson, Lane & Pullen, 2005), or they could even be scripts created by the instructor. Most importantly, students need a model to illustrate how fluent reading should sound like so that they have a set goal in mind while they practice reading on their own or with peers. For this

matter, the instructor may read the script aloud while introducing the script, or use any available audio scripts.

Here are the procedures of how to conduct RT in the classroom.

1. *Text selection*: instructor chooses a script at student's instructional level.
2. *Modeling*: instructor reads the script for students to demonstrate what fluent reading should be like. If an audio version of the script is available, the instructor can play it.
3. *Discussion*: discuss the plot, characters, settings, etc. with students. Vocabulary and sentence structures can be discussed as well to ensure comprehension.
4. *Assign roles*: divide students into groups and assign roles to them. When students are familiar with RT, the instructor may let them choose their roles.
5. *Practice*: students practice the role with their peers, and sometimes practice by themselves.
6. *Feedback and comment*: after practice, instructor gives feedback and comments for improvement.
7. *Perform*: students stand in front of the class and perform the script.

2.5)The Effects of Reader's Theater

Martinez, Roser and Strecker (2002) stated, "Readers Theater is a great way to develop children's meaningful and fluent reading." In their article, "*I never thought I could be a star*": A Readers Theater ticket to fluency, they conducted a 10-week RT project with second grade students. Every week from Monday to Friday, the teachers set daily routines where students spent 30 minutes on Reader's Theater. The second graders were found to have increased reading speed by 17 words per minute on average. The researchers concluded that RT offers "an incentive for returning to the text again and again" (Martinez, Roser and Strecker, 2002) and that it promotes oral reading fluency.

Other research indicates that RT does not only potentially improve oral fluency, but it creates motivation and confidence in readers (e.g. McKay, 2008; Rinehart, 1999). One strong motivator is the fact that students have to read to an audience and want the audience to understand and be entertained by their reading. Once students find that they are able to read and make sense of the script for an audience, they become confident and motivated to read more. Researchers also find that students enjoy the opportunity to choose their roles in scripts, to make different voices for different characters according to their nature, mood, feelings, or the changed situations in the performance.

3. Methodology

Participants:

Participants in the six-week study included 38 first year students enrolled in Intensive English (1006001) course. They are Thai students majoring in Chinese Language Teaching. Among these 38 students, one student is blind. Like every student who enrolled in Intensive English course, their English competence is at A1 – A2 based on CEFR levels. The course mainly focuses on the integrated 4 skills of English: Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing.

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

The script:

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

Reader's Theater intervention:

The RT intervention took place at the last 30 minutes of the class meeting, starting from the first week to the sixth week. The data collection is divided into 3 phases:

1. RT introduction:

This stage took place on the second class meeting of the first week. At this stage, all students were given the chapter 1 of the book in the form of an RT script. They were instructed to read silently. After they finished reading, the instructor discussed the story and

the characters of the script in the students' first language to ensure their comprehension. The instructor then read the script aloud to the class.

The following class meeting was the mini-lesson of reading fluency. The instructor read the same script aloud again. This time he pointed out what 'fluent' reading should sound like. Students were then introduced to the 4 dimensions of reading fluency: pace, accuracy, phrasing, and prosody. These areas of fluency were set as a goal of students' reading practice.

2. RT interventions:

Students were told they were to perform RT twice. The first RT performance would take place on the last class meeting of the third week (before the midterm exam), and the second on the sixth week (before the final exam). On the third class meeting of the first week, students were asked to form a group of 4-5 people. Each group was assigned a different script. There were total 9 groups, and chapters 1 to 9 were distributed to each. Altogether, the first RT took up the first half of the book. Each group then assigned the reading parts on their own.

Each 30 minutes of RT intervention became the routine of the students. They were to bring the script to class. It started with 10 minutes of individual reading where students read silently on their own. Then they got together with their group members and read aloud for another 20 minutes. The instructor would observe the class and ready to help with unknown words and correct pronunciation. Comments and feedback were given to each group so they would improve themselves while reading at home.

After the students perform oral reading of the script on the third week, the new scripts (chapter 10 - 17) were given to them on the fourth weeks. The process of RT intervention was repeated.

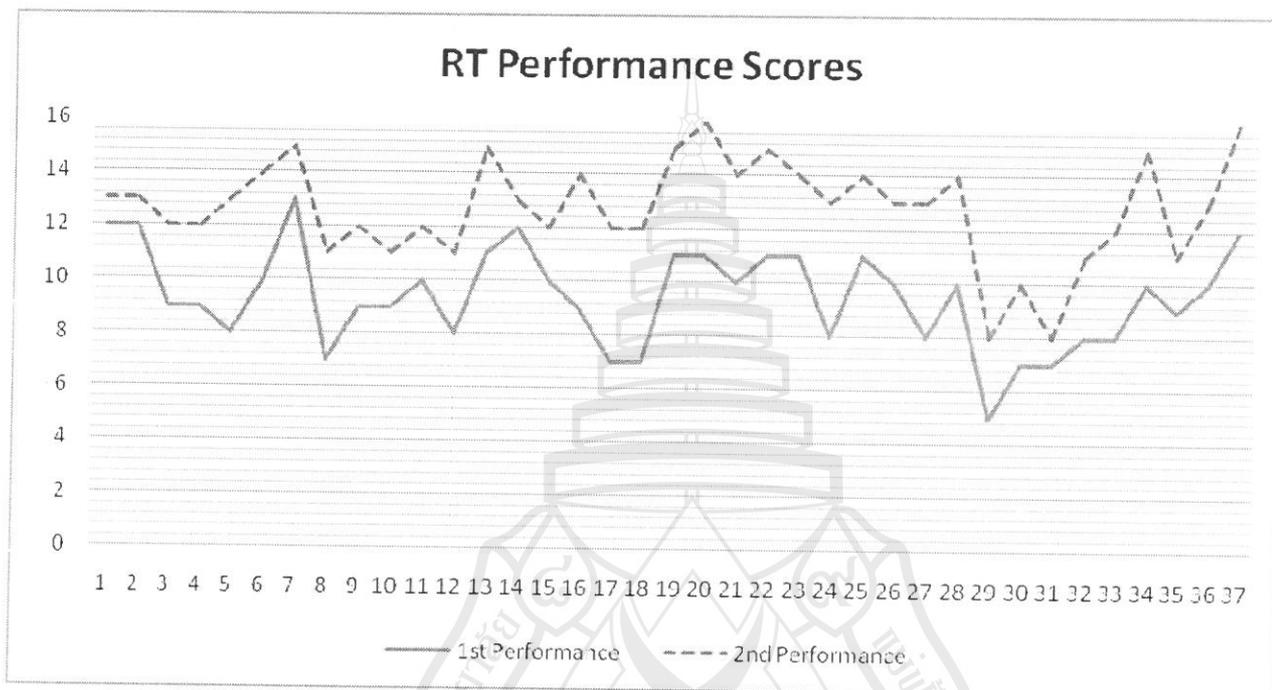
3. RT assessment: The first and the second RT performances, each group member was assessed by the instructor with Fluency Rubric (modified from Rasinski's Creating Fluent Readers). The rubric is 16 points total, with 4 points maximum given to the four areas of fluency. The students' scores from both performances are compared in order to check their progress in reading fluency.

4. Results

Overall Fluency

Data revealed significant gain of fluency among the participants from the 1st performance and the 2nd performance as shown in the graph below:

Graph 1: Gain scores (1st and 2nd RT performance)



Regarding the four areas of fluency, all participants also gained higher scores in the second performance for every area. Phrasing is, in particular, the area that the participants show a distinctive progress.

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

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

Motivation

Data from the Self-Evaluation of all participants also suggests that participants regard their oral reading skills as progressive between the 1st performance and the 2nd performance. 59.8% answered “Agree” when they were asked whether their oral performance have improved in all areas of fluency. 28% reported that they “disagree”.

Regarding the reflection of the RT activity, participants gave overall positive comment. 30 participants said that they found RT “very entertaining”. 23 of them reported that RT helps “build confidence in oral reading”. 12 participants noted that because they read aloud with their peers, and shared the reading parts among the group members, they became more confident than reading individually. 4 participants admitted that they were confident during the performance, even though they were not quite sure whether they read certain words correctly. 1 participant said that she is motivated to read more scripts, and that “group members should rotate the different parts of the scripts.”

5. Discussion and Suggestions

The findings suggest that Reader’s Theater may be an effective tool to improve reading fluency of the EFL learners. Not only does RT provide the meaningful reasons for students to re-read the same text again and again, it also incentivizes students to read. However, RT requires the instructor to play the crucial role in modelling fluent reading, so that students grasp the idea of what fluent reading sounds like. Corrective feedback is also an important part in building confidence of students. As the data suggests that “Phrasing” is the most prominent aspect that the participants gained after the 2nd performance, most participants admitted that they would not have paid attention to the punctuations or pauses while reading aloud. After the instructor emphasized on the importance of pauses on the process of comprehension of the text, the participants became self-aware and did not overlook the punctuations.

Interestingly, “Expression and Volume” seems to be the area of fluency where most participants did not improve much. Although the majority of the participants who are shy readers have improved in terms of volume, expression (or prosody) still did not change significantly. When discussed the characters and the situations in the script, most participants exhibited a good comprehension. It therefore should be assumed that comprehension should foster expression while the participants were reading aloud. This fact still leaves the researcher puzzled, and the possible assumption is that most Thai EFL speakers do not realize

the importance of the prosodic features in the English language. Extra lessons on intonation may have to integrate with RT, apart from the mini-lessons of reading fluency.

Limitations and suggestions for further study

Insights from using RT in this study render the researcher to consider some limitations of administrating RT in classrooms:

1. *Class period*: the study was conducted with the participants enrolled in Intensive English course which was offered over the period of six weeks. Given that fluency requires regular practice for a certain period of time, the researcher found that six weeks may not have been enough time for students to develop fluency.
2. *Class size*: there were 38 participants in Intensive English. With this amount of the participants, it was rather difficult for the researcher to monitor individual reading. Since corrective feedback plays an important role in developing fluency, the researcher should have monitored the participants more closely every time they read. However, doing so would have been time consuming, given that there were only 30 minutes for each RT intervention.
3. *Correlations between accurate pronunciation and comprehension*: the majority of the participants were struggling with accurate pronunciation while reading aloud. Frequently, they incorrectly pronounced the words which are at their grade level. Other unknown words were often pronounced based on the spelling, which frequently resulted in incorrect pronunciation. Fossilization may have been the reason why some participants mispronounced the words they already know the meaning. Since it is uncertain to determine whether accuracy reflects comprehension, it is a challenge for researchers to conduct more studies on this matter.

Conclusion

Fluency in reading has been on the focus of many researchers in EFL/ESL settings, but for Thailand's EFL context, fluency instructions are almost unrecognizable. Reader's Theater is introduced as one of the technique to build fluency for Thai EFL students. RT has proven to help improve oral reading fluency to the participants in this study. The most empowering reason that English classrooms should implement RT to reading instruction is that it is incentive by design. It also motivates students to reread the same text without being discouraged. Frequent reading practice, as theories suggest, is an important method to develop fluency.

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