

# The Impact of SRA Reading Laboratory on Reading Proficiency Improvement

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**Abstract.** Due to Globalization, English becomes ‘World Language’ not the language of native speakers of English. Among the 4 language skills, reading is regarded as the frequently used skills because in knowledge-based societies, knowledge, information, news, and various forms of entertainment can be retrieved and shared on the Internet using English. New and effective teaching methods for improving learners’ reading proficiency have been designed up to now. The aims of this research are to find out learners’ satisfaction of the SRA (Science and Research Association) Reading Laboratory and to study the improvement of learners’ reading proficiency. The population consisting of 126 students of SuanSunandhaRajabhatUniversity is assigned to join the independent reading program via SRA Reading Laboratory. The research tools include a 5-scale questionnaire and Pre and Posttest. Mean and Standard Deviation are used to rank the satisfaction level of the Reading Laboratory, while t-test is used to analyze the result of Pre and Posttest. The research findings reveal that the results of questionnaire analysis are as follows; 1) the students’ satisfaction of SRA Reading Laboratory is at high level, in terms of the challenge of Learn about word exercises, knowing more vocabulary, and improving reading speed respectively. Moreover, reading strategies the students often use include surveying, using context clues, as well as questioning and reading. Furthermore, the t-test analysis result of the population’s pre and post-test is 0.01, which indicates that the students’ reading proficiency is higher. It is, therefore, suggested that such additional activities as Vocabulary Bank and Vocabulary Mapping should be assigned to enrich learners’ reading proficiency. Moreover, the integration of speaking and writing activities should be included while using the reading laboratory.

**Keywords:** Independent Reading, Reading Strategies, SRA Reading Laboratory

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays English is not only a tool for communication in daily life but a means of connection in global business, politics, entertainment, industry and education. Thanks to the Information Communication Technology (ICT), people all over the world with different cultures and language can easily get in touch with one another by using the Internet, and certainly the language these people use as a tool for communication is English. David Crystal [1] defined this kind of phenomenon as “English as a global language”. Since non-native speakers of English outnumber native speakers, the language communication is mostly among non-native speakers. However, in terms of English language teaching, the current teaching methodology employed in teaching contexts is Communicative Approach, which emphasizes the situation or context of native speakers, in which a specific skill, listening or speaking, is to be used. In reality today since English is used worldwide among non-native speakers, it is suggested more local cultures and contexts should be added in English curriculums at all levels.

Moreover, English language is something which allows greater access to the world around us. That is to say ‘communication’ takes place when there is an exchange of message or information between sender – receiver of the message. The sender will speak or write the message in English while the receiver will listen to or read the message and decode it in their brain using the knowledge of language – sound, word meaning, etc. The communication using ICT in the global world can be done easily and fast with reasonable cost, and the language used in the worldwide web in the forms of texts, articles, chat rooms, blog, and various social networks is English. Jane Melitz [2] points out that good reading and writing skills are required for most ICT users. Sender of the message online should possess such effective writing skills as word usages, language forms and functions so that the sent message could be understood. For those who retrieve and browse the websites to find out information, knowledge, online news, it is necessary for them to possess not only

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information retrieval skills but also such effective reading skills as reading for information, getting main idea, guessing meaning of unknown words by using context clues, and vocabulary skills.

The teaching of reading skills is mainly focused on the readings prepared by teachers, and most teaching procedures include 3 steps; pre –while – and post – reading activities. In pre-reading activity learners will be motivated to read or be asked to talk about the topic they’re going to read, and some reading strategies: skimming, scanning and context clues, etc. will be review. In while-reading activity learners will read silently applying various kinds of reading strategies to complete the reading exercises. Sometimes teachers may translate the reading text into L1 or learners’ mother language. In post-reading activity teachers will check whether the learners can provide the right answer or not, and learners may be asked to do some extra vocabulary exercises. Han Jing-Mei [3]concludes that this kind of teaching is common in most reading classes in Asia, which focuses on teachers’ center, learners’ understanding of the text, and teachers’ translation into L1. Moreover, due to the mixed ability reading classes, the texts prepared by teachers may be too difficult for some students, who have low proficiency in English. This leads to learners’ low level of reading ability, reading misbehavior and poor motivation to read in class and outside class, and they can rarely read by themselves because they rely on teachers’ translation.

Based on the reading problems above, the research questions are as follows;

- How will suitable reading materials be prepared for mixed ability students?
- How will learners be motivated to do the independent reading?
- Is Science and Research Association (SRA) Reading Laboratory suitable for the students?
- Is there an improvement of learners’ reading proficiency after the use of SRA Reading Laboratory?

## 2. Research Methodology

The population of this study consists of 126 students of faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences; 40 first year students of English language program, 36 second year students of Japanese language program, and 50 second year students of Chinese language program; all of whom registered to study the course; Processes in Reading Continuous Texts. There are 5 steps of research Methodology.

Step 1 Figuring out suitable reading materials serving the needs of mixed ability students. SRA Reading Laboratory 2 b, which is an approximate reading- grade level ranging from 2.5 to 8.0, printed by SRA/McGraw-Hill is studied. It is found that this reading program [4] provides individualized skills instruction, permits independent work, promotes students’ sense of responsibility, and lets each student moves at his or her own rate, based on individual ability. The core components of SRA Reading Laboratory contain 150 four-page Power Builder folders arranged in color-coded levels of graduated difficulty, and Power Builder Key Card. The 10-color levels of Power Builders correspond to approximate reading level as shown in the table below.

Table 1: Power Builder Reading Levels

Color Levels	Lime	Aqua	Blue	Purple	Violet
Approximate Reading Level	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5
Student’s score of pre-test	0 – 4	5	6	7 – 8	9
Color Levels	Rose	Red	Orange	Gold	Brown
Approximate Reading Level	5.0	5.5	6.0	7.0	8.0
Student’s score of pre-test	10	11	12	13	13

Table 1 shows Power Builder Reading Levels, which include 10 colors. Each color corresponds to approximate reading level. After pre-test with total score of 13 taken from SRA Starting Level Guide, each student will be assigned to read Power Builder Color based on his/her score of pre-test. There will be 15 folders for each color. This feature of SRA Reading Laboratory meets the needs of slow, average, and superior learners by providing multilevel reading materials. Moreover, the reading selections are a balanced collection of fiction and nonfiction short stories and articles that can motivate students to enjoy reading. In addition, they are sources of a great deal of incidental learning – about plants, animals, history, science, technology, discovery, fine arts, social institutions, sports, and different cultures. It is, therefore, necessary to

assign the students in the course: 'Processes in reading continuous text' to participate in SRA Reading Laboratory with the purpose of encouraging the students to study independently.

Step 2 Introducing SRA Reading Laboratory to the population. SRA Reading Laboratory is introduced to the students so as to motivate independent reading with 5 steps as follows;

- Orientation and pre-test
- Power Builder introduction. It includes the review of Survey, Question and Read (SQR) technique.
- Independent reading using SAR Reading Laboratory. In this step each student is required to read 6 Power Builder Folders, which are available in the library.
- Monitoring student's progress and giving feedback. The student progress is monitored, and the feedback is provided to each student. 30-minute session a week in class is set for students to talk about what each one has read, and learned from the reading materials.
- Pretest and post-test taken from SRA Reading Laboratory – Starting Level Guide are used to compare the students' reading proficiency before and after participating in the 6-week independent reading treatment using SRA Reading Laboratory. The tests include two reading comprehension texts with 4-multiple choice questions.

The test questions require the students to demonstrate the following reading abilities;

- Getting main idea
- Getting details
- Using context clues
- Identifying pronoun reference
- Making inference

Step 3 Finding out the students' satisfaction of SRA Reading Laboratory. A 5-scale rating questionnaire is used to find out the students' satisfaction of SRA Reading Laboratory.

There are 26 items divided into 2 parts as follows;

- Level of the students' satisfaction of SRA Reading Laboratory
  - Motivation from the contents
  - Motivation from format and illustration
  - Readability of the texts
  - Readability of instruction for comprehension
  - Readability of instruction for word study
  - Challenge of Comprehension questions
  - Challenge of Learn about word exercises
  - Knowing more vocabulary
  - Knowing more sentence structure
  - Knowing more about the world around you
  - Improving reading skills
  - Improving reading speed
  - Encouraging independent reading
- Level of frequency in employing reading strategies
  - Surveying- Questioning and reading
  - Using background knowledge to assist comprehension
  - Using context clues to guess meaning of unknown word
  - Using word meaning to assist comprehension
  - Using word part of speech to assist comprehension
  - Using prefix and suffix to assist comprehension
  - Using sentence pattern to assist comprehension
  - Finding pronoun reference
  - Making inference
  - Taking notes

- Using an English-Thai dictionary
- Creating vocabulary bank

Step 4 Finding out the students' improvement of reading proficiency after participating in 6-week independent reading treatment using SRA Reading Laboratory. To find out the students' improvement, pretest and post-test score of each individual student are compared to find S.D and t-test of the differences.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The students' responses to the 5-scale rating questionnaire concerning their satisfaction of SRA Reading Laboratory are analyzed. Mean and Standard Deviation are used to rank the satisfaction level of the Reading Laboratory from the highest to the lowest level. There are 26 items in the questionnaire, which is grouped into 2 parts; 1) level of students' satisfaction of SRA Reading Laboratory; 13 items, and 2) level of frequency in employing reading strategies; 13 items. The 5-scale ratings – Strongly agree, Agree, Not sure, Disagree, and Strongly disagree – are used to measure level of satisfaction in part 1, while Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely, and Never are used to measure level of frequency in part 2.

The analysis results from table 2 show that the overall level of satisfaction of SRA Reading Laboratory is 'satisfied' with the overall mean of 3.73 and standard deviation of 0.78. The table, also, reveals the six items of satisfaction ranking from the highest satisfaction to the lowest: 1) Challenge of learn about exercises, 2) Knowing more about the world, 3) Knowing more vocabulary, 4) Motivation from the contents, and 5) Readability of the texts and Encouraging independent reading.

Table 2: Satisfaction level of SRA Reading Laboratory

Satisfaction of Power Builder	Mean	S.D.	Level of Satisfaction
1. Challenge of learn about word exercises	4.38	0.73	Satisfied
2. Knowing more about the world	4.14	0.76	Satisfied
3. Knowing more vocabulary	4.10	0.65	Satisfied
4. Motivation from the contents	3.84	0.93	Satisfied
5. Readability of the texts	3.82	0.75	Satisfied
6. Encouraging independent reading	3.82	0.75	Satisfied
Overall	3.73	0.78	Satisfied

Based on table 3, the results reveal that the overall level of frequency in employing reading strategies when reading independently using SRA Reading Laboratory is 'often' with the overall mean of 3.58 and standard deviation of 0.71. The table, also, reveals the five items of the frequency ranking from 'always' to 'never': 1) Survey, 2) Using context clues to guess meaning of unknown word, 3) Question and read, 4) Using background knowledge to assist comprehension, and 5) Finding pronoun reference.

Table 3: Level of frequency in employing reading strategies

Reading strategies	Mean	S.D.	Level of Frequency
1. Survey	4.36	0.68	Often
2. Using context clues to guess meaning	4.14	0.68	Often
3. Question and read	4.08	0.73	Often
4. Using background knowledge	4.06	0.63	Often
5. Finding pronoun reference	3.72	0.85	Often
Overall	3.58	0.77	Often

In terms of the improvement of the students' reading proficiency, it is found that the pretest mean score is 2.05 while the post-test mean score shows a slight increase at 2.14. The t-test analysis result of the population's pretest and post-test is 0.01, which indicates that the students' reading proficiency is higher after the treatment of SRA Reading Laboratory.

In conclusion, it is found that the 3 groups of students' satisfaction of SRA Reading Laboratory which is at high level. These findings reflect that independent reading can help learners in many ways; such as knowing more vocabulary, improving reading speed, and employing the reading strategies. That is because the readability of the reading materials which are graded to suit each learner's reading level, and the time learners contribute to independent reading. Moreover, it is found that while using SRA Reading Laboratory, students often employ such reading strategies as surveying, using context clues to guess meaning of the unknown word, questioning and reading, and using background knowledge. It is, therefore, suggested that SRA Reading Laboratory or some other kinds of external readings be assigned to students wishing to improve their reading proficiency. The results agree with Gordon McGShiach, [5] who studied the effectiveness of SRA Reading Laboratory 2a with boys of below average ability. However, Tammy Bruce Wilkinson [6] pointed out that another kind of treatment to improve reading proficiency – a computer-assisted reading program, Academy of Reading – resulted in the largest increase in reading performance of second and third graders in a Mississippi school.

#### **4. Limitation and Future Research**

Reading skills is major concern in English Language Teaching today because of the needs of using English in global business communication and especially in knowledge-based society, in which all citizens are assumed to be well educated. Since texts, messages, information, news, knowledge can be retrieved and shared on the Internet, those who can comprehend such online materials well and fast will be qualified to work in various international organizations and institutions. Further study on how to read better, and how to motivate learners both learn to read, and read to learn should be emphasized. Moreover, the study on learning styles which could promote reading habit, and independent reading should be explored and introduced to students.

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