

Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of Graded Readers in Promoting English Reading Skills in Thai EFL Students: A Case Study of Secondary School Teachers in Bangkok

Korkaew Samitayothin *

Pataraporn Tapinta **

Abstract

This study aims to survey the use of Graded Readers in Thai secondary schools and to explore the attitudes of English language teachers towards the use of the materials in promoting reading skills in Thai secondary schools. The participants were 45 teachers of Foreign Languages Departments from 6 out of 66 secondary schools (9.09%) in Bangkok which used Graded Readers in English language teaching. The questionnaire and semi-structured interview were the major instruments. The descriptive and interpretive methods of content analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Berg, 2004) were conducted for this study. The results revealed Graded Readers

* Graduate Student in English for Specific Purposes Program,
Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University.
e-mail: kng.korkaew@gmail.com

** Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty
of Humanities, Kasetsart University. e-mail: ptapinta@yahoo.com

were commonly used as external reading (47%) to provide the students with an opportunity for extensive reading and promote their reading habits. However, these teachers seemed to lack awareness of the fact that Graded Readers could enhance the use of reading strategies. Yet, 53% of the teachers reported positive attitudes in the use of the materials in teaching strategies. Eight major reading strategies (e.g., building background knowledge, vocabulary building, skimming and identifying main ideas, generating questions, scanning and identifying supporting details, inferring meaning/interpreting, summarizing, and brainstorming) were reported to be substantially used among these teachers. Overall, the results of this study suggest that the schools should promote more effective reading instruction on the use of this material in improving reading skills in Thai students more effectively.

Keywords: Teachers' attitudes; Graded Readers; EFL students;
Reading strategies; Reading comprehension

ทัศนคติของครูต่อการใช้หนังสืออ่านนอกเวลา
เพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษในนักเรียนไทย:
กรณีศึกษาของครูชั้นมัธยมศึกษาจากโรงเรียน
ในเขตกรุงเทพมหานคร

กอแก้ว สมิตะโยธิน*

ภัตราพร ตีบปินดา**

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มุ่งเน้นศึกษาการใช้หนังสืออ่านนอกเวลาภาษาอังกฤษของนักเรียนระดับชั้นมัธยมศึกษาของไทย และเพื่อสำรวจทัศนคติของครูผู้สอนวิชาภาษาอังกฤษต่อการใช้หนังสืออ่านนอกเวลาเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษ ผู้ให้ข้อมูลจำนวนทั้งหมด 45 คน เป็นครูประจำภาควิชาภาษาต่างประเทศจาก 6 โรงเรียนในกรุงเทพมหานครที่อยู่ภายใต้การควบคุมของสำนักงานการศึกษาขั้นพื้นฐาน (สพฐ.) ซึ่งได้บรรจุหนังสืออ่านนอกเวลาภาษาอังกฤษในหลักสูตรของโรงเรียน การเก็บข้อมูลของงานวิจัยนี้ใช้แบบสอบถามและการสัมภาษณ์เป็นเครื่องมือหลัก และการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหาใช้วิธีการเชิงบรรยายและการตีความภายใต้

* นิสิตระดับมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อวัฒนธรรมสังค์เนียฯ
ภาควิชาภาษาต่างประเทศ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยเกษตรศาสตร์ ติดต่อได้ที่:
kng.korkaew@gmail.com

** ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ประจำภาควิชาภาษาต่างประเทศ คณะมนุษยศาสตร์
มหาวิทยาลัยเกษตรศาสตร์ ติดต่อได้ที่: ptapinta@yahoo.com

กรอบทฤษฎีที่เกี่ยวข้อง จากการศึกษาพบว่า 47% ของครูในโรงเรียนดังกล่าวใช้หนังสือนอกเวลาเป็นการอ่านเสริมนอกห้องเรียน โดยมีวัตถุประสงค์หลักเพื่อส่งเสริมนิสัยรักการอ่าน และให้นักเรียนมีโอกาสอ่านหนังสือภาษาอังกฤษที่หลากหลายและเหมาะสมกับระดับความสามารถทางภาษาอังกฤษของตนมากขึ้น ตามนโยบายของโรงเรียน แต่ไม่ตระหนักรถึงความสำคัญในการนำหนังสืออ่านนอกเวลามาใช้เพื่อพัฒนาการอ่าน อย่างไรก็ตาม 53% ของครูในโรงเรียนดังกล่าวนำหนังสืออ่านนอกเวลามาใช้ในห้องเรียนเพื่อการพัฒนาการอ่าน และจากผลสำรวจพบว่า ครูเหล่านั้นรายงานการสอนการอ่านโดยใช้หนังสือนอกเวลาเป็นครื่องมือในการพัฒนาการอ่าน 8 กลวิธีเป็นหลัก เมื่อพิจารณาถึงทัศนคติโดยรวมของครูผู้สอน การอ่านในโรงเรียนเหล่านี้ ผลวิจัยบ่งบอกว่า โรงเรียนควรจะได้มีการพัฒนาส่งเสริมการสอนการอ่านแก่ผู้สอน ซึ่งรวมถึงการนำหนังสืออ่านนอกเวลามาใช้พัฒนาการอ่าน กลวิธีที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่สอง; กลวิธีด้านการอ่าน; ความเข้าใจด้านการอ่าน

คำสำคัญ: ทัศนคติของครู; หนังสืออ่านนอกเวลาภาษาอังกฤษ;

นักเรียนที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาที่สอง; กลวิธีด้านการอ่าน;

ความเข้าใจด้านการอ่าน

1. Rationale of the study

In Thailand, English plays an important role as it is used as a lingua franca in various areas of studies and professions (Baker, 2012; Nomnian, 2014). In education, teaching the four English language skills - reading, writing, speaking, and listening is assigned in curriculum from primary to secondary levels as both a compulsory and an elective subject to promote English language proficiency in Thai students (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008). However, as foreign language learners, Thai students have encountered obstacles such as insufficient background knowledge and linguistic knowledge which are raised as the primary concerns for their English language development (Chawwang, 2008). The difficulties in developing reading skills and comprehension are among those concerns.

To decrease these difficulties, not only can reading materials help the learners to improve their reading abilities, but also teachers' attitudes or beliefs in reading instruction have a great influence in the development of learners' attitudes and abilities in reading skills as well (Nourie & Lenski, 1998). Experts have also suggested that extensive reading including the use of Graded Readers is one of the widespread approaches which has been used to improve the learners' reading skills (Waring, 2000). To note, Graded Readers are books which are graded for different levels of readers from beginners to advanced readers. The materials are simplified in vocabulary, difficulty of grammar structures and the number of words used in telling stories (Bulushy, n.d.).

As aforementioned, teachers' attitudes or beliefs in reading instruction as well as the use of reading materials affect learners' attitudes and abilities in this skill. Therefore, the exploration of the teachers' attitudes towards their strategies in developing reading skills as well as the use of Graded Readers

should allow us to learn more about the instructional context of English reading in Thai schools these days. Especially, this present study should bring more insight about the use of Graded Readers to enhance learning activities to promote reading comprehension skill in Thai students. The better understanding of the instructional phenomenon of this skill should eventually lead to further development in the field.

Although several studies (e.g., Kleinová, 2015; McQuillan, 2016) have examined roles of Graded Readers in promoting reading comprehension, Thai teachers' attitudes towards the use of Graded Readers as supplementary reading materials in an English language curriculum have not been substantially focused on. Therefore, it has become the main interest of this study to explore their beliefs concerning the use of Graded Readers, as well as their views related to their common practices.

2. Research Questions

1. How are Graded Readers used to promote English reading skills of Thai students in secondary schools?
2. What are the attitudes of English language teachers in Thai secondary schools towards the use of Graded Readers in promoting their students' English reading skills?

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Reading comprehension

According to Woolley (2011), reading comprehension is defined as “the process of making meaning from text” (p. 15). A text can be in wide range from words to a discourse comprising of a large number of sentences (Aebersold & Field, 1997, p. 9). The goal of the comprehension is to gain the meaning from isolated words or sentences and to understand what is described in the context. Reading comprehension takes place when there is a relationship between a reader and text. A reader interacts with the written text and makes the meaning through the various processes of comprehension.

3.2 Reading Strategies

Reading strategies are the specific approaches which show how the readers interact with the texts and help them to succeed in reading comprehension more effectively (Carrell, 1989). In order to comprehend the texts more efficiently, it is vital for readers to have appropriate reading strategies to enhance their reading process (Auerbach & Paxton, 1997, as cited in Chinwonno, 2001). The following section describes various reading strategies and their benefits. To note, as the results of this study showed that 8 reading strategies were mainly used with Graded Readers by the teachers, only those major strategies will be presented as follows:

3.2.1 Building background knowledge

Building background knowledge is used before reading activities to promote students' comprehension. It helps connect their previous experience to the new ideas found in reading and provides students with different backgrounds the opportunities to find clarity in meaning (Duke & Pearson, 2002). This strategy could activate students' background knowledge about content or story, raise their motivation in reading, and assess their knowledge of the topic (Herrmann, 2013).

3.2.2 Making prediction

According to Lysnchuk, Pressley, and Vye (1990), making prediction is "the ability to find the clues in the structure and content of the story to guess what would happen next" (p. 482). Predictions can help second language readers to check their comprehension and focus on important information (Irwin, 1986). Moreover, it can help lead them to expect more about the stories based on their previous experiences (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Thus, by using this strategy, it can make the texts more comprehensible and help learners to understand them more clearly.

3.2.3 Vocabulary building

Vocabulary building is used to help the readers increase or build up their vocabulary knowledge and how they work through the texts they read. Since vocabulary plays an important role in learners' reading skill development and their academic achievement (Anderson, 1999), by the use of this strategy in teaching reading, it could help students develop their vocabulary skills, comprehend the texts, and enhance their communication with others in English (Education Service Agencies region 6 & 7, 2006).

3.2.4 Skimming and identifying main ideas

According to Duffy (2003), the purposes of skimming are to quickly identify the main ideas and general overview of the content. Using this strategy can help readers to read and locate the information more quickly, increase the amount of usable data obtained from the materials, and give the chance to decide if the text is interesting and whether to continue reading it in more detail (Beale, 2013).

3.2.5 Scanning and identifying supporting details

According to Grellet (1981) “scanning requires readers to search for specific information without reading the whole text” (as cited in Souhila, 2014, p. 12). Beale (2013) noted that it was one of the effective devices that a reader can use to help him/her to quickly locate specific information. It is an effective device to accomplish successful comprehension.

3.2.6 Inferring meaning/interpreting

Inferring or reading between lines is the ability to draw a conclusion or meaning from the information of the texts that has been implied rather than directly stated by an author (Bailey, 2014). By using this strategy, it could help readers to read the text more critically, and allow them to use a variety of strategies to solve comprehension problems or deepen their understanding of a text.

3.2.7 Summarizing

Summarizing is how the readers can identify the most important ideas of the texts, integrate them in a meaningful way, and create a brief retelling with the bare essentials or the gist (Duffy, 2003). By applying this strategy, it helps the readers to understand the organizational structure of the texts and

enables them to focus on the essential ideas and important details (Jones, 2012).

3.2.8 Brainstorming

Osborn (1953) explained that brainstorming is the method which allows the mind to create new ideas without judging their value at the same time (as cited in Ghabanchi & Behrooznia, 2014, p. 514). By combining brainstorming and reading, it could help develop ideas of the stories more in-depth and promote learners' comprehension (Navaee & Asadi, 2015).

3.3 Graded Readers and their characteristics

Graded Reader refers to books of which the language is simplified in vocabulary, complexity of grammar structures and by reducing the number of words. It is graded for different levels from beginners to advanced readers in order to suit the individual competence of the second language learners (Waring, 2000; Bulushy, n.d.). According to Waring (n.d.), there are 4 major characteristics in Graded Readers that should be considered as follows:

3.3.1 Characterization

Characters are commonly one of the important components which attract the readers and keep them reading until the end of the story. Waring (2000) explained that in order to help second language learners get into the story and learn through Graded Readers, characters have to be believable and simple to illustrate and remember. Personalities of the characters should be developed and also change.

3.3.2 Voice

Voice is a strong narrative device which gives the materials a distinctive flavor and make them unique. It can convey the author's attitude, personality, and character. In reading materials for second language learners, it is important to keep the voices from the original stories to prevent confusion and misunderstanding in their reading.

3.3.3 Background knowledge

Background knowledge of the readers is considered as a component which makes the reading more comprehensible (Anderson, 1999). For second language learners, it is important to carefully consider the reading materials which have to cover the content of knowledge, culture, and specific information which could help the readers understand the stories more easily (Herrmann, 2013).

3.3.4 Language and Simplification

According to Bulushy (n.d.), in second language learning, levels of language difficulty should be seriously considered and has to correspond to the learners. Language in reading materials should be modified in order to allow the readers to understand most of the contents. In order to make the learners engage in reading step by step, the process of simplification is used to modify the existing texts in various aspects, e.g., vocabulary and structure. In this style of learning, the learners will learn the language from the basic to the advanced level, and it will be the fundamental practice to promote their reading skill successfully.

3.4 Teaching reading skills in a foreign language

Teaching reading skills aims to provide the learners how to read and apply reading strategies in order to make sense and comprehend the texts more effectively (Nutall, 1996; Roit, n.d.). This is also true for teaching reading to readers in a foreign language. Therefore, teaching readers how to use strategies to enhance each reading skill has been widely practiced as part of reading instruction. Experts have discussed various approaches of teaching reading skills effectively. Among others, Mikulecky (2008), suggests that it will be more effective if learners can practice each strategy with a wide range of example texts and have opportunities to discuss the benefits of the strategy use. Doing this, learners should be able to apply the skills naturally and effectively overtime.

In addition, teaching the learners how to engage in reading effectively using various reading strategies, choosing the suitable materials for learners in different language proficiency is also essential. Especially, when the learners are able to read the stories of their interests and suit their language proficiency, they will have more motivation and enjoyment towards their reading (Johnson & Blair, 2003).

3.5 Related Studies

A number of previous studies have suggested that the use of Graded Readers in training reading skills could yield positive impacts and development of reading in EFL learners. For instance, the study of McQuillan (2016) showed that by using controlled-vocabulary materials such as Graded Readers, readers were able to acquire a sufficient amount of words for reading a higher level of

texts. In other words, the increasing vocabulary learned from Graded Readers could serve them as a possible bridge to more challenging texts such as newspapers and academic texts. Also, in the study of Graded Readers as a tool to raise learners' interest in reading by Kleinová (2015), the results revealed that, in contrast to other types of texts, Graded Readers as a form of the extensive reading approach to ELT classes' curricula allowed students to develop positive attitudes towards reading in English and brought their attention back to literature. Moreover, the study of improving reading skills through effective reading strategies by Küçükglu (2013) also revealed that by using reading strategies, the students developed a better understanding of the strategies, and their comprehension in reading were well promoted. Lastly, Johnson & Blair (2003) pointed out the importance of the role of self-selected literature to reading engagement. Their study showed that when students had an opportunity to make their own choice on reading, it did not only help motivate their interest and enjoyment, but also help them learn how to manage and deal with the problems arise when reading.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Participants and Data collection

The participants of the study were from 6 public secondary schools in Bangkok (9.09%) which were under the Office of the Basic Education Commission. From the preliminary survey by telephone, it was found out that 6 of 66 schools used the Graded Readers in their curricula, however, 45 teachers who taught reading in English in only 6 schools agreed to participate in this study. After gaining findings from the questionnaire surveys, semi-structured interviews

were conducted with 5 teachers (11.11%) individually to gain more in-depth details. The interviews were permitted by the head of the foreign languages department of each school.

4.2 Instruments: Questionnaire and Interview

Questionnaire and semi-structured interview (Berg, 2004; Creswell, 2009) were the two major instruments in this study. In order to gain the overall picture regarding the management of the use of Graded Readers in a school's curriculum as well as of the teachers' general attitudes towards the use of the materials, major topics of the questions decided for the survey included 1) teachers' background information, 2) the use of Graded Readers in the schools' curriculum, 3) the teachers' knowledge of Graded Readers, and 4) their attitudes towards the use of the materials with reading strategies to promote students' English skills. The items' formats of the questionnaire included checklists, open-ended questions, and opinion statements regarding teachers' attitudes. The two instruments were validated in terms of content by several experts in the reading instruction field. After obtaining the overall responses from the questionnaire survey, some gained data regarding how Graded Readers could help promote students' reading skills and the students' interests in reading Graded Readers were found limited or unclear. Therefore, the semi-structured interview questions were developed to address these points. To gain more in-depth information and reflections, the researcher decided to interview 5 teachers who agreed to give more report in detail. The major aspects that appeared to need more elaboration from the survey responses included teachers' opinions towards using learning activities and reading strategies which helped promote students' interests in reading Graded Readers and how

the characteristics or features of Graded Readers helped promote students' reading skills.

4.3 Data Analysis

To analyze the data for this study, descriptive and interpretive methods of content analysis (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Berg, 2004) were conducted. First, the participants' responses from the questionnaires were categorized in 3 main aspects: 1) the contexts of the use of Graded Readers in 6 schools, 2) teaching practices regarding the strategy use with Graded Readers, and teachers' attitudes towards the use of the material to develop reading skills of Thai EFL students, and 3) the problems in using Graded Readers. These 3 main aspects were described based on the frameworks of this study. Finally, Major concepts regarding how the Graded Readers enhanced English reading skills in Thai secondary school students were summarized leading to the conclusions and discussions of the overall findings.

5. Results of the Study

The report of the findings is presented and discussed in three main sections based on the theoretical frameworks and results from questionnaires and interviews.

5.1 The contexts of the use of Graded Readers in Thai secondary schools in Bangkok

This section mainly describes how Thai secondary school teachers from 6 out of 66 schools (9.09%) in Bangkok used Graded Readers. Different aspects of the contexts of the use of Graded Readers can be described as follows:

5.1.1 Learners

Graded Readers are mainly used for students from Mathayom 1-6 (grades 7-12). The levels of students assigned to read Graded Readers depended on the school curriculum policy and teachers' opinions about the overall English reading ability of students. In some schools, the readings are assigned to either Mathayom 1-3 (grades 7-9) or Mathayom 4-6 (grades 10-12) while in some other schools, all secondary (Mathayom) students read Graded Readers.

5.1.2 The purpose and management of the use of Graded Readers

The purposes of these 6 schools in using Graded Readers were to give the students an opportunity to read various kinds of English materials as well as to promote motivation in their reading habits and develop reading skills. In one academic year, Graded Readers were used to serve in three ways: external reading, in class reading, and as both external readings and in class materials. The percentages of the use of Graded Readers and how the teachers managed the material in each way are presented below:

Table 1

The percentages and the management of the use of Graded Readers

Way of Use	Percentage	The Management
1. External reading	47%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers assigned Graded Readers as a take-home assignment after school hours or during the term break.
2. In class reading	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extra activities (e.g., doing research and reports) were assigned to support their self-study learning and to improve the learners' reading skills. - Graded Readers were integrated as part of reading lessons in the classroom at least 2 hours per week.
3. External readings and in class materials	33%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Graded Readers were used as part of teaching reading strategies and extra activities in both classroom and take home assignments to help develop students' English reading ability.

To note, the teachers also revealed that the reading of Graded Readers could help them evaluate and assess their students' reading ability.

5.1.3 Assessment and evaluation of the students' reading skills

In these 6 schools, written tests and extended tasks were commonly employed for both formative and summative assessments. The forms of the test included multiple choice and open-ended questions. In addition to the tests, most teachers agreed that extended activities from the reading also allowed them to evaluate students' reading performance in addition to the assessment results.

5.2 The teachers' attitudes towards the use of Graded Readers to promote English reading skills in Thai EFL students

Although how Graded Readers were used to enhance reading skills was not described substantially by the teachers who mainly used the materials as external reading, approximately 53% of the teachers who integrated reading Graded Readers as part of classroom lessons reported that they were mainly used when practicing reading strategies. They reported that 11 reading strategies were taught in class; however, only 8 strategies were substantially discussed. The percentages of the 8 reading strategies used with Graded Readers are presented below:

Table 2

The percentages of eight reading strategies used when reading Graded Readers

Reading strategies	Percentage
1. Building background knowledge	25%
2. Making prediction	29%
3. Vocabulary building	40%
4. Skimming and identifying main ideas	29%
5. Scanning and identifying supporting details	34%
6. Inferring meaning/interpreting	23%
7. Summarizing	50%
8. Brainstorming	31%

(The 3 remaining strategies were generating questions, making connection and visualizing.) Thus, the teachers' attitudes towards the use of Graded Readers and the practice of the use of the 8 strategies are summarized as follows:

5.2.1 Building background knowledge

Twenty- five percent of the teachers who used Graded Readers agreed that using the strategy of building background knowledge could help the students to connect their experiences to the texts. This strategy establishes basic understanding of the stories. Most of the teachers introduced the strategy as a pre- reading activity and integrated it in learning activities such as in discussion about characters, events, and settings. They noted that teaching students about that using background knowledge to familiarize these elements of the stories could help them read more effectively. The strategy helped the students to connect and recall meanings better. They could better comprehend and generate the ideas of what they were reading. Moreover, in some learners who lacked good reading habits and willingness to read in English, the use of the strategy could stimulate their interests and increase their willingness and eagerness in reading as well.

5.2.2 Making prediction

Twenty-nine percent of the teachers reported in the survey that they introduced the use of the strategy of making prediction to help students establish reading comprehension of stories from Graded Readers. Most teachers viewed that because of the simplified texts of Graded Readers (e.g., simplified vocabulary, sentence structures, etc.), the students were able to guess or predict parts of the stories more easily. This could help prepare their thoughts before moving to the next steps of readings, and identify the overall pictures of the stories. Especially, they noted using pictures (which are one of the key elements of Graded Readers) and the key words were successful in teaching the students. The students were actively engaged in making predictions in their reading, and this enabled them to make predictions more easily and accurately. As a result, they began to focus more on what they were

reading. This awareness finally motivated and stimulated them to find answers and prove their predictions.

5.2.3 Vocabulary building

Forty percent of the teachers noted the importance of this strategy and discussed the impacts of the use of this strategy in improving their students' English language and reading abilities. They usually considered using this strategy as one of the major devices in reading activities. They reflected in the survey that the simplified vocabularies and sentence structures helped students learn more vocabulary, especially when using this strategy with the proper levels of Graded Readers. This helped them follow the stories more easily and made them feel more comfortable with their reading. In addition, the teachers noted that the students could practice the strategy even in their self-study reading. They could select suitable ways relevant to their language proficiency to learn new words. The most common method was making their own collection of personal vocabulary notes.

5.2.4 Skimming and identifying main ideas

It was generally noted by the teachers from the interview that although it seemed that the students had the general senses of skimming and identifying main ideas, they were still unable to use the strategies well enough. Thus, the explanation of how to use these strategies and extensive training was important. From the survey, twenty-nine percent of the teachers reflected that Graded Readers could help promote the skills of skimming and identifying the main ideas. This is due to simplified features of the texts (e.g., vocabulary, grammar structures and reduced number of words, and other elements of the stories) which are carefully chosen to suit each level of readers. After practicing these two strategies substantially in reading Graded Readers, students spent

less time on their reading and could understand the main points and purposes of the stories more clearly. This could help decrease the boredom of reading.

5.2.5 Scanning and identifying supporting details

Thirty-four percent of the teachers reported that the use of proper level of Graded Readers could help students to scan and find the specific details. Moreover, they revealed that the simplification of language as well as special features such as characters, events, and setting in Graded Readers helped promote the ease of the use of these strategies. When the learners could do scanning (along with skimming) effectively, it would finally lead them to establish good comprehension.

5.2.6 Inferring meaning/interpreting

Twenty-three percent of the teachers observed that the improved skills of reading between the lines and making interpretations enabled students to understand the stories effectively. However, they agreed that it is a high-level strategy and the students generally had difficulties with this skill in their reading. Nevertheless, with all features of Graded Readers (i.e., characterization, voice, background knowledge, and language simplification), they observed that students could practice and improve these skills more easily.

5.2.7 Summarizing

The survey revealed that although fifty percent of the teachers believed that summarizing is an important skill, it is interesting to note that to the questions regarding how they used this strategy with Graded Readers, they did not seem to reflect substantially how they taught this reading strategy. They only reported that they assigned the students to summarize the stories they read and used summarizing to evaluate the students' comprehension. In their

opinion, how well the students were able to summarize the stories could reflect students' comprehension.

Nevertheless, among these teachers, there were a handful of them (13.2%) who taught how to use the summarizing strategy in the classroom effectively when their students read Graded Readers. These teachers introduced the overall structure of a story (e.g., the sequences of events, characters and highlighted scenes) and raised students' awareness of identifying main ideas so that they could combine them to make a summary. They claimed that this teaching method could help students, including unskilled readers, to be able to understand the stories and summarize the texts more correctly.

5.2.8 Brainstorming

Brainstorming was also used in reading activities including those with Graded Readers to promote various skills leading to comprehension. Thirty-one percent of the teachers believed that using the strategy of brainstorming could help the students not only to improve their reading skills and comprehension, but also help them learn how to express their thoughts and work with others. They viewed that by applying the strategy in group work activities in class between the students and the discussion between the teacher and students, it enabled students to review and recheck their understanding which led them to have more comprehension of what they had read.

After practicing, the teachers observed that the students could comprehend the contents more easily and precisely. It also helped students with poor reading skills to concentrate more on the story and follow the story more comfortably. Moreover, the teachers noticed that the students also learned how to compromise with others and had better skills in handling difficult situations or conflicts.

5.3 The Problems in using Graded Readers to promote reading comprehension in Thai EFL students

Although Graded Readers were well-managed for the use of both teachers and readers in these 6 schools, there were problems reported upon the use of this kind of reading material. The teachers' comments from both questionnaires and interviews regarding two main aspects of the problems are summarized as follows:

5.3.1 Learners

Most teachers expected to improve their students' reading skills by using Graded Readers. Nevertheless, they were aware that every learner had differences in English language potential. Although Graded Readers have simplified language (e.g., vocabulary and sentence structures) and are graded into many levels to suit different learners, the teachers still faced problems caused by students' differences. They noted that Thai schools normally have large-sized classrooms of heterogeneous groups of learners (approximately 40-50 students). Therefore, although Graded Readers of a certain level were selected to suit the students' level, it did not suit all or even most students in one classroom. Moreover, some teachers also mentioned that the weak language ability could be too time consuming when practicing reading skills in class. This in turn decreased learners' interests and brought boredom to the readers.

5.3.2 Contents of Graded Readers

The teachers viewed that despite the graded level of difficulties and simplified features of the materials, the unfamiliar contexts of stories could turn into a problem. The teachers noted that students nowadays tend to like stories

that are in trend and similar to their lifestyles. For these students, the Graded Readers' stories are quite obsolete and not interesting. When in class, even if they tried to use Graded Readers with the help of reading strategies in order to promote both students' interests and their reading skills, they often did not enjoy the stories. This led them to lack focus. For external reading, one of the teachers revealed that when Graded Readers were assigned, it was hard to find students who were willing to read for their pleasure and learn English from the contents. Most of them only read the stories in order to get a good score on a comprehension test. Therefore, the contents of the material, which did not suit students' interests, could hinder improvement of their reading skills.

6. Discussion and Implications

Although there were teachers who reported using Graded Readers to promote the use of reading strategies and agreed that it could raise awareness and reading skills development, approximately 53% of all teachers used the materials in these 6 schools. The other teachers assigned it as external reading only. This seemed to indicate that many teachers who teach reading in these schools were not seriously aware of the fact that Graded Readers could improve students' reading strategies. Moreover, only a small number of teachers who used Graded Readers emphasized the impact of the use of the materials on teaching major reading strategies, such as building background knowledge (25%), making prediction (29%), skimming and identifying main ideas (29%), and inferring meaning/interpreting (23%).

As defined by Carrell (1989), reading strategies are the specific methods which show how the readers interact with the texts to establish comprehension.

In addition, the study of Küçükglu (2013) supported that teaching reading strategies is a key element in developing students' comprehension and increased the understanding and improvement of reading comprehension. Regarding the impact of using reading materials such as Graded Readers to develop learners' vocabulary, the study of McQuillan (2016) confirmed that students could move on to reading texts with higher levels of difficulties such as newspapers, classic novels, or even academic texts. Moreover, the study of Kleinová (2015) reported that Graded Readers could develop positive attitudes towards reading in English. The principles and evidence from these studies seem to suggest that the schools in this present study should consider promoting teachers to have better awareness in connecting the use of Graded Readers and the teaching of reading strategies to promote reading skills. The training of how the features of the material could enhance reading processes should be provided. When the teachers' understanding of instructional knowledge and skills are well-grounded, the teachers should be able to promote the use of reading materials (e.g., Graded Readers) more effectively.

Besides, to address the problems of a large-sized classroom of heterogeneous learners, teachers can use Graded Readers of various levels and stories to best suit the different groups of students with different language abilities. This may help reduce the problem of using one reading material to fit all students. As a consequence, their reading instruction should be more effective. Moreover, when the students are allowed to select the materials based on their interest and ability, they are not only more motivated to read, but they also have more positive attitudes and enjoyment towards reading (Kragler, 2000, p. 133; Johnson & Blair, 2003).

In conclusion, Graded Readers are described as the books which are written specifically for second language learners to develop their reading ability

and can help create a series of stepping stones for learners to confidently read authentic texts (Waring, 2000). Therefore, if these schools can promote better knowledge of teaching reading skills among the teachers as well as awareness of the fact that Graded Readers can enhance the use of reading strategies, it should strengthen the effectiveness of the use of this material in improving reading skills in Thai students.

7. Conclusion

In summary, this study revealed that only 6 out of 66 secondary schools (9.09%) in Bangkok included Graded Readers in their curricula as external reading (47%) and in class activities (20%). Some schools used the material for both purposes (33%). In these schools, the materials were mainly aimed to promote the students' reading habits and give them an opportunity to read various types of English books suited to their levels of language proficiency. After reading, written tests and extended tasks were involved for both formative and summative assessments to evaluate students' understanding of the stories.

Regarding the teachers' reflections on their attitudes towards the use of Graded Readers in promoting reading skills, those who used it mainly as external reading materials did not reveal their attitudes substantially. In brief, they used it accordingly to the schools' policies. However, approximately 53% of the teachers in these schools reported that they used it in the classroom to promote their students' reading strategies. The results showed that 8 strategies were substantially used (23- 50% as reported in Table 2). Due to the characteristics of Graded Readers (e.g., simplification of text and story schema

related to readers' background knowledge), by using the material to reinforce the practice of reading strategies, the teachers agreed that it could help the students improve their reading skills and ability to comprehend the texts more effectively. To illustrate, they became more capable of using background knowledge to familiarize texts, predicting parts of stories more easily, and spending less time reading because of improved ability in skimming and identifying main ideas. Nevertheless, the teachers who actively used Graded Readers in this study revealed some difficulties in managing the use of this kind of material. The two main problems were caused by large-sized classes of heterogeneous learners, and in some cases, the students' lack of interest in stories' contents, especially in those that they were not familiar with.

8. Recommendation for further studies

It was agreed by most teachers who used Graded Readers in teaching reading strategies in their classrooms that Graded Readers can promote effective reading processes and comprehension. Further studies can be expanded to observe how well students who have learned the use of reading strategies in classrooms can apply their skills to the reading of Graded Readers or even other kinds of texts outside of classrooms. Moreover, when various levels and/or stories of Graded Readers are used with heterogeneous learners in one classroom, it is interesting to observe how lessons can be best arranged.

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