

Developing Students' Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension Through Reading English Newspapers

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Abstract— Reading comprehension is an important skill needed for all areas of schools. However, many students struggle to understand the texts they read. To help them cope with this problem, therefore, integrating English newspapers in a reading class is one technique to help achieve this aim. Newspapers, in either a print or online version, are an important form of mass media which provide up to date information. Newspapers connect individuals to their local society and other foreign societies. They are also easily accessible. This study aims at introducing newspapers as a teaching tool to motivate and challenge students with new learning experiences in order to develop students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. The participants in this study are 54 second year English major students at Kasetsart University. The research uses two instruments for data collection which include a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The findings are predominantly positive, suggesting that reading English newspapers can help students learn a lot of vocabulary and develop students' reading skills because the contents are rich and vivid and the language is authentic.

Keywords—English newspapers; mass media; vocabulary; reading comprehension

I. INTRODUCTION

Newspapers, in either a print or an online version, plays an important role in our everyday life. Newspapers are regarded as reliable and easily accessible along with being of reasonable cost to readers. These are some of the reasons for the newspapers' continued popularity and public demand. Reading newspapers daily keeps us informed and updated of what is going on around the world. Newspapers carry the news of the world and they cover a wide variety of news subjects, such as news of accidents, disasters, crime, politics, protests and demonstrations, business and finance, wars and terrorism and sports and various other columns. A newspaper is printed initially to inform, influence, entertain and educate its local readers. Leading newspapers, however, have their entire copy available on the internet. A nation's newspapers provide a window through which people all over the world can

look into the country to get some understanding about things that interest and concern the population, their living standards and how they think and act. They also provide historical records of events that have shaped a country and its citizens. English newspapers have a distinctive style of writing. There is a certain fixed and accepted layout to almost every newspapers regardless of geographical location, or even language. An understanding of the terminology and vocabulary used in a newspaper is almost as important as understanding the layout. Reading English newspapers can help students learn and expand vocabulary and terminology and develop reading skills because the contents of English newspapers are often rich and vivid. In addition, the language used in English newspapers differs slightly from normal, conversational or even academic English. Besides, English newspapers help students enjoy reading, based on their interests. Materials printed in a newspaper are divided into two categories: straight news stories and feature articles. Straight news stories normally make up the biggest part of a publication. They tell of facts and recent events of interest and concern to readers. Straight news stories are not based on the opinion of the writer or journalist. However, the story may quote the opinions or the words said by the people who are featured in the news. These quotes are always contained within inverted commas. The front and most prominent pages in the daily newspapers are made up of straight news stories. Feature articles include the editorial and the many other columns written by specialist journalists or high profile writers which express the opinions of the writer. They usually deal with events in the news or put forward opinions about areas of special interests.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading is a way of acquiring information and knowledge from other people and sources. It is a foundation for further reading and studying. Reading comprehension is the process through which readers use their own syntactic, semantic, rhetorical and prior knowledge as well as necessary cognitive skills to analyze, interpret and understand the writer's thoughts and ideas conveyed through the printed text [1]. Reading has a major influence on vocabulary knowledge, and the reading process is one that learner's need to develop in order to succeed in

language learning [2, 3, 4, 5]. Vocabulary is an important component of reading comprehension. According to Merriam Webster, [6] the newspaper is a paper that is printed and distributed usually daily or weekly and that contains news, articles of opinion, features, and advertising. Cheyney [7] likens the newspaper to textbook that provides up-to-date information on local, national and world affairs. The language used in newspapers is entirely different from the language used in textbooks. In 1985, [8] stated that reading English newspapers gives educational support to language development programmes. Many researchers have studied the use of newspapers as a tool in a language classroom because they are up to date and provide the latest information with precious linguistic data. They also provide students with an opportunity to read real life events and incidents. In 2018, [9] conducted a research study on the role of using English newspapers in enhancing pre-intermediate level learners' reading comprehension skills, it was found that the use of newspapers had challenged the learners' linguistic levels as they were accustomed to language learning textbooks with their typical linguistic style. It would be highly recommended to use newspapers articles in reading comprehension sessions. Ahmmed [10] conducted a research study on the effectiveness of reading English newspapers for improving vocabulary and reading skills of Dhaka University students. The findings suggest that reading English newspapers widens students' outlook and enriches their knowledge. Reading English newspapers can be used as a supplement to textbooks. English newspapers are very helpful for learning new words, idioms phrases and sentence structures. In addition, the students' vocabulary and reading skills are gradually improved. Similar views are expressed by [11], who shows that reading English newspapers improves literacy skills and helps learners develop vocabulary and reading skills. There are 3 factors that affect students' reading comprehension. The first one is students' background knowledge about the topic. This background knowledge includes what the students has experienced, what he has read about the subject and specific vocabulary he knows about a particular subject. The second one is the students' interests in the topic. If the students are interested in a topic, they may pay more attention to their reading and they will have a desire to read the text in more detail. The third one is the students' understanding. Understanding is crucial to the process of reading. The students should not only understand what they read, but also know how to get the meaning of each words or sentences and the writer's ideas.

III. PROCEDURES

The teacher chose 10 news stories to teach the students and designed exercises to help the students understand the text. The teacher elicited students' background knowledge of the topic and encouraged the use of an English dictionary to understand unknown words.

A. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate the students' opinions on using English newspapers to develop students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. The research questions are:

- 1) Do English newspapers help develop students' vocabulary and reading comprehension?
- 2) What are the students' attitudes towards using English newspapers to develop their vocabulary and reading comprehension?

B. Participants

The participants of this study were a class of second year undergraduate English major students at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science at Kasetsart University, Kamphaeng Saen campus in Thailand. These students registered to study "English Reading" of the academic year 2020 which was a compulsory course. The course focus was on improving students' reading skills. The recruited participants formally indicated their consent to participate as respondents in this study. All students were also informed that their identities would be kept anonymous.

C. Materials

The materials selected to supplement in-class teaching used in this study included material from 2 English language newspapers in Thailand: The Bangkok Post and The Nation.

D. Instruments

The instruments used in this study to collect the data were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was used to survey students' opinions on using English newspapers to develop their vocabulary and comprehension in a reading class. The questionnaire was divided into 2 parts. The first part was for general questions about the participants' personal information regarding gender, age, how often they read English newspapers and what their purposes of reading were. The second part was used to obtain the students' attitudes towards using English newspapers to develop their vocabulary and reading comprehension. The participants' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed in terms of means scores and standard deviations on a five-points Likert scales, which were interpreted as follows:

- 4.51 to 5.00 = Strongly agree
- 3.51 to 4.50 = Agree
- 2.51 to 3.50 = Partly agree
- 1.51 to 2.50 = Disagree
- 1.00 to 1.50 = Strongly disagree

E. Semi-structured interview

To provide further support, 27 students were randomly selected for a semi-structured interview at the end of the experiment. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded with similar themes categorized

F. Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data using percentage, the means and standard deviation)SD.(

IV. FINDINGS

The findings of the questionnaire provide some revealing statistics.

TABLE 1: HOW OFTEN THE STUDENTS READ ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS

English Newspapers reading	Number of students	Percentage
Every day	8	14.81
Once a week	23	42.59
Twice a week	14	25.92
Three times a week	9	16.66

Table 1 shows that the majority of students (42.59%) who participated in this study read English newspapers once a week while 8 students (14.81%) read English newspapers every day.

TABLE 2: FOR WHAT PURPOSE(S) STUDENTS READ ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS

Purpose(s) of reading English Newspapers	Number of students	Percentage
To update information	24	44.44
To improve reading skills	12	22.22
To enrich students' vocabulary	11	20.37
To broaden students' perspective	7	12.96

Table 2 indicates that 24 students in the survey read English newspapers to update information = (44.44%) while 7 students (12.96%) read English newspapers to broaden students' perspective.

TABLE 3: STUDENTS' OPINIONS ON USING ENGLISH NEWSPAPERS TO DEVELOP VOCABULARY AND READING SKILLS.

Item	Mean	SD
1. Reading English newspaper was interesting.	4.58	0.72.
2 Various sections in a newspaper motivated me to read.	4.56	0.69
3. Reading English newspapers improved my reading skills.	4.52	0.67
4. Having vocabulary tests every week increased my vocabulary knowledge.	4.12	0.82
5. Newspaper terminology helped me understand the news stories better.	4.36	0.63
6. I enjoyed reading English newspapers.	4.21	0.65
7. News headlines motivated my interest.	4.56	0.69
8. I learnt a lot of vocabulary from reading the news stories.	4.12	0.82

9. Reading English newspapers encouraged me to learn and understand the content better.	4.08	0.75
10. Reading English newspapers developed my vocabulary and the ability to use English.	4.12	0.82

As can be seen from Table 3, the students had favourable attitudes towards using English newspapers to develop their vocabulary and reading comprehension. Most students thought that reading English newspapers was interesting. In addition, various sections and news headlines motivated the students' interests to learn. It also helped develop vocabulary and the ability to use English. Moreover, reading English newspapers improved students' reading skills. Furthermore, newspapers helped them understand news stories better and having vocabulary tests every week increased students' vocabulary knowledge. Newspapers can also provide people with a source of enjoyment. Reading English newspapers is not only to enhance students' knowledge about general information but it will enrich vocabulary and improve reading skills.

Findings from the semi-structured interviews

The following are some quotes from the students' concerning their positive attitudes towards using English newspapers.

1) "I enjoy reading various columns in an English newspapers."

2) "I can be exposed to the real language."

3) "I like the way the teacher uses English newspapers as supplementary material to teach reading".

4) "The news story is very interesting".

5) "I like reading English newspapers every day because the news is up to date."

6) "I improved English vocabulary, phrases and idioms from reading English newspapers".

7) "I learn what's happening around the world from reading English newspapers."

8) "Reading English newspapers motivates me to read more texts in English."

However, there are some negative effects as quoted below:

1) "The news story "Cancer Study Shows Vitamin C Blunts Chemo" is very difficult to understand.

2) "When I found difficult vocabulary that I couldn't read, I looked it up in an English dictionary".

V. CONCLUSION

English newspapers play a vital role in the development of language skills. They are an effective, invaluable source of authentic materials which can be

selected to use in a classroom. English teachers should use them as supplementary material along with the other texts used in the classroom to enrich the students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. Since newspapers provide the latest news and information by generating news every day, the students get exposure to the real language. However, the materials used in the classroom should not be too difficult for the students to understand. Otherwise, it will discourage the students' interests. Teachers should be more cautious in selecting the materials that are appropriate for the level of the students in terms of their needs, interests and language level. The teacher should help the students overcome the difficulties they encounter by allowing the students to bring their dictionaries to class when they have difficulties in understanding a news story.

VI. LIMITATIONS

As this study was conducted on using English newspapers to develop students' vocabulary and reading comprehension with a small sample size of students in a reading class of Kasetsart University, the outcomes may not generalize to all lecture environments. It is recommended for further research to apply the same research using English newspapers as a teaching tool to enhance other linguistic skills such as speaking and writing. In addition, if this research was conducted with a large sample of EFL learners in multiple levels, it is recommended to observe, follow and compare the differences in the learners' linguistic achievements and abilities amongst different levels.

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APPENDIX

READ THE TEXT CAREFULLY AND DO THE EXERCISES THAT FOLLOW. PEANUTS ANIMATOR, 91, DIES

SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA: Bill Melendez, the animator who gave life to Snoopy, Charlie Brown and other Peanuts characters in scores of movies and TV specials, has died. He was 91. Melendez died on Tuesday at St John's Health Center.

His nearly seven decades as a professional animator began in 1938 when he was hired by Walt Disney Studios and worked on Mickey Mouse cartoons and classic animated features such as *Pinocchio* and *Fantasia*.

He went on to animate TV specials such as *A Charlie Brown Christmas* and was the voice of Snoopy, who never spoke intelligible words but issued expressive howls, sighs and sobs.

Melendez was born in 1916 in Hermosillo in the Mexican state of Sonora. He moved with his family to Arizona in 1928 and then to Los Angeles in the 1930s, attending the Chouinard Art Institute.

He took part in a strike that led to the unionisation of Disney artists in 1941, and later moved to Warner, where he worked on Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig and Daffy Duck shorts. In 1948, Melendez left Warner and over the next 15 years worked as a director and producer on

more than 1,000 commercials and movies for United Productions of America (UPA), Playhouse Pictures and John Sutherland Productions. At UPA, he helped animate *Gerald McBoing-Boing*, which won the 1951 Academy Award for best cartoon short. Melendez met Peanuts creator Charles M. Schulz in 1959 while creating Ford TV commercials featuring Peanuts characters. The two became friends and Melendez became the only person Schulz authorised to animate his characters.

Melendez founded his own production company in 1964 and with his partner Lee Mendelson went on to produce, direct or animate around 70 Peanuts TV specials, four movies and hundreds of commercials.

The first special was 1965's *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

The show reportedly worried CBS as it broke so much new ground for a cartoon.

It lacked a laugh track, used real children as voice actors, had a jazz score and included a scene in which Linus recited lines from the New Testament.

The show was a ratings success and has gone on to become a Christmas perennial. He was also involved in the animated version of *The Lion, The Witch And The Wardrobe*. AP



Bill Melendez

Source: Bangkok Post, September 5, 2008.

Match the headings to the relevant paragraphs.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| ____ 1. Paragraph 1+2 | A. The first show |
| ____ 2. Paragraph 3 | B. Innovations |
| ____ 3. Paragraph 4 | C. Starts a company |
| ____ 4. Paragraph 5 | D. Career Develops |
| ____ 5. Paragraph 6 | E. Early life |
| ____ 6. Paragraph 7 | F. A Big Hit |
| ____ 7. Paragraph 8 | G. Melendez Dies |
| ____ 8. Paragraph 9 | H. Animated Charlie Brown |
| ____ 9. Paragraph 10 | I. Beginning of Career |

Vocabulary Exercise

Match the words on the left with their definitions on the right. Write the letter in the space given. The number in brackets refers to the paragraph number.

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. animator (1) | a. a slow breath out that makes |
| a | long soft sound especially because you are disappointed you are disappointed, tired, annoyed, or relaxed |
| _____ 2. howl (4) | b. someone who makes films or cartoons |
| _____ 3. sigh (4) | c. people that the film is about |
| _____ 4. characters (6) | d. the long loud sound that a |
| dog | or similar animal makes |
| _____ 5. recite (9) | e. say it aloud |