

讀者劇場對臺灣小學四年級學童英文閱讀能力之成效研究

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摘要

本研究以準實驗法探討實施讀者劇場對臺灣的小學四年級學生英文閱讀能力以及閱讀態度的成效。65位四年級的學生參與此研究。實驗施以認字測驗、閱讀測驗、閱讀態度問卷及訪談以評估學生英文閱讀能力進步的情形及閱讀態度可能的改變。研究結果顯示大部分學生的英文閱讀理解與認字能力都有明顯的進步，也對讀者劇場有正面的感受。研究結論是讀者劇場對於小學四年級學生英文閱讀理解的改善有正面的影響，但是文稿的困難度與學生對於表演的焦慮感這二項議題可能會影響學生的閱讀態度。然而，本研究意味著小學的英文教師對於讀者劇場在英文課程中所扮演的角色與將讀者劇場融入英文教學二方面可能會獲得一些幫助。

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關鍵字：讀者劇場、英文閱讀能力、閱讀態度、英文閱讀理解

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Introduction

The sequence of English teaching curriculum is based on the assumption that before EFL beginners start learning English reading, they had better acquire adequate language experiences including effective use and understanding of oral languages (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998) and listening comprehension (Menyuk, 1998). Moreover, many researchers state that English reading is difficult for students who have just entered the school or who are the beginning learners of learning a foreign language (Shi, Chou, Chen, & Chu., 1998). Therefore, English education at the stage of elementary school in Taiwan puts much emphasis on listening and speaking which are regarded as the basic communicative skills, while writing and reading which are seen as literary abilities are neglected.

However, reading is significant in developing independent learning and helping students to not only get access to more language input but also gain more world knowledge. Since English teachers' intervention in class supplies limited input for students, it is important to create opportunities for learners to learn independently by themselves without teacher's help (Liao, 2003). Therefore, if students can begin their English reading earlier, they will have chances to become independent learners and improve their English abilities outside the English classroom.

Despite the importance of English reading, there are still some obstacles when teachers put English reading programs into practice in English classes. Possible factors in influencing beginning English reading practices are students' multi-level English abilities, excessive student numbers, limited instruction hours, and limited instruction resources, etc. (Liao, 2003). Although most English teachers think English reading is important for language learners, these impeding obstacles for promoting English reading practices need to be overcome. As the characteristics of Readers Theater (hereafter referred to as RT) might probably provide solutions to overcome the obstacles in implementing English reading programs in elementary schools, this study is intended to implement a RT program into fourth-grade English classes to promote students' reading ability in word recognition and reading comprehension.

What's more, learning attitude is often the crucial element for the students to be willing to actively get involved in learning activities. For this reason, reading attitude survey will be conducted in this study to see how RT can affect students' reading attitude and interests. Based on the purposes of this study, the research questions are presented as follows:

- (1) What are the effects of Readers Theater on enhancing fourth-grade students' reading ability?
- (2) How does Readers Theater affect fourth-grade students' attitudes toward English reading?

Literature Review

Walker (2005) pointed out that RT is literature-based oral reading which readers, standing or sitting in fixed position, take turns reading lines of the scripts aloud openly with interpretive and expressive intonation to their listening audience rather than through acting. In other words, the presentation of RT is narration without full stage sets, costumes and memorization of lines as scripts are used publicly in performance (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). Therefore, it is easier for students to participate as performers because less preparation time is needed in RT (Annarella, 1999). Also, script sources of RT can be based on all kinds of material (Worthy & Prater, 2002) such as folk story, fairy tales, poetry, prose, even textbooks and other dialogue-based stories, and they can be readily adapted by teachers or students. Hence, the resources for RT are not difficult to find. Moreover, as the level of difficulty of different parts within a script has a wide range, RT is an excellent activity to group students by their interests rather than their reading level (Worthy & Prater, 2002). In all, RT can help students take a play, poetry, fairy tales, prose selection or even the literature that is covered in the curriculum and turn them into a successful learning experience (Annarella, 1999).

In RT, students have to reread their scripts over and over again for the purpose of reaching reading fluency, since they have to read fluently with appropriate expression and intonation before they perform it for an audience. Students who have ability to read fluently does more than make them sound like good readers, since it is evident that they comprehend what they are reading (Dowhower, 1987; Samuels, 1979, 1997). Therefore, some researchers (e.g., Anderson, Wilkinson, & Mason, 1991; Hoffman & Isaacs, 1991) argued that fluency is the result of good comprehension. On the contrary, non-fluent readers struggle with word recognition, fail to comprehend texts, have little motivation to read, and result in spending less time reading (Chard, Vaughn, & Tyler, 2002; Mastropieri, Leinart, & Scruggs, 1999; Stanovich, 1986). In short, fluency is an essential aspect of reading proficiency (Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Pikulski and Chard (2005) illustrated the multifaceted process of fluency, including at least two activities, word decoding and the construction of the meaning of the text. Therefore, automaticity of decoding is an essential skill if students want to achieve the goal of reading fluency. The most often-used and research-based intervention that has been proven effective in increasing students' reading fluency is repeated readings (Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Tyler & Chard, 2000). As mentioned above, rereading is the main means of reaching fluency in RT, because the essence of the technique involves readers to read and reread their script lines over time until a satisfactory level of fluency is reached. There are a number of related RT studies, all of which show the positive results of the effects of RT on students' reading ability.

Rinehart (1999) pointed out that using repeated reading and RT both increase low-achieving students' attitudes, confidence, oral fluency, and sight word recognition. Besides, RT allows students to determine when they feel ready to perform and this leads to a dramatic rise in students' self-confidence, oral fluency, and motivation to read aloud (Worthy & Broaddus, 2001; Worthy & Prater, 2002).

Motivation, in a general sense, can be referred to as the dynamically changing cumulative awareness in a person which "initiates, directs, coordinates, amplifies, terminates, and evaluates the cognitive and motor processes whereby initial wishes and desires are selected, prioritized, operationalized, and acted out" (Dornyei & Otto, 1998, p. 18). Attitude, in a psychological sense, is a tendency or inclination showing the perceived positive or negative notions, beliefs, feelings or emotions about specific issues, people, or objects. Likewise, English reading attitude indicates a person's positive or negative perceived feelings or beliefs about the issue of English reading. Unlike motivation, attitude appears to have an evaluative essence and this is one important characteristic of it (Manami, 2009). Eagly and Chaiken (1993) viewed attitude as a "psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (p.1). Furthermore, according to Ajzen (2001), the evaluative dimensions could take many forms, such as good-bad, harmful-beneficial, pleasant-unpleasant, and likable-dislikable. In this research, the reading attitude questionnaire was used to explore students' attitudes (e.g., perceived positive or negative notions, beliefs, feelings or emotions) toward English reading before and after the instruction of RT.

In view of the previous studies about the effects of RT on English learning, most of them focused on oral fluency and motivation to read. Therefore, the present study intended to explore if RT would improve forth-grade students' reading ability in the light of word recognition and reading comprehension, and if RT would foster their positive attitudes toward English reading.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study was carried out by a quasi-experimental design. The participants were measured by pretest-posttest and questionnaire to evaluate the development or any possible change in their word recognition skill, reading comprehension and reading attitude. The intervention lasted for 12 weeks, two English classes a week. The interview was conducted to 13 students after the intervention in order to obtain more information about their opinions or feelings in RT and their reading attitude.

RT can be defined as a student-focused activity in which students use literature

to develop a script and act the plot out by taking it on the stage with them and reading them aloud. One of the primary principles of RT is to “act out” literature in classroom performance and to provide a visual and aural stimulus to students who are not accustomed to using imagination to appreciate literary text (Ratliff, 2000). Although it is literature-based, the application can be extensive. Resources from any materials can be transferred into scripts, including textbooks on hand. One of the advantages of the performance in RT is that students can take the script with them in the classroom playing space and read their lines by using physical movement and oral expression without any props, costumes or special lights which are required in conventional drama performance. Another advantage of RT is that it is not limited to those students with a high level of language proficiency; instead, students of all levels can participate in this activity, involving the entire class (Martha, 1995). Since students do not have to memorize the script lines and they can perform with other partners on the stage, this will reduce learners’ anxiety.

Besides, compared to conventional drama performance, it will take less time in preparing the RT performance because no props, costumes or any other stage settings are needed. The instruction of RT may solve some of the problems currently besetting English reading programs, entailing large size classes, multi-level English proficiency learners, or limited instructional resources and hours. Therefore, incorporating RT into English teaching is a good start to have students practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing in an authentic context and experience language learning naturally.

Participants

Two classes of fourth graders in an elementary school in Yunlin County participated in this study. One class of 33 students, 17 male and 16 female, was selected to receive Readers Theater intervention (the experimental group) and the other class of 32 students, 17 male and 15 female, received traditional teacher-directed instruction (the control group). All of the participants received formal English education at school for one and half years since they were third graders.

Instruments

First, three pretests and posttests, following the same format and test items but with test items reorganized at the posttests, were employed in this study. These tests were aimed at examining students’ reading ability, including word recognition and reading comprehension. Second, reading attitude questionnaire was used to know their attitude toward English reading. Third, the interview guide was utilized obtain more information about their opinions or feelings in RT and their reading attitude.

Word Recognition Test

The test was intended to examine students' ability of decoding words and constructing the meanings of words. The formats of the test items were partly adapted from Chen's thesis (2002) (please see Appendix A). There were 25 items, all of which were multiple choices in this test and the first researcher chose some of them from students' textbooks from Rainbow English Book One to Book Four, which were published by Rainbow Children Culture Publisher and some of them from Readers Theater scripts.

Reading Comprehension Test

The purpose of the test was aimed at examining students' understanding about simple and basic English sentences and short passages. Because of the fourth-grade students' limited English proficiency, the sentences and short passages entailed pictures for their correspondence to choose the answer. The formats of the test items were partly adapted from Tsao's thesis (2005) (please see Appendix B). There were 25 test items, which were divided into two parts, 15 test items of testing the simple sentences in the first part and 10 of testing reading comprehension for two short passages in the second part.

Reading Attitude Questionnaire

The reading attitude questionnaire was used to understand students' attitude toward English reading before and after the instruction of RT. There were 20 items, all of which used a five-point Likert scale, in the pretest and posttest. Besides, there were additional four close-ended questions which were added in the posttest questionnaire for students in the experimental group to answer their feelings about RT. Reading attitude questionnaire was adapted from Mckenna and Kear's (1990) Elementary Reading Attitude Scale.

Interview Guide

The interview was semi-structured consisting of seven questions. The seven interview questions were generated by the researchers. The interview for each student lasted approximately 30 minutes and was conducted in Chinese. The interview data were tape-recorded.

Data Collection Procedures

Before the study, an individual consent form was distributed to the students and their parents in order to obtain their permission to carry out the study and use the data for analysis for academic research purpose. Measures of pretest were administered to

65 fourth-graders in both experimental group and control group to obtain the data of their beginning level on reading comprehension and word recognition and to understand their attitude toward English reading. After the instruction of RT for 12 weeks, both groups took posttests to evaluate their progress of reading ability and any possible change in their reading attitude. Following the posttest, in-depth interviews were conducted with 13 students to explore their attitude toward English reading and RT. Each of the interviewees' responses was audio-taped and then transcribed.

Data Analysis

Pilot Study

Reading comprehension test and word recognition test were employed to evaluate fourth-grade students' English ability before and after the intervention of the RT program. Besides, reading attitude questionnaire was also administered to investigate and compare their English reading attitude both before and after the implementation of the RT program. Since these instruments were adapted from Tsao's thesis (2005) and Chen's thesis (2002), the reliability needed to be tested.

The original versions of the instruments were given to the researcher's colleague who is an English teacher with a master's degree in teaching English as a foreign language and two professors of English Departments in order to confirm the appropriateness of the reading test and clarity of wordings and expressions of the reading attitude questionnaire adapted from Mckenna & Kear's study (1990). After some items had been modified, these instruments were distributed to four fourth-grade classes of 125 students to do the pilot study. The software Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 14.0) was used to analyze the collected data in the pilot study. Cronbach's alpha value was taken to test the reliability of the instruments. The Cronbach alpha value obtained in the questionnaire reached .926, representing the reliability of this instrument was feasible. The Cronbach alpha value of word recognition test was .858 and reading comprehension test was .844, suggesting the reliabilities of these instruments could be accepted.

Formal Study

The software Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 14.0) was used to analyze the collected data in this study. Between-group performance in pretest and posttest of word recognition and reading comprehension were analyzed by independent-sample t-tests, and paired-sample t tests were applied to compare students' performance within the experimental group and the control group. The questionnaire was also analyzed by t tests to evaluate any attitude changes of students' attitude toward English reading. Also, the interviewees' responses were

tape-recorded and transcribed to understand students' feelings and attitude toward reading and RT.

Results

Results for Research Question 1: What are the effects of Readers Theater on enhancing fourth-grade students' reading ability?

The first researcher examined the effects of RT on students' reading ability via evaluating the improvement between the pretest-posttest within RT group and between groups. Besides, interviewees' responses to the interview questions were disclosed to understand their awareness of English reading improvement.

Results of Performances in Word Recognition Tests

Table 1 to Table 4 demonstrated the results between and within groups' performances in word recognition pretests-posttests. Table 1 showed that participants in the experimental group revealed the improvement of the mean scores of 14.1 with the mean grade from 58.06 to 72.24 and reached the significant difference ($t = -11.207, p < 0.01$).

Table 1 *Paired-sample T test results of the experimental group (RT group) on Word Recognition Tests*

	M	N	SD	M	t	p
Pretest	58.06	33	22.57			
Posttest	72.24	33	19.90	-14.18	-11.207	.000**

** $p < 0.01$

Table 2 showed that the development of word recognition within the control group also reached the significant difference ($t = -3.898, p < 0.01$) with the mean grade from 58 to 60.50.

Table 2 *Paired-sample T test results of the control group (Non-RT group) on Word Recognition Tests*

	M	N	SD	M	t	p
Pretest	58	32	23.72			
Posttest	60.50	32	22.22	-2.50	-3.898	.000**

** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 demonstrated between-groups' performance in pretest. It indicated that the t test revealed no significant difference between the two groups.

Table 3 *Independent-sample T test results on Word Recognition Tests of the between-group performance in pretest*

	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Pretest	The experimental group	33	58.06	22.57	.011	.992
	The control group	32	58	23.72		

$p > 0.05$

Table 4 revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed the control group with the increase mean scores of 11.74 and reached significant difference ($t = 2.246, p < 0.05$).

Table 4 *Independent-sample T test results on Word Recognition Tests of the between-group performance in posttest*

	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Posttest	The experimental group	33	72.24	19.90	2.246	.028*
	The control group	32	60.50	22.22		

* $p < 0.05$

Results of Performances in Reading Comprehension Tests

Table 5 to Table 8 demonstrated the results between and within groups' performances in reading comprehension pretests-posttests. Table 5 revealed the development of reading comprehension within the experimental group with the improved mean grades of 8.76 and reached the significant difference ($t = -15.957, p < 0.01$).

Table 5 *Paired-sample T test results of the experimental group (RT group) on Reading Comprehension Tests*

	M	N	SD	M	t	p
Pretest	64.09	33	18.21	-8.76	-15.957	.000**
Posttest	72.85	33	17.51			

** $p < 0.01$

Table 6 showed the development of reading comprehension within the control group with the improved mean grades of 2.13, from 65.38 to 67.50, and reached the significant difference ($t = -3.283, p < 0.05$).

Table 6 *Paired-sample T test results of the control group (Non-RT group) on Reading Comprehension Tests*

	M	N	SD	M	t	p
Pretest	65.38	32	19.27	-2.13	-3.283	.003*
Posttest	67.50	32	20.28			

* $p < 0.05$

As to the between groups' mean score in the pretest, table 7 indicated that the t-test value did not reach any significant difference between the two groups in the

pretest on Reading Comprehension Tests ($t = -.276, p > 0.05$).

Table 7 *Independent-sample T test results on Reading Comprehension Tests of the between-group performance in pretest*

	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Pretest	The experimental group	33	64.09	18.21	-.276	.783
	The control group	32	65.38	19.27		

$p > 0.05$

Table 8 revealed that the participants in the RT group outperformed those in the control group in the posttest with the increased mean scores of 5.35. However, the t-test value reached no significant difference. ($t = 1.139, p > 0.05$).

Table 8 *Independent-sample T test results on Reading Comprehension Tests of the between-group performance in posttest*

	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Posttest	The experimental group	33	72.85	17.51	1.139	.259
	The control group	32	67.50	20.28		

$p > 0.05$

Results from the Interview

According to the collected data from the interview, most of the students stated that they had great improvement in vocabulary learning. Some said that they had improvement in reading fluency and reading comprehension. To take Ken and Wendy as an example, Ken responded that RT helped his English become better because some unknown words and sentences were learned after his constant practice. His responses corresponded to his performance of word recognition in pretest-posttest with the increased scores from 52 to 76. Wendy also said she made a great improvement in vocabulary leaning, which corresponded to her performance in word recognition tests with increased scores from 56 to 80. Their responses demonstrated that most of them made some improvement in new words learning. However, with regard to reading comprehension, the range of the progress did not have such a dramatic change as that of word recognition.

Results for Research Question 2: How does Readers Theater affect fourth-grade students' attitudes toward English reading?

The first researcher examined the effects of RT on students' attitude toward English reading via evaluating the attitude change between the pretest and the posttest within RT group, and between the RT group and the non-RT group. In addition, four close-ended questions regarding students' feelings about RT were added in the posttest for students in the RT group to answer, and some information on English reading might be learned from their responses.

Results of Reading Attitude Questionnaires

A five-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire. Their responses to each item were presented from never, seldom, sometimes, often, and always. If students checked “never”, they got 1 point, “seldom” for 2 points, “sometimes” for 3 points, “often” for 4 points and “always” for 5 points. The more scores they got, the better attitude they had.

Table 9 showed that students in the experimental group increased the mean scores of 4.73 on reading attitude on the whole, but it did not reach the significant difference ($t = -1.292, p > 0.05$).

Table 9 *Paired-sample T test result of the experimental group (RT group) on Reading Attitude Questionnaire*

	M	N	SD	M	t	p
Pretest	56.85	33	11.40			
Posttest	61.58	33	14.56	-4.73	-1.292	.205

$p > 0.05$

Table 10 revealed that there was no significant difference on overall reading attitude between the two groups in the pretest and posttest ($t = -.460, p > 0.05$; $t = .839, p > 0.05$).

Table 10 *Independent-sample T test results on Reading Attitude Questionnaire of the between-group performance in pretest-posttest*

	Group	N	M	SD	t	p
Pretest	The experimental group	33	56.85	11.40	-.618	.539
	The control group	32	58.47	14.13		
Posttest	The experimental group	33	61.58	14.56	.839	.404
	The control group	32	58.28	17.02		

$p > 0.05$

Results of Close-ended Questions

There were additional close-ended questions which were added in posttest questionnaire for 33 students in the experimental group to answer their feelings about RT. Seventeen students expressed that they were willing to practice RT after class. The reason why students were willing to practice RT after class was attributed to the responses as follows: RT is interesting; they could learn more English, develop friendship, and know more English words and so on. On the contrary, the reasons why students were unwilling to practice RT after class were attributed to the responses as follows: there was least cooperation within the group; they wanted to play in recess time, and they felt RT was difficult.

Seventeen students, who thought that reading English children books was interesting, or they could learn more English stories and know more new English words, expressed that they liked English children books. The other students who showed no interests in English children books thought that they did not have English books; they did not understand English or it was too difficult for them to read English. What's more, twenty-three students stated that they liked RT program to be integrated into English classes and twenty-one students responded they liked English more because of RT, because they valued the feeling of cooperation with their group members in RT; they could learn more new words; RT is more interesting than English textbooks and RT could help to improve their English and so on. The others who showed no interests in RT stated that they felt RT was difficult and they did not understand English.

Results from the Interview

According to the collected data from their responses, they were classified into two categories, positive responses and negative responses in the following section.

Positive side of their responses

Their responses displayed that RT was interesting and helpful in improving their English after continuous practice. Some stated that they learned more new words or sentences through RT. Most of the interviewees had positive feelings about RT and liked RT to be integrated into English classes. They thought RT could improve their English in terms of expanding the knowledge of vocabulary. Some stated that they liked the part of RT on performing in front of others because they had the opportunity to express themselves while some liked the process of practicing and rehearsing in their groups because they liked the feeling of cooperation. In general, almost all the interviewees answered that RT was interesting and it made English classes more fun.

Negative side of their responses

Some indicated that the part they did not like RT was to perform in front of others because that made them feel uneasy and nervous. Also, they did not like practicing when some teammates in their group did not cooperate. Moreover, David and Steven thought some scripts are too difficult for them. Therefore, it might be hard for them to keep up with other teammates and finally reduce the motivation to read in advance.

Discussion

Discussion on Research Question 1: What are the effects of Readers Theater on enhancing fourth-grade students' reading ability?

With respect to students' reading ability, students within the RT group made prominent progress with gained improvement scores of 14.18 and 8.76 in both word recognition and reading comprehension, respectively. Also, the range of the improvement in both tests had reached significant differences ($t = -11.207, p < 0.01$; $t = -15.957, p < 0.01$). In comparison with the non-RT group, students in the RT group also outperformed in both word cognition test and reading comprehension test, with the increased mean scores of 11.74 and 5.35, respectively. However, there is significant difference only in word recognition test, not in reading comprehension test ($t = 2.246, p < 0.05$; $t = 1.139, p > 0.05$). In addition, the collected data from the interview also showed that most students said that they had obvious improvement in vocabulary learning while some said that they had improvement in reading fluency and reading comprehension. Students' responses are consistent with their performance in word recognition test and reading comprehension test. Therefore, the results of pretest-posttest on word recognition and reading comprehension, and collected interview data all indicate that Readers Theater has positive effects on enhancing fourth-grade students' reading ability.

The essence of RT is repeated reading. Some studies indicated that repeated reading has been shown to be effective to improve students' word recognition, speed, accuracy, and comprehension (Homan, Klesius, & Hite, 1993; Samuels, 1997; Worthy & Broaddus, 2001). Besides, Taguchi (1997) also argued that repeated reading may be an effective way to increase word recognition skills and lead to fluent reading. What's more, Rinehart' research (1999) pointed out that using repeated reading and RT both increase low-achieving students' attitudes, confidence, oral fluency, and sight word recognition. As far as word recognition and reading comprehension are concerned, the results of the study also correspond to these previous studies.

Moreover, low-achieving students could also keep up with their teammates' reading speed even though they could only read out a few simple sentences in the scripts. It represented that they did not struggle for word recognition and it was exhilarating to discover that they could read English. In addition, most audience could follow the speed of performers' reading as well. In the process of repeated reading, students were more and more familiar with the new words until they eventually learned the unknown words. That was probably the reason why students in the RT group outperformed dramatically better than those in the non-RT groups. All in all, repeated reading in Readers Theater was in favor of reading ability in the light of word recognition and reading comprehension for fourth graders.

Discussion on Research Question 2: How does Readers Theater affect fourth-grade

students' attitudes toward English reading?

The results, shown in table 3 and table 4, indicated that there is no significant difference within and between the groups. The collected data from the interview showed the possible reasons why the participants did not take much different attitude towards English reading before and after the instruction of RT. Steven and David said some scripts were too difficult, while Landy, Paul, Peggy, and David said they felt nervous if they had to perform in front of others. Also, Coco and Crystal said they did not like the fact that some teammates did not cooperate in practice. What's more, the results of close-ended question indicate the same responses of the participants who show no interests in RT as those of interviewees mentioned above. Therefore, the difficulty of RT scripts, their anxiety of performing and the issue of cooperation in RT probably led some of them to hold their attitude toward RT. These factors should be concerned when English teachers want to apply RT in their English teaching.

What's more, Rinehart's research (1999) indicates that students are proud of reading in front of their audience and positive changes in attitudes when they became successful and fluent readers through the RT event. The results of students' English reading attitudes in the current study are not congruent with Rinehart's research on the part of students' confidence. Among interviewees' responses and based on the first researcher's observation, students, especially introverted ones, felt uneasy and nervous when they performed in front of their audience. Also, Hung's (2008) study pointed out that RT decreased significantly high-achieving students' foreign language learning anxiety, but not for low-achieving students. The study demonstrated that RT did not have the same influence on all students. Thus, if there had been more opportunities provided for students to perform successfully, they would have had more confidence in performing and, further, reduce the anxiety to present in front of their audience.

For the most part, RT did not exert evidently the same influence on students' reading attitude as they did on enhancing students' reading ability. Even so, its contribution to activating students' willingness to begin to read English children books can not be ignored.

Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, RT has positive effects on improving fourth-grade students' reading ability according to the findings of this study. Also, based on the collected interview data, most students stated they learned more new English words in RT and they liked RT since it was interesting and it made learning English more fun than before. As far as poor readers or low-proficiency students are concerned, RT is

conducive to helping those resistant readers turn to be active readers (Worthy & Prater, 2002), as they are willing to read and reread scripts many times since RT provides the authentic and legitimate reason for readers to get involved in repeated reading (Rinehart, 1999). Therefore, RT could be integrated into fourth-grade English classes in regular English curriculum.

The findings of this study might contribute to English teachers who would like to enhance students' reading ability. As discussed above, the issues with regard to the degree of difficulty of scripts and students' anxiety about performing might influence students' reading attitudes. Hence, English teachers should ascertain that the scripts are at students' instructional level and provide sufficient time for them to practice and opportunities to succeed. In addition, the role of the teacher in RT should be a facilitator, not a director. The teacher should circulate in the classroom and give students advice when they are practicing or rehearsing their scripts. Judgmental comments might frustrate students' confidence as well. Thus, teachers should be tolerant of students' mistakes and give students freedom to create, to talk, to share, and to learn from each other in their learning process.

Generally speaking, English teachers could adopt RT in accordance with students' needs or English reading materials. Without a doubt, there is no best or absolutely right teaching approach to promote students' English reading. RT could be esteemed as an additional teaching method for English teachers' references.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The findings of this study might contribute to teachers who would like to improve students' reading ability. This study is aimed at examining the effects of Readers Theater on fourth-grade students' English reading ability and their reading attitudes in an elementary school. Nevertheless, based on the research design in the study, the findings can not be generalized and application has its limitations. The limitations are described below.

Firstly, the sample size of the study was small and the participants were not chosen randomly. Two fourth-grade classes in a primary school, totally 65 students, participated in the study. Therefore, the results of the research might not be generalized to other contexts. For this reason, more participants and sample randomization should be considered in future research.

Secondly, the time span of the study was not long enough to examine the effects of RT on English reading because from beginning to read to reading proficiency takes time to progress and reveal. Although the results of the study showed that RT had positive impact on students' reading ability, the researcher might conduct a longitudinal study for the purpose of understanding the students'

improvement in their reading process through observation over a longer period of time.

Finally, the researchers found that some poor readers had dramatic improvement in word recognition or reading comprehension tests. However, the research focused on students' reading performance on the whole. In order to understand the process of those specific students' improvement thoroughly, future researchers could consider conducting a case study to inquire into specific participants such as low-proficiency readers, or an action research to observe participants' reading process.

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Appendix A Word Recognition Test

Class: number: name:

說明：這個測驗共有兩個大題，第一大題有 12 題，第二大題有 13 題，共 25 題。題型均為選擇題。請小朋友仔細閱讀每一大題的指示，並認真作答喔！測驗時間：20 分鐘

(一)下面各題中，請你選出圖片所代表的單字，並將答案寫在前面空格中。

題號	答案欄	題目	A	B	C	D
例題	B		windy	window	house	horse
1			candy	cane	canny	caddie
2			arm	army	alarm	alert
3			baseball	basket	basketball	basin
4			ten	tent	tan	tense
5			rope	row	robot	robin
6			gift	giant	give	glove
7			spoon	spoke	spark	spool
8			tea	tire	tee	tie
9			wolf	wow	wonder	what
10			cola	cookie	July	juice
11			sin	seen	seeing	sing
12			wash	warm	watch	water

(二)在下面各題中,請你選出與中文意思符合的英文單字。

題號	答案欄	題目	A	B	C	D
例題	A	貓	cat	dog	lion	penguin
1		房子	horn	horse	house	home
2		麵包	break	bread	blackboard	basketball
3		毛毛蟲	catfish	camera	castle	caterpillar
4		飢餓的	hamburger	hungry	hammy	hurry
5		農夫	farmer	family	familiar	farm
6		彩虹	raincoat	rainbow	bunny	sunny
7		哥哥	brother	bother	father	further
8		瞭解	understand	umbrella	underway	undecided
9		橘色的	arrange	orange	angle	angel
10		稻草	grass	straw	draw	drew
11		外套	coke	cook	coat	cost
12		溜滑梯	sand	slim	send	slide
13		畫圖	drain	draw	pant	photo

Adapted from Chen's thesis (2002) on *The Development of English Reading Diagnostic Test for Junior High School Students*.

National Chung Hsing University

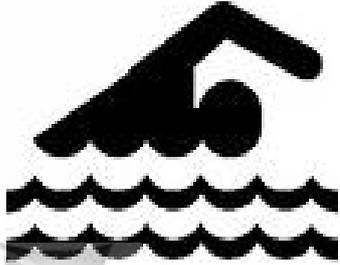
Appendix B Reading Comprehension Test

class: number: name:

分測驗一：句子理解

說明：這個測驗共有兩個大題，第一大題有 7 題，第二大題有 8 題，共 15 題。題型為配合題和是非題。請小朋友仔細閱讀，看圖回答問題，並認真作答喔！測驗時間：15 分鐘。

(一) 閱讀下列的句子，找出符合句子意思的圖，將圖片的代號填入括號中。

<p>A</p> 	<p>B</p> 	<p>C</p> 
<p>D</p> 	<p>E</p> 	<p>F</p> 
<p>G</p> 	<p>H</p> 	<p>I</p> 

() 1. The raccoon is reading a book.

() 2. It is five o'clock.

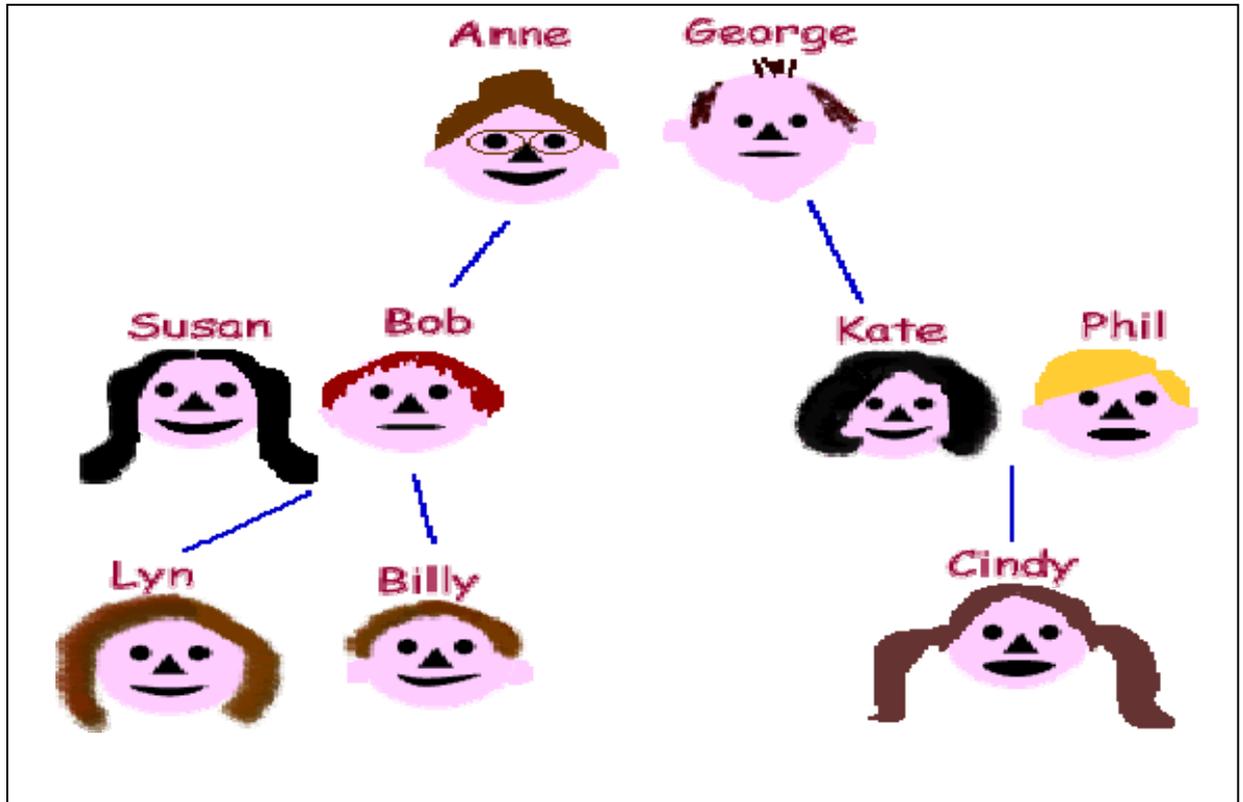
() 3. He can swim.

() 4. It is a pineapple.

() 5. She is my teacher.

- () 6. It is rainy.
- () 7. I can jump up high.

(二) 請根據圖片的內容, 判斷下列句子是否正確, 如果正確請在括號裡打 [o], 如果錯誤請在括號裡打 [x]。



I am Cindy. This is my family.

- () 8. Billy is my uncle.
- () 9. Kate is my mother.
- () 10. Anne is my grandma.
- () 11. Susan is my sister.
- () 12. Bob is my father.
- () 13. George is my grandpa.
- () 14. Phil is my father.
- () 15. Lyn is my mother.



分測驗二:短文閱讀

說明: 這個測驗共 10 題。題型為選擇題。閱讀完下列短文後, 回答之後的問題, 並從選項中, 選出最適合的答案, 要認真作答喔! 測驗時間: 25 分鐘。

(一) Once upon a time, there are three little pigs.

The oldest pig is called John.

The second pig is called Bill.

The youngest pig is called Peter.

When they grew up, their mother told them to leave home to build their own houses.

John builds a house with straw.

Bill builds his house with sticks.

Peter builds a house with bricks.

One day, here comes a hungry big and bad wolf.

He wants to eat the three little pigs.

The big and bad wolf blows down John's straw house.

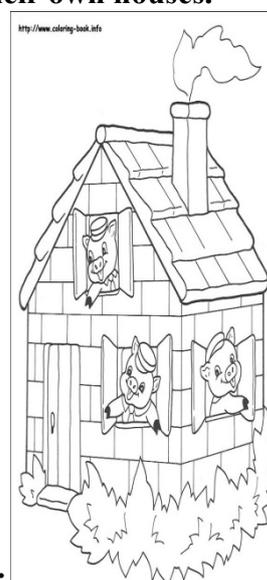
The big and bad wolf blows down Bill's stick house.

John and Bill run to Peter's house.

The big and bad wolf can not blow down Peter's brick house.

Peter is happy because his house is safe and the wolf can not come in.

The three little pigs live happily together.



The picture is from: www.coloring-book.info/coloring/coloring_page...

() 16. Who builds the house with straw?

- (1) John
- (2) Peter
- (3) Bill

() 17. What is Peter's house?

- (1) the straw house
- (2) the stick house
- (3) the brick house

() 18. Who is the smartest (最聰明) in the story?

- (1) the wolf
- (2) mother

- (3) Peter
- () 19. Who told the three little pigs to build their houses?
- (1) the wolf
 - (2) mother
 - (3) John
- () 20. What is true about the wolf?
- (1) The wolf and the three little pigs are good friends.
 - (2) The wolf eats the three little pigs.
 - (3) The wolf is big and bad.

(二) Sandy and Mike are talking about their favorite food at school.

Sandy: What do you like, Mike?

Mike: I like pizzas. Do you like pizzas?

Sandy: No, I don't. I like hamburgers.

Mike: Do you like apple pies?

Sandy: Yes, I do.

Mike: Do you like hot dogs?

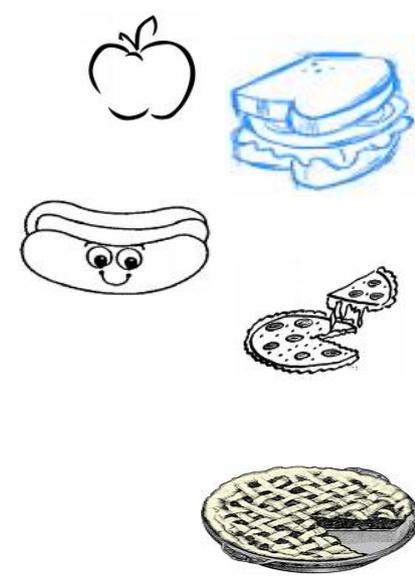
Sandy: No, I don't.

Do you like sandwiches?

Mike: Yes, I do.

Sandy: Me, too. Let's go to eat some sandwiches together.

Mike: O. K.



- () 21. Who likes sandwiches ?
- (1) Mike
 - (2) Sandy
 - (3) Mike and Sandy
- () 22. Who likes pizzas?
- (1) Sandy
 - (2) Mike
 - (3) Mike and Sandy
- () 23. Does Sandy like hot dogs?

- (1) Yes, she does.
 - (2) No, she does not.
 - (3) No, she is not.
- () 24. Where are Sandy and Mike talking about their favorite food?
- (1) At Mike's home
 - (2) At Sandy's home
 - (3) At school
- () 25. How many foods are they talking about?
- (1) Five
 - (2) Six
 - (3) Four

Adapted from Tsao's thesis (2005) on *the Effects of Balanced Reading Instruction on Fifth-grade Students' English Reading Ability and Reading Attitude*.

Effects of Readers Theater on Taiwanese Fourth Graders' English Reading Ability

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the effects of Readers Theater (RT) on Taiwanese fourth-grade students' English reading and reading attitude via quasi-experimental research. Sixty-five fourth graders participated in this study. The instruments, including word recognition tests, reading comprehension tests, reading attitude questionnaires, and interview guide, were employed to evaluate the progress of their reading ability and the possible change of their reading attitude before and after the treatment of RT. Thirteen students were interviewed after the intervention in order to obtain more information about their opinions or feelings in RT and their reading attitude. The findings indicated that most students not only made prominent improvement in their English reading ability but also showed their positive feelings about RT. It was concluded that RT has positive effects on improving fourth-grade students' reading ability. But the issues concerning the degree of difficulty of scripts and students' anxiety about performing might influence students' reading attitudes. Nevertheless, this study implies that English teachers in elementary school may gain insights into the role of RT in English curriculum and ways to integrate RT into their English teaching.



Keywords: Readers Theater, English reading ability, reading attitude, English reading comprehension