**USING TASK-BASED LEARNING APPROACH TO IMPROVE MATTHAYOMSUKSA 6 STUDENTS’ ENGLISH READING COMPREHENSION ABILITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

 The purposes of this research were to study and compare Matthayomsuksa 6 students’ English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning approach before and and after studying and to investigate the Matthayomsuksa 6 students’ attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach. The sample consisted of 40 students of Matthayomsuksa 6/1 Students at Thatnaraiwittaya School, Sakon Nakhon Province under the Sakon Nakhon Secondary Educational Service Area Office in the first semester of the academic year 2021, selected by cluster random sampling. The research was one group pretest-posttest design. The research instruments included 12 lesson plans, an English reading comprehension test, and attitude questionnaire. The experiment lasted 12 weeks, 2 hours a week, or 24-four hours in total. The mean, percentage, standard deviation, One Sample t-test and t-test for Dependent Samples were used for data analysis. The findings of this research were: (1) The students’ pretest and posttest mean scores of English reading comprehension ability were 15.38 or 38.44 percent and 31.58 or 78.94 percent respectively. The posttest mean score was also higher than the set criterion of 70 percent and the students’ English reading comprehension ability was significantly higher than that of the pretest. (2) The students’ attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach was at a very good level.

**Keywords:** Task-based learning approach, English reading comprehension,
 Attitude towards teaching English using task-based learning approach

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**Introduction**

 English becomes a global lingua franca, also known as a bridge language or a common language (Crystal, 2003: 69). People all over the world use English to communicate with others from foreign countries in education, economy, society, transportation, and culture. Therefore, the English language has become increasingly important and influential, especially for member states in the ASEAN.

 Basic Education Core Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2008:252) indicates that English language is taught as a foreign language and that students are required to learn English from primary to secondary school levels to develop four English skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Learners must be aware of diversity of cultures and viewpoints in the world community, conductive to friendship and cooperation with various countries because of foreign languages. As a result, reading seems to be one of the most essential skills for students among the four English skills in both classroom contexts and extracurricular environments (Carrell 1989: 120). Also, Williams (1994: 37) mentions that reading allows learners to further improve language skills already acquired through the acquisition of listening, speaking, and writing skills. Reading also helps students understand the text effectively.

 The English reading comprehension ability is important for life. Reading will be able to educate people in various fields in effective way to gain knowledge. Also, reading comprehension is an essential ability in daily life, such as reading a newspaper or magazine, understanding properties and usage guidelines on prescription drug labels, making personal choices based upon advertisement claims, and a seemingly endless myriad of other applications too numerous to mention. Reading comprehension raises the bar for communicating fluently in English and improves individual development and lives in general.

 In Thailand, reading serves as a silent skill for Thai learners who want to master English. According to Anderson (1999: 39), with strengthened reading skills, readers will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas. Since Thailand is a non-native English-speaking country, there are not many opportunities for Thai learners to interact with other people by using English. Although reading is considered to be a meaningful language learning activity, many language learners encounter reading difficulties in reading class. In English reading class, most of the time, the teacher asks, and pay much attention to the explanation of vocabulary and grammar items. From the report on the learning achievement of English reading courses for Matthayomsuksa 6 students (Thatnaraiwittaya School, 2020: 24), it was found that the learning achievement of English reading and writing courses among Matthayomsuksa 6 students average score was 40.30 percent which was considered below the criterion of 70 percent. It clearly demonstrates that the learners have problems in reading English. The success of the learning process depends on the methods of the instructor. Therefore, teachers need to develop and improve teaching techniques and provide an atmosphere conducive to learning. Otherwise, students will undoubtedly continue to fail in learning reading comprehension.

 Task-Based Learning (TBL) indicates how tasks can be used as the central focus in a supportive methodological framework. Tasks are always activities where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose as a goal in order to achieve an outcome. The aim of the task is to create a real purpose for language use and provide a natural context for language study. Students prepare for the task, report back after the task and then study the language that arises naturally out of the task cycle and its accompanying materials (Willis,1996: 56-57). Furthermore, Littlewood (1981: 17-18), Taylor (1983: 69-83), Brumfit (1984: 65), and Willis (1996: 137), mention the benefits of the task-based learning approach as it allows students to use language that corresponds to real situations, practice using natural language, practice problem-solving skills, motivate them to perform tasks, and build confidence in reading. It also creates a good relationship between teachers and students and between students. Hence, reading comprehension in Thai classroom focus on translation from English to Thai instead of engaging learners in the reading process, which would help readers comprehend or interpret the meaning of whatever text is being consumed.

 In conclusion, the task-based learning by Jane Willis (1996: 23-24) tends to be an effective approach for a communicative purpose and students will be able to achieve an outcome by using speaking and listening abilities. Even though task-based learning has a tendency to be compatible with speaking and listening abilities, many English learners still have problems with reading comprehension ability which is rarely found in any studies. That was the reason why the researcher decides to study whether the task-based learning approach could assist EFL students reading comprehension ability or not and to investigate the level of attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach. The research findings can be guidelines for teaching English reading comprehension in Thailand in the future.

**Purposes of the study**

 The purposes of the study were to study and compare the English reading comprehension ability of Matthayomsuksa 6 students before and after studying by using task-based learning approach and to investigate students’ attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning approach.

**Literature Review**

 The study of using task-based learning approach to improve Matthayoksuksa 6 students’ English reading comprehension ability was conducted in the first semester of the 2021 academic year at Thatnaraiwittaya school under the Sakon Nakhon Secondary Educational Service Area Office. The researcher studied for this study as follows:

 1. **Reading Comprehension** is a process of interactions between a reader and a writer. Understanding the written texts depends on individual capability of readers and reading comprehension through readers’ schema knowledge can help them predict the information or meaning of the texts. This is consistent with Wallace (1992: 4) who defines that reading comprehension is a process of interpreting what the writer has written in the reading text and readers' purpose is to understand the writer's aim.

2. **Task-Based Learning Approach** was developed by Willis (1996:56-57). Task-based learning approach focuses on the use of authentic language. The assessment is primary based on the task outcomes rather than accuracy of language forms. Task-based learning approach is advantageous to the students because it is more student-centered, allows for meaningful communication, and provides for practical language skill building.

 3. **Related Researches**

 Torky (2006) examined task-based instruction program in the classroom. The main purpose of the study was to identify appropriate strategies for designing a task- based program in the light of the cognitive approach to develop the speaking skills of first year secondary students. This study was conducted on two intact first year secondary classes in a governmental Egyptian school. The results of the study emphasized that task-based instruction was effective in enhancing the experimental group students' overall speaking performance.

 Beside, Pliankham (2008) studied the development of English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning of Matthayomsuksa 3 students at Baan Naseenuan School in Sakon Nakhon. The sample group consists of 25 students. The findings of this research were; the students' pretest and posttest English reading comprehension ability scores were 48.90% and 75.90% respectively and the students' attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension by using task-based language learning were at a good level.

 In addition, Pannop (2016) studied and compared the English speaking ability before and after using task-based learning. This study was conducted of 29 Mathayomsuksa 3 students at Thetsaban 2 Mukmontri school, Udon Thani, Under Nakhon Udon Thani Municipality Education office. The results showed that the students' posttest mean score on English speaking ability was higher than a set criterion of 70 percent and the students' posttest mean score on English speaking ability was higher than the pretest one. Moreover, the students' attitude toward teaching English speaking using task-based learning was at a very good level.

**Conceptual Framework Dependent variables**

Students’ English reading comprehension ability

 **Independent variable**

Students’ attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach

Teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach

**Figure 1**: Conceptual Framework

**Research Methodology**

 **1.** **Population and Sample**

 **1.1 Population** The population in this study was 432 of Mattayomsuksa 6 students of 12 classrooms enrolled in the course, Additional English (EN 33203), in the first semester of the academic year 2021 in Thatnaraiwittaya school under the Sakon Nakhon Secondary Educational Service Area Office, Muang district, Sakon Nakhon Province.

 **1**.**2 Sample**

 The sample in this study was 40 students of Matayomsuksa 6/1 students studying English course (EN 33203) in the first semester of the academic year 2021 at Thatnaraiwittaya school, Muang, Sakon Nakhon Province selected by cluster random sampling using classroom as a sampling unit.

 **2. Research Design**

 This study was an experimental research with a one group pretest-posttest design. It was a quantitative research method (Cambell & Stanley, 1969).

 $T\_{1}$ X $T\_{2}$

$T\_{1}$ means Pretest

 **X** means Teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach

 $T\_{2}$ means Posttest

 **3. Research Instruments**

 In order to construct this study, three research instruments were employed as follows:

 3.1 Lesson plans of teaching reading comprehension ability using task-based learning approach, the lesson plans consisted of 12 units, 2 hours a unit.

 3.2 A reading comprehension ability test, the reading comprehension test was developed by the researcher based on Miller (1990: 3-5) to examine the reading comprehension ability of students in 4 levels; literal level, interpretive level, critical level, and applied level. This test was a multiple-choice test with 40 items in an English version.

 3.3 A students 'attitude questionnaire toward teaching reading comprehension ability using task-based learning approach. The attitude questionnaire was developed in Thai version consisted of 20 items related to the contents using a five-point Likert's rating scales.

 **4. Data Collection**

 The researcher collected the data in the first semester of the academic year 2021 to perform data collection. The details of data were as follows:

 4.1 Students took the pretest using English reading comprehension ability test with 40 items before studying for 60 minutes.

 4.2. The teaching process was carried out according to the 12 lesson plans for 12 weeks, 2 hours a week, 24 hours in total.

 4.3 After the whole teaching process using task-based learning approach was completed, the students took the posttest which was the same English reading comprehension ability test as the pretest.

 4.4 The attitude questionnaire was used to examine the students' attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach.

 4.5 The collected scores from the pretest and posttest and the students' attitude data were statistically analyzed and interpreted.

 **5. Data Analysis**

 **5.1 The process of data analysis**

 The collected data of a reading comprehension ability test and the students 'attitude questionnaire ware statistically analyzed as follows:

 5.1.1 The researcher analyzed the data to study the teaching English reading comprehension using mean (X̅), percentage, and standard deviation (S.D.).

 5.1.2 The researcher analyzed the data to compare the teaching English reading comprehension after studying English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach with the criterion of 70 percent using t-test for Dependent Samples.

 5.1.3 The researcher analyzed the data to investigate the students' attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach using mean (X̅) and standard deviation (S.D.).

**6. The Statistics Used in the Study**

 Three following types of statistics were used to analyze the obtain data from the reading comprehension ability test and students' attitude questionnaire.

 6.1The basic statistics used to analyze the data included: Percentage, Mean ($\overline{X}$), and Standard Deviation (S.D.).

 6.2The statistics used to evaluate the quality of the instruments included: the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC), Difficulty Index (p), Discrimination Index (r), and Reliability.

6.3 The statistics used to analyze hypotheses

 6.3.1 The first hypothesis compared the students’ pretest scores with the criterion of 70 percent using One-sample t-test, analyzed by using SPSS program for Windows.

 6.3.2 The second hypothesis compared between the students’ pretest and posttest scores using t-test for Dependent Samples. The hypotheses were analyzed by using SPSS program for Windows.

**Results of the reesearch study**

The results of the study of using task-based learning approach to improve Matthayomsuksa 6 students’ English reading comprehension ability are shown in the following tables:

**Table 1:** Mean, Standard Deviation, Percent and a Comparison of Pretest and Posttest
 Mean Scores of the students’ English Reading Comprehension Ability Before
 and After Studying English Reading Comprehension Ability Using Task-Based Learning Approach

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Test** | **n** | $$\overline{X}$$ | **S.D.** | **70 Percent** | **t** |
| Pretest | 40 | 15.38 | 2.88 | 38.44 | 57.37\*\* |
| Posttest | 40 | 31.58 | 3.28 | 78.94 |

\*\* p < .01

 From Table 1, it shows that the students’ pretest mean score on English reading comprehension ability was 15.38 or 38.44 percent and the posttest was 31.58 or 78.94 percent. The results explain that the students’ English reading comprehension ability before and after studying English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach was significantly higher than that of before the intervention at the 0.01 level.

**Table 2:** Mean, Standard Deviation and Investigation of Students’ Attitude Toward
 Teaching English Reading Comprehension Ability Using Task-Based Learning Approach of Matthayomsuksa 6 Students

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Questionnaire** | **n** | $$\overline{X}$$ | **S.D.** | **Interpretation** |
| Students’ attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach | 40 | 4.95 | 0.55 | Very Good |

 From Table 2, it presents that the mean of students’ attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach was at 4.95. It indicates that students’ attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach was at a very good level.

**Conclusion and Discussion**

 From the research results, they can be expained as follows:

 **1. Conclusion**

 The study and the comparison of the pretest and the posttest on English reading comprehension ability and the investigation of the students’ attitude toward learning English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning approach can be summarized as follows:

 1.1 The students’ pretest and posttest mean score on English reading comprehension ability were 15.60 or 38.44 percent and 31.63 or 78.94 percent respectively. The students’ posttest mean score on English reading comprehension ability was higher than the set criterion of 70 percent and the students’ English reading comprehension ability after the experiment was significantly higher than that of the pretest.

 1.2 The students' attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach was at the very good level. The mean score was 4.95.

 **2. Discussion**

 This study was experimental research with a one group pretest-posttest design. The research objectives were to study and compare students' English reading comprehension ability before and after using task-based learning approach and to investigate the students’ attitude toward teaching reading comprehension using task-based learning approach. The findings are presented for discussion as follows:

 2.1 According to the study and the comparison of the English reading comprehension ability of Matthayomsuksa 6 students before and after using task-based learning approach, it was found that the students’ pretest and posttest scores on English reading comprehension ability were 15.60 or 38.44 percent and 31.63 or 78.94 percent, respectively. Moreover, the study and the comparison of the English reading comprehension ability of Matthayomsuksa 6 students after using task-based learning approach was higher than 70 percent which was in accordance with the first hypothesis. As shown from the results of the study, three conclusions are presented as follows:

 First, this might be because teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach recalled their background knowledge at the beginning by giving them relevant pictures and asking questions. The method was by Willis (1996:23-24) who stated that in the pre-task step should be focused on relevant knowledge, some language points and vocabulary to make sure other steps of task would be untroubled and comprehended. Then, the meaning of vocabulary is provided in reading before starting reading. Anderson (1983 : 87) stated that schema theory is based on the belief that “every act of comprehension involves one’s knowledge of the world as well”. Thus, the students could follow the trace to comprehend the overview of the reading. According to the studies of Jariya (2013), the study of English reading comprehension ability using schema theory of Pratomsuksa 6 students found the students’ pretest and posttest scores were 42.38 percent and 70.24 percent, respectively.

 Second, this might be because teaching English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach in while-reading step provided brainstorming step for sharing their ideas with friends to help them more understanding. As a result, they could improve their English reading comprehension ability. According to Hilke (1992: 44), cooperative learning is a strategy to help students work in group to achieve with both cognitive and emotional goals. Also, Supapak (2007) found that the results of reading English comprehension using collaborative method of Matthayomsuksa 5 students found the students’ posttest scores were higher than pretest scores at the .05 level.

 Third, the English reading comprehension using task-based learning approach is an active learning which allows students to learn it themselves with teachers as facilitators. Moreover, the tasks used in the study which are listing, ordering and sorting, and comparing helped student understand easier. The tasks provided the aims for student to read and provided students better understandings by guiding the students to meet outline of the reading. The advantages of each task can be described as follows:

 The simplest type of task is listing. According to Willis & Willis (2011: 36), it may seem at first sight far too simple, but the linguistic challenge can vary according to what you ask learner to list; it could result in a list of words or short phrases or even quite complex sentences. Also, Pliankham (2008) studied the development of English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning of Matthayomsuksa 3 students. The findings of this research are; the students' pretest and posttest English reading comprehension ability scores were 48.90% and 75.90% respectively. Another benefit of starting with a listing task is that items on list could be ordered or sored or compared in some ways or others.

 Moreover, the second task type was ordering and sorting meaning that the learners would be sequencing, categorizing, ranking and classifying. All these activities could help to sort and order information according to specified criteria. This type of task provided the same category or the storyline to lead their understanding by following the timeline in the reading. In accordance with Willis (1996: 23-24), the outcome would be the capacity of ordering and sorting information according to specific criteria. In addition, the comparison task was the task to find similarities or differences.

 Lastly, according to Willis & Willis (2011: 36), one of using comparison task is that students gain a very rich exposure to language within the security of a tight and well-defined framework. Also, Arsairach (2014) illustrated the students’ reading ability after studying by English reading achievement through task-Based reading activity model was significantly higher than that before at the 0.05 level.

 2.2 From the investigation of students' attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning approach, it revealed that the students' attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension ability using task-based learning approach was at a very good level. It can be mainly divided into three topics as follows:

 Firstly, the students were inspired to pay attention to reading text by looking at the relevant pictures and asking questions related to prior knowledge which were able to stimulate students’ prior knowledge and link them to the reading task they were going to read. The students might like teaching English reading comprehension ability by using task-based learning approach and showed their attitude on their success of the posttest scores after studying. This supports the idea of Anderson (1983 : 87) who stated that schema theory is based on the belief that “every act of comprehension involves one’s knowledge of the world as well”.

 Secondly, one of the highest mean scores of the students’ attitude were the task provided students to work in groups. It was shown that students like to do tasks or study with their friends in the step of brainstorming, presenting, and helping each other. Moreover, the small-group tasks not only reduced students’ anxiety and stress but also gave them spaces to talk, enjoy and share their friends’ opinion about the reading text. This might be a better way to help students more interested in learning English. This idea supports by Willis&Willis (2011: 36) who stated that brainstorming had been found to be an extremely effective way of getting even shy learners involved in topics and promotes richer task interaction.

 Lastly, the task-based learning approach led the students to comprehend overall a better overview of the reading by listing, ordering, sorting, and comparing. Plus, the task helped students find answers from reading task faster and more accurately. And specific tasks encouraged students’ participation.

 In summary, the students have positive attitude toward teaching English reading comprehension ability because students felt comfortable to read with friends, being motivated by recalling background knowledge or doing tasks.

**Recommendations**

 The recommendations from the study are as follows:

 **1. Recommendations from the study**

 In order to make use of this study, the research proposes the following recommendations as follows:

 1.1 Using task-based learning approach to improve English reading comprehension motivates students to be able to list, ordering, and comparing the passage to understand the overall reading text instead of detailing text reading. This would also improve students’ confidence to accomplish the tasks.

 1.2 Implementing task-based learning approach to improve English reading comprehension should be at least two hours per a reading text, so that the students can spend time in each step effectively.

 1.3 Using task-based learning approach to improve English reading comprehension requires the teachers to prepare more extensive knowledge and deep understandings about the reading text to discuss and explain the answers in class, and the necessity and usefulness of preparing lesson materials and reflection.

 **2. Recommendations for further study**

 The researcher's recommendations for further study were as follows:

 2.1 Researchers should apply the using task-based learning approach to all learners of different levels by integrating the tasks into the topics of other English skills.

 2.2 Researchers should study using task-based learning approach to students in various levels and educational backgrounds.

 2.3 Researchers should apply new activities or tasks to activate students’ prior knowledge, such as, telling stories, watching video, playing games, or etc.

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