

Storytelling: A Method to Enhance Reading Achievement and Attitudes toward English Reading of Thai Primary School Learners

การเล่านิทาน: การส่งเสริมความสามารถในการอ่านและการพัฒนา
เจตคติในการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนชาวไทยระดับประถมศึกษา

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งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาผลกระทบของการสอนอ่านภาษาอังกฤษโดยการเล่านิทานต่อการส่งเสริมความสามารถในการอ่านและการพัฒนาทัศนคติต่อการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษของผู้เรียนชาวไทยระดับประถมศึกษาชั้นปีที่ 4 จำนวน 26 คน งานวิจัยนี้วัดความสามารถในการอ่านของผู้เรียนโดยใช้คำถามหลังบทอ่านที่สร้างขึ้นโดยอ้างอิงจากทฤษฎีการเรียนรู้ของ Bloom (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) และมีการประเมินเจตคติของผู้เรียนต่อการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษโดยใช้แบบทดสอบเจตคติก่อนและหลังการ

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ใช้กิจกรรมการอ่าน ผลการศึกษาพบว่าวิธีดังกล่าวทำให้ผู้เรียนมีความสามารถในการอ่านที่สะท้อนผ่านการพัฒนาด้านพุทธิพิสัยทั้ง 5 ด้าน คือมีความสามารถด้านความจำมากที่สุด และด้านคิดวิเคราะห์น้อยที่สุด นอกจากนั้นผู้เรียนมีเจตคติต่อการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษดีขึ้น ดังนั้นจึงกล่าวได้ว่าการสอนอ่านโดยการเล่านิทานเป็นวิธีการที่มีประสิทธิภาพในการส่งเสริมความสามารถในการอ่านและการพัฒนาเจตคติต่อการอ่านภาษาอังกฤษสำหรับผู้เรียนระดับประถมศึกษา

คำสำคัญ: การเล่านิทาน เจตคติ การอ่านภาษาอังกฤษ

Abstract

This study investigates the impacts of the storytelling teaching method on the enhancement of reading achievement and attitudes of Thai primary school learners toward English reading. The study was conducted with twenty-six fourth-grade students. The gains in reading achievement were assessed through post-reading questions created accordingly to Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Additionally, students' attitudes toward English reading were measured twice by an attitude test, prior to and after reading activities. The results revealed that students achieved the five cognitive domains. The students showed the greatest success in the Remembering domain; in contrast, they developed the least in the Analyzing domain. Moreover, The students' attitudes toward English reading noticeably developed. Therefore, it was proven that storytelling was an effective method in promoting reading achievement and positive attitudes of Thai primary school learners toward English reading.

Keywords: Storytelling, attitude, English reading

Introduction

It is said that reading is the easiest way to acquire knowledge at the cheapest price. People have the ability to gain any information they desire through reading; thus, it should be promoted as a favorable habit for people at a very young age in order to support their lifelong learning. Unfortunately, Thais read very little, merely two books per year (Ganghair, 2015). This is far less than people in Thailand's neighboring countries; most Singaporeans finish forty-five books and Vietnamese people read sixty books per year (Saengpassa, 2012). The situation concerning the Thai reading behavior is really worrisome as confirmed by a literary screening test arranged by The Office of Basic Education Commission in 2014. This test established that there were 127,800 third-grade students and 73,290 sixth-grade students who experienced great difficulty reading and approximately thirty percent of them were illiterate (Sopontammarak, 2014). If this problem continues to be ignored, what will happen to the quality of Thailand's human resources?

Also important, as English is the official language of the ASEAN community, it is alarming that Thai students have problems reading not only in the Thai language; but also in the English language (Pawapatcharaudom, 2007). Most ESL/EFL students have problems reading English texts. Limited knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structure is regarded as the main problem as students lack reading exposure (Gunning, 2002). In-class studying is inadequate due to the fact that reading is a time-consuming activity. Consequently, extensive reading should be strongly

promoted. A number of research studies confirmed positive impacts of extensive reading on EFL/ESL learners that it encouraged students to better maintain reading development, improve self-directed reading and enhance students' motivation in reading and learning a target language when students read texts with appropriate levels of difficulty (Lake & Holster, 2014; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Yamashita, 2015).

Extensive reading has been integrated with many other teaching methods in English classes to enhance the reading skills of learners. In the studies of Hazel (2015), Kirchhoff (2015) and Mermelstein (2014), extensive reading was applied with collaborative and communicative language teaching methods such as class discussion and book talk, resulting in students' more contribution to the communicative activities. Once students had knowledge from reading, they put forward their L2 output by communicating from what they understood and actively interacted with classmates; therefore, this mixed method formed students' motivation to read.

Informal settings are one of the reasons why the integration of extensive reading with the communicative teaching method can promote reading motivation. An individual can learn language in both "formal and informal language learning settings" if s/he is intensively engaged with intelligible input (Krashen, 1982). Lightbown and Spada (2001) further explained that the formal setting was where the target language was taught to learners whereas in informal settings learners learned a language in a form of social interaction which provided an authentic source assisting them to obtain the target language without the formal structure of a

traditional four-walled classroom (Bahrani, Sim & Nekoueizadeh, 2014; Smith, 2015).

Currently, informal settings are being highlighted in educational research due to their positive effects on language learning. Many studies supported the significance of informal settings which provided more learning opportunities and encouraged “a wide range of strategies” suitable for a variety of learners resulting in successful learning (Smith, 2015). Therefore, learning in informal settings should be interdisciplinary in order to allow learners to broaden previous knowledge, maintain interests, integrate information to solve problems in innovative ways, and accomplish new comprehension of old knowledge (Anderson, Lucas & Ginns, 2003).

In addition to the positive impacts of informal settings on successful learning, Smith (2015) also suggested that learning in an informal setting enhanced a more positive attitude and motivation towards language learning. Attitude is a factor contributing to language proficiency because learners with positive attitudes have the mindset that makes language learning more or less possible (Gardner, 1985; Ushida, 2005). This is in compliance with prior studies; language learners’ positive attitudes toward language learning can be altered by the anxiety the learners experience in foreign language learning situations (Oroujlou & Vahedi, 2011; Ushida, 2005). It would seem that the friendly atmosphere of an informal setting and a positive attitude toward language learning are interrelated.

According to the previous benefits of language learning in informal settings, this environment should be employed because most learners are familiar with this form of learning from a young age. Storytelling is the very first form of teaching in an informal setting which effectively enhances the audience's emotional intelligence (Bala, 2015; Dujmović, 2006). Hsu (2015) stated that most people had experienced or been exposed to stories more or less since they were young, as children are naturally attracted to stories. Since there was not too much information little education was required to understand; and the variations in the narrator's voice sparked children's interest. Through tales, storytelling conveyed knowledge from generation to generation; simultaneously, values, thoughts, emotions and imaginations were communicated to the audience (Bala, 2015; Green & Brock, 2000; Keshta, 2013). In addition, a previous study presented that storytelling enhanced students' vocabulary and reading skills to the point that they could connect meanings and feelings with words (Mokhtar, Halim & Kamarulzaman, 2011).

Moreover, storytelling created motivation and a low anxiety environment for language learning because a rapport between the instructor and students or among students themselves was created. Interpersonal skills also increased through storytelling as it was a social activity that people did as a group to share experiences, laughter, and feelings (Dujmović, 2006; Speaker, Taylor & Kamen, 2004).

Because of the advantages of storytelling, it has recently been promoted as one of the most essential methods in teaching English to EFL students, especially in young learners. The stories used in storytelling are

regarded as intelligible input that facilitated language learning (Bala, 2015; Craig, 1996; Hsu, 2015). Unfortunately, in the Thai EFL context, there is little research concerning storytelling and informal settings, even though it is effective in improving reading skills. Therefore, with respect to the alarming problem concerning Thai students' reading skills, this study will investigate the impact of storytelling in an informal setting on enhancing the reading achievement and attitudes toward English reading of primary school students.

Research Questions

1. What cognitive domain of Revised Bloom's Taxonomy can the participants achieve by the method of storytelling?
2. What are the participants' attitudes prior to and after the use of the storytelling method?

Methods

Participants

Twenty-six fourth-grade students of Huayploo Pittaya School, Muang District, Chiang Rai Province participated in the present study. The researchers focused on grade-four students due to the fourth-grade level indicator in the 2008 core curriculum that a student should be able to, "[a]nswer questions from listening to or reading sentences, dialogues or simple tales" (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Tools

1. Four Aesop's Fables

Four Aesop's Fables were selected based on two Krashen's hypotheses (1985) – the Input hypothesis and the Affective Filter hypothesis. The Input hypothesis (i+1) proposed that context, linguistic information, world knowledge and previously acquired linguistic competence are the key elements enabling acquirers to understand language. When acquirers learn new language structures, they should build from what they have already acquired in order to move beyond the existing knowledge level.

Another relevant hypothesis is the Affective Filter hypothesis. This hypothesis refers to acquirers' mental blocks in acquiring language. The Affective filter is high when acquirers have anxiety or any feelings that relate to the revelation of weakness. On the other hand, the affective filter is low when acquirers feel that they are potential members of the group, especially when they do not realize that they are learning the second language.

Therefore, according to the two hypotheses of Krashen (1985), Aesop's Fables were selected, for students were already familiar with the stories' in Thai versions. In addition, the difficulty of the fables was examined, using The Oxford Text Checker (Oxford 3000™) to confirm the appropriateness of the texts with the students' levels and to arrange the fables' order from the easiest to the most difficult to create a rapport and comfortable feeling for the students. According to Oxford 3000™, there are three difficulty levels. A typical low intermediate text is close to 100%; a

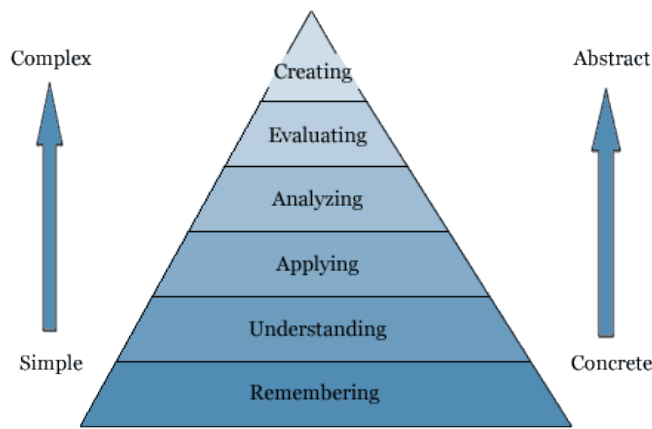
typical high intermediate text is about 90-95%; and a typical advanced text is about 75-90%. Table 1 presents difficulty and order of the fables.

Table 1. The four Aesop’s Fables and their difficulty in Oxford 3000™

Aesop’s Fables	Oxford 3000™ (%)
1) The Fox and the Grapes	99
2) The Dog and the Shadow	97
3) The Ant and the Grasshopper	91
4) The Crow and the Pitcher	88

2. Post-reading Questions

Six post-reading questions were created in accordance with the six categories of Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy: Remembering, Understanding, Applying, Analyzing, Evaluating and Creating, as presented in Picture 1 (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). (See the questions in Appendix A)



Picture 1. Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

All post-reading questions were examined by two experts for the content validity called ‘Index of Item-Objective Congruence’ (IOC) (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977). According to the experts’ suggestions, the questions were revised and tried out with 4 fourth-grade students for checking the post-reading questions’ comprehensibility. Eventually, the 6 questions were utilized in the study (See Appendix A).

3. Attitude Test

An eighteen-statement attitude test was used as a pre-test and post-test before and after the students experienced the storytelling teaching method. In designing the attitude test, the Likert Scale (1932) was applied. Twenty-five statements spanning both positive and negative attitudes toward English reading were created; subsequently, the statements were presented to two experts to examine the content validity or ‘Index of Item-Objective Congruence’ (IOC) (Rovinelli & Hambleton, 1977). Due to the experts’ comments, the neutral and off-topic statements were discarded; some items were adjusted to best suit the test’s objectives. Eventually, there were eighteen statements which consisted of nine items reflecting positive attitudes and the other nine items mirroring negative attitudes toward English reading. All statements were in a random sequence. In order to check the test questions’ intelligibility and effectiveness, the test was scrutinized by four fourth-grade students. The questions were then revised with the experts’ suggestions and finally applied in the pre-test and post-test of the current study.

Data Collection and Analysis

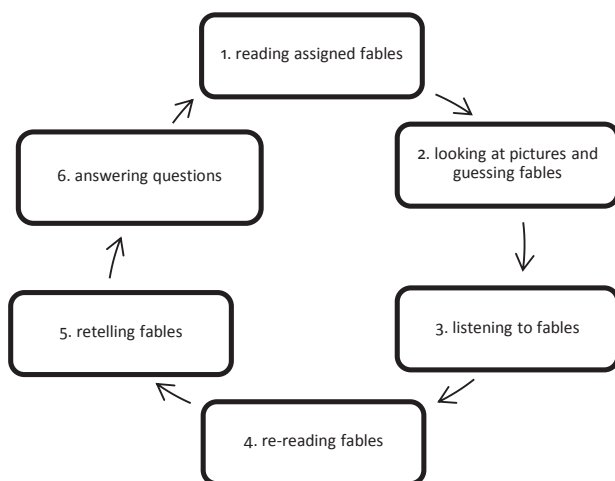
1. The attitude test was conducted with the participants before and after the use of the storytelling teaching method. After the participants completed the attitude tests, the scores for the negative items were calculated in reverse to reflect overall attitude in a single direction (value). A positive attitude was presented by a high overall score while a negative attitude was indicated by a low overall score (McLeod, 2008). The average attitude score of each item was calculated and defined. These values are in Table 2.

Table 2 Meaning of average attitude score

Mean	Meaning
4.50-5.00	Having a very positive attitude toward reading English
3.50-4.49	Having a positive attitude toward reading English
2.50-3.49	Having a neutral attitude toward reading English
1.50-2.49	Having a negative attitude toward reading English
1.00-1.49	Having a very negative attitude toward reading English

2. In the study, 26 students were separated into 8 groups (6 groups of 3 and 2 groups of 4). In order to create a low Affective Filter, each group was supervised by a teacher who was a third-year English major. The small age gap between the teachers and the group members together with a micro-group size created a relaxed atmosphere. According to Krashen's (1985) expectation, a low Affective Filter could encourage and allow them to feel involved with the group and have greater learning potential. In the method (Picture 2), first, the students read assigned fables prior to the meeting with their group for 4 weeks. This is to

promote extensive reading and informal setting method due to the fact that they could read in their leisure time and at their own pace. Second, the students looked at pictures and guess what would happen in the fable. Third, the storytelling method was applied at this step; students listened to the fable recited by the teachers in English in an informal fashion that the students could freely ask questions and react to the story. Subsequently, the students had a short time to re-read the story and then retold the fables in Thai to the teachers in order to display their comprehension. Last, the students answered six post-reading questions in accordance with the cognitive domains of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002). Moreover, in this method, students were allowed to answer questions in Thai in order to eliminate the language barrier.



Picture 2. Storytelling process used in the informal setting method of the external reading project

3. For the analysis of post-reading questions, a correct answer received one point; an incomplete or incorrect answer would be marked zero. For example, from “The Crow and the Pitcher”, a question asked, “Do you like the crow or not? Why?” A student received one point for answering, “Yes, I like, for it has attempt.” Her answer was complete for both questions and thus given full credit. A student received zero from his answer, “Don’t like”, because his answer was incomplete and did not answer the question “Why?” The scores in each domain of twenty-six students from the four fables were added up to see the overall picture of the students’ performance in each domain. In addition, by investigating the proportion of the students’ achievement in each domain, the researchers defined those students who were able to give four correct answers (4 points) as very good, three correct answers (3 points) as good, two correct answers (2 points) as average and one correct answer (1 points) as poor.

Results and Discussion

Attitudes toward English Reading

Table 3 illustrates the attitudes toward English reading of the students before and after the implementation of the storytelling in an informal setting method.

Table 3. Students' attitudes toward English reading

Item	Statement	Before			After		
		\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	SD	Meaning
1.	English reading gives me more knowledge.	4.6	0.6	V.Positive*	4.8	0.4	V.Positive
2.	English reading expands my vocabulary.	4.3	0.9	Positive	4.7	0.6	V.Positive
3.	I understand English texts well.	3.5	0.8	Positive	4	0.8	Positive
4.	English reading is <u>not</u> important for my study.	4.4	1.2	Positive	4.5	1.2	V.Positive
5.	English reading is <u>not</u> beneficial for me.	4.3	1.2	Positive	4.3	1.1	Positive
6.	English reading is a very difficult skill.	2.9	1.1	Neutral	3	1.4	Neutral
7.	I feel happy when I read English.	4.1	0.9	Positive	4.1	0.7	Positive

Item	Statement	Before			After		
		\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	SD	Meaning
8.	English reading enhances the confidence of my English.	3.9	1.1	Positive	4	0.9	Positive
9.	English reading is boring.	4.3	1	Positive	4.7	0.7	V.Positive
10.	English reading is a good activity for my free time.	4.5	0.7	V.Positive	4.6	0.6	V.Positive
11.	I am confused when I read English.	4.6	0.6	V.Positive	4.7	0.5	V.Positive
12.	I always feel nervous when I read English texts.	2.6	1.1	Neutral	3.1	1.1	Neutral
13.	English reading improves my creativity.	4.3	0.7	Positive	4.7	0.6	V.Positive
14.	I do not like reading English.	4.1	0.9	Positive	4.1	1.3	Positive

Item	Statement	Before			After		
		\bar{X}	S.D.	Meaning	\bar{X}	SD	Meaning
15.	English reading is useful for my other English skills.	4.3	0.9	Positive	4.6	0.9	V.Positive
16.	English reading is a waste of time.	4.5	1	Positive	4.8	0.5	V.Positive
17.	English reading is useful for my future career(s).	4.7	0.5	V.Positive	5	0	V.Positive
18.	English reading does not help to improve my life.	4.7	0.5	V.Positive	4.8	0.6	V.Positive
Total Average Scores		4.1	0.9	Positive	4.4	0.8	Positive

***Remark:** V. positive stands for Very Positive.

Table 3 shows that both before and after the use of the storytelling method, the students had three levels of attitudes toward English reading – neutral, positive and very positive, but after the use, the overall mean scores increased with some noticeable items.

Firstly, for item 2, “English reading expands my vocabulary”, and item 9, “English reading is boring”, the students showed a change in

attitudes from ‘positive’ to ‘very positive’, from 4.27 to 4.69. This means the students appreciated the benefits of English reading and English reading was not as boring as they felt prior to the activity. Secondly, for item 3, “I understand English texts well”, and item 12, “I always feel nervous when I read English texts”, their attitudes remained at positive and neutral respectively, but the mean change is 0.50. The change expressed in these two items showed that the students felt they were able to understand English texts better and their nervousness from English decreased. In addition, SD in a majority of items decreased, meaning the students had fairly similar attitudes toward English reading. However, some items contradicted this statement, such as items 6, 12, 14, and 18. It could be concluded that the storytelling method increased the students’ attitudes toward English reading, but their attitudes concerning the difficulty, feelings of nervousness and benefits of English reading remained varied.

The results from the attitude survey showed that the students did not have negative or very negative attitudes which possibly meant that for grade-four students, attitudes toward English reading were not really a problem. The problem might actually arise after the primary level when learning activities might not encourage students to have interest in extended reading. This perspective is presented in Kush, Watkins and Brookhart’s (2005) study that for reading experiences at a young age, positive reading attitudes might not display a clear connection to reading success. Nonetheless, if pedagogy cultivates positive attitudes, it greatly

tends to strengthen the connection between positive English reading attitudes and reading achievement.

The researchers found that the storytelling method was an attractive activity to teach English reading. This method kept the students' attention throughout the whole learning process and therefore increases the average attitudes from positive to very positive. The students participated more in a less anxious atmosphere. In addition, the researchers observed that when the students were familiar with the story in their first language before reading in English, they could associate the meaning with their background knowledge without difficulty. This is related to the characteristics of informal settings that support learners to apply what they have already known to create new meaning from the text (Anderson, Lucas & Ginns, 2003; Bahrani, Sim & Nekoueizadeh, 2014). Therefore, it can be concluded that the method of storytelling in an informal setting promotes positive attitudes toward reading English.

Reading Comprehension

Table 4 shows the percentages of the students' reading achievement based on six cognitive domains. Twenty-six participants answered post-reading questions in each domain four times (four fables). The full score for each domain is one hundred and four.

Table 4. Students' reading achievement scores

Cognitive Domain	Score achieved out of 104	%
1. Remembering	103	99.04
2. Understanding	97	93.27
3. Applying	92	88.46
4. Analyzing	80	76.92
5. Evaluating	93	89.42
6. Creating	93	89.42

Table 4 shows that Remembering is the domain in which the students showed the highest achievement, 99.04% while Analyzing was the domain with the lowest achievement, 76.92%.

Table 5. Students' reading achievement rankings

Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domains (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001)	Students' reading achievement ranking					
	4	3	2	1	0	
	Very Good	Good	Moderate	Poor	Very Poor	
	No. of students	No. of students	No. of students	No. of students	No. of students	%
Remembering	25	96.2	1	3.85	-	-
Understanding	19	73.1	7	26.9	-	-
Applying	16	61.5	8	30.8	2	7.69
Analyzing	10	38.5	10	38.5	4	15.4
Evaluating	19	73.1	4	15.4	2	7.69
Creating	16	61.5	9	34.6	1	3.85

Table 5 showed the students' reading achievement rankings based on the cognitive domains of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The students who were in a Very Good rank gave all correct answers for all fables in a domain. Those in a Good rank answered correctly in three fables. A Moderate level was those who gave two correct answers; and a Poor level was those who had one correct answer.

First of all, for every domain the highest percentage appeared at a Very Good rank. The Remembering and Understanding domains showed similar results as the students' scores demonstrated Very Good (Remembering - 96.15%; Understanding - 73.08%) and Good rankings (Remembering - 3.85%; Understanding - 26.92%).

Second, the Applying and Creating domains showed similar results as the students were ranked as Very Good (61.54% in both Applying and Creating), Good, (Applying - 30.77%; Creating - 34.62%) and Moderate ranks (Applying - 7.69%, Creating - 3.85%). Third, the Evaluating domain showed an interesting result of a high percentage of students, 73.08%, ranked Very Good, and 3.85% ranked as Poor.

Fourth, the Analyzing domain had particularly significant results compared to the other domains. This domain had the lowest percentage of the students ranked as Very Good, 38.46%, and the highest percentage of the students ranked as Poor, 7.69%. It can be concluded that with the storytelling method, the majority of the students were in Very Good and Good rankings in nearly all domains except Analyzing.

As the method of storytelling was implemented, it could be noticed that for the Remembering and Understanding domains, there was a high percentage of the students ranked as Very Good. This revealed that for grade-four students, there were few problems in achieving the low order cognitive domains. This finding is similar to previous studies in that the students could achieve the Remembering domain after a reading activity (Boonnithi & Boonphadung, 2015) and the Understanding domain after the use of a teaching method stressing integration of the four skills and student-centeredness (Chantrachai & Poonsawad (2013).

However, in the Applying and other higher domains, the students' rankings were distributed to Moderate and Poor levels. This result signaled that as the domain got higher, the students showed greater variance in cognitive ability. The Analyzing domain stood out, as the students' rankings were distributed from Very Good to Poor levels. This implies that the students struggled to achieve higher cognitive domains. Moreover, the Analyzing domain demanded the students to have a good command of the Thai language as the questions asked them to analyze the Thai proverb best describing each fable. Hence, this cognitive domain should be the issue that teachers take into consideration to greater develop students' cognitive skills.

Interestingly, the Evaluating domain belonging to the higher cognitive domains presented many students ranked as Very Good and few students as Poor. This finding suggests the students' various abilities as some students failed to give reason(s) which was the key point in the Evaluating domain. It may be that primary students know the answer, but

they might not be frequently exposed to the question ‘why’ nor conditioned to think about reason(s). Therefore, practices and teaching methods that encourage the use of students’ reasoning process should be highlighted in primary education.

Furthermore, there were three noticeable points from their written answers. Firstly, the students were good at drawing an important scene from fables; this related to the Understanding domain. Secondly, to examine the Analyzing domain, the students were asked to identify a Thai proverb best describing the story. Only few students were able to name a Thai proverb related to the story, but many were able to give a moral that explained a concept of the story. Thirdly, one of the problems found during data analysis was the students’ spelling skills, even in their first language; sometimes it failed to convey their understanding of the text. As a result, there was occasional misunderstanding of answers.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This study proves that the teaching method of storytelling in an informal setting can improve the students’ achievement in the cognitive domains of Bloom’s Taxonomy, especially in Remembering, Understanding and Evaluating. The method also enhanced the students’ attitudes toward reading English.

For those who are interested in applying this method, longer periods of method implementation are suggested as students’ reading achievements and attitudes develop over time. Moreover, they should particularly consider the

selection of challenging materials for students (Hsu, 2015) and classroom management in terms of time and noise (Keshta, 2013).

For further research, to emphasize the success of the Analyzing and Evaluating domains, researchers should consider the key characteristics that students are expected to achieve in each domain. Classroom activities highlighting those characteristics can then be created and implemented alongside the storytelling method to completely develop all of the students' cognitive domains.

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