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USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE FIFTH GRADE STUDENTS' READING COMPREHENSION SKILL

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate students' opinions towards the reading comprehension through cooperative learning activities. The subjects were 25 students in grade 5 at Bannonnoi school, Ubon Ratchathani, Thailand. The studied was operated in an English course in second semester of 2014 academic year. The experiment took two days a week for five weeks. There are two instruments which were used in this study; lesson plans which were used for teaching over 10 periods, consisting of five lesson plans from New Express English Activities Book 5, and the questionnaire for checking the students' opinions towards cooperative learning. The research findings were as follows: The mean score of all determination is 3.82 which reflect that the subjects improved their reading skill due to the cooperative-learning activities in the class. The opinions were taken from each item indicated that the students have a positive attitude in cooperative learning in all items. Furthermore the cooperative learning activities can motivate in reading comprehension to a maximum of 4.56. The results of the study helped the teacher to improve teaching English by using cooperative learning strategy, promote reading comprehension, encourage and support students in reading English by using cooperative learning.

Keywords:

Cooperative Learning, Reading Skill, Reading for Comprehension.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English is used in the daily life such as newspapers, televisions, Internet and in other sources because English is an international language which is used all over the world. So, English has been established in the curriculum from primary to university education in Thailand. The students must learn it in order that they are able to communicate in English. English syllabus provides students with opportunities to equally acquire all four skills of English. However, reading skill is necessary for those whose official language is not English to access knowledge

and information in their daily lives. Several research reports agree that there is a strong correlation between reading and academic success. In other words, a student who is a good reader is more likely to do well in school and pass exams than a student who is a weak reader. As the world becomes more complex, reading is increasingly more important for students trying to find their place in it. So this is reason why reading skills are important. Group learning has traditionally been a part of educational practice. Its effectiveness has been documented through hundreds of research studies (Johnson & Johnson, 1986). Cooperative learning is now widely recognized as one of the most promising practices in the field of education. It is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. Class members are organized into small groups after receiving instruction from the teacher. They then work through the assignment until all group members successfully understand and complete it. In cooperative learning situations there is a positive interdependence among students' goal attainments; students perceive that they can reach their learning goals if and only if the other students in the learning group also reach their goals (Johnson & Johnson, 1986).

According to Suphasaranakom (2003:76), "cooperation among students who celebrate each other's successes, encourage each other to do homework, and learn to work together regardless of ethnic backgrounds or whether they are male or female, bright or struggling, disabled or not, is still rare". Junyatom (1995: Abstract) investigated the effect of cooperative learning by student teams in achievement division technique on reading comprehension and found that the students in the experimental group obtain higher reading comprehension result in the posttest rather than that of the pretest. In addition, Saiyot (1995 : 79-200) found that cooperative learning using the STAD model help students gain more knowledge and improvement more comfortable in learning in learning to read comprehension. The research has reviewed these literatures which are about the cooperative-learning, and found that the results of the study are benefit to English teachers for improving reading skill and encouraging students have positive attitude in reading English. Thus, the research has decided to use the cooperative-learning activities to enhance grade 5 students' reading skill.

Purpose of the Study: To investigate the students' opinions toward using cooperative learning to enhance fifth grade students' reading skill

Research Question: What are the students' opinions toward using cooperative learning to enhance fifth students' reading skill?

Significance of Study: The results of the study are the appropriate way to choose in teaching reading class. English teachers can use cooperative learning activities to improve reading skill and encourage students to have positive attitude in reading English. In addition, it can pave the way for further development of teaching English reading and learning in the future.

Scope of the Study: The subjects were grade five students. There were twenty-five students at Bannonoi School, Buntharik district, Ubon Ratchathani province. They studied an English course in the second semester of the 2014 academic year. The experiment took place two days a week for five weeks. Research Instruments were the lesson plans; there were five lesson plans in this study which cover five different articles from New Express English Activities Book 5 and a reading comprehension questionnaire which is five scales containing ten items.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The subjects for the study included grade 5 students. There were 25 students who were studying in the second semester of academic year 2014 at Bannonoi School, Buntharik district, Ubon Ratchathani province. They were divided into groups. Each group consisted of five students: one student with high scores in English, two with moderate and two with lower scores. Their average English score obtained from an achievement test in the first semester of academic year 2014. The two instruments used in this study were 1) lesson plans which were used for teaching over 10 periods of the students in grade 5, consisting of five lesson plans from New Express English Activities Book 5, and 2) the questionnaire for checking the students' opinions towards Cooperative learning. There are five scales containing 10 items.

Constructing the lesson plans: Lesson plans were constructed by using cooperative-learning activities to enhance grade5 students' reading skill. The lesson plans were constructed by researcher as follows: 1) The contents and how to construct the lesson plans were studied and analyzed according to Foreign Language Standards (Thai Ministry of Education) by using cooperative-learning activities. 2) The objective of each lesson plan was identified. The researcher chose articles. 3) The five lesson plans were constructed by studying the cooperative learning theory and document involved for organizing the activities in class. Each lesson plan consisted of five steps as follows: Step 1 - Class Presentation; the teacher explained the objectives of the study and brainstorm about article title for motivating students, the students in each group then tried to find out the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases in content. Step 2 - Team Study; each group consisted of five students: one student with high scores in English, two with moderate and two with lower scores. Students worked together to accomplish the goal of the task. Each member of the group was assigned to task a certain role. They worked together on their given assignment. Step 3 - Quizzes/Exercises; the students have to do the exercises independently for checking their understanding when they finished each lesson. Step 4 - Individual Improvement Scores; teacher calculated the mean of individual improvement scores. Mean scores obtained from the exercise was computed. Step 5 - Team Recognition; the result of task performance was relayed to the group. Teacher appreciated students' performance and presented the prize to each group. Moreover, the lesson plans were submitted by the researcher for the experts to check its contents and contents validity. The lesson plans were checked and adapted. And then try out with students who were not the subject and improved it again. The lesson plans were employed for experimenting with the subjects.

Constructing Questionnaire: the questionnaire was constructed to check the students' attitude towards cooperative learning activities on the basis of involved theory documents. There are five scales containing 10 items. Wording and its content validity was checked by advisors and experts. Then, it was improved and tried out with the field group for testing. This was done after the subjects finished their lesson by using cooperative learning activities. The questionnaire was constructed by researcher as follows: 1) study how to construct questionnaire and consider the detail wanted to know 2) interpret and write the questionnaire 3) check it for the content validity by the experts 4) Improve it and try out with grade 5 students 5) Finding the reliability of questionnaire by using Coefficient alpha of Conbrach 6) Experiment with subjects.

Data Collection and analysis: the data were collected during the second semester of 2014 academic year. The duration of the subjects spend on studying by using cooperative learning activities instruction were ten periods. The place of this study is at Bannonnoi School, Buntharik district, Ubon Ratchathani province. First, the subjects were divided into five groups. Each group consisted of five students: one student with high level, two with moderate level and two with lower level. Then, the researcher used the five lesson plans with the subjects for five weeks. Then, the subjects did the questionnaire of reading comprehension for analyzing students' opinions after using cooperative learning activities in the classroom. Finally, the data was computed and analyzed. The collected data was analyzed by using descriptive statistic. Finding average and Standard deviation were calculated by using Excel.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data were collected during the second semester of 2014 academic year. There are 25 students who answered the questionnaire of reading comprehension for analyzing students' opinions after using cooperative learning activities in the classroom. The questionnaire analysis result which is discussed in accordance with the research "What are the students' opinions toward using cooperative learning to enhance grade 5 students' reading skill?"

The questionnaire has allowed students give their opinions on cooperative learning activities. The results of data were explained the following: The first item of the questionnaire, there were totally fourteen students who were agreed strongly, and eleven students who agreed. The cooperative learning activities have motivated the students to read in English at a maximum of mean scores as 4.56, and standard deviation was 0.50. The second item, there were five students who were totally on agreed strongly. There were ten students who were agreed and uncertain. Therefore, they were motivated when they had a global understanding of a reading. The maximum of mean scores was 3.8, and standard deviation was 0.76. The students could grasp the main idea of the texts in the lesson in the third item. Twelve students were uncertain, eleven were agreed and two strongly agreed. The maximum of mean scores was 3.6, and standard deviation was 0.64. The questionnaire asked as the students tried to understand the general idea of a sentence before going to read the next sentence on the fourth item. There were five students who were strongly agreed, eleven were agreed, nine were uncertain. The maximum of mean scores was 3.84, and standard deviation was 0.74. The fifth item, the students were asked about using Cooperative-Learning Activities has motivated them to keep working in the periods. The results were five students who were strongly agreed. Nine students were agreed and eleven were uncertain. The maximum of mean scores was 3.76, and standard deviation was 0.77. The students still did not understand a reading was asked on the sixth item. There were four students who were strongly agreed. Eight students were agreed and thirteen were uncertain. The maximum of mean scores was 3.64, and standard deviation was 0.75. According to the results of the table above, there was a student as strongly agreed on the seventh item. Seventeen were agreed and seven were uncertain. The maximum of mean scores was 3.76, and standard deviation was 0.52. Therefore, they actively participated in the activities of the period.(i.e. assignments, questionnaires or tests). The eighth item was asked to express students' opinions as they could discuss the texts with other students. Six students were strongly agreed, seven were agreed and twelve were uncertain. The maximum of mean scores was 3.72, and standard deviation was 0.79. The ninth item of the questionnaire, there were three students who were

strongly agreed. They were agreed, were twelve. And ten students were uncertain. The results were shown their vocabulary in English has improved after learning by the cooperative activities in the class. The maximum of mean scores was 3.76, and standard deviation was 0.52. The last item, there were five students who were strongly agreed, eight students were agreed, and two were uncertain. The maximum of mean scores was 3.82, and standard deviation was 0.68. Therefore, they have improved my reading skill due to the cooperative learning activities in the class.

4. DISCUSSION

The researcher discussed the result of this study as follows: 1) The finding of using five lesson plans which were constructed by using cooperative-learning activities were each group had improved reading comprehension because the scores were passed in the exercise one to five. According to Moryadee (2001: Abstract) studied the effects of cooperative learning using Student Team-Achievement Division (STAD) technique on the self-efficacy and English learning achievement of Pratomsuksa 5 students. The results indicated that the experimental group had higher self-efficacy after the treatment than before the treatment at .01 level of significance. The experimental group had higher English learning achievement after the treatment than before the treatment by .01 level of significance. On the post-test, the experimental group had a higher self-efficacy and English learning achievement than those students who studied through the conventional method at the .01 level of significance. The contents of lesson plans were consisted five lesson plans from New Express English Activities Book 5 which were very interesting because they were suitable for the students' abilities and levels. All of written articles encouraged students to attend class and encouraged them to practice reading comprehension. Therefore, the result of questionnaire revealed that the students learning with cooperative learning had positive attitude on learning English. This result agreed with the findings of Tang (2000: 77-89) studied the 12 ESL students from India, South Korea, Hong Kong, Croatia and Taiwan at a secondary school in Canada which used the concept mapping skill to teach ESL reading in the classroom. The observation of ESL students' cooperative learning activities in an eight-week period indicated that teaching reading by using concept mapping strategy could improve reading comprehension and the communication skills as they learned to negotiate meaning with their partners and among themselves. During cooperative-learning activities, the students had held their friends in the same group to have the best answers to make higher scores. English dictionary were allowed to fine correct answers. The scores of other groups in the English class motivated them to be enthusiastic in reading comprehension. According to Seetape (2003: Abstract), who studied the effects of cooperative learning on English reading achievement and the students' behavior towards this learning method used in the English classroom. The subjects were 29 Mathayomsuksa3 students in Kanchanapisek Wittayalai Uthaitani School selected by means of purposive sampling. The instruments were English reading achievement test, cooperative learning behavioral observation sheet and lesson plans using cooperative learning technique. The results showed that the post-test scores after using cooperative learning were higher than the post-test scores at the .05 level of significance. Most of the subjects showed very good behavior in cooperating on their tasks. Their cooperative behavior had increasingly developed. Some elements of poor behavior had decreased by up to 14.29 percent.

The result of questionnaire revealed that the students learning with cooperative learning activities have positive atmosphere in the English classroom. And the subjects have improved their reading skill due to the Cooperative-Learning Activities in the English class. The results of the study showed that the students have held positive opinion on cooperative learning activities. Furthermore reading comprehension activities are variety exercises for instance completion, matching, mind mapping, true or false, and questions -answers. The diversity of exercises enhanced students to cooperate with members in their group. According to, Wichadee (2005 : unpagged), who studied the effect of cooperative learning on English reading development of 40 first-year students at Bangkok University, surveyed the students' attitude towards cooperative learning method used in English classroom, and examined their cooperative learning behavior. The results indicated that the students obtained high reading comprehension scores on the posttest than the pretest scores at the .05 level of significance. As to their attitudes towards cooperative learning the finding indicated that most students rated cooperative learning moderately positive. Also, assessment forms showed that they performed good cooperative learning behaviors in their tasks. In conclusion, after the lessons were complete, the students had their opinions evaluated by questionnaire. The result of their opinions toward the cooperative learning was that the students had good attitude and positive opinion in reading English by using cooperative learning activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the students' opinions toward using cooperative learning to enhance grade 5 students' reading skill. The subjects were the students in grade 5. They studied in an English course in the second semester of the 2014 academic year. The experiment took two days a week for five weeks. They were divided into five groups. Each group mixed with 5 students with different score level: one student with high scores in English, two with moderate and two with lower scores. The research instruments were constructed by the researcher. There are two instruments; 1) five lesson plans which were constructed by using student teams achievement division cooperative learning strategy. They were taught two hours a week by five lesson plans in five weeks. 2) Reading comprehension questionnaire which is five scales containing 10 items. The collected data were analyzed by using descriptive statistic such as the research results for using cooperative learning activities to enhance grade 5 students' reading skill. After using cooperative learning activities, the mean scores of all determination reflected that the subjects have improved reading skill due to the cooperative learning activities in the class. The opinions were taken from each item indicate that the students have positive attitude in cooperative learning in all items. Furthermore the cooperative learning activities can motivate in reading comprehension.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations were based on the finding of the study.

1) General Recommendation; a) Instructors should understand exactly the theory and process of student teams achievement division cooperative learning strategy. In additions, teachers should practice the social skills before using experiment such as, communication, brain storming, acceptance of individual difference, solving the problems in group and sharing the information together. b) Students should be allowed to have an opportunity to work in a group

before experiment to allow them become acquainted. c) The contents of the lessons should be suitable for their levels. As a result, the students are interested and encouraged to study the details of the contexts. 2) Recommendation for Further Study a) The result of this study discloses the cooperative learning activities has increased students' English reading comprehension ability. Consequently, a replication of the study could be conducted with other skills such as writing, speaking or listening. The teachers can use the findings for developing their teaching process and improving the students' competency in learning English. b) The study should focus on comparisons between cooperative learning activities and other instructions.

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