The Effect of Project Work on Students' Reading Comprehension: A Study at Baoshan University

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to investigate the effects of project work on Baoshan University students' reading comprehension and the Baoshan University students' opinion towards project work. The samples were 30 the first-year students majoring in Pre-school Education in Baoshan University. There were three instruments employed in this study and they were lesson plans, reading comprehension test and student's opinion questionnaire. The data from tests were statistically analyzed by paired sample t-test. mean and standard deviation. The result of the research revealed that: 1) The Baoshan University students' mean score in reading comprehension posttest significantly differed from the pre-test at the level of 0.05. 2) The Baoshan University students' opinion towards the project work was as a high level.

Keywords: Reading; Project Work; Reading Comprehension; Opinion; Baoshan University

Introduction

In the tide of economic and informational globalization, the importance of English has become increasingly prominent. As one of the most important information carriers, English is a universal language that been most widely used in all fields of human life, making it is necessary in 21st century. English proficiency is closely related to the level of income and the ease of working environment (Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003). Reading is regarded as one of the four essential skills in language learning and teaching (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Reading plays an important role in strengthening students' listening, speaking and writing skills in language teaching and learning and learners can acquire writing, vocabulary, speaking, grammar, and spelling by reading (Maxom, 2009; Cohen, 1990; Harmer, 1998). Reading comprehension, the ultimate goal of reading (Urfali Dadandi & Ungan, 2023) is important,

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not just for understanding the text, but for broader learning, success in education, and employment. It is even important for our social lives, because of email, text, and social networking sites (Oakhill, Cain & Elbro, 2015). However, the current situation is that college students in China are poor in English and a fair number of students are facing the difficulty when learning English (Li & Sun, 2023). Specifically, students have improper reading habits and methods, lack of interest and extracurricular reading habits (Chen, Huang, Bao & Li, 2023). Generally speaking, Chinese students face various reading challenges; including limited vocabulary, lack of effective reading strategies, cultural barriers, reliance on translation, lack of motivation and extracurricular reading habits. These difficulties are rooted in linguistic differences, the exam-oriented education system, and traditional teaching methods. With globalization, there has been a shift towards more communicative and student-centered approaches. However, the implementation of these methods varies widely across different regions and educational institutions in China, leading to disparities in the quality of EFL reading instruction.

The researcher is interested in exploring whether or not project work could improve students' reading comprehension. Moreover, the students' opinions towards project work are explored as well. The present study will be significant and fruitful for the future researchers who want to carry out the research in similar areas.

Research Objectives

This research has the following objectives:

1. To compare Baoshan University students' reading comprehension scores before and after receiving the project work.

2. To explore the Baoshan University students' opinions towards the project work.

Literature Review

Reading Comprehension

Reading is a cognitive process for constructing meaning and obtaining information through connecting with prior knowledge to decode letters, symbols. According to Francoise Grellet (1981) reading comprehension as extracting information as efficiently as possible from a written text. Reading comprehension is to make what a person reads meaningful by using brain to think (Block, Gambrell, & Presley, 2002). Irwin (2007) presented that there are at least five processes occurring in comprehension activity: understanding sentences, connecting sentences, understanding the whole, elaborating, and metacognition. Schemata, or background knowledge structures, plays a crucial role in reading comprehension. Formal schema refers to background knowledge of the formal, rhetorical forms organizational

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structures of various text types, content schema is background knowledge of the content area of the reading text (Fries & Charles,1963).

Project Work

Project work refers to a learning activity that involves students working on a specific project or task. According to Ribe and Vidal (1993) this kind of task focuses on students' communicative development, cognitive development and global personality development. Project work tends to be fun and engaging in language learning which needs what Krashen called comprehensible input and what Swain called comprehensible output (Ribe & Vidal, 1993; Fried-Booth, 2002). Hedge (2002) described projects as extended tasks that incorporate multiple language skills through a series of interconnected activities. Haines (1989) elaborated project work as involving multi-skill activities which focus on a theme of interest rather than specific language tasks. Project has been proposed to stimulate learner autonomy, foster critical thinking, and enhance language skills, including reading (Stoller, 2006). Dewey (1938) pointed that project work provides opportunity for students to make right decisions and activities based on their resourcefulness and ability. Haines (1989) suggested four types of projects, information and research project, survey project, production project and performance and organizational project according to the way of information is "reported". Legutke and Thomas (1993) classified projects as text projects, research projects, correspondence projects and encounter projects according to sources of information. Henry (1994) suggested three types of projects as structured projects, unstructured projects and semi-structured projects according to the degree to which the teacher and students decide on the nature and sequencing of project-related activities. Fried-Booth (2002) classified types of projects into two main classes based on duration that project work takes. One is long term project; another is short term project.

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Conceptual Framework

This study aimed to investigate the effects of project work on college students' reading comprehension and explore the Baoshan university students' opinion towards the project work. The following is the conceptual framework of this study:

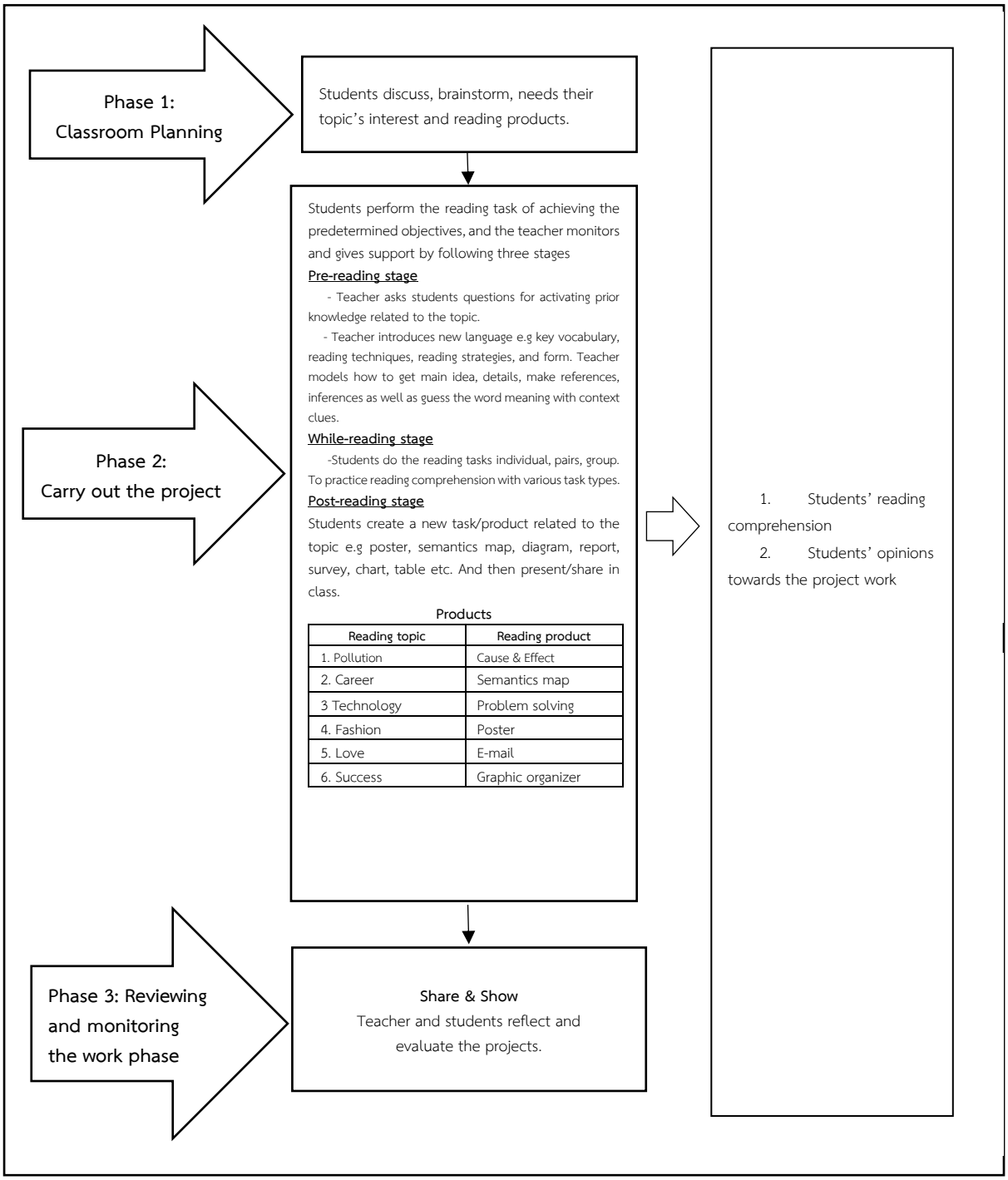

Figure 1 Conceptual framework of the project work

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Research Methods

In this study, quantitative method was used to investigate the effects of project work on college students' reading comprehension, and explore their opinion towards the project work. The instruments included lesson plan, reading comprehension test and questionnaire. The design of this research was the One Group Pre-Post Test Design.

Population and Samples

The population of this study was 184 of the first-year students majoring in pre-school education in Baoshan University. All of them had enrolled in English course in second semester of 2024.

The samples were 30 first year students majoring in Pre-school Education in Baoshan University. They enrolled in English course in second semester of 2024, and were taught by the researcher. The sample was selected purposive for 1 classroom as a sampling unit.

Research Instruments

1. Lesson plan, the researcher constructed six lesson plans according to the concepts of a project work with detailed information of tasks and procedures to be used in classroom. Three experts in English teaching validated the lesson plans according to the evaluation forms to assess the effectiveness of each lesson plans. The results from the evaluation form were calculated for mean scores and compared using the following criteria: 4.00 – 3.50 = Excellent; 3.49 – 2.50 = Good; 2.49 – 1.50 = Average; 1.49 – 1.00 = Revise. Items scoring higher than 3 were reserved and those scoring lower than 3 were modified.

The results from lesson plans evaluation form indicated that the average scores of the lesson plan were between 3.00 - 4.00 and the overall score was 3.48. It implied that the lesson plans contained the majority of relevant characteristics and the overall lesson plans were good.

2. English Reading comprehension test, the reading comprehension test was developed related to the topics for content validity. The reading comprehension test involves 30 multiple choices by which students were required to read for main idea, words, specific information, reference and inference. After that, three experts who were experienced in reading assessment evaluated the items objective congruence (IOC) of reading comprehension test by using the IOC index. Results indicated the items were rated higher than 0.5 of the IOC index, meaning that they were acceptably congruent with the

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objectives and the reading comprehension aspects. Then the reading comprehension test was tried out with students in another class to evaluate the difficulty of each item. The reliability of the overall test calculated by Kuder-Richardson-20 formula (KR-20) was 0.82, which can be interpreted that the test had "high" reliability. The test items of which difficulty indices ranged between 0.33 - 0.76, and discrimination indices were higher than 0.20.

3. Questionnaire, the questionnaire that adopts the Likert Five-point rating scale was employed to explore students' opinion towards project work. The questionnaire had seven questions and one open-ended question. In order to make sure that the questionnaire can be understood well by students and the result was accurate, the questionnaire was written in Chinese. The students' reflection was interpreted by the Mean score and the criteria as follows: 4.50 – 5.00 = very high satisfying; 3.50 – 4.49 = high satisfying; 2.50 – 3.49 = moderate satisfying; 1.50 – 2.49 = low satisfying; 1.00 – 1.49 = very low satisfying.

Data collection

First, sample students took the pre-test on English reading comprehension. Secondly, the researcher implemented the experimental procedures, using project work to enhance students' reading comprehension through 6 lesson plans lasted six weeks. After the treatment, sample students took posttest, the same set of English reading comprehension and questionnaire to collect students' opinions towards project work.

Data analysis

The result was analyzed by the paired sample t-test to compare the difference between scores of pre-tests and post-test. The data from questionnaire were analyzed by mean score and standard deviation.

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Research Results

From the research finding, the researcher has provided conclusion according to each research objectives as follows:

1. To compare Baoshan University students' reading comprehension scores before and after receiving the project work.

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, t-values, and the significance of the pre-post English reading comprehension test

	N	$\overline{X}$	S. D.	Mean Differences	t	P
Post-test	30	20.53	3.23			
				4.13	6.95	0.00**
Pre-test	30	16.40	3.68			

* p<0.05

The results from table 1 showed that the mean scores from the pre-test and post-test of English reading comprehension were compared by using a paired sample t-test. The mean score in post-test (20.53) was significantly higher than in pre-test (16.40), with a mean difference (M.D.) of 4.13. The difference between the pre-test and post-test were statistically significant at level of p<0.01.

Table 2 Comparison of pre-test and post-test in each aspect

Aspects	Total score	Pretest		Posttest		t.	Sig.
		$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.		
1) Main idea	6	3.63	1.25	4.63	1.27	-4.79	.000*
2) Word in context clues	6	3.33	1.37	4.10	1.32	-2.76	.010*
3) Details	6	3.10	1.03	3.93	0.74	-3.34	.002*
4) References	6	3.33	1.12	3.90	1.09	-2.29	.030*
5) Inferences	6	3.00	1.29	3.97	1.16	-3.59	.001*

* p<0.05

The table 2 showed the scores of each aspect in post-test are higher than that in pre-test, the difference between the pre-test and post-test in all five aspects were statistically significant at level of p<0.05.

2. To explore the Baoshan university students' opinions towards the project work.

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Table 3 The students' opinions towards project work

Statements	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	Meaning
1. The reading lessons using the project work were engaging and enjoyable.	4.13	0.71	High
2. The activities and discussions in the reading lessons improved my reading comprehension.	4.27	0.57	High
3. The group work and collaborative activities in the reading lessons were beneficial to my learning.	4.27	0.57	High
4. The project work helped me feel more confident in summarizing and analyzing texts.	4.13	0.62	High
5. The teacher provided clear instructions and guidance throughout the reading lessons.	4.20	0.70	High
6. The resources and materials used in the reading lessons were helpful and relevant.	4.17	0.64	High
7. Overall, I am satisfied with my experience in the reading lessons using the project work.	4.17	0.78	High
Overall	**4.19**	**0.66**	**High**

Table 3 presented the overall of student's opinions towards the project work as a high level ($\overline{X}$ =4.19). The overall of student's opinions towards project work as a high level. When we considered three of the highest items, it shows that students rated "The activities and discussions in the reading lessons improved my reading comprehension." ($\overline{X}$ = 4.27); "The group work and collaborative activities in the reading lessons were beneficial to my learning." ($\overline{X}$ = 4.27), and "The teacher provided clear instructions and guidance throughout the reading lessons" ($\overline{X}$ = 4.20) respectively.

Research Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the posttest scores of the reading comprehension test were higher than the pre-test scores and there was significantly different at 0.05. This confirmed the first hypothesis that project work was effective in improving students' reading comprehension. The findings of the study revealed that after the application of project work in English reading class, students performed better on the reading comprehension test. This confirmed the first hypothesis that project work was effective in improving students' reading comprehension. These findings supported the idea that project enhanced language learning (Haines, 1989; Hutchinson, 1992; Henry, 1994; Stoller, 2006). Moreover, these findings are consistent with the previous studies of Linde, Inga & Daniela, Linda. (2025) conducted teachers' insights into the efficacy of the reading circle project

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using English language teaching graded readers. The aim of this study was to analyses teachers' perceptions on the efficacy of the 'Reading Circle' project and the most common teaching techniques. The findings of this study revealed that teachers highly evaluated the benefits of the project and observed positive improvements in students' reading motivation, text comprehension, and advancements in their reading and speaking skills. The improvement in students' reading comprehension can be attributed to several key factors. First, the instruction was designed following the project work framework, which integrated with the three stages of reading instruction: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading. This structured approach helps simplify the complexity of reading tasks, making them more accessible to English learners (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004), and it allows students to think and have fun, and develop in interaction (Tanjung, 2022). Additionally, this instructional framework provides teachers opportunity to transfer responsibility to students in the student-centered environment. Moreover, Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Theory (1987) supports this process by ensuring that instruction is adaptive to students' proficiency levels. Finally, project work aims to make language learning fun and engaging, and it also involves comprehensible input as well as output (Ribe & Vidal, 1993; Fried-Booth, 2002). As a result, students were learned and improved through skill instruction on interesting topics, and created new end products.

1. The students' opinions towards the project work, the study found the overall mean score of questionnaires was as a high level. It revealed that the students were satisfied with this type of teaching and learning, which verified the second hypothesis that students' opinion on the project work was as a high level. The finding was aligned with previous researches showing that learners exhibited positive attitude toward project work as they were motivated, felt confident and less anxious in English learning (Van Loi & Hang, 2021; Quach, 2023). This finding also supports the idea that projects allow students to apply their knowledge and skills in a practical context, thereby potentially enhancing their motivation, stimulating learner autonomy and understanding of the language (Little, 1991; Hutchinson, 1992; Petty, 1996; Thomas, 2000; Stoller, 2006). Furthermore, the students expressed their good feelings and willingness to continue project work through the open-ended questionnaire. The reason why students hold this positive opinion towards project is as Fried-Booth (1986) claimed that project work managed to bridge the gap between language taught in the classroom and language needed in practice as it in extended beyond the classroom.

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Research Suggestions

The study implies that it is urgent to enrich teachers' teaching methods and shift from the traditional teacher-centered approach to students-centered one.

1. Teachers who want to implement project work should receive proper training, as completing a project involves a wide range of knowledge in different fields and skills to promote the process of teaching as well as provide students access to search different resources to complete their final products.

2. Teachers in language teaching should cooperate to design more suitable, attractive, subject-related projects while placing emphasis on formative assessment to evaluate students' learning progress.

3. Further studies should be conducted with different participants of varying proficiency levels and researches also can be extended to other areas like listening, speaking and writing.

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