

Can Reading Selections Positively Influence Reading, Thinking, and Writing Skills?

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ABSTRACT: *Many English courses in higher education are designed for an academic purpose (Kramsch, 2000). In the academia, it is crucial that the English competency of students meets the level at which enables them to use English as a medium for analysis of texts in various fields, and critical writing. However, in many primary and secondary schools in Thailand, Thai students do not have adequate competence in English to do this (Wiriyaichitra, 2002, p. 7). Thus, university freshmen need English courses which can help advance their English. For this reason, reading materials of English courses at university level play an important role. While such reading materials can indirectly strengthen students' morals and integrity (core values of some universities), they can also broaden their world views and in so doing improve their thinking skills. This paper proposes several types of reading materials for English courses specifically for freshman monks and novices. The reading materials have been designed to conform to Buddhist precepts (as this is the context of the study) and to suit the specific interests of these students, their special field being religion. It has been found that the selection of English reading materials helps students develop their thinking, strengthens their English grammar and improves their organization skills in writing. Additionally, students pay more attention and learn to study on their own if the reading materials are changed each semester.*

Introduction

In countries where English is spoken and written as a foreign language (EFL), the learning and acquisition of the English language in the higher education is different from that in native English countries (Brown, 2000, p. 193). In EFL countries where English is taught as a foreign language, generally, students of all majors learn their content subjects in their native language. As a result, they only have the opportunity to be exposed to English language in two or three English courses during their degree programmes. Teachers and curriculum developers in higher education are constantly faced with the question of how the EFL university curriculum and reading materials can be designed, so as to help EFL learners advance their language skills especially reading and writing, and to improve their English competency to attain the academic proficiency level.

Kramsch (2000) states that academic language is not everyday life language and that learning to conduct an academic discourse can assist students to meet their life goals, even beyond their expectations. Cummins (1979, 1980 as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 246) made a distinction between the ability to use language in a higher-educational level as "Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP)" versus the conversational fluency as "Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS)". A clear view and true understanding of the differences between CALP and BICS can not only guide higher-level EFL instructors to design their EFL curriculum to meet students' life

goals, but it can also eliminate the misunderstanding that EFL courses in higher education should be able to automatically upgrade the students' English proficiency mainly for the BICS.

Furthermore, amongst the four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking, the skills of reading and listening are the so-called "input" language tracks that yield the enhancement of the output language tracks: writing and speaking (adapted from the concept of the ecology of language acquisition (Brown, 1991 as cited in Brown, 2000, pp. 294-296). In the tertiary level, it is crucial for students to have the English written literacy: the proficiency in the reading and writing skills. English written literacy is considered a major tool for improving English skills, as well as for understanding other subject areas (Richardson & Fleener, 2009, p. 4). In order for university students to strengthen their reading and writing skills and for them to achieve CALP, the EFL curriculum design and the reading materials play a major role.

This paper aims to present, through an empirical study, factors that affect the selection of the reading materials for EFL university courses and the proposed design of the reading materials for EFL university courses that may help students to fortify their reading, writing and cognitive skills. This paper also discusses the effects of using such reading materials in EFL courses on the thinking and writing skills of students.

Factors that affect the selection of the reading materials for EFL university courses

The selection of reading materials for EFL university courses is based on important factors such as the aim of the course, students, the temporal factors, the spatial factors, and the methods of teaching, as is detailed below.

The first factor is the aim of the EFL university courses. Many EFL university courses state the aim of the EFL courses in the course syllabi that the first-level EFL course trains students to be competent in four English skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The higher EFL courses help advance the four English skills of students at higher levels. Examples (1), (2), and (3) below show the course descriptions for three consecutive EFL university required courses for non-English major students.

(1) English 1

"A training of English for listening, reading, speaking, and writing proficiency."

(2) English 2

"A further training of English (from English I) for listening, reading, speaking, and writing proficiency."

(3) English 3

"A training of English (from English II) for listening, reading, speaking, and writing proficiency."

(The sources are from a non-English-major curriculum of a state university in Thailand).

From the course descriptions above, the EFL university courses are generally aimed at acquiring the four skills. The materials also give lecturers the liberty to plan and adapt them for teaching that falls within the course descriptions. Thus, it depends on the instructors to select suitable reading materials for their students and to aim their EFL courses at the BICS and/or CALP levels.

The second factor is students. Generally, Thai university freshmen are in the age group of 17–19 years old, and have been exposed to English language learning for 2–16 years prior to their undergraduate studies. The level of exposure to English in primary, secondary, and high schools varies according to their EFL curriculum. Additionally, some students may have their personal experiences of being exposed to English used in native English-speaking contexts either while on summer vacation or on some exchange programs such as the one-year American Field Service (AFS) programme. Such information is valuable and can be gleaned through questionnaires, distributed and collected during the introductory part of the courses. Additional information gained from the questionnaires will assist instructors to understand the English experiences,

nature, attitude, and trend of students e.g., their *academic and non-academic interests* which can be linked to their popular culture (Lin, 2010). However, factors that may affect students in class can be *gender* and *social status*. A specific group of students can consist of Buddhist-monks who are all males. All monks need to keep 227 Buddhist precepts, and thus the chosen reading materials should conform to these precepts. Major precepts include the rules against violence, robbery, adultery, lies, and alcohols. Thus, materials (readings or movies) selected for classes with monks should not contain such content or scene.

Third, the temporal factors of EFL courses cover the number of class hours and the number of sessions per week (2–3 hours x 2–3 sessions = 4–9 hours per week), the duration of each course (7–15 weeks per semester), and the number of EFL courses for the Bachelor's programs. Most undergraduate programs require two or three EFL courses.

Fourth, the spatial factors of EFL courses mean the number of students per class and the classrooms. In other words, a smaller class with 12–20 students can yield more opportunities for students to interact with one another, when compared to a larger class of 50 students. Furthermore, well-equipped classrooms with an internet access can support both instructors and students to do more activities such as video clips in English.

Fifth, the methods/approaches of teaching also play a role. The methods of EFL university courses depend on the aim of the course, the selected materials, the nature of students, the class size, the class environment, the instructors' teaching experiences, and so on. The methods, themselves, influence the reading selection of EFL courses.

There are several methods or approaches discussed in the literature (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005) such as the grammar-translation approach, the direct-method approach, the grammar approach, the audio-lingual approach, the discrete-item approach, the communicative approach, the task-based approach, the learner-strategy approach, and the integrated approach. Other methods include the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology, which is found to be able to assist integrating reading and writing skills of students in class (Loranc-Paszylk, 2009). The CLIL method allows the science-major students to acquire some arts and social-science contents through English. At the same time, the arts and social-science students can use English as a medium to comprehend science content, or even conduct mini scientific experiments in class. The CLIL method also supports the activity theory in EFL classroom settings. The activity theory was proposed by Lantolf and Genung (2004, pp. 175-196). In this theory, students are provided with more English social activities and discussion in class to help advance their English skills.

Thus, to help set the EFL university curriculum toward the CALP level, the factors, mentioned above, are the aim of the university courses, students and their background, the temporal factors, the spatial factors, and the methods of teaching. The next section will cover the proposed design of the reading materials for EFL university courses.

The proposed design for the reading materials for EFL university courses

In an empirical study during the academic year 2008 and the first semester of the academic year 2009 (2008–2009, thereafter), I have designed reading materials specifically for some groups of EFL students, based on the five factors mentioned above. The four-year program in which I have been involved require three EFL courses for specific groups of students during the first academic year. The first English course (English 1) was conducted during the first semester, the second (English 2) was conducted during the second semester, and the third (English 3) was conducted during the summer. Each semester stretched for a minimum of 15 weeks, except for a shorter period of seven weeks for the summer course. The class meetings were at least six hours per week.

The number of students for each semester is pre-assigned, depending on the enrolled students, which ranged from 8 to 24 students per group. Each group comprised a mixture of students with different English experiences and proficiencies. All students were monks and were in the age

range of 18–22 years (the mean age was 19 years). Their earliest exposure to the English language was at 4–18 years old (the mean age 11.66 years). The duration of the exposure to English ranged from 2 to 16 years (the mean duration was 7.87 years).

Considering the aim of improving students' English proficiency for the CALP level and the fact that these students had to further some content courses in English during their second to the fourth years of the program, I designed the reading materials for the three EFL courses, according to the needs of students and the concentration of each EFL course, as follows.

In English 1, from the pretest, it was found that students had different levels of English competency. Many of them had been through a Buddhist high-school track with little exposure to English and needed to have their English grammar strengthened. Thus, English grammar was the main focus of the English 1 course.

Unlike the grammar-drill approach conducted in secondary and high schools, the EFL university course should have its own approach to improve students' grammar, as well as to implement other subject contents, social values, and integrity. Besides, the EFL courses are aimed at developing the students' abilities of analytical, rational, and critical thinking. These three types of thinking will support students' learning in both language and subject areas throughout their university study, as well as their future higher education.

For the course English 1, I developed the so-called "theme-grammar-reading-based" integrated approach. First, different themes were chosen for different weeks throughout the entire semester. The themes can be general topics such as family and friendship; the academic topics e.g. Buddhism (religion); or the current/popular topics e.g., Randy Pausch's the childhood dream in *The Last Lecture* (Pausch, 2008). Once the weekly themes were set, the grammar focus of each week could be assigned, followed by the selection of suitable readings. Each week, through the reading materials, students were able to become familiar with real usage of the English grammar occurring naturally in, for example, the present tense (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 4-6). Students were then encouraged to think analytically and critically under the theme of the week. Besides that, the instructor could explain or insert the grammar rules in L1 or L2 during the session (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 4). Moreover, students with low English proficiency were encouraged to do the grammar drill exercises as their homework (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 8-10).

It must be noted that the themes, the grammar focuses, and reading materials can be adjusted, revised, or changed each academic year, to suit the English proficiency and need of students and to develop the class materials to be most updated.

During one semester of 15 weeks, I designed the themes, grammar focuses, and reading materials, as shown in Table 1.

Table 2 shows other suggested themes, grammar focus, and reading materials.

After the first semester, the course English 2 was planned for the second semester. It was expected that students would have a stronger command of English grammar, enough to move to a higher level of English for academic purposes, by the end of the first semester.

The teachers were aware of the fact that these specific groups of students were in humanities and social sciences, and their concentration was less in science. Thus, to fill the gap of their knowledge, they need to be introduced to more scientific thinking and methods.

English 2 was focused on the academic-scientific reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English. This course was designed with three main parts: the weekly themes, the class activities (hands-on activities, video-clip activities, and mini-scientific experiments), and the reading materials. The teaching approaches for this course were the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology (Loranc-Paszylk, 2009), along with the activity theory in EFL classroom settings proposed by Lantolf and Genung (2004, p. 175-196).

Each session of this course was further sub-divided into two sub-sessions. The first half (1.5 hours) was a lecture, in which the reading materials of the week were discussed and the theory of writing was explained. During the second half, students were exposed to different types of activities (one hour) such as (hands-on) mini-scientific experiments, hands-on activities, the

Table 1: Schedule, themes, grammar focus, and reading materials for the course English 1

| Week | Themes | Grammar focuses | Reading materials |
|------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| 1 | Pretest, family, (childhood) dream | Tenses | The Last Lecture (Pausch, 2008, pp. 1–18) |
| 2 | Friendship | Present tense | Winnie-the-Pooh (Milne, 1926) |
| 3 | Parents and family | Past tense | The Last Lecture (Pausch, 2008, pp. 22–26, pp. 31–34) |
| 4 | Hope | Present perfect tense | The Audacity of Hope (Obama, 2006, Prologue) |
| 5 | Values | Past perfect tense | The Audacity of Hope (Obama, 2006, pp. 53–64) |
| 6 | Values | Future tense | The Audacity of Hope (Obama, 2006, pp. 65–72) |
| 7 | Values | If clause | The Audacity of Hope (Obama, 2006, pp. 73–84) |
| 8 | Agreement (how to agree) | Nouns, pronouns | How to Have a Beautiful Mind (De Bono, 2004, pp. 3–12) |
| 9 | Refusals (how to disagree) | Modifiers | How to Have a Beautiful Mind (De Bono, 2004, pp. 13–25) |
| 10 | Literature | Voices | The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (Twain, 2008) |
| 11 | Literature | Sentences | The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (Twain, 2008) |
| 12 | Gratitude | Sentences | The Last Lecture (Pausch, 2008, pp. 157–158) Life's Greatest Lessons (Pausch, 2008, pp. 55–63) |
| 13 | Buddhism, peace, happiness | Paragraphs | Vision of Dhamma (Peace through Freedom and Happiness) (Payutto, 2007, pp. 2–7) |
| 14 | Buddhism, peace, happiness | Paragraphs | Vision of Dhamma (Peace through Freedom and Happiness) (Payutto, 2007, pp. 2–7) |
| 15 | Hope (Epilogue) | Essays | The Audacity of Hope (Obama, 2006, Epilogue) |

Table 2: Other suggested themes, grammar focus, and reading materials

| Weeks | Themes | Grammar focuses | Reading materials |
|------------|---------|------------------------|--|
| Additional | Hero | Questions, tenses | The Lucifer Effect (Zimbardo, 2007, pp. 3–22) |
| Additional | Success | Present and past tense | Life's Greatest Lessons (Urban, 2003, pp. 1–8) |
| Additional | Honesty | If clause | The Last Lecture (Pausch, 2008, pp. 163–164) |

video-clips of real academic lectures, of general activities, and of TV series/programs. Some activities were designed based on cultural weeks such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and so on. The last 30 minutes were reserved for writing a mini report or a wrap-up session.

The reading materials were selected to be related to the weekly themes, activities, and types of writing e.g., during week 3, students read on the topic of “time” in “People don’t find time. They make time” from the book entitled *Life’s Greatest Lessons* by Urban (2003, pp. 123–132). Students conducted a mini experiment of an hour glass and learned how to write an essay with contents arranged in a chronological order. The contents and activities of the entire session were based on the theme of “time”.

Students could learn English from the real academic and non-academic contexts. During the activity session, students were taught to think of every step of each activity in English. During the last 30 minutes of the session, students were asked to write a summary of the activity, and what they had learned from the activity, including the advantages and disadvantages of the activities. They could practise the writing of opinions, agreement, and disagreement in English.

This course also required students to conduct their mini group term project, in which students had to choose the topic of their interests (according to the learner-strategy approach in Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 16-18), to design an academic study or experiment, to review literature related to their topic, to run the real mini experiment or to collect questionnaires, to analyze their results, and to write a term paper. This term paper gave students a chance to conduct a real experiment or study and to write an academic report. It also trained students to think, conduct, and write an academic paper in English.

The themes, class activities, and reading materials for the course English 2 are shown in Table 3.

English 3 was the last English course for the program. For the academic year 2008, the course English 3 was scheduled to be conducted in summer within a shorter period of seven sessions. Thus, the reading materials were designed to suit the time constraint, and were focused on academic writing and English for higher reading, literary criticism, following the integrated approach (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 18-19). Table 4 shows the schedule, themes, and reading materials for the course English 3.

It can be suggested that, if the course English 3 has the same duration as the ones of the

Table 3: Schedule, themes, activities, and reading materials for the course English 2

| Weeks | Themes/focus | Activities | Reading materials |
|-------|---|--|--|
| 1 | Hard work/classification | Hands-on activity: <i>Classifying objects</i> | Life's Greatest Lessons (Urban, 2003, pp. 109-114) |
| 2 | Keeping up to date/ Writing a letter | Writing activity: <i>Writing a letter</i> | Success "Keeping up to date" (McKinlay & Hastings, 2007, pp. 14-21) |
| 3 | Time/Writing in chronological order | Hands-on activity: <i>Making a comparison and contrast of an hourglass with five different tubes</i> | Life's Greatest Lessons: "People don't find time—they make time." (Urban, 2003, pp. 123-132) |
| 4 | Gratitude, respect, and Thanksgiving/Writing a card | Writing activity: <i>Writing a thank-you card</i> | Pages to Happiness on "Gratitude and Respect" (Payutto, 2007, pp. 101-102; 89-90) |
| 5 | Family/Writing a narration | Video-clip activity: <i>Watching Professor Marian Diamond's lecture on Integrative Biology 131 (12 minutes) and answering the questions.</i> (Diamond, 2005) | Pages to Happiness on "Cherishing One's Parents: Bringing up Our Children" (Payutto, 2007, pp. 51-56) and on "Expressing Respect to Those Who are Worthy of Our Respect" (Payutto, 2007, pp. 19-21) |
| 6 | Cooking/Writing process | Hands-on and writing activities: <i>Making an omelette</i> | Success "Taking a Break" (McKinlay & Hastings, 2007, pp. 72-73) |
| 7 | Detectives/Writing description | Hands-on and writing activities: <i>Being a detective</i> | An excerpt about CERN (European Organization for Nuclear Research, June 22, 2007) and Sherlock Holmes (Doyle, 2008) |
| 8 | Christmas/Writing a probability | Writing activity: Dictation: <i>Christmas from the song "One Toy Soldier" by Enya</i> | Success "The World Ahead" (McKinlay & Hastings, 2007, pp. 42-49) The song and lyric "Auld Lang Syne" |

Table 3: Schedule, themes, activities, and reading materials for the course English 2 (*continued*)

| Weeks | Themes/focus | Activities | Reading materials |
|-------|--|---|--|
| 9 | Do good and life/ Writing comments | Activity: <i>Discussing the characters in the readings and expressing opinions</i> | The Tales of Beedle the Bard "The Tales of the Three Brothers" (Rowling, 2008, pp. 87-105) |
| 10 | Court/Writing about reasoning | Video-clip and writing activities: <i>Watching the Judge Judy video clip "An eBay auction" (Judy)</i> | Success: "An Eye for an Eye" (McKinlay & Hastings, 2007, pp. 24-31) |
| 11 | Ethics/Problems and solutions | Activities: <i>Quiz. Discussing about the ethics found in the reading materials</i> | 1. An excerpt on "China's Tainted Milk," and "The US Economy." 2. Life's Greatest Lessons: "Honesty is Still the Best Policy." (Urban, 2003, pp. 75-83) |
| 12 | Literature/Comparison and contrast | Activity: <i>Discussing, comparing, and contrasting different characters in the reading materials</i> | Island of the Aunts (Ibbotson, 2000, pp. 3-35) |
| 13 | Literary reading and criticism (opinion) | Activity: <i>Discussing about the story (opinion)</i> | Island of the Aunts (Ibbotson, 2000, pp. 36-51) |
| 14 | Literary reading and criticism (opinion) | Activity: <i>Discussing about the story (opinion)</i> | Island of the Aunts (Ibbotson, 2000, pp. 264-281) |
| 15 | Literary reading and criticism (opinion) | Activity: <i>Discussing about the story (opinion)</i> | Gulliver's Travels (Swift, 2008) |
| 16 | Literary reading and criticism (opinion) | Activity: <i>Discussing about the story (opinion)</i> | Gulliver's Travels (Swift, 2008) |

Table 4: Schedule, themes, activities, and reading materials for the course English 3

| Weeks | Themes/focus | Reading materials |
|-------|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | Overview of reading and writing | — |
| 2 | Outlining an essay/Mindmap | College Writing (Zemach & Rumisek, 2003, pp. 63-70) |
| 3 | Introduction and conclusion | College Writing (Zemach & Rumisek, 2003, pp. 71-77) |
| 4 | Kennedy's inaugural address (1961) | Reading for the Real World 2 (Zwier & Stafford-Yilmaz, 2004, pp. 109-116) |
| 5 | Reading literature | Oliver Twist (chapters 1-4) (Dickens, 2008) |
| 6 | "Cultural Attitudes Towards Time" | Reading for the Real World 2 (Zwier & Stafford-Yilmaz, 2004, pp. 165-172) |
| 7 | Reading literature | Oliver Twist (chapters 5-7) (Dickens, 2008) |

courses English 1 and English 2, instructors may apply the same format of English 2, but the reading materials would be at a higher academic level. Furthermore, the activities may include tasks on how to write the abstracts and academic papers and how to make effective oral and poster presentations.

Results

This section presents the scores of two groups of students. The first group consists of 24 male monk students, who took all three courses English 1, English 2, and English 3, throughout their first academic year in a state university in Thailand. The second group had 8 male monk students, with the scores of English 1. Other instructors were responsible for English 2 and English 3 of the second group.

Figure 1: The essay scores of the pretest and posttest of English 1 of the first group

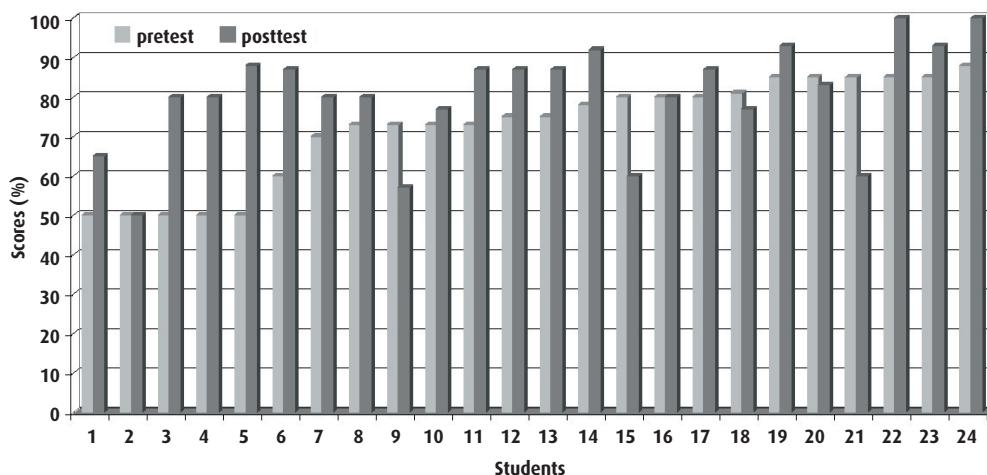


Figure 2: The essay scores of the pretest and posttest of English 1 of the second group

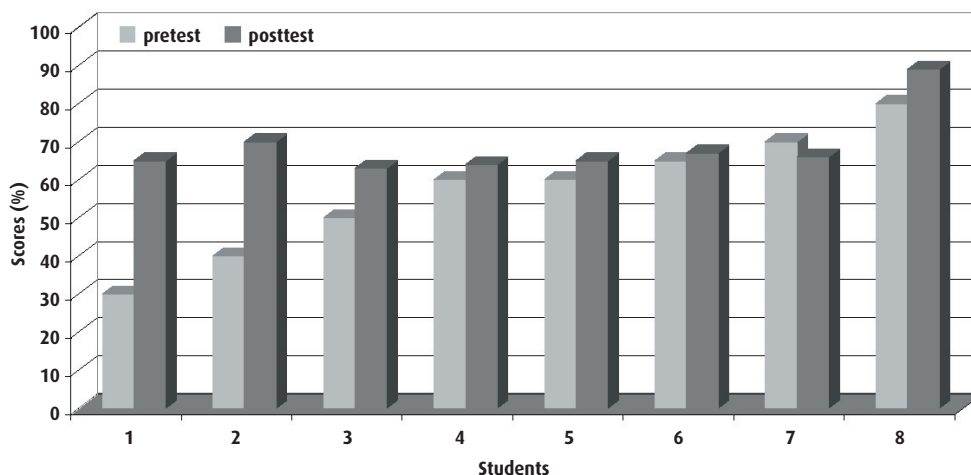


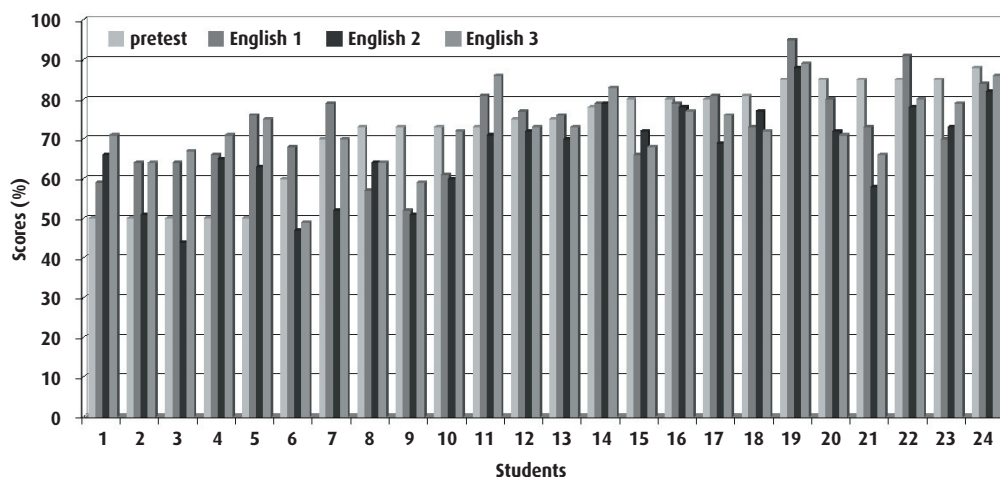
Figure 1 shows only the essay scores of the pretest and posttest of English 1 of the first group. Figure 2 presents the essay scores of the pretest and posttest of English 1 of the second group. Figure 3 illustrates the overall scores of the pretest, English1, English 2, and English 3 of the first group.

From the results shown in Figure 1, 17 out of 24 students of the first group had a higher posttest essay scores. Thus, it can be interpreted that the materials and the methods of teaching were effective for English 1 courses, especially for writing essays. It can be further noticed that students with lower pretest essay scores had a greater development than students with higher pretest essay scores.

From the results shown in Figure 2, 7 out of 8 students of the second group had a higher posttest scores for their essays. Again, it can be interpreted that the materials and the methods of teaching were effective for English 1 courses, especially for writing essays. The results present in the same way that students with lower pretest essay scores had a greater development than students with higher pretest essay scores.

Figure 3 shows the overall scores of the pretest and final scores of the courses English 1,

Figure 3: The overall scores of the pretest, English 1, English 2, and English 3 of the first group



English 2, and English 3. It can be seen that the scores fluctuated. The factors which may play a role are the content materials, the duration of the course, and the students' attention and interest. First, the content materials for English 2 were based on science, rather than humanities and social sciences in which students were majored. Second, the duration of English 3 was half that of English 1 and English 2. Third, the shorter duration of the course could affect students' attention and interest. Further studies need to be conducted to prove whether the new design of teaching and course materials truly impact upon the English language acquisition of freshmen.

Discussion and conclusion

This paper proposes one way in which reading materials can be designed for the EFL courses in a university English curriculum. Before planning the reading materials, the factors that affected the selection of the reading materials were clarified and described. These factors include the aim of the EFL university courses, students, the temporal factors, the spatial factors, and the methods/approaches of teaching.

After all factors had been considered, the design for the reading materials for the EFL university courses was constructed. In this paper, the proposed design for the reading materials for the EFL university courses was based on the focus of each course (the grammar needs, the content, academic reading/writing requirements. Teaching approaches were modified in relation to the focus of the course and the weekly themes. The "theme-grammar-reading-based" integrated approach for the course English 1 is one of the approaches which can accelerate the English-grammar acquisition of the students, along with other academic contents, so that they can use their English in academia for the rest of their program. The CLIL approach, together with the activity theory of Lantolf and Genung (2004), for the course English 2, is hoped to train students for their more advanced logical, critical, analytical, thinking, while being able to comprehend more scientific and literary contents in English. The focus on academic writing and literary reading and criticism, in English 3, framed the teaching method to include lectures and discussions, with opportunities for students to exchange their views and critical opinions.

Throughout the development of the curriculum, a frequent question arose as to how reading materials could affect the reading, thinking, and writing skills. This empirical study of small groups of students in a specific major suggested that, after the students are informed of the BICS and CALP goals of the EFL courses in a higher education at the beginning of their first course (English 1), more than 80% of the students had a clearer view of EFL learning and tended to be more inspired and motivated to master English. Thus, with a strong motivation and a positive

view of the EFL acquisition (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 64), it was assumed that students would be eager to read the materials prior to each session.

From this study, it was found that effective reading materials contained interesting contents in the major and minor fields of students. Many of the materials dealt with current issues e.g., the US economic downfall in 2008 and these triggered interesting discussions in class. Some selected materials yielded interactive activities (as in the English 2 course) and led to the strengthening of the analytical, logical, and critical thinking of students. The chosen literary works were well-known (e.g., classic literature in the English 3 course). The materials in social studies cultivated social values and integrity to students, which suited the students' needs in their educational program, and their future studies and career.

The crucial concern was that the reading materials, functioning as an input, should help advance the students' thinking (as the process between the input and output) and the students' writing (the output process). For instance, for the second course (English 2), the first group of students were allowed to design their own term paper based on scientific group projects. One group was interested in "coffee". From various printed and online sources, they learned the history of coffee, how coffee was made, the various types of coffee beverages, for example, Americano, latte, mocha, etc., and the similarities and differences of the beverages. Another group was interested in planting herbs and vegetables. They studied herbology from the sources, picked the types of plants or herbs they liked, bought the seeds, actually planted them near their dormitories, noted what they observed daily while their plants were growing, and wrote a scientific report for their term paper.

Furthermore, it is deemed that the EFL courses will be successful, if the curriculum opens the flexible schedule and rules for instructors to be able to add current or supplementary reading materials during the semesters. In this way, students would be able to discuss current issues or current news in English. Moreover, the reading materials and/or themes of each academic year should be adapted to their particular level. This is to suit the interest of different groups of students of different academic years and also to discourage new students of the current year, who receive the reading materials from former students of the past academic year, from paying less attention to the readings due to being distracted by the notes made on them by previous students. Clearly, if the reading materials are new (or partially new), students will be eager to read and learn by themselves, and the courses will be more effective. This suggests that, prior to the process of choosing the reading materials, EFL instructors may first need to source for and read up on the latest issues in an effort to ensure that they have a wide range of reading materials both in their major fields and in other fields.

To conclude, the selection of reading materials, together with the methods of teaching, can affect the reading, thinking, and writing skills of students. The contents of the carefully-chosen reading materials, along with some activities, can actually help advance students' logical, analytical, and critical thinking, which will, later, be reflected in their writing assignments. Thus, the selection of reading materials plays a major role in the success of EFL courses and curriculum.

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