

THE EFFECTS OF PROJECT-BASED READING INSTRUCTION ON ENGLISH READING ABILITY AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of Project-based Reading Instruction (PRI) on English reading ability and intercultural communicative competence of Thai students. It also investigated the correlation between students' English reading ability and intercultural communicative competence. This study employed a semi-experimental method. It was conducted for 14 weeks with one group of 32 students majoring in Tourism Management from a private university in Thailand, enrolled in an English reading course. The English reading ability test, intercultural communicative competence test, and the project-based reading portfolio rubric were constructed to measure students' English reading ability and their intercultural communicative competence, and to examine the correlation between the two variables. The obtained data was analyzed by means of statistical paired-sample t-test and Pearson's correlation coefficient. In addition, a project-based reading instruction questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol were designed to elicit students' opinions toward the intervention.

The results revealed that students' scores from both tests had increased significantly through the use of the Project-based Reading Instruction, consisting mainly of the following five stages—1) preparation, 2) conducting research, 3) analysis of cultural differences, 4) project production, and 5) self-reflection on own learning. There were also significant correlations between English reading ability and intercultural knowledge, and English reading ability and intercultural attitudes. The integration of text, talk, and image played important roles in achieving positive results. The participants believed that PRI helped them to improve their English reading ability and intercultural communicative competence. Particularly, they thought that they had become more curious and open to learning more about other cultures.

Keywords: English Reading Ability, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Project-Based Learning, Reading Instruction, Project-based Reading Instruction (PRI)

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEMS

Reading is the most important skill that learners need to master because it introduces them to new vocabulary, material and knowledge that can be used with other language skills (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). Anderson (2012) asserts that good readers have very high success in writing, listening, and speaking tasks in the twenty-first century. This is because they have gained input and developed their reading ability through extensive reading. Therefore, it is crucial that the students master their English reading ability both intensively and extensively for effective global communication.

Unfortunately, however, Thailand is not a reading culture. In fact, reading has never been a pleasurable activity in the Thai society (Strauss, 2008). The lack of their reading habits results in poor English reading ability. As evidenced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2012), a report from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2009 revealed that Thailand made no progress in reading literacy in the past nine years and was placed in the grouping of the poorest performers. Such problems have been recognized and attempts have been made to resolve them. For example, according to the report by The Government Public Relations Department (2009), The National Education Act 1999 and the Office of the Higher Education Commission introduced new initiatives, guidelines, and projects for English language teaching and learning in institutions. Despite these efforts, studies still reveal poor English reading ability. Two fundamental reasons causing these results are teaching methods and teaching materials at Thai universities. Thai teachers still provide traditional lecture-based instruction in their English classes, resulting in passive and disengaged students (Tolley, Johnson, & Koszalka, 2012). Specifically, a study conducted by Bunyakarte (2008) indicated that the use of lecture-dominant approaches failed Thai students' reading comprehension. These passive approaches show the lack of interaction and engagement with the text, social interaction and reflection among students and the teacher. In English reading classes, teachers merely follow a commercial textbook in order to finish the lessons and cover all the content needed for the exams. These practices highlight the common practice of teaching to the test. Besides, it projects the teacher-centered approach, with teachers adopting the role of knowledge transmitters rather than mediators of learning. To help Thai students in the tertiary level to achieve excellence in English reading ability, primary changes in the instructional methods and materials have to be made.

Reading instruction in the tertiary level needs to aim at helping students comprehend texts and become fluent readers. Grabe and Stoller (2011, 2013) explained that reading was a complex skill that requires many components, namely main idea, comprehension, rapid and automatic word recognition, fluent recognition processing of phrase and clause structures, strategic processing, motivation, and fluency. This suggests that drawing meaning from the text and interpreting the information based on their background knowledge are not adequate when

designing a reading curricula. For a reading class, Grabe and Stoller (2013) suggested a class project, besides oral presentation and examinations, as one of the valuable means of reading activities in class. An instructional tool that would suit this suggestion is Project-Based Learning (PBL). It is one of the most appropriate teaching tools that connect language skills and content knowledge together. It is also a potential means of reading teaching due to its integration of knowing, doing, and applying what students know to solve problems (Markham, 2011). This method offers students the opportunity to explore, interact, and make connections between the real world and their own.

However, Laopongharn and Sercombe (2009) suggested that instructional methods, such as project-oriented language learning, could become ineffective if it did not take ICC into consideration in the curriculum. In Thai English reading classes, content and learning materials are not interesting and relevant to students' needs. McDonough, Shaw, and Masuhara (2013) suggested that materials should develop students for global communication, build global relationships, and improve students' intercultural communication. Cultural content and materials should instead emphasize all speakers who use English as a medium of communication (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Matsuda, 2012). It is evident that the integration of cultural content into reading instruction can help students gain motivation to read and develop intercultural communication.

A number of studies revealed that PBL and cultural content benefit English reading teaching and learning in many ways. Firstly, reading intercultural content combined with the instruction of project-based learning possibly created active learning. Students gained motivation, enjoyment, self-esteem, and awareness (Bradley-Levine et al., 2010). Second, as part of project work, teachers and peers could provide valuable scaffolding to support deeper learning, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, in which learner agency was centered and autonomous learning occurs (Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Students gained content knowledge by reading and discussing any cultural matters and sharing ideas with others through group work. Third, Ketchum (2006) revealed that integrating reading instruction and culture learning promoted literature and cultural acquisition. Also, it helped to shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach. Finally, Shu-jing and Li-hua (2010) suggested that project-based learning was an effective tool in an extensive reading program to develop students' intercultural communicative competence and their language study. This instructional tool indicated that students became an agent of their own learning with the teacher being a facilitator.

According to the aforementioned theories and studies, it can be concluded that project-based learning can be an effective instructional tool that carries out cultural content in an English reading classroom. This integrated practice motivates students to read and helps them to learn about cultural diversity. However, very little empirical evidence has been found for research studies conducted on English reading instruction integrated with project-based

learning, emphasizing diverse cultural contents in the tertiary education in Thailand. This reveals a significant gap in English reading research. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill this research gap and discuss the effects of Project-based Reading Instruction on English reading ability and intercultural communicative competence of undergraduate students.

OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to:

1. Investigate the effects of Project-based Reading Instruction (PRI) on students' English reading ability and intercultural communicative competence.
2. Examine the correlation between English reading ability and intercultural communicative competence.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1. The population of this study was second-year Thai undergraduate students in a Thai university and those who enrolled in a foundation English reading course. Thirty-two second-year students majoring in Tourism Management of the Faculty of Liberal Arts at Sripatum University in Thailand were purposely selected as the sample of this study. Six of those were randomly selected for the semi-structured interviews.

2. The data were collected for 14 weeks from August 20th 2014 to November 19th 2014. The implementation took place in a regular classroom setting over one semester during which the researcher employed Project-based Reading Instruction (PRI) as the basis for students' learning.

3. The intercultural reading materials included three sets of cultures by country, namely native English speaking cultures (English, American, and Australian), non-native English speaking cultures (French, Italian, and Japan), and students' own culture (Thai), along with three cultural topics, namely festivals and celebrations, social norms, and intercultural contacts. These topics were designed for three chapters, namely Chapter 1 Festivals and Celebrations, Chapter 2 Social Norms, and Chapter 3 Intercultural Contacts, respectively. Each chapter covered three class periods of 300 minutes and extra-curricular activities of teacher-student conference and external reading.

4. The independent variable was Project-based Reading Instruction, which derived from the integration of project-based learning, English reading instruction, and culturally-embedded content. The dependent variables were the students' English reading ability, and their intercultural communicative competence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A semi-experimental method, with a one group pre-test-post-test design, was employed to elicit quantitative data. The population of this study was second-year Thai undergraduate students from all faculties of a private university in Thailand. Thirty-two students majoring in Tourism Management of the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Sripatum University, were selected employing the purposive sampling technique. This study included five research instruments, research procedure, and research analysis as follows:

1. Research Instruments

There were three main research instruments and a PRI lesson plan as follows:

1.1 English reading ability test was administered at the beginning of and after the implementation of PRI to measure the students' improvement of English reading ability. The test aimed to measure students' English reading comprehension strategies—literal comprehension level (recognizing main idea and identifying factual information) and interpretative comprehension level (predicting word meanings from context, inferring comparisons, and drawing conclusions or inferences). It contained 30 multiple-choice items responding to three reading articles from three different cultures and topics.

1.2 Intercultural communicative competence test (including an intercultural knowledge-based test and an intercultural attitudes and skills inventory) was constructed. The intercultural knowledge-based test was a multiple-choice type test which consisted of 30 items, covering the three different cultures and topics. The other instrument was an intercultural attitudes and skills inventory which aimed to investigate the students' attitudes of curiosity and openness toward a target speaker of English from any culture, and their skills of discovery and interaction. A questionnaire using Likert-type items (16 items of intercultural attitudes and 10 items of intercultural skills) on a 5-point scale was utilized to collect the data.

1.3 Project-based Reading Portfolio consisted of two main tools, namely project-based reading portfolio rubric and student's reflections. The final scores obtained from the project-based reading portfolio rubric were used to gather quantitative data to enhance the creditability of the research study. In addition, the students' reflections in their portfolio were analyzed and triangulated with other quantitative data.

1.4 Three PRI lesson plans designed for three units of different cultural topics obtained from the learner survey results, namely festivals and celebrations, social norms, and intercultural contacts. Each lesson plan covered 300 minutes in three class sessions. During the course, each student was required to complete three individual reading tasks, namely (i) a reading summary report on festivals and celebrations, (ii) a reading summary comparing social norms and patterns of behavior and communication of a target culture and Thai culture, and (iii) interview questions. These individual reading tasks helped to complete the three group tasks, namely (i) a reading summary, (ii) a role-play, and (iii) an interview. These group tasks were

linked and used to create a wall poster project and presentation as an end product on the group's chosen topic under the theme of "Culture and Tourism". There were five steps in PRI covering in one unit, namely preparing, researching, analyzing, producing, and reflecting to complete a wall poster project. These five steps covered ten principles, namely (1) learner-centeredness, (2) motivation, (3) authentic reading materials, (4) explicit reading instruction, (5) intensive and extensive reading comprehension, (6) scaffolding, (7) collaborative learning, (8) the integration of culture- and reading-learning, (9) continuous evaluation, and (10) self-reflection. (See Figure 1)

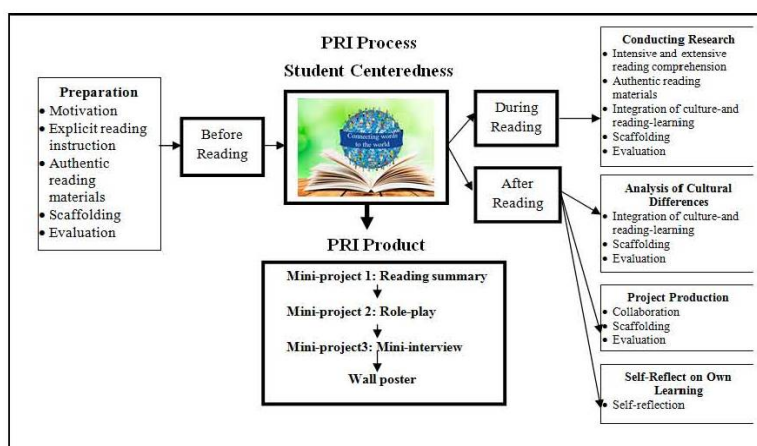


Figure 1: Instructional Framework of Project-based Reading Instruction (PRI)

The five stages of PRI are described as follows:

Stage 1: Preparation was designed to motivate students to engage in learning and participate in reading activities, explicit reading instruction, authentic reading materials, scaffolding, and assessment. In doing so, two main activities, namely 'Exploring my/their culture' and 'Linking words to the world,' were used in all the units. As for the activity of 'Exploring my/their culture,' fun, enjoyable, and interactive games and activities using props, authentic materials, and online video clips were used to activate and prepare students' basic knowledge for the first activity. As for the 'Linking words to the world,' the emphasis was placed on explicit teaching of reading strategies.

Stage 2: Conducting Research promoted intensive and extensive reading comprehension, integration of culture - and - reading-learning, authentic reading materials, scaffolding, and assessment through pair works, group works, discussions, and reading exercises and practices. Two main activities in this stage included 'Reading for comprehension' and 'Being a cultural detective.' For the activity of 'Reading for comprehension,' the teacher encouraged students to read and complete reading exercises, prepared them for researching texts, and

describing a research task following the background knowledge activation. This activity in each unit followed similar patterns of 1) discussing key vocabulary words, 2) reading the given texts, and 3) answering questions in the multiple-choice format. For 'Being a cultural detective,' the teacher prepared students to research further information about their chosen project topic and selected culture by country. A list of reliable websites for individual tasks in all units was also given to the students. Each student in the group then had to search for the cultural information of their target culture and complete a task sheet on the targeted reading strategies and intercultural contents for each mini-project in their extracurricular time. In extracurricular time, a teacher-student conference session was required at this stage of all the units in order to (a) clarify students' understanding about the projects, (b) explain the process, (c) provide assistance and suggestions, (d) informally assess their understanding of projects, and (e) express their feelings.

Stage 3: Analysis of Cultural Differences promoted integration of culture learning and reading learning, scaffolding, and evaluation. The main activities included 'Sharing with the group' (where students shared their findings from the previous stage with their group) and 'Investigating cultural differences' (where students worked in groups to share their individual reading research task for each mini-project). Each individual task was then evaluated upon completion. The evaluation was composed of student, peer, and teacher evaluations.

Stage 4: Project Production promoted collaboration, scaffolding, and evaluation. It also enhanced other language skills, including writing and speaking. The main activity performed in this stage was 'Presenting to class.' Groups had to prepare for a group mini-project in each unit (namely a report summary and presentation, role-play, and a mini-interview). In extracurricular time, a teacher-student conference session was required at this stage of all three units in order to facilitate with their project products.

Stage 5: Self-Reflect on Own Learning promoted students self-reflection so that they became aware of their learning achievements and progress, strengths and weaknesses of their performance, and future improvement. The activity in this stage was 'Voicing out.' The teacher concluded at the end of each unit by summing up reading comprehension and cultural diversity that had been included in the students' tasks and projects. At the end of each unit, students reflected on their learning in the portfolio. At the end of the course, self-evaluation, peer-evaluation, and teacher evaluation of the students' portfolios were executed using the portfolio rubric.

2. Research Procedure

There were five stages of the implementation: (1) Administering the English Reading Ability pre-test and Intercultural Communicative Competence pre-test, (2) Conducting the main study and collecting data, (3) Administering the English Reading Ability post-test and Intercultural Communicative Competence Test, (4) Distributing the Project-based Reading Instruction

Questionnaire and Interview, and (5) Analyzing quantitative data. The procedure is outlined in Figure 2

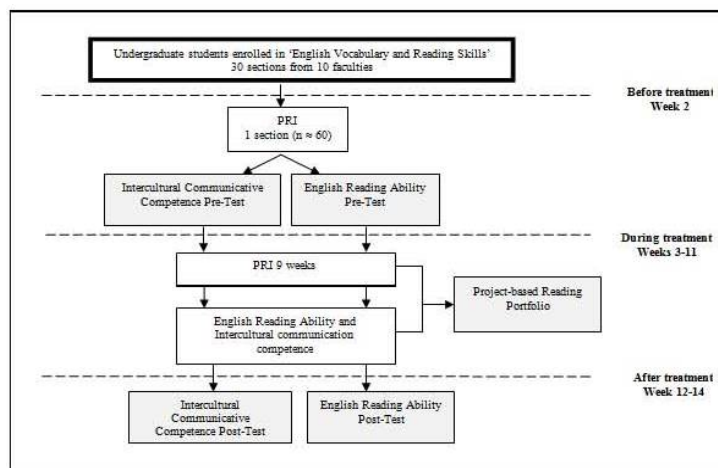


Figure 2: Outline of Research Procedure

3. Analyzing Quantitative

The improvement of the students' English reading ability was measured from the difference between pre-test and post-test scores, determined by a Paired-sample t-test. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were used to correlate between students' English reading ability and intercultural communicative competence by using the post-mean scores of the two tests.

RESULTS

The results from the paired-sample t-test indicated a statistical significance at the .05 level ($t = 5.90, p = 0.000$) between the students' pre-test scores ($\bar{x} = 12.41, S.D. = 4.85$) and post-test scores ($\bar{x} = 15.53, S.D. = 4.26$). This difference demonstrated that the students' English reading ability was enhanced considerably after the PRI implementation. Table 1 provides a descriptive summary of the difference between the means of pre-test and post-test scores.

Table 1: A descriptive summary of the difference between means of pre-test and post-test scores ($n = 32$)

Test	Score	Min	Max	\bar{x}	S.D.	t	Sig.
Pre-English Reading Ability Test	30	5.00	23.00	12.41	4.85	5.90*	0.000
Post- English Reading Ability Test	30	8.00	26.00	15.53	4.26		

* $p < 0.05$

To ensure the validity of this result, the students' scores of the portfolio rubric were analyzed as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The Mean of Project-based Reading Portfolio Rubric (n = 32)

Portfolio Rubric	Score	Min	Max	\bar{x}	S.D.
Portfolio rubric	100	57.50	99.00	79.42	9.43

This result shows that the students performed well on their reading ability based on the mean score ($\bar{x} = 79.42$, S.D. = 9.43), which supported the result from the English reading test.

Based on students' reflections in their portfolios, most of them believed that their English reading ability had increased considerably. For example, one student stated,

"I think that my reading is better. Previously, I never had to sit down and read this much, so there was no progress whatsoever. In my second year, however, I studied English reading extensively and used more English than before; hence, I learned more. Besides, I read more both inside and outside the classroom." (Female student, Reflection, 5 November 2014)

There was also a significant difference between the students' pre-test and post-test scores of the intercultural communicative competence test (see Table 3). All of the three elements, namely intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills were enhanced significantly. The students' post-intercultural knowledge-based test scores ($\bar{x} = 16.75$, S.D. = 3.35) were significantly higher than their pre-intercultural knowledge-based test scores ($\bar{x} = 13.87$, S.D. = 2.64) at the .05 critical alpha level ($t = 4.72$). As for their intercultural attitudes, it was found that their post-test scores ($\bar{x} = 69.50$, S.D. = 6.97) were significantly higher than their pre-test scores ($\bar{x} = 65.78$, S.D. = 7.30) at the .05 critical alpha level ($t = 4.28$). Similarly, the scores of the students' post-intercultural skills test ($\bar{x} = 57.31$, S.D. = 6.17) were significantly higher than their scores of the pre-intercultural skills test ($\bar{x} = 51.50$, S.D. = 7.68) at the .05 critical alpha level ($t = 6.02$). These differences demonstrated that the students' intercultural communicative competence was improved. The PRI implementation helped the students to improve their intercultural skills of discovery and interaction the most, followed by knowledge and attitudes of openness and curiosity.

Table 3: A descriptive summary of the differences between pre-test and post-test scores of intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills (n= 32)

Test	Score	Min	Max	\bar{x}	S.D.	t	Sig.
Pre-Intercultural Knowledge	30	9	20	13.87	2.64	4.72*	0.000
Post-Intercultural Knowledge		10	23	16.75	3.35		
Pre- Intercultural Attitudes	80	50	79	65.78	7.30	4.28*	0.000
Post- Intercultural Attitudes		56	80	69.50	6.97		
Pre- Intercultural Skills	70	31	70	51.50	7.68	6.02*	0.000
Post- Intercultural Skills		47	70	57.31	6.17		

*p< 0.05

These results were also aligned with the students' portfolio mean score as shown in Table 2. In the students' reflective essays, all of them agreed that PRI helped to increase their intercultural communicative competence, especially in searching for cultural information and cultural knowledge from various countries. A student stated,

"...our [intercultural communicative competence] had also increased because we learned about other cultures and festivals, and we now know how to greet others. Of course, this knowledge helped us to adapt ourselves more easily and improved our manners." (Female student, Reflection, 5 November 2014)

The result for the third research question revealed the relationships between students' scores of the post English reading ability test and intercultural knowledge-based test ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$) and the scores of English reading ability test and intercultural attitudes test ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.05$) as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation between students' English Reading Ability and Intercultural Communicative Competence (n=32)

	Intercultural Communicative Competence		
	Intercultural Knowledge	Intercultural Attitudes	Intercultural Skills
English Reading Ability	0.41*	0.42*	0.30

*p< 0.05

These results indicated that the students who gained higher scores for the English reading ability test would most likely gain higher scores for intercultural knowledge-based test and intercultural attitudes test.

DISCUSSION

Project-based Reading Instruction had significant effects on students' English reading ability due to the integration of English reading instruction, Project-Based Learning, and intercultural communicative competence. The core reason that made PRI successful was that all PRI stages, namely preparation, conducting research, analysis of cultural differences, project production, and self-reflection on own learning, were constructed based on the ten principles of student-centeredness, motivation, explicit reading instruction, authentic reading materials, intensive and extensive reading comprehension, scaffolding, collaborative learning, integration of culture-and reading-learning, continuous evaluation, and self-reflection.

During the PRI intervention, students were given extensive support and guidance from the teacher. Teacher scaffolding was one of the most important factors that directly impacted students' progress and achievement in English reading ability. This supported the reading model for English learners by McCloskey et al. (2010) who believed that students could achieve the goal of comprehension through scaffolding from teachers and their peers. However, the findings from the PRI, based on students' reflections and interviews, found that peer scaffolding did not play an important part in students' English reading comprehension. As it seemed scaffolding from students may not help them much with the learning process like reading comprehension. Therefore, the PRI students did not seem to value peer scaffolding (Samana, 2013). In the first stage of PRI, explicit instruction of reading strategies was found to be significantly helpful to the students' English reading ability. This was in line with the trend of reading instruction proposed by Anderson (2012) and the idea presented by Stoller, et al. (2013). They agreed that explicit instruction in reading comprehension helped to increase students' reading ability in an existing reading curriculum. However, the effectiveness of the explicit instruction was doubted by Luke (2014) who pointed out that an explicit instructional approach (or any approaches based on explicit instruction) was not encouraging the engagement between the teacher and students. In turn, he stated, it "can severely disadvantage some students." However, the present study argued that explicit instruction could become effective if it was combined with other instructional approach(es) as it was in this PRI. The combination of explicit instruction, content-based learning, and PBL revealed its effectiveness through students' performance and opinions. The explicit reading instruction in the preparation step of PRI could not have been effective without the use of interactive activities for reading. Stoller (2015) recommended reading, rereading, student-centeredness, teacher support, and high expectation of a reading outcome for the top-five priorities for practicing reading teachers to help students improve their reading ability. However, the present study revealed that reading materials and activities for reading were also essential to students' English reading ability. The use of interactive activities for reading in PRI (which were exploring students' own culture and others through enjoyable games and VDO clips with the English subtitles for students to read, reading for comprehension alone

and with peers, searching for cultural information through reading various authentic texts, interviewing foreigners, sharing the findings and analyzing cultural differences with their group, presenting the findings in group through presentation, role-play, and reflecting and giving feedback on the reading research project with the whole class) was found to be effective for students' English reading ability. This supported the ideas of Bunyakarte (2008), Genesee and Riches (2006), and Grabe (1991) who revealed that working together in groups or pairs assisted students to gain more motivation and enjoyment in reading. In the PRI classroom, individual and group activities were integrated because students could become active learners as they enjoyed working and sharing with the class. This was in line with the report by Taylor (2007) who stated that a successful reading instruction required a good balance of grouping practices and independent activities that were motivating. The PRI findings also coincided with a study by Simpson (2011) who mentioned that her undergraduate Thai students' language skills were improved due to the use of PBL, which provided her students with authentic tasks and information through reading, speaking, writing, and listening, a real-life situation, student-centered learning and the opportunity to speak English with teachers or classmates. In addition, teacher-student conferences were purposely included in all steps of the learning process. Small group conferences implemented in this study proved to be very beneficial as students valued them highly and mentioned them in their students' reflections. Teacher scaffolding through teacher-student conferences, as well as peer scaffolding, is one of the essential components of PRI. Simpson (2011) also found that teacher scaffolding played a major role in enhancing her students' English skills. Similar findings by Dhanarattigannon (2014) revealed that conferencing helped reinforce an idea and gave feedback immediately to her students; however, she suggested that teacher-student conference, especially on a one-on-one basis, might not be appropriate with a large class. Based on the present study, it could be argued that a conference between the instructor and students is suitable to benefit students in a large class. However, it might require extensive extracurricular time outside of the classroom for the instructor to have a conference with all groups. The real problem might occur when it is implemented in English foundation courses where instructors are responsible to teach many sections per course in addition to other major English courses. Therefore, teacher-student conferences might be most appropriate and effective for a major course with only one or two class sections. For peer scaffolding, it helped students to improve their performance to a certain degree.

Based on findings, it can also be interpreted that the higher mean scores of the intercultural communicative competence post-test (which included intercultural knowledge-based test and intercultural skills and attitudes inventory) resulted from the careful design of the integration of cultural content, project-based learning, and reading instruction. Students gained cultural knowledge, positive attitudes of openness and curiosity, and effective skills of discovery and interaction through the ten principles of PRI. Students were able to communicate

appropriately and effectively with both native- and non-native English speakers from various cultural backgrounds. Students participated in enjoyable and motivational reading games and activities which recalled and expanded their cultural knowledge of various cultures (in this study, the six selected cultures were English, American, Australian, France, Italian, and Japanese). This interactive and direct learning environment entails collaborative learning which promotes the acquisition of the culture in addition to language skills. This in turn leads to achieving intercultural communicative competence. In addition, students' attitudes of openness and curiosity were increased due to the integration of culture learning and reading learning. Students had the opportunity to explore information about cultural diversity and became aware of how and why people behave and think differently in different cultures. They learned and read more on social norms and interactions of their selected cultures and shared their findings with the class. The more they learned, read, and shared in class, the more curious they became.

For intercultural skills of discovery and interaction, students were able to search for cultural information, comprehend written texts, and analyze cultural information via the integration of culture and reading learning as mentioned previously, and through meaningful and accessible tasks. In addition to reading authentic written texts, role-plays and also interviews helped students to improve their intercultural communicative competence. The use of these tasks is encouraged in intercultural teaching and learning because they tend to help students improve their competence in intercultural communication (Corbett, 2003; Damnet, 2008). Throughout the process, students were given support and guidance from the teacher researcher. The teacher researcher challenged students by asking questions about the cultural information they had read, required them to perform role-play, and interview foreigners outside of the classroom. Peer-scaffolding was beneficial in terms of cultural information sharing.

The present study also found that there were strong correlations between students' English reading ability and intercultural knowledge, and English reading ability and intercultural attitudes. That is after the implementation of PRI, students who gained higher scores for the English reading ability test also gained higher scores for the intercultural knowledge and intercultural attitudes of openness and curiosity toward other cultures of people who use English for communication. These finding was resulted from PRI activities (which involved text, talk, and image). PRI activities in the intensive and extensive reading helped to promote the significant correlations between students' English reading ability and intercultural knowledge, and English reading ability and intercultural attitudes. The activities were carefully designed to promote communication. In PRI, reading tasks helped students to gain a wider body of cultural knowledge and language structure through printed texts. Following that, students discussed the new knowledge with the class and discover in-depth cultural information from communicating with foreigners. This helped to enhance students' communication, which was supported by Mart (2012) who stated, "Reading outside the classroom is the most significant influence on oral

communication ability" (p.91). In the PRI, the quantitative findings revealed a significant correlation between English reading ability and students' intercultural attitudes of openness and curiosity. However, there were no empirical studies conducted on this relationship to support these findings in the present study. The closest findings to support this was a research study that had investigated the effect of using metacognitive reading strategies on the development of intercultural sensitivity and found a positive correlation of the two variables (Chen & Starosta, 2000). To explain the PRI findings, students' reflections were used. For example, in the reflections, several students stated that they became more motivated and encouraged to learn English after interviewing foreigners. After the course, a number of students mentioned they felt less scared of reading English texts. They would like to interact more with foreigners in English and suggested that more real-life learning activities (such as interviewing foreigners) should be added to the PRI course or any other English course. However, they did not directly state that they would read more to improve their English reading ability.

In conclusion, students' English reading ability and intercultural communicative competence were enhanced through the use of PRI. It could be concluded that students who had gained higher scores for the English reading ability test would also be likely to gain higher scores for intercultural knowledge-based test and intercultural attitudes test. Reading was the key factor that facilitated EFL students to be able to gain content knowledge and linguistic knowledge to be able to communicate with foreigners. In the EFL learning environment, one accessible way to help students to improve their communication skills was by communicating with foreigners via social media or chat rooms, or reading texts from online websites. These activities had proven to become successful in Ware (2013) who revealed that authentic online interaction had created new literacy skills needed to write, read, communicate, produce, consume, and critique in a digital age. These skills and the authentic intercultural interactions could help students to better understand how the words and symbols could represent their ways of life.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings from this study provide pedagogical implications in three aspects as follows:

1. The use of the Project-based Reading Instruction framework in English reading courses. The current study employed the PRI framework with the Tourism Management students. It is highly suggested that this framework can also be utilized with students from different fields of study in reading courses, especially students with medium and high achievers of English reading ability. Instructors can follow the PRI stages (preparation, conducting research, analysis of cultural differences, project production, and self-reflection on own learning) and activities included in each stage; however, it is suggested that they adjust the cultural topics and

the final project based on their students' interests and nature of their study. For example, when employing PRI in an English reading class of Communication Arts students, the reading content may convey social issues in different cultures, arts photography in different cultures, and pop-culture. As for group projects, instructors may collaboratively decide with the students, so that it is meaningful to them. This study suggests that a student survey is needed prior to teaching the course. Modifications to PRI are also suggested in each stage as follows:

Stage 1: Preparation—a modification for interactive activities or games can be altered to something else based on students' interests.

Stage 2: Conducting research—as in the previous stage, the content is suggested for modification. It is suggested that instructors select authentic reading texts that are relevant to students' interests and their level of reading ability. The Fry readability formula (or Fry readability graph) is recommended as a tool to help instructors to choose appropriate texts for the students. In addition, this study suggests that instructors encourage their students to read and complete reading strategy exercises with peers or in small groups, so that they can help each other to learn these strategies and comprehend texts.

Stage 3: Analysis of cultural differences—based on the findings of this study, it suggests that instructors encourage students to provide feedback to their peers. A training section for peer assessment is strongly recommended as early as possible, so that students' perceptions about the fairness and the reliability of peer assessment are enhanced.

Stage 4: Project production—this study suggests that instructors use presentation, role-playing, interviewing foreigners, and other types of activities based on the students' final project. However, all mini-projects need to be connected and lead to the accomplishment of the final product.

Stage 5: Self-Reflection on own learning—Instructors are suggested to encourage students to give constructive feedback to their peers.

2. An integration of explicit approach and interactive approach to English reading instruction. This is essential for students to improve their English reading ability and learning skills. Students with low-level English proficiency will benefit significantly from this integration as they need explicit instruction in the English reading skills to help them to comprehend the texts they read. For example, instructors can create attractive and relevant reading materials and employ enjoyable activities or games to help gain students' motivation before reading.

3. Combination of reading activities through text, talk, and image. It is agreed that students can improve their reading ability by reading and rereading. In addition, this study suggests that instructional materials and activities are also essential. It is highly suggested that culturally-embedded texts are used by instructors. This study suggests instructors create their own materials which promote intercultural communication in three aspects, namely intercultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Activities employed in the classroom therefore

need to help promote these three aspects. This study also suggests that instructors design a reading course that combines multiple tasks, most importantly, reading and interaction.

4. Teacher and peers scaffolded learning environment. Through a teacher and peers scaffolded learning environment, students are encouraged to ask questions, provide feedback, and share their knowledge. Consequently, students can become autonomous students. Therefore, it is very important that instructors provide scaffolding to build skills in both reading and collaborative work.

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