

วิธีจัดกิจกรรมสืบหน้าที่กับชาวภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการอ่านของนักศึกษา

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บทคัดย่อ

ทักษะการอ่านเป็นสิ่งสำคัญมากสำหรับผู้เรียนภาษา เพราะทักษะดังกล่าวช่วยเสริมสร้างเพิ่มพูนข้อมูลให้ผู้เรียนสามารถนำไปพัฒนาทักษะการฟัง พูด และเขียน แต่อย่างไรก็ตาม นักศึกษาบางส่วนปฏิเสธการใช้เวลาเพื่อฝึกทักษะการอ่าน บทความวิจัยนี้มีจุดประสงค์เพื่อรายงานการศึกษาที่แสดงถึงวิธีการจัดกิจกรรม “สืบหน้าที่กับชาวภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการอ่านของนักศึกษา” และทัศนคติของนักศึกษาต่อกิจกรรมและบทเรียนสำหรับกิจกรรมนี้ ซึ่งผลิตโดยการใช้หนังสือพิมพ์ภาษาอังกฤษแบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์และพจนานุกรมภาษาอังกฤษแบบอิเล็กทรอนิกส์ กลุ่มตัวอย่างของการวิจัยครั้งนี้คือนักศึกษามหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าธนบุรีจำนวน 40 คน นำกิจกรรมและบทเรียนอ่านที่ผู้สอนผลิตมาใช้เป็นกิจกรรมก่อนเรียนเป็นเวลา 10 นาที ก่อนผู้สอนเริ่มสอนภาษาอังกฤษตามเวลาปกติทุกครั้งของชั้นเรียนนั้นเป็นเวลา 15 สัปดาห์ หรือ 1 ภาคเรียน นำคะแนนของกิจกรรมครั้งแรกและครั้งสุดท้ายซึ่งใช้บทเรียนเดียวกันมาใช้วัดพัฒนาการทางด้านทักษะการอ่านของนักศึกษา และใช้แบบสอบถามในการวัดทัศนคติที่นักศึกษามีต่อกิจกรรมและบทเรียนประกอบกิจกรรม ผลการวิจัยแสดงว่านักศึกษามีพัฒนาการทางทักษะการอ่านสูงขึ้น และกิจกรรม “สืบหน้าที่กับชาวภาษาอังกฤษเพื่อพัฒนาทักษะการอ่านของนักศึกษา” มีประโยชน์มากในการพัฒนาทักษะการอ่านของนักศึกษา

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How to Use a Ten-Minute-English News Activity to Enhance Students' Reading Skills

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Abstract

Reading skills are very important to language learners because reading skills provide them with lots of resources to also develop listening, speaking and writing skills. However, some students refuse to spend their time practising reading. This paper aims to report on a study showing how a Ten-Minute-English News activity was employed to enhance students' reading skills and attitudes towards the activity and materials designed for the activity by making use of electronic English newspapers and dictionaries. The subjects of this study were 40 students at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. The activity and the reading materials were employed during a fifteen-week semester in every class for 10 minutes before the teacher started teaching her normal English class. The scores of the first and last activities, in which the same news material was used, were employed to investigate how the students' reading skills had improved. A questionnaire was also used to examine the students' attitudes towards the activity and the materials. The findings show that the students' reading skills had improved, proving that the Ten-Minute-English News activity had been very useful.

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1. Introduction

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) has become one of the first universities in Thailand to employ task-based language learning since 2000 in its English curriculum for undergraduates, aiming at maximal purposeful use of English by exposing students to a wide range of English rather than constraining learning to certain pre-selected aspects [1]. However, since writing skills are the main focus of all tasks of the Fundamental English III course, 60% of its marks are allotted to writing, while demanding only 25% of speaking, 10 % of listening, and a minimal amount of reading integrated into the writing work. It is evident that students who study this course need more reading practice. Similarly, although the remedial English course for KMUTT postgraduate students (LNG 550: Remedial English Course for Post Graduate Students) offers some reading strategies, such as reading for main ideas, reading for details, and word tackling, there is insufficient reading practice to help students to read comfortably and comprehensively for their studies at a master's degree level. Actually, there are many kinds of activities that can help students improve their reading skills both with outcomes requiring little or no language and outcomes involving speaking or writing that encourage students to do more creative and integrative activities such as debates, discussions, and reports [2]. In addition, Krashen [3] believes that the best way to improve reading is by reading. The ideas mentioned above motivated the teacher-researcher, whose job was teaching both courses of which students' level of reading skills at that time were weak, to initiate her students into a Ten-Minute-English News activity. The rationale for the initiation of this activity is to enable the students to start reading more often with outcomes requiring

little language such as exercises on matching and answering a few questions in order to build up their reading confidence, hoping that their reading skills and their habits of reading English outside class for their future use will also be enhanced.

The crucial reason that made the teacher-researcher use English-language newspapers was they were authentic materials. As authentic materials contain a wide variety of information and written English which also reflect changes in culture, political attitudes, people in society, and language, their use in the classroom can help teachers bridge the gap between the outside world and the classroom, stimulate a wide range of communicative listening and speaking activities, motivate individual students to work with them or even extend their reading outside class, and encourage students to stay up-to-date, discover their own tastes or interests and become increasingly competent in English, especially their reading skills of a very high order. The second reason is their accessibility. Today most major newspapers have online versions which provide language teachers with a limitless supply of authentic teaching materials. Additionally, since newspaper items vary in length from a short paragraph to a complete page or more, they can be used effectively with elementary to advanced students. Therefore, teachers can select items to meet certain criteria such as length, complexity, content, available time, and level of students. Finally, most educated people read newspapers regularly; therefore, it seems to be imperative for teachers to train their students to be able to read English-language newspapers confidently [4-9].

To design newspaper materials for a reading activity, an electronic dictionary is also a useful tool that facilitates preparation. So it was used in

the Ten-Minute-English News activity to quickly gain an understanding of unfamiliar words while designing the materials. It also helped in selecting the right meanings of words for matching words and definitions exercises, since words can be copied and pasted together with their meanings very quickly into the materials.

2. Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate the results of using the Ten-Minute-English News activity to improve undergraduate and postgraduate students' reading skills. The research questions are:

1. Can the Ten-Minute-English News activity help undergraduates and postgraduates improve their reading skills?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards the activity?
3. How should the exercises for the activity be designed and how should the activity be implemented?

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects

The 40 subjects of this study were drawn from both undergraduate and postgraduate engineering and science students at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi in Bangkok, Thailand. The undergraduates were second-year students. The English course they were taking at the time was Fundamental English III, which is the last compulsory course for weak undergraduates. The postgraduates were relatively weak in English, and so, were studying the remedial English course for postgraduates.

3.2 Ten-Minute-English News Activity

The Ten-Minute-English News activity was

used to enhance the students' reading skills. In order to make use of current events to generate students' interest, the teacher-researcher spent 20-30 minutes designing exercises for the news material by scanning several electronic newspapers from both local and international sources to find the most interesting news of the day. For each unit, a short text comprising 100-150 words including some unfamiliar words was selected to encourage students to guess the meanings of such words in context. Since the subjects were engineering and science students, the texts selected were about science, technology, and society. For each text, an exercise including 5 items of a vocabulary matching exercise and 2 comprehension questions was designed (See Appendix 1).

This activity was employed at the beginning of every regular English class of the undergraduate and postgraduate subjects for one semester (15 weeks). The activity was divided into 3 stages: training, activity, and feedback. Before starting the Ten-Minute-English News activity, the subjects were trained in basic reading strategies: skimming, scanning, and word tackling, including word structure clues and context clues. Every day, before the regular class started, the students were asked to spend 10 minutes reading a small news article and do the exercises in pairs, groups or individually, without consulting a dictionary. After the reading process, the answers of the exercises were identified, and a discussion activity was set up if the students showed further interest.

3.3 Research Instruments

Two research instruments were used to collect the data: reading scores and a questionnaire. The scores of the first and last activities, in which the same news material was used for individuals,

were collected. The scores of the first activity were collected in the first week of the semester, while the scores of the last activity were collected in the 15th week of the semester. The questionnaire was distributed to the subjects immediately after the last Ten-Minute-English News activity was completed. The contents of the questionnaire dealt with the students' opinions towards the texts, the exercises, and the implementation of the activity.

3.4 Data Analysis

The scores from the first and the last activities were compared in order to see whether there was any improvement, and if so, how each group of students improved. The data from the questionnaires were tallied and analyzed to see the students' opinions towards the materials and the Ten-Minute-English News activity.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Improvement of Reading Ability

Table 1 Scores of the First and the Last Activities

Scores	First Activity (Mean)	SD	Last Activity (Mean)	SD
Undergraduates	8.7	2.478	11.8	2.627
Postgraduates	4.3	2.136	6.5	1.732

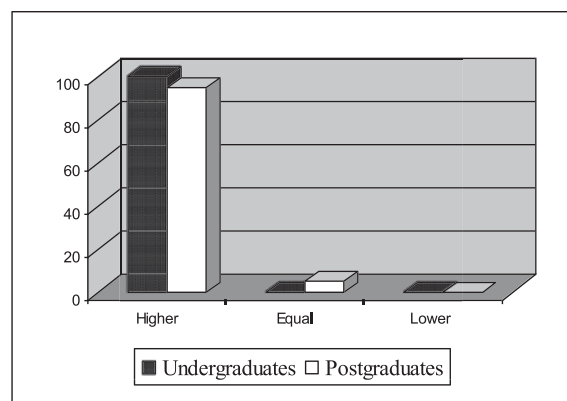


Fig. 1 Reading Scores of the 10-Minute New Activity

Table 1 shows the mean scores of the first and the last Ten-Minute-English News activities. The mean scores of the undergraduate and the postgraduate subjects move noticeably higher, from 8.7 and 4.3, to 11.8 and 6.5, respectively, out of a total possible score of 15. In addition, the bar graph in Fig. 1 shows that all of the undergraduates got higher scores in the last activity. For the postgraduates, most of them (95%) got higher scores, and only 5% of them got equal scores. Neither group got lower scores.

The researcher can conclude that the Ten-Minute-English News activity can actually help improve reading skills of both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Although the scores of the postgraduates showed that they were very weak in reading, all, except one who stayed at the same level, had improved.

4.2 Designing News Materials

4.2.1 Contents of the Texts

4.21-5.00 = very long, difficult, interesting, up-to-date

3.41-4.20 = long, difficult, interesting, up-to-date

2.61-3.40 = average, suitable

1.81-2.60 = short, easy, boring, old

1.00-1.80 = very short, easy, boring, old

Table 2 Opinions of the Students towards the Contents of the Texts

Items	Undergraduates	Postgraduates	Interpretation
1. Length	3.10	3.35	average
2. Difficulty	3.40	3.65	difficult
3. Interest	4.00	3.80	interesting
4. Modernity	4.50	4.55	very up-to-date

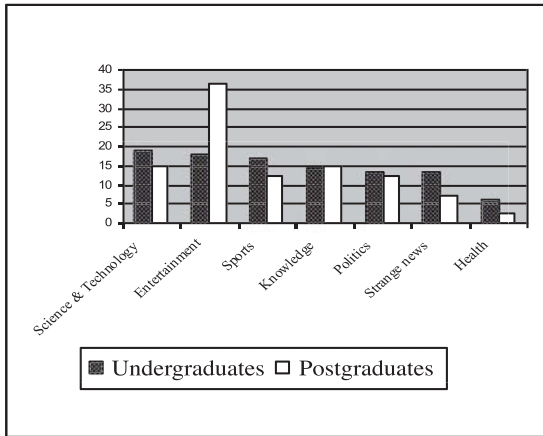


Fig. 2 Preferred News Content

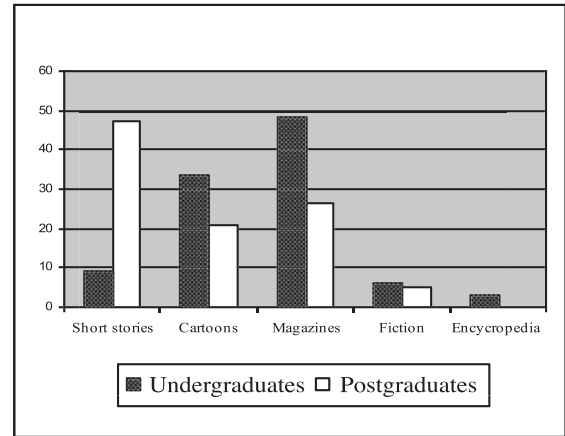


Fig. 3 Preferred Text Types

Table 2 shows that the subjects thought the length of the texts that the teacher-researcher had chosen for them was suitable and the texts were interesting and very up-to-date. However, they also thought that the contents were somewhat difficult. Although the data from Fig.2 also show that the undergraduate students were interested in many things such as science, technology, entertainment, sports, new knowledge, politics, and strange news, a large group (19.06%) preferred science and technology news. On the other hand, the largest group of postgraduate subjects (36.59%) preferred entertainment news. Apart from reading a newspaper, the bar graph in Fig. 3 shows that the largest group of undergraduate subjects (48.48%) would like to read magazine articles, whereas the largest group of postgraduate subjects (47.37%) would like to read short stories.

Accordingly, the researcher can sum up that the 100-150 word length of the texts is sufficient

for the students to read within 10 minutes. The contents of the selected texts, which were about science, technology, and society, can be used successfully to motivate the students' interest. This may be because these students were studying in science and technology fields. Although students may prefer less difficult texts, some difficult ones should be selected at times to encourage students to improve themselves. Teachers should also encourage their students to pay more attention to additional academic fields, including knowledge of the world, as well as politics, to broaden their proficiency.

4.2.2 Exercises

- 4.21-5.00 = the most preferable
- 3.41-4.20 = more preferable
- 2.61-3.40 = average, suitable
- 1.81-2.60 = less preferable
- 1.00-1.80 = the least preferable

Table 3 Preferred Numbers of Matching Words, Questions, and Preferred Question Types

Number/Types of Questions	Undergraduates	Postgraduates
No. of Matching Words	3.35	3.10
No. of Questions	3.15	3.10
Asking for main ideas	3.45	3.40
Asking for specific details	4.00	3.65
Asking for opinions	3.20	2.95
Asking for reasons	2.75	2.65

The data in Table 3 shows that 5 words and 2 questions in each exercise are suitable for this activity. Moreover, the questions that ask for main ideas and specific details are preferred to other types of questions.

Although the data do not reveal the students'

preference of questions asking for opinions and reasons, the researcher believes that when designing questions for the Ten-Minute-English News activity or other similar reading activities, such questions should be added as well in order to help students practise more in-depth reading and thinking skills.

4.3 Best Ways to Implement the Ten-Minute-English News Activity

Table 4 How to Implement the Ten-Minute-English News Activity

Items	Undergraduates	Postgraduates
1. Getting the answers to the exercises immediately	95%	80%
2. Adding a speaking activity	65%	57.5%
3. Finding their own texts	15%	32.5%
4. Doing the activity both in pairs and individually	45%	75%
5. Time allocation (10 minutes)	90%	80%

The data in Table 4 show that the majority of students, both undergraduate and postgraduate subjects (95% and 80%, respectively), wanted the teacher to give them the right answers to the exercises immediately after having finished the activity. They also wanted the teacher to add a speaking activity, selected by 65% and 57.5% of the subjects, respectively. Most of them (90% and 80%; 45% and 75%) preferred to spend 10 minutes to do this activity both in pairs and individually. Unfortunately, only 15% and 32.5% of them, respectively, wanted to find news texts themselves

to present orally in plenary.

According to the data, to run this activity successfully, teachers should think of a challenging discussion activity to encourage students to share more ideas about the texts, and provide answers to the exercises immediately. Moreover, it seems that students can do this activity alone; however, pair work should be occasionally added in order to create opportunities to deal with some difficulties and to share ideas. Since most students do not want to do any other extra work, such as finding texts for themselves, teachers may try to find some

interesting or challenging activities to encourage or train them to spend their free time reading something outside class. However, teachers should be aware of material design, because if the content of the text or the exercises is too difficult, students will not be able to finish within 10 minutes, and that could make them unhappy at their perceived failure and their normal class time.

4.4 Students, Reactions towards the Ten-Minute-English News Activity

4.4.1 General Opinions about the Ten-Minute-English News Activity

4.21-5.00 = the most satisfying, useful, inspiring

3.41-4.20 = more satisfying, useful, inspiring

2.61-3.40 = average, suitable

1.81-2.60 = less satisfying, useful, inspiring

1.00-1.80 = the least satisfying useful, inspiring

Table 5 General Opinions about the Ten-Minute-English News Activity

Items	Undergraduates	Postgraduates
1. Advantages of the activity for the current English course	4.10	4.60
2. Advantages of the activity for future use	4.20	4.60
3. Attitudes towards the activity as a motivation for spending more time to practise reading	4.00	4.75
4. Attitudes towards the activity	3.70	3.95

Table 5 shows that the postgraduate subjects felt very positive towards the Ten-Minute-News activity. They believed that the activity was the most useful for their current English course and their future use. They also thought that it was the most inspiring activity that could motivate them to spend more time practising reading. For the undergraduate subjects, they thought that the activity was useful

for the current course and their future use, and it was also an inspiring activity that made them want to practise reading more.

Although it seems that both groups of students liked this activity and realized its benefits, they did not feel that they were most satisfied with the activity. Therefore, it is worth considering their reasons.

Table 6 Good Point and Weak Point

Good Point	Undergraduates	Postgraduates
Improve reading skills	52.25%	72.97%
Weak Point		
Time management	47.82%	66.67%

The table above shows that although the majority of the undergraduate and postgraduate subjects (52.25% and 72.97%) believed that the activity

enabled them to improve their reading, they came across a major weakness of time management (selected by 47.82% and 66.67% of the subjects,

respectively). They further explained that they were able to practise reading, writing, listening, and speaking at the same time as well as asking questions, learning a variety of sentences, getting used to English conversation, and speaking English more than usual. However, sometimes the amount of time for the activity was not enough because the word exercises were difficult; therefore, the activity appropriated some normal class time.

According to the data, it confirms the researcher's ideas that it is good to implement this activity as a warm-up activity at the beginning of the lesson since it encourages students' brains to start working before the lesson and also sometimes helps them get rid of boredom and stress in regular lessons. Moreover, it can encourage them to come to class on time as Lindstromberg [10] explains that a warm-up activity is a brief activity aimed at getting students' attention, reviewing and recycling previous learning, helping students get in the mood to work with others, cheering them up if they seem tired or bored, encouraging them to come on time, encouraging a positive attitude towards English, and so on. However, teachers should not ignore time management and should not run the activity for more than 10 minutes because this may lead to negative attitudes towards the activity.

5. Conclusions

Guidelines for Using the Ten-Minute-English News Activity

5.1 Contents of the Texts

A variety of news texts should be carefully selected, because students generally want open and fun ways of expanding their worldview. Chandler and Stone [11] note that there is a wide breadth of coverage in newspapers, in which there is something of interest for almost all readers. Thus, it is not

difficult for teachers to find diverse topics in newspapers.

5.2 Exercises

Matching exercises and comprehension questions can be used successfully to improve students' reading skills. Five words for the matching exercises and two questions for the question exercises at a time are suitable depending on how good your students are at English. Questions asking for opinions and reasons should be added in order to encourage students to strengthen their in-depth reading and thinking skills. Moreover, teachers should select the texts and design the exercises carefully, because overly easy or difficult words, multiple words which have similar meanings and complicated sentences cause problems of time management.

5.3 Activity Management

Ten minutes at the beginning of a regular lesson is a suitable amount of time for this activity. The answers to the exercises should be presented immediately after the exercises, and a brief, challenging discussion activity should also be added. Apart from reading a news text, listening to radio news programmes and watching TV news programmes may be alternative challenging activities because a familiarity with newspapers will make it easier for students to understand radio and television programmes [4-5]. Moreover, teachers should train their students to realize that working in pairs or groups is a chance to enhance their learning and their confidence, and not be easily influenced by other people's beliefs, as Dickinson [12] suggests that the rationale for group activities is not to persuade students to adopt the beliefs of expert learners, but to help them to develop,

articulate and reflect on their own understanding by discussing and sharing experiences and views.

Furthermore, teachers should motivate students to do reading activities outside class in order to increase their independent learning since Dickinson [12] states that students who are active in seeking information, clarification, and confirmation of their own guesses tend to be more successful in learning than those who are not. Teachers may start training students to be independent learners by showing them how to analyze their needs, set their goals, plan their studies, implement their plans, and assess their own progress [13]. A university's self-access learning centre should offer a variety of reading texts including a special reading group in order to encourage students to spend their free time practising reading outside class. Gardner and Miller [14] also see the technique of forming students into study groups as a good way to motivate students to come to a self-access learning centre. The Self-Access Learning Centre at the School of Liberal Arts at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi currently runs reading and special interest news groups, among other interesting groups.

5.4 Copyright Law

According to the copyright law of the United States [15], only one copy of photocopied material is allowed for every 20 students enrolled in a class, or any fraction thereof, but no more than 9 copies per class. The photocopy should contain the copyright statement. Moreover, these copies must not be used to mislead others about the views or competence of the author, or as part of a commercial product. Any copy that is made should preserve the author's name, the title of the document, and a statement of copyright, if there is one. Replacement or any other use without permission from the

copyright holder is illegal. Therefore, teachers should follow the international copyright law carefully when using such authentic materials.

5.5 Thinking Skills

In preparing students for the workplace, learning language skills alone cannot help them achieve success in their occupations. Costa and Kallick [16] state that we are exposed to so many sources of information that it has become increasingly more difficult to determine whether sources are credible. Therefore, our students will have to learn how to read information and discern the biases within. They will have to become better informed about the global as well as the local impact of events. In the researcher's opinion, teachers cannot neglect this crucial role they have to play as trainers of reading skills, not only enabling students to comprehend what they read, but also increasing their critical thinking skills.

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Appendix 1

A. Instructions: Look at the pictures and read the news below.



Padma Versudevan, a scientist from India's capital, Delhi, has made an important discovery. Her team of researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology has found that peppermint oil chases away mosquitoes. It can also kill the mosquito larvae (Larvae are the wingless forms that hatch out of insect eggs). The best news of all is that it is very effective against the Anopheles mosquito, which spreads malaria. The scientists did an interesting experiment. They first took out oil from the peppermint plant called *Mentha piperita*. Then they poured some of that oil on top of water that contained mosquito larvae. The next day they found that the larvae had been killed. Several people decided to test the ability of the oil to chase away mosquitoes. They rubbed the oil on their bodies and slept out in the open. Eight out of 10 people said they did not have mosquitoes biting them.

<http://www.pitara.com/discover/eureka/online.asp?story=90>

B. Instructions: Match the words in column A with the meanings in column B and write the letters a, b, c, d or e in the spaces provided.

Column A

- ___ 1. discovery
- ___ 2. chase away
- ___ 3. mosquito
- ___ 4. spread
- ___ 5. in the open

Column B

- a. expand
- b. remove, get rid of
- c. outside
- d. finding
- e. a small flying insect that bites people and sucks their blood

C. Instructions: Answer the following questions. Write your answers in the spaces provided.

1. What did Padma Versudevan and her team find?

.....

2. Which plant is used for getting peppermint oil in this experiment?

.....