



## Using Task- Based Learning/Teaching for the Development of Reading Comprehension of English-Chinese Students in Reading Strategies in English Course

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### Abstract

This research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the students' reading comprehension after using task-based learning and evaluate the students' satisfaction with the teaching process at the end of the project. The samples of this study were 37 second year of English-Chinese major students studying Reading Strategies in English course from the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Huachiew Chalerm Prakiet University. The instruments were the reading activities, tasks, the pre-post reading comprehension tests, and course learning outcome questionnaires for investigating the satisfaction with the task-based teaching model. The data were analyzed statistically by percentages, mean, and standard deviation.

The findings showed that the efficiency of the students' reading comprehension was at a good level. The efficiency was ranged from the most effectiveness as identifying meaning of words, identifying organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays, identifying the topics, identifying supporting details, making inferences, summarizing and identifying main ideas, respectively. Regarding the course learning outcome, the students' overall satisfaction towards the instructional model was at a high level.

**Keywords:** Task-based learning, Course Learning Outcome, Reading Strategies in English Course.

### Introduction

From the perspective of the author, reading is an essential skill. It is one of the problematic skills compared to other skills. Students should be trained to improve reading which is the basis for learning at a higher level and enhancing communication in their daily lives. Students have to read to understand, ranging from directions, lessons, and other explanations about things in their lives. In learning foreign languages, reading is one of the main skills. Carrell (1986) stated that second language learning or studying a foreign language especially studying English, reading is the most important skill among the four skills. At a higher level of knowledge, the ability to read fast and understand it is considered as essential as

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speaking skill. For second language teaching or foreign languages for academic purposes, universities that rely on educational documents in English, reading skill is even more important. If students do not have the competent ability in reading, they will not be able to reach the level of success in education.

In teaching foreign language reading skills, Thailand has not yet been successful as it should be. The English Proficiency Index (EPI) has ranked English proficiency skills in the Asian region into five levels, namely very high level, high level, moderate level, low level and very low level. Thailand is classified in "very low" level, which is lower than Indonesia, China and Vietnam. Compared with listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, reading skills were lower than other skills (Office of the Education Council Secretariat, 2014). This information reflects that Thai people need to develop a high level of skill and ability to use the English language rapidly. English is an international language. If students are capable of using it, the advantages for them are both for competition in the domestic labor market as well as going abroad to find their work. Therefore, students must develop their language skills in order to keep pace with neighboring countries. The shallow English proficiency level of Thai people may be caused by teaching, which is consistent with Carrell and Eisterhold (1988), who pointed out that teachers focused on the wrong way of teaching reading. Teachers tend to focus only on learners' language knowledge and comprehension of the task based on knowledge of the language only. Teaching English reading in Thailand also focuses on using translation methods. The opportunities for the students to do activities and practice the language are very few due to many problems such as the number of students, classroom conditions and teaching materials. The content of the course is also significant that it is not conducive for the students to practice as many activities as they should.

It has been said that good teaching helps learners achieve their learning objectives. Gagne, Briggs and Wager noted that education should be well-organized with a concept or theory based on it (1992). It is practical work and teaching that will help learners to have the ability to read English for comprehension. Therefore, it should be taught with various elements in a systematic manner that is learning activities, including its designs and assessments. All teaching elements are related to each other, such as objectives, contents, methods, teaching methods, and assessments. Even though there is a number of studies about skills of reading, they were only focused on using activities before reading, after reading or during reading. Some studies focused on reading comprehension using the vocabulary discussion and stories related to the subject reading or translating the passages into students' language and describing meaning based on grammar knowledge. It can be said that those activities have not been integrated into the components of reading to enhance students' ability to understand the full range of teaching.

Researchers and scholars have found that task-based learning and teaching approaches have affect learners to learn languages; for example, Jiraporn Sangarun (2004, 1)



studied and found that the task-based teaching approach should be used in teaching English in Thailand, especially for students who learn English for a long time but still can't use the language to communicate effectively. This approach may be a suitable teaching method for teaching English and solving students' reading abilities. That was because the task-based teaching helped students learn to use language from real situations which is similar to the process of children learn their mother tongue.

Ma Raixue (2006, 1) and Zhang (1999, 46) stated that task-based teaching was hoping to eliminate the problem and doubts about the new approach to teaching English. It was also a method that simulated the link between the benefits of language, form, meaning, process and product. The teaching method could also emphasize the workload that could be tools in seeking knowledge or information that researchers or students want. Furthermore, Willis (1996) and Ellis (2004) had a similar opinion that teaching that emphasized the task would encourage learners to use language in their work. The study would build confidence in the learner's ability to use the language. The task would allow learners to practice using the language in situations as close to reality as possible, causing students to accept that they learned what they wanted in their real lives.

Some of the English-Chinese students at HCU have difficulties to express their understanding towards the reading passages. They also keep looking up meanings of unfamiliar words when reading in class. Their problem seemed to start with their capability to understand the meaning of words. Cooper (1984, 134) has found that students who study English as a foreign language are not capable of reading comprehension. The reason for not being good at reading is because of their little knowledge of vocabulary. Therefore, they paid attention to only the level of words, without knowing the use of the context to help in interpretation. Guessing meaning from the context will help these students achieve some understanding, so they should be taught to know contextual guessing. Reading is an essential tool as one of the pursuits of knowledge. Reading makes people brighter and reading can increase knowledge from various experiences, and these affect the development of human beings both intellectually, emotionally and socially. Reading is a skill that must be practiced and improved it well so that students can use them as tools for effective knowledge acquisition, whether it is reading in the mother tongue or foreign language. Students who can read English textbooks can increase their knowledge and get updated with world events. Those who can read any media in English have a more advanced step than those who cannot read English.

Many teaching methods have been applied to read reading for Thai students, including English-Chinese major students in HCU, namely translation method, implementing of language knowledge comprehension, reading comprehension using vocabulary discussion and reading stories related to the subject reading. However, reading comprehension skill seems to be the most difficult for them. This study tries to focus on task-based teaching methods, which many researchers and scholars, such as Ellis (2003) and Jiraporn Sangarun (2004) who shared some



similar ideas that the tasks will encourage students to use language in their work. The task will build confidence in the students' ability to use the language and allow them to practice using it in situations that are as close to reality of their lives as possible.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of using task-based learning to enhance English-Chinese students' reading comprehension were to;

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of the students' reading comprehension after using the project based learning.
2. Evaluate the students' satisfaction with the teaching process at the end of the project.

### Review of Literature

#### Task- based learning/teaching

According to Willis (2007), task is an activity where the target language is used by the students for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome. Task refers to a piece of classroom work that involves students in comprehending, producing, or interacting in target language while attention is focused on the meanings rather than the forms. The task should also have a sense of completeness, the students should be able to stand alone as a communicative act in a beginning, a middle and an end (Nunan, 2004).

Task-based learning/teaching approach consists of three stages (Willis, 2007). This approach also considers tasks as principal components. These three stages are:

#### 1. Pre-Task

In the pre-task phase, the teacher introduces and explores the topic with the class, prepares students in a way that encourages acquisition of the language. The teacher also ensures that students understand the task instructions.

#### 2. Task Circle

##### - Task

Students take the opportunity to use whatever they know about the target language, while working in pairs or small groups to achieve the goal of the task. At the same time that students are practicing the use of language skills the teacher monitors and encourages all attempts at communication but does not correct them.

##### - Planning

In the planning stage students prepare to report to the whole class about how they did the task, what they decided or discovered. Since the report stage is public, students will naturally want to be accurate, so they may consult their dictionaries or the teacher for language advice.



### 3. Report

Students present their spoken reports to the class orally or read the written reports. The teacher chooses which group of students will present their reports and may give them some quick feedback on the content and form. At this stage the teacher acts as chairperson and may play a recording of others doing the same task for the students to compare.

In the post-task phase, the teacher acts as a chairperson, and then may give comments on the content of the reports. It provides opportunities for learners to reflect on the task they did and to draw their attention to language forms or phrases, particularly with regards to problematic forms that occurred during the task cycle.

#### Previous Studies

Several studies have conducted task-based learning and teaching approach to promote the effect of language teaching and learning. For example, Maythinee Kaikaew and Thanachart Lornklang (2015) and Onpinya Ariyatanet (2018) investigated the effects of teaching English through task-based learning focusing on Thai students' writing ability and to explore students' opinion on the use of task-based teaching. The results found that students could improve their writing skill through this approach. Additionally, their studies revealed that students had positive views on the use of picture-description task as a way to develop their writing skill at a high level.

Sae-ong (2010) carried out a research which was participated by 10th grade students which aimed to develop the speaking ability of students. The research explored (1) the impacts of the approach of task-based teaching and learning on students' speaking ability, (2) the usefulness of group-work incorporating in the task-based learning and teaching, and (3) students' perceptions of oral skill improvement after learning through the approach. The findings showed that students' English speaking ability significantly improved at .05 level after learning through a task-based learning approach. The findings also revealed that students had positive perceptions of the improvement in English speaking abilities after learning through the approach.

Most of the mentioned studies conducted in Thailand focused on the development of speaking and writing skills. Very few of previous studies focusing on the use of task-based learning/teaching to promote students' reading skills to build the students' confidence to be able to complete with many countries, especially in the Southeast Asia. Also the researcher of this study aims to use different kinds of tasks and the different population to conduct this study. Even though the findings of this study may not be new, but it can give more insights particularly on the positive impacts of using task-based learning and teaching to Thai EFL classrooms that promotes students' reading ability.

## Methodology

The mixed method of the study on “Using Task- Based Learning/Teaching for Development of Reading Comprehension of English-Chinese Students in Reading Strategies in English Course” collected the data by using quantitative and qualitative methods, and can be divided into the following steps:

**Step 1:** Study the basic information (Analysis: A) to

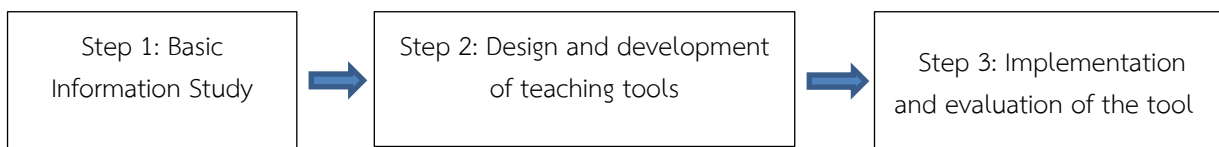
- develop the teaching process by using projects to develop the reading comprehension of learners.
- design questionnaires by focusing on the learning outcome of the reading strategies in English course.

**Step 2:** Design and Development (D and D) tools used in teaching and reading activities focused on tasks to develop English reading comprehension and satisfaction questionnaires focused on course learning outcomes.

**Step 3:** Implementation and Evaluation (I and E) are

- use of teaching tools and task-based reading activities to improve English reading comprehension, use it in the classroom and evaluation.
- use satisfaction questionnaires to see the students’ satisfaction with task-based learning for their reading comprehension.

Developing the teaching process by using workloads to develop the reading comprehension of students of the English-Chinese Program in the Reading Strategies in English course, a framework for action is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Framework of Research Methodology

The details of each step are as follows:

**Step 1: Study the primary data (Analysis: A)**

Objectives

1. To study and analyze the essential information and analyze the needs of the students as well as the problematic conditions of teaching and learning, course content, course learning outcome; needs and goals of the Faculty on graduating students,
2. To study reading behavior, students' interest in reading and their basic personal information about English reading ability.



Data sources include document sources and respondents, including:

1. Study Reading Strategies in English course of the Bachelor of Arts Program of English-Chinese program and study the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework.
2. Study knowledge about teaching and learning management in the Reading Strategies in English course.
3. Study and analyze theories and principles, including documents and research related to reading and reading English for comprehension.
4. Study and analyze theories and principles, documents and research related to teaching and learning management and activities that focus on task-based learning.
5. Study the course learning outcome in designing the questionnaires to check the student's satisfaction.

### **Step 2: Design and Development (D and D)**

Objectives

1. Design a lesson plan that focuses on tasks-based teaching to improve English reading comprehension.
2. Develop tools used in teaching and learning, such as teaching and learning management plans and reading activities focused on the tasks-based reading comprehension test.
3. Develop the questionnaires for the satisfaction assessment form for teaching and learning.

Resources include:

1. Teaching methods and reading activities that focus on tasks.
2. Plans for reading activities focusing on tasks.
3. The reading lesson plan focuses on tasks.
4. Teaching documents on task-based training and evaluation forms.
5. Satisfaction questionnaires used at the end of the project.

### **Step 3: Implementation and evaluation (I and E)**

#### **Implementation**

The objective is to use teaching methods that focus on tasks to improve reading English for understanding.

Resources are 37 English-Chinese students in the first semester of the academic year 2021. The students' ability in reading is at a average level.

#### **Evaluation**

The effectiveness of task-based teaching and learning to improve reading comprehension of English includes:

1. The ability to read for comprehension
2. Satisfaction of students with task-based teaching to improve reading English



The tools used include:

1. Lesson plans and activities focused on tasks to improve students' reading comprehension contain lesson plans, activities, and tasks.
2. Effectiveness assessment tools include: reading comprehension (criterion-based) tests and questionnaires to assess students' satisfaction with task-based teaching methods.

## Data Collection

Table 1 Data Collection

Objectives of Experiment	Before studying	During studying	After studying	Data analysis
1. to compare students' ability of reading comprehension	Test students' reading comprehension with quizzes	-	Test students' reading comprehension with quizzes	Mean and Deviation
2. study students' satisfaction	-	-	Assess the students' satisfaction with the teaching style.	Mean and Deviation

## Findings

A teaching method that emphasized on using task-based teaching for enhancing English-Chinese students' reading comprehension in Reading Strategies in English Course at Huachiew Chalermprakiet University aimed to 1) evaluate effectiveness of the students' reading comprehension after using the task-based learning, and 2) evaluate the students' satisfaction with the teaching process at the end of the project by focusing on the task of developing English reading comprehension and comparing the ability to read English for comprehension before and after teaching. The study was conducted by using quantitative methods and supplemented by qualitative methods. The results of the data analysis were as follows:



## 1. The Effectiveness of the Students' Reading Comprehension after using the Task-Based Learning

The overall results of the comparison of the ability in reading English for comprehension before and after using the task-based teaching model to develop reading comprehension were shown in Table 2.

**Table 2** The results of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the English language teaching model by task-based teaching methods for improving English reading comprehension.

Reading Strategies in English Course		No. of Students	Total scores	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall Reading Comprehension	Before study	37	15	6.50	1.52
	After study	37	15	10.26	1.38
Identify meaning of words	Before study	37	20	14.16	1.44
	After study	37	20	17.83	1.31
Making inferences	Before study	37	10	5.00	1.11
	After study	37	10	7.33	0.66
Identify the topics	Before study	37	20	8.86	1.69
	After study	37	20	14.73	1.52
Identifying main ideas	Before study	37	10	4.03	1.06
	After study	37	10	6.86	0.97
Identifying supporting details	Before study	37	10	5.03	1.18
	After study	37	10	7.33	0.75
Summarizing	Before study	37	10	4.50	0.90
	After study	37	10	7.10	0.99
Identifying organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays	Before study	37	10	4.86	1.02
	After study	37	10	7.60	0.77

From Table 2, it was found that the students' ability to read English for comprehension after using the task-based teaching ( $M = 10.26$ ,  $SD = 1.38$ ) was higher than before. The classification of reading strategy which were identifying meaning of words, making inferences, identifying topics, identifying main ideas, identifying supporting details, summarizing, and identifying organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays the students were able to use strategies for reading comprehension in various areas higher than before.

The results of students' reading comprehension by each strategy as identifying the meaning of words, making inferences, identifying topics, identifying main ideas, identifying supporting details, summarizing, and identifying organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays can be classified into their level of effectiveness as shown in Table 3.



**Table 3** Mean, Standard Deviation, and Reading Comprehension Rating

Ranging no.	Strategies for Reading Comprehension	No. of Students	Total Scores	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Percentage	Level
1	Identify meaning of words	37	20	17.83	1.31	89.15	high
2	Identifying organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays	37	10	7.60	0.77	76.00	high
3	Identify the topics	37	20	14.73	1.52	73.65	high
4	Identifying supporting details	37	10	7.33	0.75	73.3	high
5	Making inferences	37	10	7.33	0.66	73.3	high
6	Summarizing	37	10	7.10	0.99	71.00	moderate
7	Identifying main ideas	37	10	6.86	0.97	68.6	moderate
Overall Comprehension in English Reading						75.00	moderate

From Table 3, it can be seen that the students could read for comprehension at a moderate level, ranging from identifying meaning of words (the highest mean, for 89.15%), identifying organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays (76%), identifying the topics (73.65%), identifying supporting details (73.3%), making inferences (73.3%), summarizing (71%), and identifying main ideas (the lowest mean, for 68.6%).

## 2. The Students' Satisfaction with the Used of the Task-Based Teaching in English Reading

The results of the students' satisfaction with using task-based learning to improve their English comprehension are in Table 4.

**Table 4** Students' satisfaction with Task-Based Learning to improve English Reading Comprehension

No.	Course Learning Outcomes	<i>M</i>	Levels of Evaluation
1.	Students can use various reading strategies, e.g., previewing, skimming, scanning, and making inferences.	3.64	high
2.	Students can identify the topics, main ideas and supporting details.	3.73	Very high
3.	Students can understand the organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays.	3.85	Very high
Overall Satisfaction		3.74	Very high

From Table 4, the satisfaction of the students towards teaching and learning that focused on task-based education to improve English reading comprehension extracted from course learning outcomes and were distributed to the student at the end of the course was



overall found at a high level ( $M = 3.74$ ). The very high satisfaction was on understanding organizational patterns of paragraphs and essays ( $M = 3.85$ ), identifying the topics, main ideas and supporting details ( $M = 3.73$ ), and making inferences ( $M = 3.64$ ) was satisfied at a high level, respectively.

## Conclusion and Discussion

Research on the development of understanding of English reading comprehension by using task-based teaching approaches aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the students' reading comprehension after using the task-based learning and to evaluate the students' satisfaction with the teaching process at the end of the project. By teaching that focused on tasks for the development of English reading comprehension by comparing the students' ability to read English for their comprehension before and after using the English reading teaching style, focus on the tasks.

The study on the development of English reading comprehension of undergraduate students was for the 37 second-year English-Chinese major students, Faculty of Arts, for the academic year 2021. This mixed methods research with the study of quantitative methods supplemented by qualitative methods and using the experimental model, the One Group Pretest-Posttest Design. The data were analyzed by using means of ( $M$ ) values, standard deviation ( $SD$ ), and content analysis. The results of the evaluation of the effectiveness of the task-based English reading comprehension teaching were as follows:

1. After studying using English reading using the task-based instructional model that emphasizes developing reading comprehension, students had significantly higher ability in reading comprehension than before ( $M (10.26 - 6.50) = 3.76$ )

2. After learning by using a task-based instructional model that emphasizes for developing reading comprehension, the students had their overall satisfaction with the task-based learning activity model was at a high level.

After studying the teaching style of English reading for comprehension that emphasizes task-based learning, it was found that students had a higher reading comprehension ability than before. This may be because task-based teaching was the activity that responded to the development of the English reading comprehension ability of students. Also the task-based learning is a student-centered teaching activity (Nunan, 2004; Willis, 2007 ; Jiraporn Sangarun, 2004) and it promotes the conceptualization of authenticity (Krashen, 2004). These methods of real world tasks allowed the students to take responsibility for their learning process and increased their reading ability from only being the recipient of the teacher alone. Task-based teaching style was a natural language learning which was learning a language as a form of acquisition rather than learning language (Skehan, 1996 ; Krashen, 1985). The assignments/work (Input) had procedures to achieve goals of targeted language skills were included in the study to practice skills and ability to present work or task-based teaching



methods (Project-Based Instruction), which was a teaching style that focused on the learner, as well as task-based teaching with a teaching style that developed the body of knowledge and skills through the tasks. This can stimulate curiosity and lead to learning from actual practice and develop students' higher thinking skills. This can also motivate, encourage and challenge students to study on their own, especially in the borderless world nowadays. It also improved language skills through language practice in a variety of situations (Stoller, 1997). As a result, all students had opportunities to develop one's ability to read English for comprehension after studying higher than before, which the results of this research. The results were consistent with the study by Nunan and Lockwood (1991) that examined the activity as a communication practice. The tasks assigned to the students will reflect the situation the learner will face. In the present condition of the world, it is a fact that the students have learned and could use this practical concept in their lives when they learn together and help each other to achieve the target language learning. In addition, with this developed teaching style, students were likely to have a connection between learning the grammar rules of a language and using language to understand what they were reading. Tasks could be the bridge between learning language rules with using language that could help increase communication and comprehension skills in the classroom to their real life outside the classroom and increase the effectiveness of the students' language proficiency.

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