

# Exploratory Action Research in Thai Schools: English teachers identifying problems, taking action and assessing results

[www.britishcouncil.or.th](http://www.britishcouncil.or.th)



# About the authors

<b>Chapter 1</b> <b>Bhunarak Bhurampawe</b> teaches English to Grades 10, 11, and 12 students at Kuthong Phitthayalai School, Khon Kaen	<b>Chapter 7</b> <b>Pajonsak Mingsakoon</b> teaches English to Grade 12 students at Hunkhapittayakom School, Chai Nat
<b>Chapter 2</b> <b>Jittima Duangmanee</b> teaches English to Grade 11 students at Surathampitak School, Nakhon Ratchasima	<b>Chapter 8</b> <b>Nuananong Mookkhuntod</b> teaches English to Grade 11 students in Nonthaburi
<b>Chapter 3</b> <b>Jessie James Ramirez Dagunan</b> teaches English to Grade 8 students at Mathayom Taksin Rayong School, Rayong	<b>Chapter 9</b> <b>Pheerapol Muprasert</b> teaches English to Grades 4, 5, and 6 students at Wat Pho-Jae School, Samut Sakhon
<b>Chapter 4</b> <b>Menada Juiboonmee</b> teaches English to Grade 12 students at Mathayomwatsing School, Bangkok	<b>Chapter 10</b> <b>Tharach Puttarak</b> teaches English to Grade 12 students at Bunyawat Witthayalai School, Lampang
<b>Chapter 5</b> <b>Patcharin Kunna</b> teaches English to Grade 9 students at Damrongratsongkroh School, Chiang Rai	<b>Chapter 11</b> <b>Anuchit Tharamanit</b> teaches English to Grade 12 students at Takpittayakhom School, Tak
<b>Chapter 6</b> <b>Nattanan Lengluan</b> teaches English to Grade 11 students at Saparachinee Trang School, Trang	<b>Chapter 12</b> <b>Kanchanokchon Woodeson</b> teaches English to Grades 10, 11, and 12 students at Ammartpanichnukul School, Krabi

# About the editor



**Professor Anne Burns is a leading expert on the theory and practice of action research. She is a part-time Professor in Education at Curtin University; Emeritus Professor at Aston University, Birmingham; and an Honorary Professor at the University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney, and The Education University, Hong Kong.**

Professor Burns has also been Visiting Professor at Unitec, New Zealand; the University of Stockholm, Sweden; Thammasat University, Thailand; the Institute of Education, Hong Kong; and Kanda University of International Studies and Soka University, Japan.

She is known especially for her work in action research and teacher development. Professor Burns has received funding to support her research by the Australian Government, British Council, British Academy, and Cambridge English, and to assist hundreds of language teachers in Australia, Chile, Japan, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom.

Professor Burns has published extensively in the field of action research. Collaborative Action Research for English Language Teachers and Doing Action Research: A Guide for Practitioners helped to shape the field of language teacher research. Recent publications such as Energizing Teacher Research and Sustaining Action Research: A Practical Guide for Institutional Engagement continue to promote classroom enquiry in schools and by teachers. As a PhD supervisor, she has supervised doctoral theses from many researchers from ASEAN Member States, namely Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Indonesia.



# Contents

<b>About the authors</b>	<b>02</b>
<b>About the editor</b>	<b>03</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>Foreword</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>08</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 1</b> What strategies improve students confidence to speak in the target language <b>Bhunnarak Bhurampawe</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 2</b> How to support students to cope with reading comprehension problems? <b>Jittima Duangmanee</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 3</b> How do students improve their vocabulary retention? <b>Jessie James Ramirez Dagunan</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Chapter 4</b> How to enhance students' writing skills? <b>Menada Juiboonmee</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Chapter 5</b> A breakthrough in grammar lessons! <b>Patcharin Kunna</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Chapter 6</b> How to enhance students' reading comprehension skills? <b>Nattanan Lengluan</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Chapter 7</b> How to improve students' speaking skills? <b>Pajonsak Mingsakoon</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Chapter 8</b> How to encourage the writing of varied sentence structures in writing tasks? <b>Nuananong Mookkhuntod</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Chapter 9</b> How to improve students' pronunciation skills? <b>Pheerapol Muprasert</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Chapter 10</b> Improving students critical thinking skills through the use of the QARED model <b>Tharach Puttarak</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Chapter 11</b> Perceptions of students and issues in teaching and learning writing <b>Anuchit Tharamanit</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Chapter 12</b> Students difficulties in learning vocabulary in reading and writing classes <b>Kanchanokchon Woodeson</b>	<b>80</b>

# Foreword



**The education sector, along with many other sectors, has increasingly placed greater and greater value on evidence. Educational evidence, however, is quite different from that of, say, healthcare or law.**

For instance, in schools, teachers are typically responsible for different groups of students. They may have several groups of 30 students, for a year or for multiple years. Teachers are responsible for the futures of many young people, and their groups differ by age, level, subject, specialism, and in many other ways. Teachers regularly take on new cohorts of students and must adapt and alter their approaches. A one-size-fits-all approach is not something teachers or schools should entertain, and so it is heartening to read twelve chapters from teachers investigating and interrogating diverse angles of their own teaching practice.



The centrality of classroom action research to Thai teachers can be seen in the teacher competency framework, which stipulates all teachers must undertake action research as a mandatory requirement. This emphasises the value of this publication for teachers and education supervisors in Thailand. Classroom research is a vitally important part of what it means to be a member of the teaching profession. It demonstrates the drive and commitment that so many teachers put in to their students' learning. Ultimately, teacher research sends the message that each and every learner in the class is valued and important, and that the teacher is determined to help each of them progress. At the heart of action research is the pursuit of excellence, both in terms of teacher and student performance. This publication captures that pursuit of excellence. It shines a light on the need to focus on the identification of problems. It articulates problems in a way that allows other teachers to reflect on and learn from their counterparts across the country. Importantly, it counters the idea that we can do the same thing over and over and hope for the best. The effect of the pandemic on students and student learning further highlights the reason why teachers need to take a case-by-case approach to classes and students.

Reading the chapters, you will be — as I was — struck by the openness and honesty of these teacher-researchers. While they have made great improvements in their classrooms through collaborative effort, they continue to identify and acknowledge other needs and opportunities. The work is never done. It is a continuous, cyclical examination of their teaching and students' learning. It exemplifies all the qualities that make the teaching profession so great: openness to new ideas, intellectual curiosity, leading by example, selflessness, empathy, patience, and self-awareness.

This iterative process was apparent in the symposium held at the British Council Thailand and later at the Thailand TESOL conference in which these teacher-researchers presented their findings, which received wide acclaim from peers. The reasons why their research was so well received are many, but at least in part, it was from their willingness to step out of their comfort zone. Inviting in feedback from students, other teachers, and supervisors is vital for gaining new insights and perspectives, yet it is understandably a big step to take. Nevertheless, it is hugely beneficial and rewarding, as these teacher-researchers have clearly demonstrated.

The British Council in Thailand remains fully committed to supporting the quality of English language teaching and learning. In addition to this report's focus on teacher-researchers, the British Council supports practising teachers of English through the commissioning of close-to-practice research, online English language teaching methodology courses, and digital innovation grants research.

I would like to express my gratitude to the mentors who provided valuable advice and guidance throughout the implementation and evaluation phase. We were delighted to have Professor Anne Burns as editor of this publication and her contributions during the formation and development of these chapters. Lastly, my sincere thanks go to these teacher-researchers, their students, and their colleagues and supervisors in their schools. The publication is a collection of hours, days, weeks, and months of effort on their part, and the result is a collection of twelve very meaningful chapters. I have no doubt that other teacher-researchers will find them hugely influential in their own exploratory action research.

**Helga Stellmacher,**  
**Country Director Thailand**

# Introduction from the editor



**It is both a pleasure and a privilege to be invited to provide this introductory chapter to the accounts of Thai teachers' exploratory action research (EAR) that follow. There is now growing evidence that EAR, and other forms of teachers' enquiries into classroom practices and student learning, is an inspiring and motivating way for teachers to become familiar with research (Banegas, 2019; Zheng & Huang, 2022). The accounts in this volume, and the enthusiasm for research exhibited by the authors, add weight to these arguments.**

It is both a pleasure and a privilege to be invited to provide this introductory chapter to the accounts of Thai teachers' exploratory action research (EAR) that follow. There is now growing evidence that EAR, and other forms of teachers' enquiries into classroom practices and student learning, is an inspiring and motivating way for teachers to become familiar with research (Banegas, 2019; Zheng & Huang, 2022). The accounts in this volume, and the enthusiasm for research exhibited by the authors, add weight to these arguments.

Action research appeals to professionally minded teachers — who are usually naturally inquisitive about their classrooms — because it is contextualised within and focused on their own daily concerns and pedagogical practices. Research conducted in this way can provide immediate results for improving teaching and learning and for resolving perplexing issues that naturally come up in any classroom situation. All of the teachers whose work is featured here have obviously reflected carefully on what areas of their own teaching and their students' learning they wished to know more about and how to gain this deeper knowledge.

In this brief overview, I first explain a little about the EAR approach they took and then draw out themes that might provide key messages and suggestions for other educators in Thailand and elsewhere.

## **What is exploratory action research?**

Exploratory action research is part of a 'suite' or 'family' (Hanks, 2019) of approaches used by language teaching practitioners who wish to research and understand pedagogical issues in their contexts (see Burns, Edwards & Ellis, 2022 for a discussion of different approaches to practitioner research). Building on notions of action research (AR) and teacher research, the term was introduced into the field of language teaching by Smith, Connelly, and Rebolledo (2014), who wanted to offer teachers they worked with in the British Council 'Champion Teachers Project' in Chile a realistic and practical way of doing research in circumstances in which the teachers experienced large classes and few resources. Their ideas about EAR have since been extended to other countries in the Americas, Africa, India, and South Asia.



EAR differs from AR, with its focus on a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (see Burns, 2010) by introducing a preliminary stage of exploration before the research begins. In EAR, the two main phases of research are Exploration and Action.

Exploration consists of: A) Plan to explore; B) Explore; C) Analyse and Reflect. This phase encourages teachers to reflect as deeply as possible on their current situation before beginning any action. For example, they could think of areas they are unsure about, or new techniques or materials they have heard of and would like to try out. Their reflections lead on to possible questions (e.g. How could I help my students become less nervous when speaking?). Teachers can then consider what data they could collect to answer their question (e.g. asking students to write down their ideas or interviewing them in their main language to get their perspectives). They are then ready to move into the Action part of the research, which is parallel to the phases in the action research cycle: 1) Plan to change; 2) Act; 3) Observe; 4) Reflect. As in AR, after this first experience of EAR, teachers may decide to continue their explorations and actions and do further research.

The authors of the EAR framework argue that the Exploration phase helps teachers to become more confident that they can carry out the Action phase successfully to meet the needs of their students. EAR has been valued particularly for its ability to introduce teachers to research gradually and to mentor them as they begin to explore their personal classroom issues.

### **The context of the EAR project in Thai classrooms**

The present collection contains the accounts of 12 Thai English as foreign language (EFL) teachers who teach in primary and/or secondary schools in Thailand and were involved in a six-month-long

British Council EAR pilot project. The project arose as a result of the Ministry of Education (MoE)'s proposals for teacher professional development. Part of the MoE's objectives was for teachers to be equipped to carry out classroom investigations with a view to becoming more self-directed agents of change who could meet and resolve classroom challenges through research. However, it was recognised that teachers are not necessarily trained or experienced in conducting research, and it is important to provide them with support when beginning classroom investigations. To this end, the British Council in Thailand in combination with King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi, decided to pilot a small-scale capacity-building programme. This programme built on the work of Smith, Connelly and Rebolledo (2014), which in turn echoes broader movements in English language teacher professional development which have encouraged the development of classroom practitioner research over the last three decades (e.g., Burns, 2011; Hanks, 2019).

The programme was offered online over a period of nine months in 2022-23. There were two stages:

1. a research phase during the first four months, where participating teachers attended six online workshops to introduce them to EAR, and they were also mentored in one-on-one sessions as they did their research.
2. a dissemination stage where teachers were supported to present their research at the international ThaiTESOL Conference, followed by writing up their research for publication. The mentoring aspect of the programme was considered very important, as one intended outcome is to build up a body of local school and university-based mentors who have experience in EAR and who can act in the future to support other practitioners who wish to conduct classroom research in Thailand.

### Themes and implications from the EAR Project: An ecological perspective

To frame the various themes and implications that emerge from the Thai EAR Project, I will draw on recent work with two of my colleagues using ecological systems theory (Burns et al., 2022). This theory offers a useful way to explain the different sets of systems that operate in an educational context and that work to create (or not) the sustainability of an activity.

Ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; van Lier, 2011) argues that people act within

different sets of social systems in their environment, identified as macro-systems, meso-systems, and micro-systems. A macro-system can be thought of as the broad national, political, cultural, and social systems, in this case, those that surround education and English language teaching. The meso-system is to do with the sector, school, or professional development programme in which the teacher and students are located. At the micro-system level lies the individual, or the specific classroom, with its particular teacher and students. These systems are not isolated from each other but interact, as shown in Figure 1

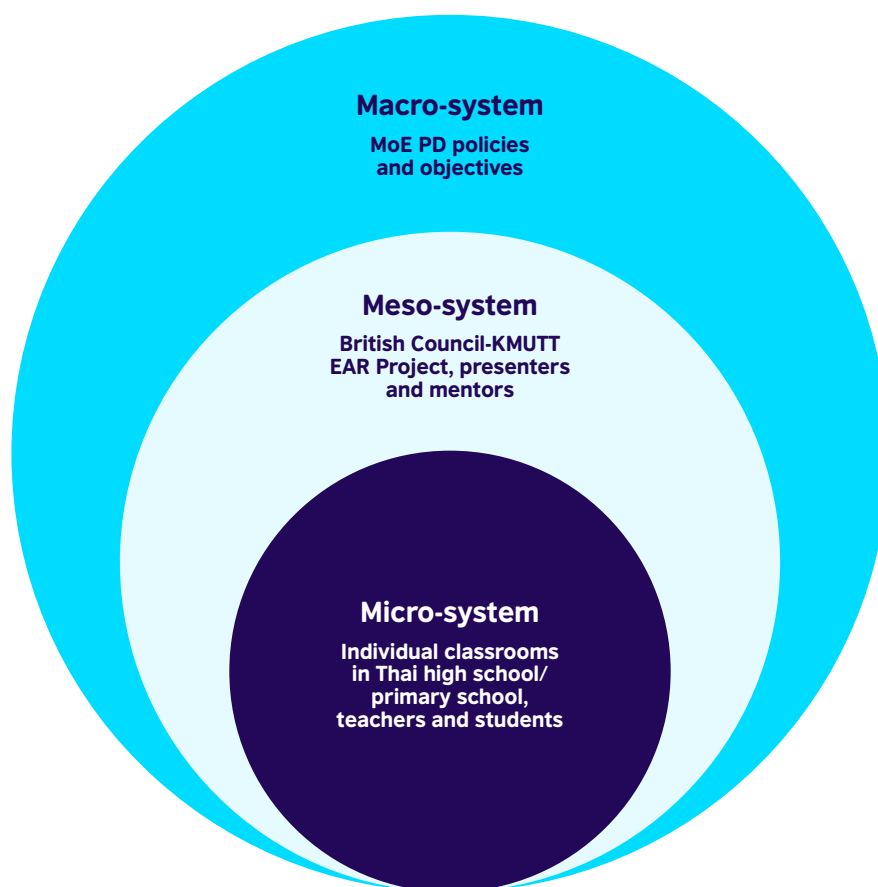


Figure 1. The ecological systems of the Thai EAR Project

### Themes at the macro-level

The EAR Project emerged from the macro-context of the Ministry of Education and its recent aims and directions, since 2021, for teacher professional development. In its current professional development scheme, the MoE is promoting research by teachers as part of individual development plans. Gaining classroom research skills is seen as valuable to equip teachers to investigate teaching and learning issues, identify challenges, explore ways of addressing them, and help teachers interact to reflect on their experiences of classroom change. The overall objective is to enable teachers to become more self-directed, to empower the decisions they make when teaching English, and to improve learning outcomes. In addition to these objectives for teacher development, the MoE's plan is to develop a cadre of mentors specialising in teachers' research. In this sense, the goal is to build sustainability and continuity into the overall objectives.

It has long been argued that philosophically and methodologically, action research is a democratic, 'grass-roots', and 'bottom-up' approach to research (Crookes, 1989). However, it can also be said that imperatives towards new action that come 'top-down' can be instrumental in generating change (Burns et al., 2022). As Somekh (1993) argues, "if the way the instruction changes is through a top-down approach there is no reason why that cannot be recognised and built on. Top-down does not have to mean that individuals are repressed" (p. 37).

In the Thai EAR project, the macro- (or top-down) system of the MoE is an impetus or 'driver' for the programme. This implies that there is general openness and support for such a programme at a high political and educational level. In studies of conditions that support the success of practitioner research, having an overall climate in which research by teachers is encouraged and accepted has been found to be productive. However, at the same time, if educational changes are to be incorporated into sustained and successful practice, the implementation process must be introduced to teachers in a collaborative, motivating, and engaging way that does not lose sight of the cognitive and behavioural aspects of teaching and the beliefs and values of teachers (Kennedy, 1987, 2010). This is where the next system level of the programme becomes relevant, as it is a demonstration by substantive players of finding ways to support teachers through a professional development change process.

### Themes at the meso-level

In their discussion of support for teacher research, Borg and Sanchez (2014, p. 3) note 14 conditions for effectiveness. They include questions such as: Will teachers have access to appropriate advice or mentoring?; Is the time required for teacher research available?; Will the teachers have access to a community of teacher-researchers?; Will they have opportunities to share their work? Will they have access to appropriate resources?

It can be seen that the EAR project fulfils several of these conditions at the meso-level. The structuring of the programme by a combination of the British Council (a large, internationally known organisation) and KMUTT (with local expertise in Thai language teacher education) creates a strong framework for advice and mentoring support, as well as the necessary resources. Additionally, the programme itself is experimental in that it is a pilot aiming to uncover effective ways to assist teachers in their transitions to classroom research. The lessons learned in this initial iteration will provide a basis for judging its effectiveness, for making changes, and for refining the programme (see Burns & Westmacott, 2017).

The two-step phasing of the programme builds in sufficient time for the teachers to learn about EAR (through the series of online workshops, which provides them with necessary resources) and carry out research in their classrooms (with built-in individual mentoring support). This timing is adequate to do small-scale studies without requiring their prolonged research engagement. Importantly, they also have an opportunity to disseminate the research to other teachers (through the conference presentation and publications in this volume). Because the structure and phases of the programme are clearly outlined, teachers can see in advance what is expected of them. Through the online workshops, they are also able to share their ideas with other teachers and mentors in a community of research practice. Another important aspect of the programme is that teacher participation is voluntary, thereby attracting practitioners who are open to conducting EAR and interrogating their practices, and who can provide models and encouragement for others. Moreover, the teachers were working in conducive school environments where their research was valued by school principals, department heads, colleagues, and students.



### Themes at the micro-level

The themes at the micro-level are related to the individual experiences and activities of teachers and students who participated in the programme.

From the various accounts, it can be seen that the teachers' main focus was on particular language skills they felt were in need of improvement. Seven focused on the macro-skills of speaking (Chapters 1 and 7), writing (Chapters 4, 8, and 11), and reading (Chapters 2 and 6), while others focused on micro-skills of vocabulary (Chapters 3 and 12), grammar (Chapter 5), and pronunciation (Chapter 9). Because EAR lends itself readily to practical classroom inquiries, a skills focus is logical and understandable. These are curriculum areas that typically take precedence in teachers' daily work and may even constitute the way the courses they teach and assess are structured. One exception to this focus is Chapter 10, where the teacher researched the implementation of a particular model (Cottrell, 2014) to strengthen critical thinking skills. This is an interesting example of how particular theories or concepts teachers know of may motivate them to explore creative ways to adapt their practices.

Another noticeable feature is that all the topics were self-selected by the teachers because of specific issues or dilemmas they were encountering. For example, Bhunnarak Bhurampawe (Chapter 1) explains that "I noticed that during speaking activities, [students] were not participating or volunteering to speak in the target language. In addition, their speaking skills were not improving noticeably either" (p. 17). In another class, Anuchit Tharamanit noticed that the "students tend to make grammatical mistakes and produce confusing sentences" (p. 75). Teachers' own observations of their students and their classroom dynamics and practices can be powerful motivators for searching for more effective alternatives and for analysing the outcomes.

Through researching, the teachers also demonstrate a willingness to open up their classrooms to scrutiny by themselves and others. They achieved this by using different methods for collecting data and using the data as evidence for change. Several studies used observations by colleagues who could give them feedback. Pheerapol Muprasert (Chapter 9) was one of the teachers whose colleagues observed the class using a rubric of eight questions focusing "on my activity in relation to creating positive conditions for learning about pronunciation" (p. 66). The observations showed that the students were indeed finding pronunciation difficult, but not because

of a lack of attention or participation. This led Pheerapol to devise new teaching strategies with a stronger focus on modelling, shadowing, mimicking, and differentiating sounds.

Another way of evaluating practices was by seeking students' opinions through questionnaires or focus groups. In the Exploration phase, Pajonsak Mingsakoon (Chapter 7) surveyed students to learn about their "feelings, and attitudes towards the first teaching speaking activities organised in the class" (p. 54). In Chapter 8, Nuananong Mookkhuntod's focus group revealed that rather than teacher scores, "students preferred receiving written feedback on how their writing can improve" which meant they could then "correct their mistakes immediately and resubmit their work" (p. 62). Kanchanokchon Woodeson (Chapter 12) found a focus group to also be very valuable in the Action phase "to get students' impressions of the changes and innovations I made" (p. 82).

Keeping a reflective diary was another way for teachers to reflect on their practices and think about different ways to help their students. Jessie James Ramirez Dagunan (Chapter 3) used "guide questions that required the answers to focus directly on new vocabulary teaching and learning" (p. 31). These allowed him keep track of his classroom activities and reflect on how the students reacted to them, which then helped him formulate some new teaching plans. Pheerapol Muprasert (Chapter 9) found that "the value of a reflective research journal" was that it "helped me capture my thoughts, impressions, and observations" (p. 67).

Another noteworthy feature is the wide variety of teaching and learning strategies that developed. They are richly described in the chapters that follow and readers will gain many valuable ideas for their own teaching practice. Suffice it to say here that they included not only teacher-oriented strategies, offering structured approaches to pedagogy (e.g. pre-, while- and post- skills activities, process or text-based tasks, planned scaffolding techniques) but also student-oriented approaches, building up affordances for learning (e.g. using prior knowledge, brainstorming, peer support, and feedback). An example of combining these two approaches is found in Tharach Puttarak's research in Chapter 10 where a 'task-teach-task' procedure first drew on students' current knowledge, then provided teacher input based on the students' observed needs, and finally "allowed students a second chance to re-do their presentation...following input" (p.69). This approach was very effective in increasing students' critical thinking skills.

Finally, at this micro-level, it is valuable to consider the impact of the EAR Program on the individual teachers' professional development. One important aspect was that teachers stated that they had learned more about doing and continuing research:

Joining the EAR project has actually widened my points of view, and I have learned how to write research questions, design research tools, collect and analyse data, create and implement action plans, and present my work using posters. (Chapter 2)

To extend the research, a possible idea is to allow students to work in their own groups independently by observing them from a distance and assisting them only when they encounter problems. (Chapter 7)

Another major impact was on improvements to teaching practice:

'Even though I had been teaching the students of this study continuously for five years, the students' speaking skills had not improved. The key finding from EAR brought some important changes to my teaching practice.' (Chapter 1)

To sum up, the action helped me in how to improve my students' writing. (Chapter 4)

Teachers also appreciated their students' perspectives and abilities more:

One of the most important steps was to ask students about their issues... when students are allowed to express their own ideas, experiences, or whatever they want, they can make English content. (Chapter 3)

They used to be less active in class, because I was more focused on teaching than designing a variety of activities to enable them to participate and communicate. (Chapter 5)

They also reflected on the nature of their own role and their beliefs about teaching:

...my study... highlights the teacher's role in providing feedback (Chapter 8)

I am a firm believer that all students can learn, regardless of where they come from, how they grew up, or what grade they are in. (Chapter 9)

...it is essential to create a pleasant learning environment and provide fruitful guidance. (Chapter 12)

## Final thoughts

**The teachers' everyday contexts, in combination with the British Council-KMUTT EAR programme and the MoE policies, provided a stimulating ecological environment for development.**

Having the opportunity to investigate teaching practices, but also to collaborate with a major international organisation, university partners, other teachers and colleagues, and students facilitated the teachers' development in ways that provide sustainable tools for further research and professional learning (Burns, et.al, 2022). These experiences are not to be underestimated, as they provide powerful models for other teachers as well as implications for institutional capacity-building. What readers will find in these pages is not just the research stories of individual teachers but also maps for future classroom research exploration, and potentially for innovative and collaborative professional development initiatives within their schools. Our hope is that this volume sets out a classroom research scenario for other educators in Thailand to consider.

## References

- Banegas, D.L. (2019). Language curriculum transformation and motivation through action research. *The Curriculum Journal*, 30:4, 422–440.
- Borg, S., & Sanchez, H.S. (2014). *Key issues in doing and supporting language teacher research*. In S. Borg & H.S. Sanchez (Eds.), *International perspectives on teacher research* (pp. 1–13). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press.
- Burns, A. (2010). *Doing action research in English language teaching: A guide for practitioners*. Routledge.
- Burns, A. (2011). *Action research in the field of second language teaching and learning*. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 237–249). Volume 2. Routledge.
- Burns, A. & Westmacott, A. (2017). Teacher to researcher: Reflections on a new action research program for university EFL teachers. *Profile: Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 20(1), 15–23.
- Burns, A., Edwards, E. & Ellis, N.J. (2022). *Sustaining action research: A practical guide for institutional engagement*. Routledge.
- Cottrell, S. (2014). *Critical thinking skills: Developing effective analysis and argument*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crookes, G. (1989). Grassroots action to improve ESL programs. *University of Hawaii Working Papers in ESL*, 8(2), 45–61.
- Hanks, J. (2019). From research-as-practice to exploratory practice-as-research in language teaching and beyond. *Language Teaching*, 52(2), 143–187.
- Kennedy, C. (1987). Innovating for a change: Teacher development and innovation. *ELT Journal*, 41(3), 163–170.
- Kennedy, C. (2010). Learning English in a global context. In S. Hunston & D. Oakey (Eds.), *Introducing applied Linguistics* (pp. 84–93). Routledge.
- Smith, R., Connelly, T. & Rebolledo, P. (2014). *Teacher research as CPD: A project with Chilean secondary school teachers*. In D. Hayes (Ed.), *Innovations in the continuing professional development of English language teachers* (pp. 111–128). The British Council.
- Somekh, B. (1993). *Quality in educational research*. In J. Edge & K. Richards (Eds.), *Teachers Develop Teachers Research* (pp. 26–38). Oxford: Heinemann.
- Van Lier, L. (2011). *Language learning: An ecological-semiotic approach*. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 383–394). Volume 2. Routledge.
- Zheng, H. & Huang, T. (2022). EFL teachers' motivational complexity and dynamics during collaborative action research. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.957476/full>



# Acknowledgements

The publication of Exploratory Action Research in Thai Schools: English Teachers Identifying Problems, Taking Action, and Assessing Results would not have been possible without the work of Assoc. Prof. Sonthida Keuravong, Dr. Rachanee Dersingh, and Pattanavimol Israngkura Na Ayudhya. Their work on the design and delivery of the Exploratory Action Research project and support of the authors in this chapter has been invaluable. Thanks also go to Ekkarat Subannarat and Ewan MacRae for their logistical support, which helped to bring the many individual pieces together for this publication. Our heartfelt thanks go to the lead mentor, Paula Rebolledo, as well as our two mentors, Vanita Chopra and Gyanu Dahal, for their commitment to mentoring the teachers throughout the project. Their dedication is greatly valued and appreciated.

We would also like to sincerely thank Helga Stellmacher, Country Director of the British Council Thailand, who has been a passionate advocate of teacher research. Her support of activities for teacher-researchers has led to exciting and meaningful opportunities, namely mentoring, conference presentations, and this publication. We are also very grateful to have had the support of Professor Anne Burns as the editor, and her contribution throughout has been integral to how the publication has evolved and developed.

**A special thanks go to all the heads, supervisors, students, and colleagues from the schools at which the authors teach. Without their backing, support, and participation, there would be no project and no publication.**

Lastly, we would like to thank the authors of these chapters. As teacher-researchers, they have demonstrated inspirational commitment to improving learning outcomes for their students. They have willingly left the comfort zone and taken on new and challenging responsibilities. Their pre-conference poster presentations and conference panel presentation brought English language teacher classroom research in Thailand to a wider audience. We hope that their chapters will be of similar interest to other teachers in Thailand.



# Chapter 1

## What strategies improve students confidence to speak in the target language

—

Bhunnarak Bhurampawe



<b>Teaching experience</b> 11 Years	<b>Area of interest in teaching</b> Teaching Speaking for Presentations
--	--

## Introduction

I have been teaching English for over ten years and currently teach English to students in Grades 10 to 12 (16–18 years old) in Kuthong Phitthayalai School, an upper secondary school in a rural area of Khon Kaen in the north-east of Thailand. There are a total of 45 students in this upper secondary school. I conducted the research with 16 students in Grade 11 (17 years old). These students have been studying English with me since they were in Grade 7 (13 years old). However, I noticed that during speaking activities, they were not participating or volunteering to speak in the target language. In addition, their speaking skills were not improving noticeably either.

## Methods

I formulated four questions for the exploratory phase of my investigation:

1. What do the students think about speaking in the target language?
2. Why do the students hesitate to speak in the target language?

3. How do the students respond to different speaking activities?

4. What kind of support can the researcher provide to enable the students to speak with confidence?

To find the answers to these questions, I employed three tools — namely, a reflective journal, an observation form, and a focus group interview — and collected data over a three-week period. These tools were then used to analyse the situations from different perspectives, so as to seek a better understanding of students' thoughts about speaking in the target language and why the students hesitated to do so. First, to reflect on how the students responded to the variety of speaking activities, I noted in my reflective journal the students' reactions and actual quotes provided during an informal chat about what the students seemed to enjoy or not enjoy about the activity. Additionally, I examined what specific difficulties they faced whilst performing speaking activities. Next, three of my colleagues were asked to observe the classes one person at a time, once a week for three weeks, using the criteria in Table 1.1 to make notes on what happened.





Criteria/parameters for observation		
<p><b>How does the teacher provide instructions for the speaking activity?</b></p> <div>  <p>Is the students' mother tongue language used frequently?</p> </div> <div>  <p>Does the teacher make use of instruction checking questions?</p> </div> <div>  <p>Does the teacher make use of body language/gestures to explain the speaking activity?</p> </div>		
 <p><b>In what way are speaking activities demonstrated/ modelled out before the students?</b></p>	<p><b>How does the teacher monitor students' participation in speaking tasks?</b></p>	<p><b>What kind of feedback does the teacher provide on the performance of the students?</b></p>
	<p><b>How does the teacher motivate the students to practise speaking in the target language?</b></p>	<p><b>How often does the teacher encourage peer support/ feedback to enhance students' speaking confidence?</b></p>

Table 1.1. Observation schedule for peer teachers



The observers noted that I used instruction checking questions in the class to ensure that students understood how to do the activity/task. Questions and L1 were used when needed to provide more opportunities for students to think in the target language. I gave positive feedback (both individual and group) quite often, with praise and peer support.

During the last week of data collecting, the students were informally asked the following questions in class as a group:

1. Do you enjoy speaking in English?  
Why / Why not?
2. Do you find speaking English easy or difficult?  
Why? Please explain.
3. What makes you want to practise speaking more in English?
4. Do you feel confident speaking in English about your experiences? Why or why not?
5. What challenges do you face whilst speaking in the target language?
6. What can help you overcome your fear of speaking? Please explain.
7. What kinds of topics inspire you to speak in English?
8. What kind of speaking activities do you like in class? Why?
9. What kind of speaking opportunities do you get at school to increase your confidence?
10. Do you use any online apps as additional materials to gain confidence in speaking?



On the basis of feedback from my colleagues, I provided clearer translation in Thai language to help improve the students' understanding. Furthermore, body language and guiding sentences were prioritised to enable the students to feel more confident to speak

in the classroom. I also asked myself 'what strategies can I implement in the lesson to improve the students' confidence to speak in target language?' In turn, I decided to apply strategies in three stages when assigning speaking tasks to students (Table 1.2)

Pre-speaking stage	While-speaking stage	Post-speaking stage
Brainstorming with the entire class about the topic to activate their background knowledge/ vocabulary related to the topic. This enabled the students to become aware about the key ideas/words and support them to use these ideas/words to further talk about or discuss the topic/theme.	The focus was on the content and meaning rather than the form. For this, the students were put into pairs/groups and assigned guided speaking tasks, such as using pictures/sentence starters/graphic organisers to scaffold students to encourage them to elaborate on the topic/ theme. The students were provided opportunities to talk with each other to learn and pick up vocabulary and structures to gain the confidence to share findings individually in the next stage.	Students were asked to represent their group and present key findings related to the theme or topic. A criteria checklist was also provided to enable other groups to share their feedback related to the content/ideas presented. After every task, exit slips (written student responses to questions posed by the teacher at the end of a class or lesson) were provided to share key points of learning from the speaking task and share with the whole class.

Table 1.2. Three phase activity

I made a conscious decision to start with brainstorming to support students in picking appropriate vocabulary. Following this, I put students into pairs/groups to provide maximum opportunities to practise speaking in English. Lastly, I encouraged them to present their ideas individually on a rotation basis to help them gain confidence to speak in the target language.

These steps were followed every week for four weeks throughout the speaking lessons. During this phase, I collected the data by peer observation and a focus group interview. I divided the peer observation into three phases (Table 1.2), with three of my colleagues being asked to individually observe a class once a week during the first three weeks. The students were divided into three groups for the focus group interview, which was conducted at the end of the fourth week.

At the end of my exploration, some surprising information was revealed during the focus group interviews, as follows:

- Most pupils enjoyed speaking in English whilst some were afraid of doing so.
- Just over half of the pupils felt that speaking English was easy whilst just under half felt that doing so was quite difficult. The difficulty was mainly because they could not remember how to pronounce each word.

- About a quarter of the students said that they used online applications to help improve English speaking. Meanwhile, the remainder did not use any online applications or other resource because they felt they were being forced to study English, which they believe is not necessary for them.
- None of the students felt confident in speaking English. Over half of them worried that their accent will affect their intelligibility.
- A quarter of the students said that they do not know much vocabulary, and a few were afraid of using incorrect grammatical structures.
- Conversely, many students reported that they like game-based learning, and some were willing to engage in roleplays while some were eager for competition.
- Almost half of the students said setting up dialogue to practise with friends made them more interested in the topic.
- Only a few students mentioned that exchanging information from the context is interesting, or that the connection between their background and new knowledge from the context would be effective.
- However, most students expressed a preference for more practice in English through topics of personal interest and those related to their daily lives.

**I observed that the pupils put more effort into group work and games conducted in the classroom; when asked to speak individually, the pupils were quiet or pretended to act as though they were trying hard to speak.**

My main finding was that most students enjoyed speaking whilst playing games but that they avoided speaking when they were asked to do so individually. Their confidence when speaking in English depended on the difficulty of the task, the complexity of the language structures, and the familiarity of the context and the vocabulary. The students were almost silent when they were asked to speak individually. Their lack of participation in speaking in class was largely due to their low self-confidence and their limited vocabulary and grammar. They had difficulties speaking because they were anxious not to make mistakes and were worried that other people might misunderstand what they were saying.

According to the different methods I used, the key findings of what and how the students' confidence increased are given below.

1. The students felt more confident in the while-speaking stage when doing group work activities and when dealing with familiar topics.
2. The students were able to use more vocabulary from the pre-speaking stage after brainstorming with friends. They were also able to mix in new vocabulary they learned during the while-speaking stage.
3. The students were more confident with grammatical structures after the pre-speaking stage, and they were more accurate in the while-speaking stage when performing guided speaking tasks and when they were asked to practise several times.
4. The students were more relaxed about making mistakes in the while-speaking stage when supported by peers.

To conclude, I found that peer support, speaking on familiar topics, and using a group work strategy encouraged the students and enabled them to speak with confidence.





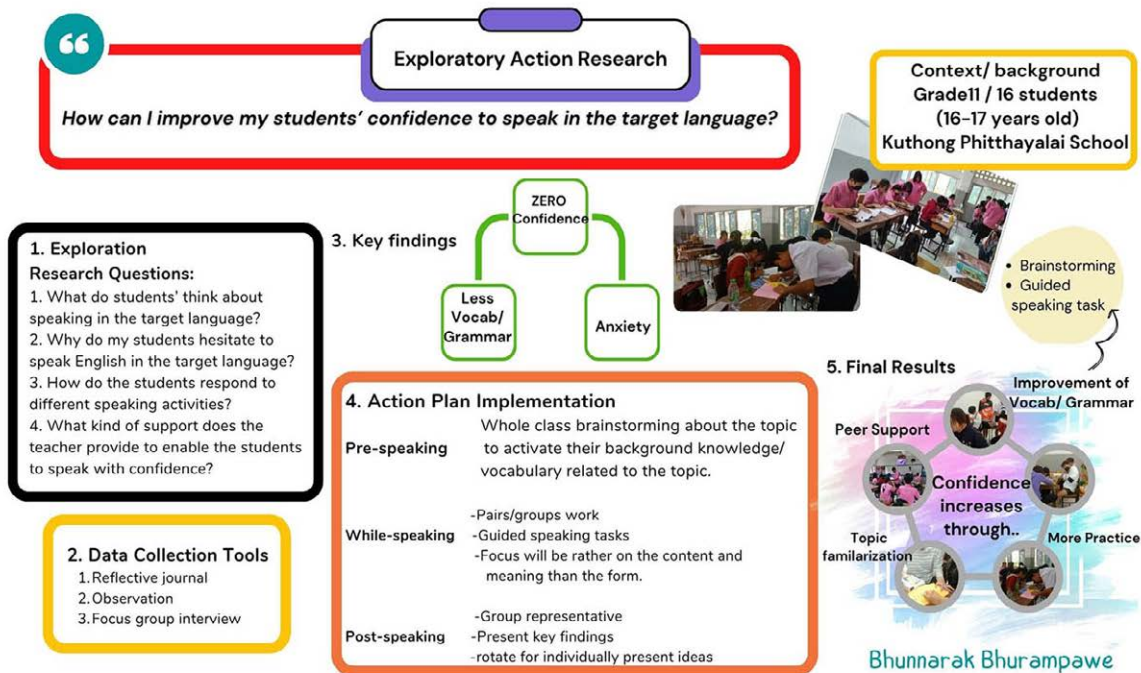


Figure 1.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

I have been teaching English for over ten years and currently teach English to students in Grades 10 to 12 (16–18 years old) in Kuthong Phitthayalai School, an upper secondary school in a rural area of Khon Kaen in the north-east of Thailand. There are a total of 45 students in this upper secondary school. I conducted the research with 16 students in Grade 11 (17 years old). These students have been studying English with me since they were in Grade 7 Discussion

Exploratory action research (EAR) showed me how to see the roots of the students' problems in learning English and led to the right decisions to solve those problems. Even though I had been teaching the students of this study continuously for five years,

the students' speaking skills had not improved. The key finding from EAR brought some important changes to my teaching practice. First, listening to students' problems has led to more understanding of what they want to improve and how to help them achieve this. Second, writing effective reflective journals has really helped me to identify the problems and to avoid the researcher trap of trying to be more positive about the research findings than about the students' truthful responses. And lastly, because students need friends, support, and a good classroom atmosphere, I have come to realise that teachers should always make use of pair or group work, give support when possible, and create suitable activities to help the students to learn in the best ways they can.

# Chapter 2

## How to support students to cope with reading comprehension problems?

---

Jittima Duangmanee



<b>Teaching experience</b> 24 Years	<b>Area of interest in teaching</b> Writing, Speaking and Formative Assessment
--	---

## Introduction

My reading class was a small class of only 12 students, all in Grade 11 (16–17 years old). They had attended other English reading classes when they were in Grade 10. Therefore, I assumed that they had already learned some reading strategies. However, after a few weeks of the semester, it turned out that the students struggled to comprehend English texts and always used dictionaries and translation applications when they read. Additionally, they lacked the confidence to complete reading comprehension tasks themselves or to summarise what they had read.

To give appropriate support, I needed to explore key factors that might affect the students' reading comprehension. Therefore, I formulated four questions:

1. What are students' perceptions about reading comprehension?
2. What kinds of reading texts do students prefer in the reading class?
3. What kinds of reading comprehension activities pose a challenge for the students in the reading class?
4. What kinds of reading comprehension tasks do I use with my students?

In the initial data collection, to find answers to the four questions, I designed three initial enquiry tools to help me analyse the situation from different perspectives.




Initial enquiry tools	
 <p><b>Questionnaire</b></p>	<p>I designed a questionnaire to get information from my students' perspectives about reading comprehension and their preferences in the reading class. The questionnaire consisted of 5-scale Likert ratings and open-ended questions, and it was completed two months before the intervention.</p>
 <p><b>Class observations by a colleague</b></p>	<p>To obtain information about what kinds of reading comprehension activities might pose a challenge for the students in the reading class, I asked one of my colleagues to observe while I was teaching three reading lessons, namely pre, while, and post. I also asked them to note down what happened in the class, using an English-language observation form, which I created.</p>
 <p><b>Teacher's reflective journal</b></p>	<p>To be certain about what kinds of reading comprehension activities might pose a challenge for the students in the reading class and what kinds of reading comprehension tasks I actually used with my students, I kept a reflective journal and updated it after every reading class.</p>

Table 2.1. Initial enquiry tools

## The three tools above led to some initial findings (Q1-Q4).

<p><b>Q1.</b></p> <p><b>What are students' perceptions about reading comprehension?</b></p>	<p>About a third of my students felt English reading comprehension was difficult. Nevertheless, two-thirds thought that reading texts in English was an important skill to have because they need it for their further studies and work. A similar proportion of students used English–Thai dictionaries when they read English materials because dictionaries help them with word meanings. Most students read titles and looked at pictures to guess the meaning before reading English texts. However, two students could not summarise a reading text after finishing reading.</p>
<p><b>Q2.</b></p> <p><b>What kinds of reading texts do students prefer in the reading class?</b></p>	<p>The majority of students preferred reading fiction texts, such as novels and short stories. Apart from reading English texts, the students love reading Thai novels and comics. They also like reading news, articles, and documentaries in Thai and English to get general ideas and specific information. However, the reflective journal showed that only half of the students appreciated more technical texts on innovations and health, with the vast majority of students greatly preferring texts on teenage life and life at university.</p>
<p><b>Q3.</b></p> <p><b>What kinds of reading comprehension activities pose a challenge for the students in the reading class?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seventy percent of students found the vocabulary matching task difficult even though they worked in groups and only the strong students took the lead in completing the task.</li> <li>• When the students had to read the whole text, 60% asked the teacher if they could use dictionaries/mobile phones.</li> <li>• Matching tasks (matching words with meanings), true/false questions, and sentence completion (reading for details) posed a challenge.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Q4.</b></p> <p><b>What kinds of reading comprehension tasks do I use with my students?</b></p>	<p>I used a variety of tasks for reading comprehension, including questions, photos, and a matching task at the pre-reading stage. I used individual activities such as the true/false and the sentence completion tasks at the while-reading stage. I also allowed students to work individually and in groups. I tended not to directly teach students to use reading strategies such as skimming/scanning to get general ideas or details. I asked students questions to activate their background knowledge and I made a point of pre-teaching new vocabulary. During the while-reading stage, I used true/false statements and sentence completion. At the post-reading stage, I transferred reading to writing by having the students write a summary of the text using their own words.</p> <p>Overall, the students had a positive attitude towards English reading and reading outside class. They liked reading fiction texts, such as novels and short stories. Despite this, the students still encountered reading difficulties because they lacked sufficient vocabulary knowledge, thereby hindering their comprehension of texts. Furthermore, they faced real challenges when trying to summarise the texts using their own words.</p>



## Methods

After some reflection on the findings, I developed an action plan that included GRS (Guessing-Reading-Summarising) activities (shown in Figure 2.1) in each stage of my lesson plans.

GRS  
STEPS

Actions implemented to bring changes

G-Guessing meanings from context

R-Reading for gist and details

S-Summarising text

**G-While-reading**

- [a] Highlight unknown words
- [b] Learn how to guess the meanings of the words

**R-While-reading**

- [a] Read the text to find the gist and details
- [b] Work in groups to discuss and share reading techniques
- [c] Pinpoint effective techniques/strategies

**S-Post-reading**

- [a] Complete text summarising exercises
- [b] Summarise texts

**Applied these steps once a week for four weeks.**

Figure 2.1. Actions Implemented to Bring Changes



The main teaching and learning activities during this time can be seen in Table 2.2.

Pre-reading	While-reading	Post-reading
I activated students' background knowledge and pre-taught seven to ten new vocabulary items.	<p>I asked students to highlight any unknown words. I let them decide whether they needed to know the meaning of each word or not (asking myself 'Did the vocabulary affect their comprehension?'). If yes, they would learn by guessing the meanings of the words by using other words in the sentences, other sentences in the paragraph, or by looking at the prefixes, suffixes, or roots.</p> <p>I had the students individually read the text, encouraging them to get the gist and details of the text using questions/worksheets. I then let them work in groups to discuss their answers and share how they were able to find them. Some volunteers were asked to share their techniques with the class. After that, I helped the students to pinpoint the most effective techniques/strategies to get the gist and details of the text.</p>	I asked the students to summarise the text in their own words. First, I let them practise how to do this by choosing words for them to complete the summary. I then had them summarise the text using their own words.

Table 2.2. Pre-while-post Activities

Per the above, the majority of the activity occurred in the while-reading stage. As such, student support in reading comprehension was task-based and strategy focused.

At the end of the implementation phase, I used peer observations and student questionnaires to see the effects of my action plan. The peer observations happened twice, in the second and the fourth week of the intervention, and the questionnaires were administered by the end of the fourth week.

Findings

The students appeared to learn to deal with unknown words by using; i) the context, ii) other sentences in the paragraph, and iii) prefixes, suffixes, and roots. They reduced their reliance on dictionaries and did not need to ask their peers for help as much because they could now better figure out the words themselves. However, some students continued to struggle with difficult words, leading to confusion when they reached the while-reading stage.

The students looked more confident as they read and completed reading comprehension questions individually. Only a few out of the 12 students seemed to lack the confidence to complete the tasks on their own, so they continued to ask their peers for help. The students were able to give correct



answers to most of the questions. In groups, they were also eager to share their answers to the comprehension questions and the techniques they used to find the answers. These answers showed that their reading comprehension skills had improved.

Most students could summarise the text after practising doing so with sample texts, whereas some students were not able to do it well. The reasons for finding this a challenge included issues such as copying the pattern and words from the original text ('patchwriting'), and the fact that some students even copied sentences verbatim from the original text.





Figure 2.2. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

I learned that although the students had attended many English reading classes, they were not able to use reading strategies such as guessing the meaning of unknown words from the context, or skimming or scanning texts to find main ideas and details. They needed to be taught directly, either by me as the teacher or by their peers. Working and sharing in groups helped raise students' confidence. The students needed time to compare and discuss the answers of the reading tasks before they could give the answers to their teacher or to the class. I also learned that the students had their own ways of communicating with each other and that these were more effective than learning from the teacher's

explanations. The text summarising task was a combination of reading and writing skills. Some students might understand the texts but could not write the summary well. As a senior teacher, I used to judge any learning situations based on my own beliefs and experiences. I always solved my students' learning problems by what I believed to be good practices. I rarely looked closely at the underlying problems or explored the possible factors that might affect my lessons. Joining the EAR project has actually widened my points of view, and I have learned how to write research questions, design research tools, collect and analyse data, create and implement action plans, and present my work using posters.

# Chapter 3

## How do students improve their vocabulary retention?

---

Jessie James Ramirez Dagunan



**Teaching experience**

14 years teaching experience in public school and international school contexts

**Area of interest in teaching**

vocabulary and grammar

## Introduction

The students in this study are enrolled in the 'Gifted Program' which focuses on Maths and Science. Their subjects are taught through the medium of Thai language (except the two English courses, namely 'Fundamentals of English' and 'English for Everyday Use'). I teach the course 'English for Everyday Use' to Grade 8 students at Mathayom Taksin Rayong School, Rayong Provincial Administrative Organization. There are 26 students in this class. After having conducted teaching for a few weeks with a group of students assigned to me, I discovered that the students were struggling to acquire and retain new vocabulary. Additionally, the students' responses during the pre- and post-teaching phases were limited, and they were hesitant to use the new vocabulary that they had recently been taught. Accordingly, student retention and long-term memory became the focus of my inquiry. This chapter outlines one approach, flipped learning, which can help teachers and students overcome time constraints. To focus on my exploration, I came up with four research questions:

Two focused on my teaching:

Q1: How do I teach new vocabulary?

Q2: To what extent does the teacher provide an opportunity for the students to practise the target language vocabulary?

And two focused on my students' learning:

Q3: What do students think of their vocabulary knowledge?

Q4: What difficulties do students have when learning vocabulary?

To find the answers to these questions, and to ensure that specific teaching strategy problems wouldn't be overlooked, I scheduled peer evaluation, planned to conduct a focus group interview using bilingual questions on PowerPoint, and I kept a reflective journal.

To collect data on my own teaching, I wrote my own reflective journal, focusing on the vocabulary being taught to my students, and in particular, the difficulties they face — such as what they find difficult about the new language vocabulary difficult and how they learn the definitions.



## Methods

The three tools or instruments used to discover students' impressions and needs were as follows:

### Focus group interviews

From among the 26 students in my class, I randomly selected 15 mixed ability students and divided them into three groups of five members each. I then asked them to answer questions, which were given in Thai as well as English to ensure that the students would fully understand the contents. I presented using Microsoft PowerPoint so that the language itself would be visible to all students, and I also recorded the audio. The focus group interviews went well, and they occurred on three separate days (two days in one week, and one in the next). In these focus groups, the aim was to uncover student issues relating to vocabulary retention. Whilst one group was being interviewed by me, the rest of the students prepared their answers. I intentionally chose this open, scaffolded focus group interview with different groups of students in the class, so that others could see and read the questions and reflect on them. Whilst interviewing the first group, the rest of the students did not know if they would be chosen. As a result, all 26 students were motivated to think of responses, as well as having time to think about the answers in case they were chosen. The advantage of this approach was that it gave students time to discuss and develop opinions towards the given questions.





### Peer Evaluation

The peer evaluations were arranged with a fellow teacher who also teaches the same class. We both teach English to this class, so we already knew our struggles regarding how to improve the students' learning experiences. She observed my classroom teaching (focusing on my teaching techniques before, while, and after teaching) as well as the learning experiences of the students (relating to their language use). The observations happened three times, each at different times during the 1-hour class period. The observing teacher focused on certain parameters, such as how I introduced new vocabulary in different ways, including i) by giving the definitions, ii) by switching from synonyms to antonyms, and iii) by giving the equivalent term in Thai.

**The observation schedule required the observing teacher to focus mainly on vocabulary teaching and learning rather than other aspects in the class.**

## Reflective Journal

I decided to record the daily teaching experiences that might help me answer the research questions. I wrote guide questions that required the answers to focus directly on new vocabulary teaching and learning. One of the important factors was the emphasis on the description of vocabulary teaching strategies:

1. How many opportunities did you give to the students to practise the target language vocabulary?
2. How often do the students ask about/clarify the definition of the new target language vocabulary?
3. What specific challenges do students face when learning new vocabulary?

This process led to the following initial findings:

- In the first lesson, I elicited vocabulary by using pictures and we explored the pronunciation, meaning, grammatical use, functionality, and spelling (which was an issue).
- In the second lesson, during the recap and review of the past lesson, it was clear that students had not acquired the vocabulary successfully.
- Most students reported that they forget previously taught vocabulary within a week and cannot use newly introduced words in subsequent speaking or writing tasks (productive skills).

- About half of the students felt that they have insufficient vocabulary and are 'beginners'.
- Interestingly, half of the group believed that the pandemic and online learning had prevented them from coming to class with sufficient background knowledge or vocabulary.
- Students were all able to recognise vocabulary but could not use it accurately or appropriately. This surface level issue affects students' confidence and increases their anxiety.
- The peer observation revealed that although I use a variety of approaches, there needs to be more time allocated for students to grasp the vocabulary and more repetition opportunities must be provided.
- Although the peer observation indicated that I created a positive learning atmosphere, my reflective journal highlighted that I tend to use a whole-class approach, and that therefore I should try to create opportunities for more individual, pair, and small group activities.

My students' difficulty in learning new vocabulary was arguably due to their lack of prior knowledge of the words. This was something the students themselves were aware of and attributed to the pandemic and online delivery during that period. It is also of note that when the students attempted to translate using the Thai language, they experienced great difficulty.



To bring about change and try to improve vocabulary acquisition and students' active vocabulary, the following steps were taken:

Pre-speaking stage	While-speaking stage	Post-speaking stage
<p>I used a flipped approach by providing students with a list of the words in advance. This meant students could study before class and free up more time for activities which could reinforce the meaning and appropriate usage of target vocabulary.</p> <p>In this flipped approach, students were asked to prepare and bring in an item or object associated with to-be-learned vocabulary. This 'show and tell' activity was thought to be more meaningful for the students and their peers.</p>	<p>Because one of the initial findings was that time was an issue, the flipped learning approach allowed time for a greater variety of modes. During class, I reinforced the meaning of newly introduced words through using songs and video clips. This context-led approach meant that students could see the words in action and in context.</p> <p>Because students came to class prepared for the vocabulary, I could ask more generative questions. For example, when teaching the word 'abandon', I was able to ask open-ended questions about stray cats or dogs.</p> <p>Lastly, the flipped approach allowed me to use more individual, pair, and group work.</p>	<p>I asked my students to write simple, conversational-type questions with a template in which the students had to fill in the vocabulary they had explored deeply and had learned. The students undertook a practice conversation with their partner; this led to output through a speaking activity in front of the class (with scripts allowed to help students with learning loss (which was a result of school closures and the switch to online delivery caused by the recent COVID-19 pandemic) to feel less anxiety or stress).</p> <p>I also provided the students with a matching type test, wherein they read the definition and matched it with the vocabulary using contextual clues.</p> <p>Lastly, I conducted an informal check whilst summarising the lesson and gave short feedback.</p>

Table 3.1. Summary of Actions Taken

## Findings

The main finding was that by using the flipped learning approach to teach vocabulary, more time in class could be found for exploring the meaning and appropriate usage of the words. More time could be allocated to activities in which students reinforced their understanding of the words. Learning new words within a context — such as from a video clip or from a song — increased the depth of understanding. Thus, giving students lists of words before class to study independently (or to discuss with friends) created more space and time in class to look more deeply into a word.

Almost all of my students said that they were able to remember the new target language vocabulary well because they had read it, Googled it, read the meaning of the words, and had translated it in Thai. There were students who said: 'Teacher, I like the vocabulary used in the video clips; it wasn't boring at all, and you can listen to it many times as well'. Another student mentioned that she kept a note on her table about the vocabulary that we were to tackle in future classes. These responses and strategies were quite common, but they were mainly among students of high-prior attainment, and some students still had difficulty retaining vocabulary.



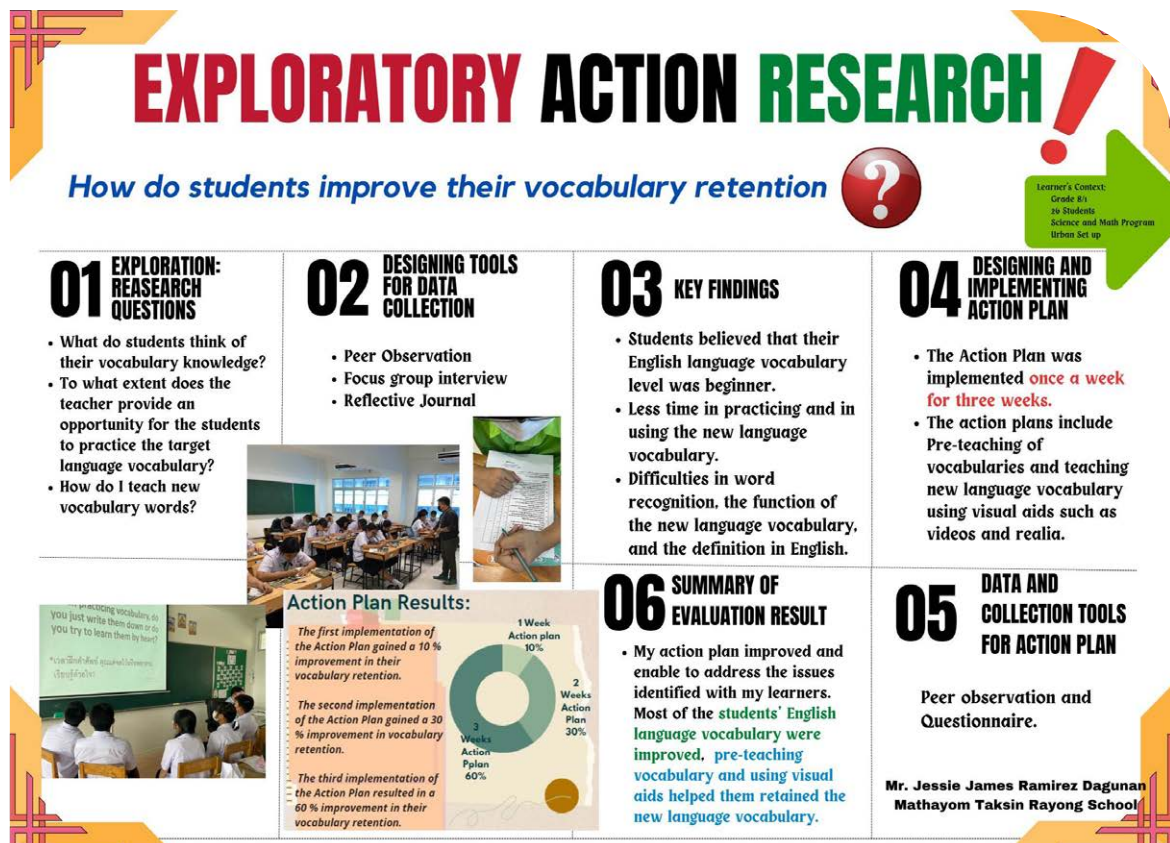


Figure 3.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

One of the most important steps was to ask students about their issues. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, students are very self-conscious about their abilities. The learning loss resulting from school closures, online learning, and other factors may have lowered their motivation, belief, and confidence, and increased their anxiety. Allowing students to prepare for class through the flipped learning method could offer benefits for both the student and the teacher. Often, teachers do not have time to cover all aspects in the class, such as introducing vocabulary at the start to ending the lesson with the new words in the students' active vocabulary. However, by giving students the to-be-learned words and asking them to prepare by looking up the definition and finding the translation ahead of time, more time can be found in class to explore the words in more engaging, enjoyable, meaningful, and — most importantly — more effective ways.

Although the approach had a positive impact, repetition is still needed. I found that students needed three interactions with new vocabulary, on different days, to truly be able to use such words productively when speaking and writing. Even after this, I found that although the students had become more effective, my perception that new words had entered their active vocabulary occurred in only six out of ten cases. Therefore, teachers must ensure that only essential, high-frequency, and level- and age-appropriate words are reinforced and practised. More work should be done to separate low-frequency from high-frequency words. Additionally, more training in generative questioning would be helpful to improve teaching techniques and student recall.

# Chapter 4

## How to enhance students' writing skills?

---

Menada Juiboonmee



**Teaching experience**

9 Years

**Area of interest in teaching**

Communicative Language Teaching

## Introduction

Based on Thailand's national strategy 'Thailand 4.0', education and human resource development have gained increasing attention in the movement to create a sustainable future. Similarly, English language is no less important because it directly impacts on the economy, industry, science, medicine, education, information and technology, and communication of the country (Kitjaroonchai, 2012). As such, low English proficiency levels have a negative impact on employability. In particular, Thai students should leave the education system with English communication skills. Written communication is just as important; however, few students can confidently write in English. In fact, most English as a Foreign Language learners in Thailand have great difficulty in writing effectively. My study focused on student writing and was conducted in Mathayomwatsing School, a rural school containing approximately 3,200 students on the border between Bangkok and Samut Sakorn Province. This study aimed to improve the English writing skills among 45 students in Grade 12 (17–18 years old).

## Method

Various tools and methods were used to conduct the exploratory action research. The first step was an exploration stage, comprising four research questions:

RQ1: What kinds of tasks do my students prefer in the writing class?

RQ2: Why do my students commit errors/mistakes in constructing sentences in written form?

RQ3: How do my students feel when they share their experiences in written form?

RQ4: How do I extend support to my students to write accurately?

Three main data collection tools were used for the exploration research questions: 1) questionnaires; 2) peer observations; iii) reflective journals (the focus group mentioned later was held after the revised lessons). Three of the research questions given above

(Nos. 1–3) were in the questionnaires. The other research question (No. 4) was used in the teacher/peer observation and the reflective journals. The questionnaire was administered to 45 students; a teacher/peer observer observed classes over a three-week period; and I made six entries into respective reflective journals to better understand the classroom teaching problem. Finally, a focus group was held at the end of the process.

The total duration of collecting data was three weeks, divided into two phases. The first phase was teacher/peer observations of three lessons (each lasting approximately 50 minutes of classroom teaching). The reflective journal was written after every class and there were six such journals (because I taught English writing twice a week). The second phase included the questionnaires, which had an open-ended format so as to get answers from the students' perspective. In total, the exploratory stage lasted almost a month.

From the questionnaires, the findings showed that the students preferred writing tasks which relate to their lives, such as telling real life experiences, story writing, and even a few formal writing tasks to enhance their writing skills. Additionally, the students had difficulty in recognising how to use vocabulary and syntax. Furthermore, they did not know how to spell new words and stated that they were not motivated to pay attention during the teaching process. According to the students, individual feedback is not a feature of classes and not all students felt able to improve their writing in the classroom. The students also had no time to practise the things I presented in the classroom. Peer observer feedback revealed that the students had not been given individual error correction at all during class. Therefore, they still did not know how to revise their written mistakes. However, the feedback from peer observation and my own reflective journal suggested that students were highly motivated to share their viewpoints and perspectives on their contributions generally. The task was to write about 'Good Deeds for Myself', 'Good Deeds for My Parents/Family', and 'Good Deeds for My Country'. In summary, after all these stages and steps, the data informed me that students need: 1.) more vocabulary support, 2.) more practice, and 3.) detailed feedback.



## Introduction

The culmination of this procedure led to the need to act, based on the following question: 'What approach can I implement to improve my students' accuracy when writing in English?' This question led to the decision to employ a process-writing approach. I hoped that this approach could not only improve students' written content but also written accuracy. I implemented the approach for two periods a week for 4–5 consecutive weeks. It contained the following four steps to facilitate the students' learning of how

to construct and edit writing tasks, including sharing their written pieces individually with other students or in groups with the whole class.

1. Pre-writing stage: brainstorming and mind mapping.
2. Draft stage: focusing on content.
3. Revision and editing stage: peer checking.
4. Final draft and sharing stage: sharing and collecting progression as a portfolio.



The following describes what occurred in the class at each stage:

- Pre-writing stage: the students were encouraged to generate ideas on the topic by using strategies such as brainstorming and mind mapping. After brainstorming, looking at some pictures, or watching videos, the students were asked to share with the larger group using the technique of mind mapping. Key vocabulary was represented and displayed on the board/word wall board. In this stage, the students were triggered to learn in-use

vocabulary through brainstorming, and then to use the same words when they wrote their first draft.

- Drafting stage: the students practised vocabulary in context mainly through the use of videos and pictures. When they were stuck, they would be shown a picture and questioned about it to elicit the word. When I wanted them to write about a topic, I played some video clips containing the language focus with the support of English subtitles, so as to help the students to recognise key words and the correct use of grammar.
- Revision and editing stage: the students had more time to practise and learn the syntax. They were instructed to check content for the first time with their peers and group members. After content checking, the peers and group members identified syntax and asked the students to check and correct it. Most of the students were given feedback to be able to improve their friends' contents. They proofread each other's work, focusing on sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, and use of tense. When the students were not able to find grammatical errors/mistakes, the teacher researcher scaffolded the process for them. Before presenting and submitting their work, the students felt more confident when their writing tasks were re-checked to improve their writing.
- Final draft and sharing stage: the students' final work was put up in the class and they were encouraged to share their final drafts individually with other students or as group presentations for the whole class. The final drafts were submitted to the teacher and then added to students' portfolios.

My new approach lasted for a month with classes held twice a week during that period. The students had four topics to write about for the process-writing approach: 'About Me', 'My Good Deeds', 'My Funny Story', and a free writing topic. Students went through a process of pre-writing, drafting followed by a revision and editing, and lastly a final draft and sharing stage. To evaluate the above actions, I used two tools to analyse the results.

---

**There were three weeks of peer observations, and 35 students of mixed ability were selected for focus group interviews.**

---





## Findings

The students could gain more vocabulary at the pre-writing stage. Furthermore, they were motivated to retrieve vocabulary by brainstorming things related to the topic and then sharing with the class. When the students were stuck, they would be shown a picture and questioned about it to help them guess the word. When I wanted them to write about the topic, I played some video clips containing the language focus with the support of English subtitles to help the students recognise key words and the correct use of grammar. From the interview responses, the students preferred watching music videos with English lyrics; such videos involved the relevant topic and inspired them to remember the content to be written during the draft stage. After brainstorming or looking at some pictures/videos, the students were asked to share with the whole group using the mind mapping technique. Key vocabulary was represented and displayed on the board/word wall board.

Doing the pre-writing stage supported the students in retrieving and remembering vocabulary or language focus in a stress-free manner. The writing activities — especially the pre-writing and drafting stage, and the revision and editing stage — prompted the students to use classroom time to practise vocabulary and sentence construction. During pre-writing, the students were triggered to learn in-use vocabulary through brainstorming and then to use the same words when they wrote their first draft. Besides this, the drafting stage encouraged the students to practise vocabulary in context through the use of videos/pictures and other media. When they were asked to write without concerning themselves with grammar, they were able to come up with good

sentences. The students initially started writing sentences with focus on content and then they focused on different aspects of grammar, such as spelling. In the revision and editing stage, the students had more time to practise and learn the syntax. They were told to check the contents for the first time by their peers and group members. After content checking, the students were asked to check and correct the syntax used by their peers and group members. Most of the students received feedback on how to improve their friends' content. They proofread each other's work, focusing on sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, and use of tense. When the students were not able to find grammar errors/mistakes, I demonstrated how to do so and extended my support through scaffolding. They felt more confident when their writing tasks were re-checked, which allowed them to have the best version of their writing before presenting and publishing.

From the steps taken, the students appeared to benefit most in terms of vocabulary acquisition, especially at the pre-writing stage. Doing this stage supported the students in retrieving and remembering vocabulary or language focus within a stress-free environment. They were motivated to retrieve vocabulary by brainstorming things related to the topic, and then sharing with other students in the class. From the interviews, students preferred watching music videos with English lyrics as a reminder during the drafting stage. The students initially started writing sentences with a focus on content and then focused on different aspects of grammar, such as spelling. When students were asked to write without worrying about grammar, they were able to form sentences more readily.





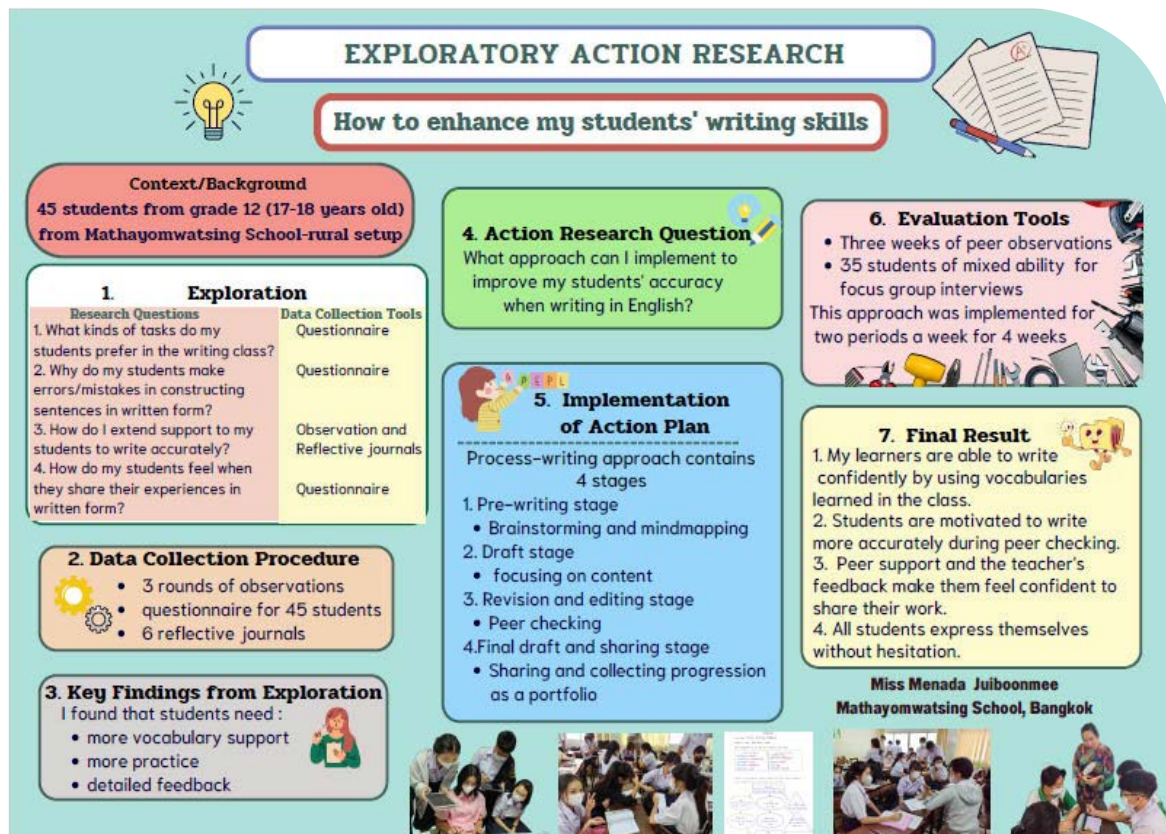


Figure 4.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

The classroom action plan enabled my students to write with more confidence by making use of vocabulary learned in the class. After I implemented the action plan, in the pre-writing stage, it was found that supporting vocabulary acquisition by encouraging students to brainstorm and share can provide more vocabulary knowledge, which can then be used in writing the content. Drafting was the stage in which the students made use of the vocabulary learned through brainstorming and mind mapping, and this enabled them to write with confidence. Moreover, focusing on content encouraged the students to enhance their personal expression, and getting feedback from their peers had an impact on their writing achievement. Finally, reporting their progress by collecting their written tasks as a portfolio made students more proactive in writing, giving them not only a sense of audience and purpose but also allowing them to always keep better writing in mind.

To sum up, the action helped me in how to improve my students' writing. This depended on vocabulary sufficiency, repetitive practice, and feedback. It prioritised content over grammatical accuracy through peer checking to reduce foreign language anxiety when receiving feedback from the teacher. When the focus is on English grammatical competency, students are not able to write and/or deliver effectively because they are anxious or worried about being corrected. Conversely, when students are allowed to express their own ideas,

experiences, or whatever they want, they can make English content. Furthermore, encouraging students to take the lead in sharing their ideas using topical content and receiving grammar correction by peer checking and feedback can make students feel more comfortable. Letting students have chances to find and correct their own errors first, then letting them check their friends' work and vice versa, as well as receiving teacher-led feedback, will support them in attempting to recognise and use the grammar or language focus of the lesson.

## References

Kitjaroonchai, N & Kitjaroonchai, T. (2012) 'Motivation Toward English Language Learning of Thai Students Majoring in English at Asia-Pacific International University', *Human Behavior, Development and Society* (7)1, pp. 21–38

# Chapter 5

## A breakthrough in grammar lessons!

---

Patcharin Kunna



**Teaching experience**  
14 years

**Area of interest in teaching**  
Motivating students, planning lessons,  
and classroom research

## Introduction

Nowadays, English is increasingly seen as an international language that is widely used as a tool for global communication. Nevertheless, it is difficult for Thai students to have many opportunities to use English outside of the classroom. To use English to communicate well, Hongthong (2015) stated that students need to possess adequate language content, specifically English vocabulary and grammar. However, it seems that even though Thai students study English in school for many years, their English language proficiency level remains low, with grammar being a particular issue. Therefore, teaching grammar remains an important topic for English teachers to focus on (Sinthai, 2016).

In general, I have a good rapport with my students, and the class atmosphere during lessons (including those focusing on vocabulary or on skills) is positive. However, I noticed that in grammar lessons, students' participation and interaction levels dropped. Reflecting on my research teaching journal, I decided to work on improvements to grammar lessons.

## Method

After the journal reflection, I developed the following questions to investigate the possible causes of the problem:

1. How do I teach English grammar?
2. What classroom activities do the students like or dislike during grammar lessons?
3. What behaviours do the students show when I teach grammar to them?
4. How do students participate in grammar lessons?

To answer these questions, I selected the following activities: (5.1) writing a reflective journal to reflect on impressions after teaching, (5.2) making a video recording to observe teaching, and (5.3) conducting interviews to learn more from the students.

### My teaching reflective journal

Topic/ area of teaching: Present simple vs Present continuous

Class: Grade 9 (Mattayom 3.8)

Date of teaching: September 9th, 2022

I taught present simple vs present continuous tense and informed them that I was going to record the video of my teaching. Surprisingly, they didn't act strange! I started the lesson with comparing sentences of the two tenses to have them notice the similarity and difference as I believe they have studied about these two for several times.

I elicited them after letting them search for more information on usage, form and example sentences of the two tenses. I walked around to see if they're doing the task or not. Most of them were using the phone for working while a few watching some clips on another app. Then, I randomly picked students using popsicle sticks to fill in the mind-mapping. I just realized that I always look for students on my right-hand side to answer because they're always response to me when I ask them. I should try to change this or motivate students in other sides to speak more. I also like the way students came up and wrote sentences on the board. Previously, I had them speak the sentences so I didn't know that they used the correct form of verb or not.

By writing, I could see that some students misspelled words and forgot punctuation mark. I will try to have them write more in the next classes. I used gap-fill exercise for them to practice the grammar. From my observation, there're students that need more help noticing the subjects of the sentences whether it's singular or plural so that they can work on correct form of verbs. They also tell me they wanted to know keywords of the tenses so when I check their answer with the whole class, I helped them point out the keywords first.

I ended the class with checking their books so I could see that they're on track. I planned on having them review the form and will work on semi-control and freer practice.



Picture 5.1. Writing a reflective journal

From these activities, a researcher would be able to see clear evidence of the problem. One example showed that activities in grammar lessons lacked student participation and students also had less support on the language. This led me to ask the following question: What activities can I implement in grammar lessons to make them more communicative?

I re-designed lesson plans by adding more active and interactive activities in the practice and production stages, such as personalisation, online interactive exercises, sentence writing, class survey, and writing stories, as described in Table 5.1. I also added a variety of interaction patterns so the students would have chances to use grammar structures on their own and with their friends.

Activity/Approach	Guideline
<b>Personalisation</b>	I asked the students to use their own photos along with a timeline to practise using past simple tense to describe their past events.
<b>Online interactive exercise</b>	Kahoot and Quizizz were used after the students finished working on a controlled practice activity with present perfect tense. I also usually used them as a review or a warm-up activity before presenting new grammar points.
<b>Sentence writing</b>	This activity went alongside a 'rip and run' activity. I had students work in groups and practise sentence writing to review forms and usages of present simple and present continuous.
<b>Class survey</b>	To have students use present perfect tense form, I applied a class survey in freer practice. They had a table that listed some life experiences, and they would ask their friends whether they had experienced any of them. After that, I asked for feedback from students who would report back on what they got from the survey.
<b>Writing stories</b>	This activity was used to help students work in groups and use the language more creatively. I gave the template of a social media post, and they had to write stories using the present continuous and present simple forms in the context of posting whilst being on vacation.

Table 5.1. Activities added in the practice and production stages in grammar lessons

To evaluate the impact of this, I designed two evaluation tools: (1) peer observation and (2) focused group discussion. The tools here are different from the ones used in the exploratory stage, because they were not for investigation but rather to evaluate success and see if the change made any impact.

The lesson plan was trialled for three weeks. My colleagues conducted peer observations, and I conducted a focus group discussion with 17 students in the last week of the implementation.



### Peer Evaluation form

Objective: The objective of the peer observation is to assess the success of the actions implemented in teaching grammar communicatively.

Stages	Question	What happened
Presentation	Were the students able to notice the language themselves? How?	
	How did the teacher personalize grammar? Could the students personalize the grammar examples in their context?	
	How could the students notice and recognize the language by themselves?	
Practice	Did the group work activities help the students learn grammar? In what way?	
	How engaged were students during controlled practice activities?	
	Were the students participating in grammar lessons actively?	
Production	To what extent were students able to produce the language freely and communicatively?	
	How effectively did the teacher provide feedback to the students on their controlled practice work?	

Table 5.2. Peer Evaluation form

<b>Focus Group Discussion</b>  <b>Topic:</b> Design the steps of teaching and provide activities to be more lively and communicative in grammar lessons.  <b>Introduction:</b> The focus group discussion aims to collect information about the teacher and your behaviour when you're in grammar lessons.	
1. What starter activity did you find more effective to engage you to participate in grammar lessons? Why? (contextualisation, personalisation, visual and online interactive activity)  2. Which one of these activities (contextualisation, personalisation, visual and online interactive) was more useful to help you comprehend the grammar being taught?  3. Were you able to notice the language structure by yourself? What support did the teacher provide you to recognize language structure?	4. Did you get enough support from the teacher to learn language structures?  5. Did working alone or working with a partner help you practice grammar? In what way?  6. In what way does the visual and online interactive mode make you practice grammar more actively?  7. Did the controlled practice activities like gap filling help you minimize grammar errors? How?  8. Do you think you have improvements in your grammar? In what way?  9. How helpful is a sentence writing activity for you to minimize grammar errors?  10. Was the freer activity like the class survey useful for you to practice the language independently? How?

Table 5.3. Focus Group Discussion



## Findings

The main observable effect from the actions implemented was that the students could use the language more actively. In collaboration with their friends, their participation improved when they did the activities in the practice and production stages. From the summary of the evaluation results (shown in Table 5.2), the focus group discussions showed the following: 1) the support from the teacher whilst presenting the grammar and doing the activities made the students relax; 2) their rapport with the teacher

improved; and 3) some students found it difficult when working on long and complicated reading texts and they still needed guidance from teachers and peers whilst doing group work activities. Lastly, the design of the lessons to improve class participation and build students' confidence became more of a priority for me. Knowing more about the problem directly from students helps further understanding of how to teach students effectively. The effects from the study could be seen through my own observations and the students' observations (Table 5.2).

What were the effects of the actions you attempted?	
<p>What was the effect of your actions for key <b>finding 1</b>?</p> <p><b>Effects of the action plan:</b>  <b>Students were able to use the newly learned vocabulary in a controlled practice task.</b></p>	<p><b>Effect on the improvement of students' participation</b></p> <p>Students got more chances to participate and communicate because they were given chances to use the language to work on their own and later on in small groups during semi-controlled practice and production stages. (Peer Observation)</p> <p>The teacher contextualised/personalised the language and structure, helping the students finish the tasks on time; when the teacher asked for the reason for their answers (which referred to the structures), they could explain their reasons. (Peer Observation)</p> <p>We got the chance to practise language and structure more in grammar lessons by working with our friends and with support from the teacher. (Focus group discussion)</p> <p>Students were given an opportunity to practise language and structure freely by doing class surveys and writing short stories. Whilst the students performed the task, the teacher monitored how they used the language to complete the task. It was observed that students used the language actively with their friends and participated well. (Peer Observation)</p>
<p>What was the effect of your actions for key <b>finding 2</b>?</p>	<p><b>Effect on the student's ability to communicate</b></p> <p>Owing to the variety of classroom activities, we had more chances to use language and structure to communicate. We are more active in grammar lessons these days than we used to be. (Focus group discussion)</p> <p>Now, we can answer the questions asked by the teacher because they have shown the visuals and examples repeatedly. We could notice and recognise structures. (Focus group discussion)</p> <p>The teacher set semi-controlled practice in groups; whilst working in groups, the students seemed to help each other to prepare the language before performing the task. (Peer Observation)</p> <p>However, the students found it difficult when they worked on long and complicated reading texts. They said that they still needed the teacher's guidance and support on language and grammar. (Focus group discussion)</p>

Table 5.2. Summary of evaluation results

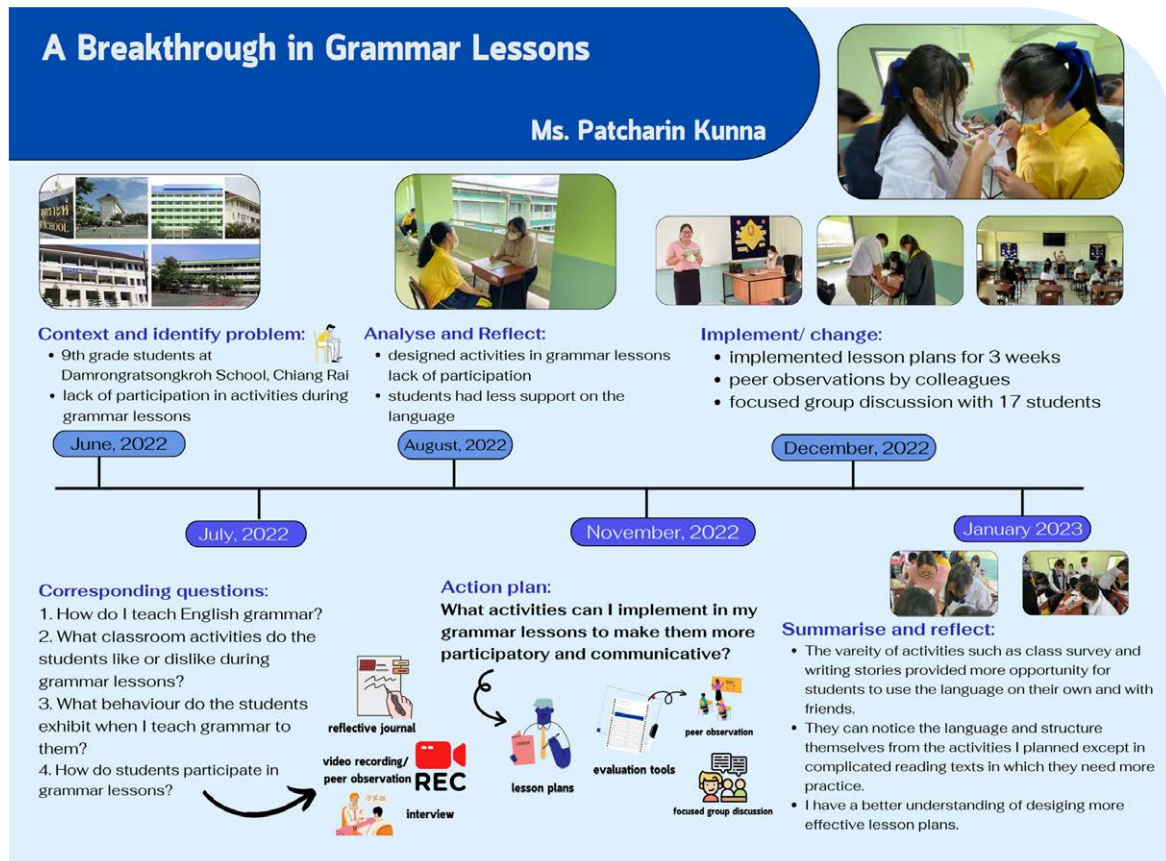


Figure 5.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

The data collected suggests that my students have gradually developed their engagement in grammar lessons, which I can attest to, having observed them closely.

They used to be less active in class, because I was more focused on teaching than designing a variety of activities to enable them to participate and communicate, but now they are active in grammar lessons. They seemed to help each other in groups and in freer practice activities.

The students can now notice the language and structure themselves from the activities I planned, except in complicated reading texts, and can use them freely; however, they need more practice. This made me realise how important designing the lessons is to improve class participation.

## References

- Hongthong S. & Modehiran P. (2015). EFL teachers' perspectives toward using mind mapping technique in grammar instruction. *An Online Journal of Education*, 10(1), 103–117. Retrieved from <https://so01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/OJED/article/view/40480>
- Sinthalai W. & Somchob S. (2014). Learning grammar through task-based activities: a case study of first-year English majors at Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University. *Humanities and Social Sciences Journal, Ubon Ratchathani Rajabhat University*, 7(2), 293–300. Retrieved from <https://so01.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/humanjubru/article/download/206663/143662/>

# Chapter 6

## How to enhance students' reading comprehension skills?

---

Nattanan Lengluan



**Teaching experience**

28 Years

**Area of interest in teaching**

Teaching and assessing writing

## Introduction

Reading skills help people to expand their knowledge and develop their capacity for critical thinking. Consequently, to be able to read and comprehend key concepts of reading texts correctly and effectively is essential for all learners of a language. Reading comprehension is of the utmost importance because it provides the basis for much of the learning in school (Alvermann and Earle, 2003). Therefore, those who master reading skills can achieve their learning goals more effectively and successfully. Researchers have stated that comprehension is a strategy in which readers simultaneously balance new information from the text and connect that with what they already know (Koda, 2005 in Grabe, p.14).

However, learners' reading strategies tend to be limited and they lack clear strategies for pre-, during-, and post-reading phases (Texas Educational Agency, 2002). Not activating prior knowledge or failing to recognise keywords or key information greatly impacts upon students' abilities in identifying information from texts. One factor which has affected students in Thailand has been the rise in multiple-choice tests and questions, which can be answered without having to read or understand the meaning of the text. Such surface-level tasks and their consequences on students' perceptions of reading could explain continuously low achievement in reading comprehension. Therefore, this study was conducted to enhance students' reading comprehension skills as an effective way to support learning outcomes.

## Method

Through reading comprehension, students should obtain information from the written texts that they have read. The study consisted of 38 students (16 years old) in Grade 11 of Saparachinee Trang School. The students were deemed to be good at science and mathematics but not at English.

Their main problem in reading class was that they could not identify key information from the reading texts. I conducted the study based on the Exploratory Action Research procedures, and I started by examining causes of student challenges in reading comprehension. An observation tool, student questionnaire, and teacher reflective journal were used to investigate the four exploratory questions. The first two questions were related to the students' attitudes and the last two were related to my teaching:

1. What different strategies do the students use when they read?
2. What kind of reading texts do the students prefer?
3. What reading strategies do I teach my students?
4. How do I select the reading texts for reading classes?

After the data was collected and analysed, the findings showed that 'skimming' (reading quickly to get a general overview of the text) was a challenge. Similarly, 'scanning' (reading quickly to find specific details or facts) is also an issue addressed in this study.

The overall challenges were as follows:

1. Students had difficulty with the concept of skimming.
2. Students had difficulty selecting keywords from the reading texts.
3. Students could not comprehend the key information of the reading texts in a timely manner.
4. Students could not correctly summarise important information from the reading texts.

Once these findings were identified, an action plan to help promote reading comprehension was carefully

established and implemented. The procedures were as follows:

<p><b>Pre-reading: SIP</b> (Set the purpose / Integrate prior knowledge / Preview the texts and predict)</p>	<p>In order, the students were encouraged to:</p> <p>set the purpose for reading and what they need to be able to understand, know, or do after reading.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• integrate prior knowledge, determining what they already know, and how the texts relate to other subjects or topics.</li> <li>• preview the texts and predict what the main concepts are going to be.</li> </ul>
<p><b>While reading</b></p>	<p>How to effectively skim the texts for the gist was clearly explained and modelled to the students. Then a 'My Keywords Activity' was applied to help them practice, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elicit some words from the students, write them on the board, and explain if they are key words or not; if they are, explain how the words relate to the texts.</li> <li>• Provide the students with post-it notes, ask them to identify other key words, then write them down and stick them up on the board.</li> <li>• In groups, the students rearrange the key words to help get the key concepts of the reading passage.</li> <li>• During the 'scan' process, provide graphic organisers to assist the students with annotation so that they can summarise key information after they finish reading.</li> </ul>
<p><b>After reading</b></p>	<p>Apart from answering questions from the teacher to check student comprehension, the students were guided in summarising information from the text using their keywords and graphic organisers from the while-reading process.</p>

Table 6.1. Activities





**The while-reading section was a lot more active than general reading classes. However, this allowed for peer support, higher engagement levels, purposeful reading, and scaffolding.**

This action plan was implemented twice a week for five weeks. To find out if the plan was effective enough to enhance the students' comprehension skills, two evaluation tools — namely, a peer observation form and questionnaires — were constructed. The peer observer (a teacher colleague) visited classes three times to observe and take notes on teaching and learning, whilst the questionnaire was used at the end of the implementation to investigate the students' feedback on any changes in their skills in comprehending texts regarding the strategies used in the lessons.

## Findings

The main objective of this study was to investigate effective ways to enrich the students' reading comprehension skills. The four key findings from this study were as follows:

### Finding 1

Encouraging the students to set the purpose for reading and integrating their prior knowledge was helpful because it allowed them to predict the concepts of the reading texts. The students seemed to be more prepared for the reading activities that followed. They were able to write down their varying predictions in their notebooks, and then they eagerly engaged in discussions on the possibilities of their predictions, made on the basis of their experiences and background knowledge.

### Finding 2

The 'My Keywords Activity' helped to show the students how to select and connect keywords to be able to grasp the gist of the reading texts when scanning. The students displayed greater confidence in helping to eliminate unimportant words and sharing this information with their classmates. However, some students of low-prior attainment still needed to be closely monitored when they selected keywords, because they generally selected difficult words rather than the keywords that would help them get the gist of the text.

### Finding 3

A graphic organiser provided during the scan process developed the students' skills in identifying key information. The students were able to effectively comprehend and annotate key concepts of reading texts. Most students learned to better control their learning process and take only important information from the reading texts when they completed the concept maps.

### Finding 4

Sequences of selecting keywords, highlighting key information, and annotating texts were prompts that helped the students in developing summarising skills. They could summarise the texts faster and easier, and the students' subsequent written summaries of a text were simpler, clearer, and easier to understand.

There appeared to be a marked improvement in the students' reading comprehension ability; they were better able to comprehend key information and could summarise it effectively. Additionally, the students' responses at the end of the study suggest that the models used strengthened their reading strategies, greatly helping to improve their reading comprehension ability.





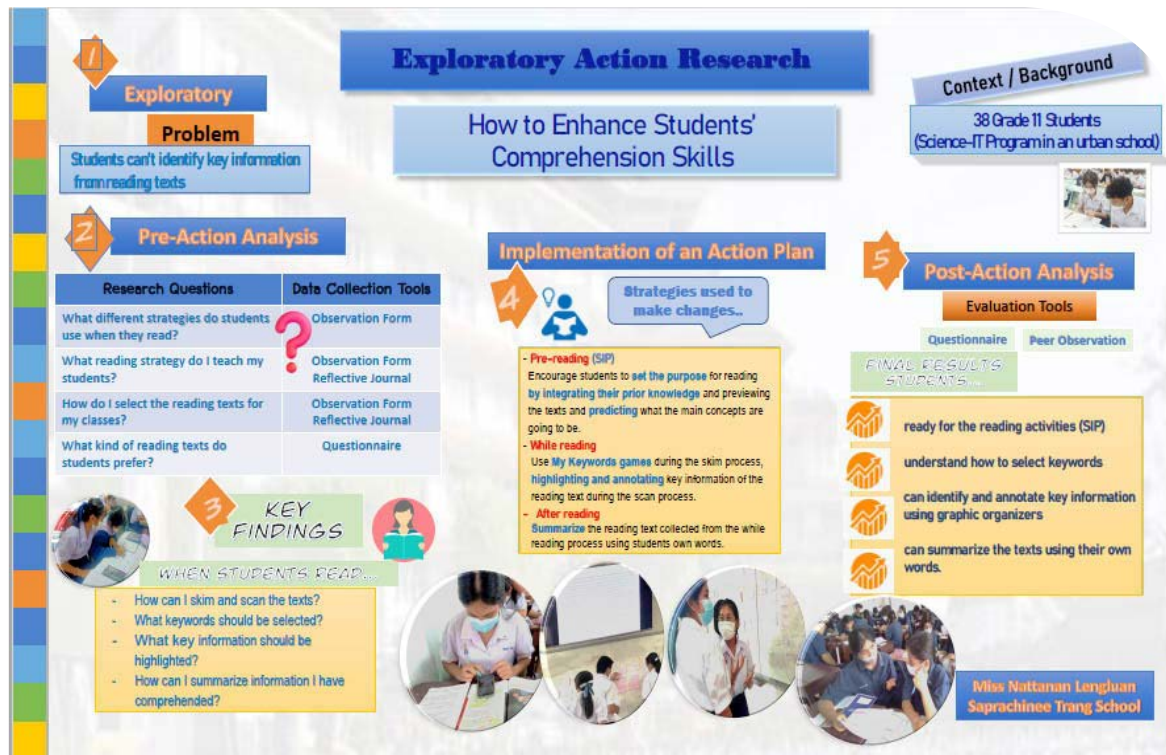


Figure 6.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

Reading comprehension and being able to effectively summarise texts are essential lifelong skills. The pre-while-post reading approach that I employed ensured that the students clearly understood how to engage in effective reading. The pre-reading strategy, SIP (set the purpose / integrate prior knowledge/ preview the texts and predict) activated the students' prior knowledge and allowed them to predict the main concepts of the selection. In addition, the 'My Keywords Activity' was used to help the students to identify important words and information whilst annotating key concepts of the reading text. After reading, the students summarised texts using their keywords and graphic organisers from the while-reading process.

Nevertheless, improvements in summarising were likely partly a result of the students' writing skills rather than solely being a product of this study's reading strategy. Similarly, some students could comprehend information from the reading texts well, yet they could not meaningfully convey what they had read in written form. This may be because in summary writing, paraphrasing successfully is a separate skill and requires specific instruction (Hijikata-Someya et al., 2015), and this was not a feature of this study. Despite this, the steps above were found to have been a positive tool in fostering the students' reading comprehension and they may help to move students away from the multiple-choice question and surface-level approaches. Teachers and test makers should similarly avoid relying on these basic approaches.

## References

- Alvermann, D., & Earle, J. (2003). Comprehension instruction. In A.P. Sweet & C. Snow (Eds.), *Rethinking reading comprehension* (pp. 12–30). New York: Guilford Press.
- Alderson, J.C. (2000). *Assessing reading*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bernhardt, E.B. & Kamil, M.L. (1995). Interpreting relationships between L1 and L2 reading: Consolidating the linguistic threshold and the linguistic interdependence hypotheses. *Applied Linguistics*, 16, 16–34.
- Grabe, W. (2009). *Reading in a second language: Moving from theory to practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoover, W.A. & Tunmer W.E. (1993). The components of reading. In G.B. Thompson, W.E. Tunmer, & T. Nicholson (Eds.), *Reading acquisition processes* (pp. 1–19). Multilingual Matters.
- Hijikata, Y., Yamanishi, H., & Ono, M. (2011). The evaluation of L2 summary writing: Reliability of a holistic rubric. Paper presented at the 10th Symposium on Second Language Writing in 2011. Taipei, Taiwan: Howard International House.
- Texas Educational Agency. (2002). *Comprehension Instruction*, 4-8. Retrieved from [http://www.netxv.net/pm\\_attach/67/TRI-Comprehension\\_Instr.pdf](http://www.netxv.net/pm_attach/67/TRI-Comprehension_Instr.pdf).

# Chapter 7

## How to improve students' speaking skills?

---

Pajonsak Mingsakoon



**Teaching experience**

29 Years

**Area of interest in teaching**

Comprehensive reading, vocabulary meaning in context analysis, grammar and language structure analysis, paragraph writing development and speaking English in specific contexts.

## Introduction

A great number of studies (McKay, 2004; Srisang, 2014; Wanich, 2014) argue that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) (Jenkins, 2000) is on the rise. Darasawang (2007) asserts that the main purpose of learning English is how to use it in staged-goal-oriented situations (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Mingsakoon & Srinon, 2019) including communication, education, business, and tourism.

Regarding the use of English in Thailand, Srisang (2014) highlights that membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an increasingly important factor. It is now a prerequisite that Thai people should be able to use English for communication. For this reason, since 2002 the Ministry of Education has prioritised English language teaching and learning in schools, focusing on communicative medium skills with an emphasis on accuracy and fluency.

Speaking is arguably the most important productive language skill in English. It is taught at schools to empower Thai people's employability, including opportunities to secure good jobs and business negotiations on the international stage (Ur, 1996; Wanich, 2014). Nevertheless, Thai people struggle with speaking English because they rarely use the language day-to-day, and there is interference from Thai as their mother tongue. This largely explains Thai people's lack of self-confidence and shyness when using English for communication.

As such, the purpose of my research was to use Exploratory Action Research (Creswell, 2008) to improve students' speaking skills in the context of ELF at a Thai upper secondary school. English teachers in Thailand are increasingly under pressure to improve their students' speaking competence in order to meet society's purposes and expectations (Teng & Sinwongsawat, 2015). This report aims to explain how ELF Thai upper secondary school students were encouraged to begin to speak English, described in the classroom activities provided in the curriculum and teacher's lesson plan.

## Method

The participants of this study were selected from 267 students in seven classes of Mattayom Suksa 6 (Upper Secondary School-Grade 12) at Hunkhapittayakom Secondary School, Chainat Province, in northern central Thailand. These students were enrolled in the Fundamental English 6 course, in the second semester of academic year 2022. At this point they had been learning English at school for at least 10 years.

There were 25 students in Mattayom Suksa 6 (Grade 12) special class (10 boys and 15 girls, age 17–18) in the programme of Science and Technology. These students devoted two hours per week to this special programme. However, when observing these students' learning behaviours, I deemed that they were very shy and lacked the confidence to speak English, or even to cooperate with the speaking activities the teacher provided to challenge their speaking performance. Therefore, despite a long period of learning English at school, such students were not viewed as being able to use English for communication.

As mentioned above, this study is aimed at investigating teaching strategies that can improve students' speaking skills and help them cope with shyness and lack of confidence in interactions and information exchanges. Thus, my research questions are presented as follows:

- What did students practise before doing the speaking activities?
- How did the students feel when they practised speaking English before doing the speaking tasks?
- What prevented the students from giving their ideas in the discussion task?



The research instruments I used — mainly described in the stages of Exploratory Data Collection and Expanded Action Plan in Action Research (Rebolledo & Bullock, 2020) — consisted of:

#### A. Exploratory Data Collection Stage (EDCS)

- Open-ended questions from a survey to collect students' ideas, feelings, and attitudes towards the first teaching speaking activities organised in the class
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to get the students' opinions about my teaching strategies
- Reflective Writing Journal written by me as the teacher researcher to discover what happened in the classroom in which the students were taught English speaking skills

#### B. Expanded Action Plan Stage (EAPS)

- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to recheck the students' opinions about my teaching strategies and activities organised for speaking practice and performance
- Peer Observation to reflect what the teacher researcher's peer noticed and what he/she thought about the teaching speaking activities organised in the classroom
- Lesson Plan, with pre-while-post teaching English speaking engagement, to recheck which teaching activities or strategies in the action lesson plan encouraged the students to be more confident speaking English



The teaching/learning strategies and main activities relate to pre-while-post teaching speaking activities. Before starting to speak, the students were engaged with both the meaning of the keywords and the structures of modelling sentences. They then performed pronunciation, intonation, and stress practices by listening to the teacher and watching clips from YouTube and shadowing (repeating the content heard). Finally, during the post-speaking activities, the students expressed their ideas through speaking tasks in both pair work and group work. Regarding the teaching/learning strategies, the details of the pre-while-post teaching speaking are described as follows:

- A. Multi-Media Use was implemented when the students were asked to imitate the pronunciation and stress of the keywords and the intonation of sentences when watching internet clips on YouTube or TikTok, and using smart phones with an online dictionary.

- B. Concept-Checking Questions (CCQ) were used in the form of Yes-No questions to check whether the students understood the task clearly.
- C. Word Meaning and Structure Substitution Drills were deployed when the students practised saying the keywords and sentences in context.
- D. Pronunciation Practice of Intonation and Drills was engaged when the students listened to the teacher, repeated after him, and said the missing parts in front of the whole class.
- E. Pair Work and Group Work were organised, in which the students practised saying things related to the tasks and expressed speaking performance in the target task.

Activity Name/Title	Pre-teaching speaking English	While-teaching speaking English	Post-teaching speaking English
Using Social Media	Yes	Yes	No
Concept-Checking Questions	No	Yes	Yes
Word Meaning and Structure	Yes	Yes	No
Pronunciation, Intonation, and Drilling Work with teacher	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pair Work and Group Work	No	Yes	Yes

Table 7.1. List of activities used in teaching speaking English

I collected the data with respect to the two main stages of the research design and tools. To begin with, at the Exploratory Data Collection Stage (EDCS), I analysed the data from both students' and my ideas, feelings, and attitudes towards teaching speaking activities to fundamentally investigate what the authentic problem was when students learned and performed speaking. Additionally, at the Expanded Action Plan Stage (EAPS), I used the information derived from the EDCS to create background problems used when designing teaching speaking lesson plans. After these plans were implemented in the class, I collected and analysed both students' and my peer's opinions about the teaching activities to expound which speaking skills of my students had improved and how.



## Findings

Organising the class with the pre-while-post teaching speaking lesson plan revealed that implementing multimedia, concept-checking questions, demonstration and pronunciation, and intonation practices was beneficial in enhancing the students' speaking abilities at the end of the class. Nevertheless, designing speaking models (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Mingsakoon & Srinon, 2019) for certain speaking situations and applying them with substitution drills and group work organisation would probably encourage students to speak English better in real-life interactions. For this reason, the findings about students' strategies and the teacher's teaching techniques are discussed threefold, as follows.

First, for the vast majority of the participants, employing social media (specifically internet clips on YouTube and TikTok) contributed to their speaking abilities. The students used these media (in conjunction with smart phones with online dictionaries) to study the meaning of words and sentences and to imitate how to pronounce words and phrases. Second, most students agreed that pronunciation, intonation, and accent practice

with repetition after the teacher; and concept-checking questions and substitution drills on sentence structures encouraged them to be more confident to participate in speaking tasks. Lastly, participants also reported that pair work and group work were effective dynamics in teaching speaking activities. Most participants said that word meaning investigation and sentence structure understanding made them more confident before doing the speaking tasks. Substitution drills on sentence structures encouraged them to be more confident before doing the speaking tasks. After employing the action lesson plan, the participants maintained that using several kinds of multimedia enabled them to speak better because they had pre-encountered word meanings and sentence structures. The bar graphs below show the numbers of students for each learning strategy/teaching technique, separated into Focus Group and Peer Observing data.

## No. of students

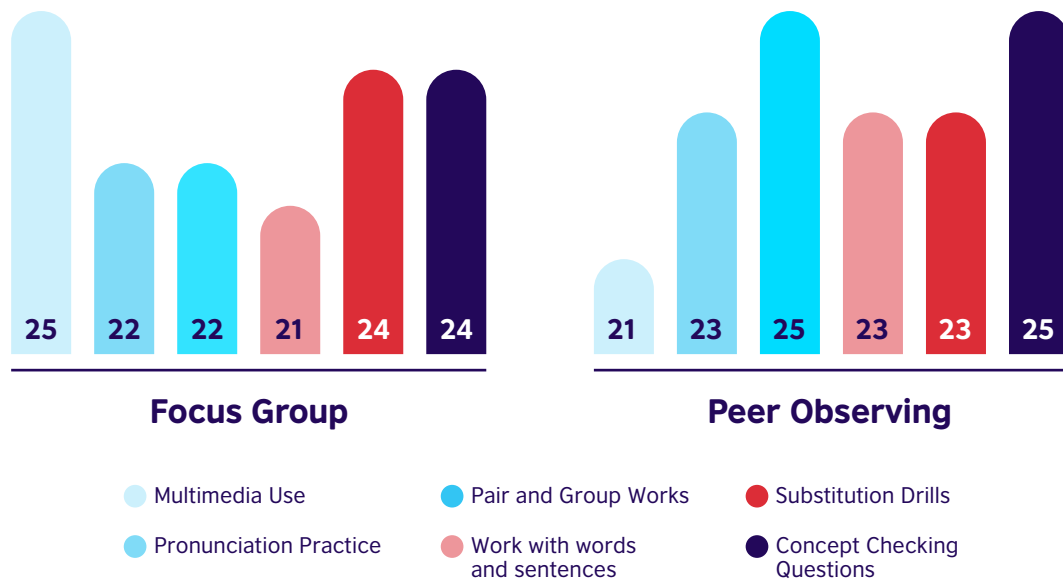


Figure 7.1. Students' Learning Strategies and Teacher's Teaching Techniques

Most of the students reflected that the teacher's use of concept-checking questions helped them to

overcome shyness and become more confident to perform the speaking task.

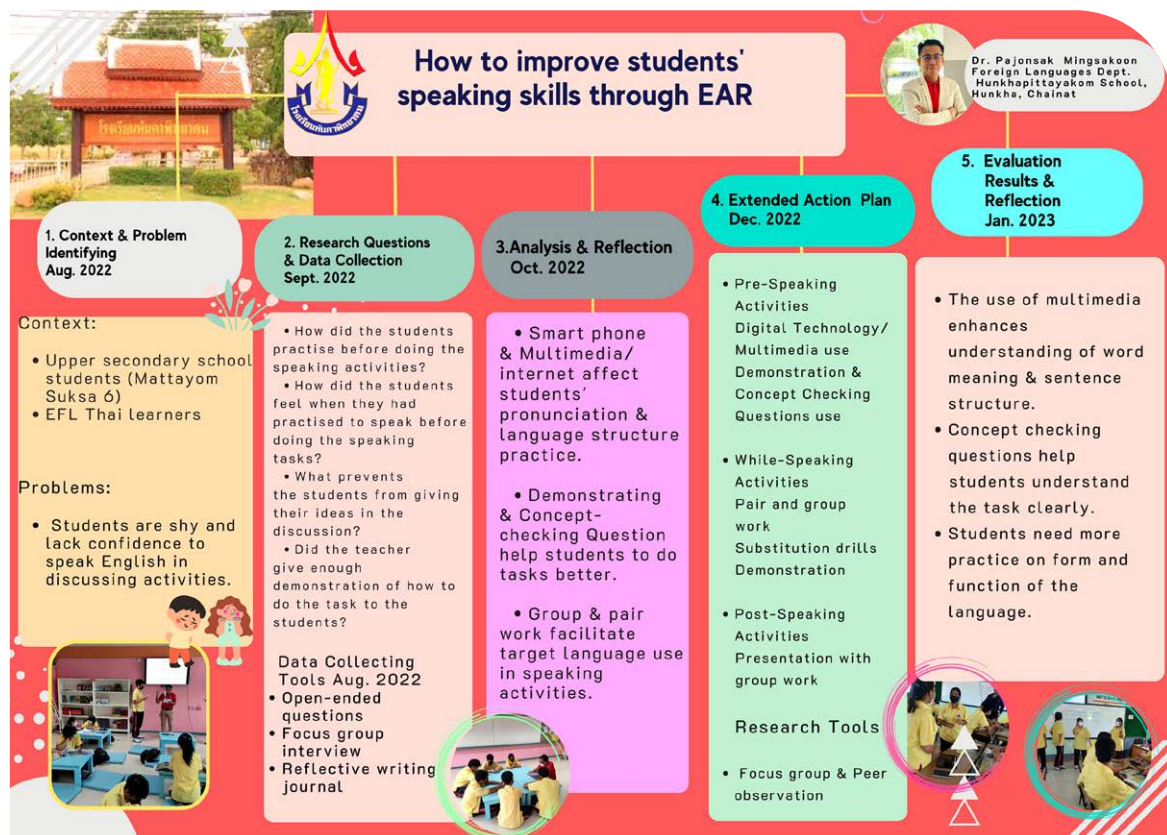


Figure 7.2. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

The pre-while-post teaching speaking activities were applied using a communicative teaching approach because the information exchange and interaction among the participants was promoted while doing the activities provided. Before starting to speak, the students were engaged with both the meaning of the keywords and the structures of the modelling sentences themselves, as well as pronunciation, intonation, and stress practice. At the post-speaking activities stage, the students expressed their ideas through the speaking tasks in both pair work and group work. This implies that the use of multimedia before speaking activities helped the students gain a better understanding of word meaning and sentence structure. Likewise, they needed more practice so that they could use those words and sentence structures in different circumstances. Nevertheless, the students still struggled to use the target language in some activities.

To sum up, the class with social media use for background practising of vocabulary, sentence structure, and language functions was very useful because it enabled the students to gain a better understanding of word meaning and sentence structure. Substitution drills together with pair and group work seemed essential to students' willingness before starting to say things in English. To extend the research, a possible idea is to allow students to work in their own groups independently by observing them from a distance and assisting them only when they encounter problems. Doing so might encourage them to perform more speaking in the target task. Designing speaking models (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Mingsakoon & Srinon, 2019) in some speaking situations and then applying them with substitution drills and group work organisation would probably lead students to be more confident when exposed to speaking interactions in their daily life in the future.

## References

- Creswell, J. (2008). *Research Designs: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage.
- Darasawang, P. (2007). English language teaching and education in Thailand: A decade of change. In N. D. Prescott (Eds.), *English in Southeast Asia: Varieties, literacies and literatures* (pp. 187–204). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Halliday, M.A.K. & Matthiessen, C.M.I.M. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed.). London: Hodder Arnold.
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an international language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McKay, S.L. (2004). Teaching English as an international language: The role of culture in Asian contexts. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 1(1).
- Mingsakoon, P. & Srinon, U. (2019). Development of secondary school students' generic structure execution in personal experience recount writing text through SFL genre-based approach. *Advance in Language and Literary Studies*, 9(6). 112–119.
- Ministry of Education. (2002). *The basic education core curriculum 2002*. Bangkok: Kurusapa Ladprao Publishing.
- Rebolledo, P. & Bullock, D. (Eds.). (2020). *Champion Teachers Mexico II: Story of Exploratory Action Research*. London: British Council.
- Srisang, T. (2014). *Problem for Thai university English major students when speaking English* (master's thesis). Thammasat University.
- Teng, B. & Sinwongsuwat, K. (2015). Teaching and learning English in Thailand and the integration of Conversation Analysis (CA) into the classroom. *English Language Teaching*, 8(3), 13–23.
- Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching: practice and theory*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Wanich, W. (2014). The relationship between the CLT approach and Thai EFL students' attitudes and motivation in leaning speaking. *Language Education and Acquisition Research Network Journal*, 7(1), 106–124.



# Chapter 8

## How to encourage the writing of varied sentence structures in writing tasks?

---

Nuananong Mookkhuntod





**Teaching experience**  
9 Years

**Area of interest in teaching**  
Grammar, Reading and Writing

## Introduction

As the researcher in this project, I teach a 'fundamentals of writing' course to Grade 12 students (18 years old) in a large secondary school in Nonthaburi, Thailand. This school has more than 2,400 students and an average class size of 40. My class comprises students with mixed abilities. The classrooms are well equipped with overhead projectors, audio systems, an internet connection, and interactive boards.

In this course, students were able to write a complete sentence and a paragraph. However, I noticed that writing a variety of sentences — simple, compound, and complex sentences — can be a challenging task for many students. They are unable to formulate longer sentences, and these lack subjects, objects, and/or conjunctions (for instance), even though they have learned sentence writing for many years. This exploratory action research aimed to identify effective teaching strategies and techniques that can help students improve their writing skills as beginners.

## Method

I formulated four questions for the exploratory phase of my investigation:

1. How do I teach writing three types of sentences?
2. What do the students like and dislike about sentence-writing activities?
3. What challenges do the students face when doing sentence-writing activities?
4. How do other subject teachers check students' writing tasks and give them feedback?

To find out what happened in a writing class, I started with peer observations. My colleague was asked to observe my teaching of writing and focus on types of sentences, teaching steps, and students' behaviour. The guideline for observation was set, including five relevant questions:

1. How is each type of sentence structure presented?
2. How is the teacher present in the teaching steps (pre, while, and post)?
3. Can the students differentiate between independent and dependent clauses?
4. How does the teacher present the key elements (subject, verb, object) with examples?
5. What are the conjunctions and usage being presented?

To find out what students found difficult or easy during the writing class, I arranged two 30-minute focus groups, each with seven students. I asked the following questions:

1. What do you like and dislike about the sentence-writing activity and why?  
For example, rearranging words, writing a short diary, filling in the story, or choosing words at random and making sentences from them?
2. How do you feel when doing [activity name] and why?
3. Do you find it difficult to do the sentence-writing activity? Please explain.
4. What kind of support do you need?
5. What do you think about the way I teach different types of sentences?



I set up another interview with other language teachers of different subjects, namely English, French, and Thai. I asked them to share their approaches to giving students’ feedback through the following questions:

- 1. How do you correct the students’ homework?
- 2. How do you give feedback to the students? Please explain. For example, discussing in person, sending email, note-taking.
- 3. What are the students’ responses after giving them feedback?

Colleagues who observed my teaching reported that I provided sentence structures with conjunctions, gave students examples, and modelled how to achieve the tasks. Students practised writing sentences with a variety of activities on a worksheet. The language teachers, as observers, explained that presenting the rubrics before giving the assignments was helpful. They checked students’ tasks and gave feedback by taking notes, talking in person, and scoring. Students then resubmitted their papers again after the first check.

From this input, I found that students preferred sentence-writing activities that are easy to do. However, they did not go beyond sentence writing — such as writing a story — because they lack vocabulary, grammar, and ideation. I also discovered that students struggled with sentence-writing tasks because they are afraid of making mistakes. Unexpectedly, the students’ inability to write certain types of sentences was not down to sentence structure. Instead, students have difficulties writing because they lack language and ideas, and they are also afraid of writing incorrect sentences. Even though they were provided with examples, easy activities, feedback, and extra points, they needed more language support, such as with vocabulary and ideation.

To improve student outcomes in language and ideation, and to improve students’ confidence in writing, I implemented sentence writing teaching steps in a three-week action plan. This plan is summarised in Table 8.1.

Pre-writing	While-writing	Post-writing
<p>I began the lesson by instructing the students to watch a movie segment intended to catch their interest and foster their creativity.</p> <p>The students were asked a few Wh-questions to help ideas flow: who, what, where, when, why, and how.</p> <p>I then listed words and phrases related to the movie or to students’ answers.</p>	<p>I presented types of sentences using basic conjunctions and highlighted the key elements and structure.</p> <p>I used the words and phrases from the pre-writing task and told the students to write full sentences of each type.</p> <p>I then asked the students to complete a writing task, namely, semi-controlled writing, using six words and a given topic.</p>	<p>I concluded the class by asking the students to get into pairs and check their work together. The students then submitted their work to me for correction and scoring.</p>

Table 8.1. Sentence Writing Teaching Steps

At the end of the class, I checked the students' sentence tasks by talking to them in person and giving feedback.

I formed two 30-minute focus groups, each with seven students, and the students asked each other the following questions:

1. How did watching movie segments help you to enhance your creativity and interest in writing?
2. How useful did you find using wh- questions in the pre-writing stage?
3. Was the introduction of the key elements and structure of each type of sentence helpful? In what way?
4. How helpful was the filling-in-the-blanks activity to help you write?
5. How did you feel when writing full sentences of each sentence type in the while-writing stage? Did it help your writing?
6. At which stage of writing did you require support from the teacher to improve writing sentences?
7. How useful was the sentence-writing task in building your writing confidence? Why?
8. How effective was getting into pairs and checking the writing task together?
9. How did you feel when the teacher provided feedback on a sentence-writing task?



I also used a writing task rubric to assess the students' writing, in which I assigned the following elements a score from 1 (lowest) to 3 (highest): sentence structure, vocabulary use, punctuation and capitalisation, and spelling. The criteria can be seen in Table 8.2.

Topics	1	2	3
<b>Sentence structure</b>	Incomplete sentences; three or more fragments or run-ons	Incomplete sentences; three or more fragments or run-ons	Incomplete sentences; three or more fragments or run-ons
<b>Vocabulary use</b>	Vocabulary and conjunctions used incorrectly in at least three sentences	Vocabulary and conjunctions used incorrectly in at least three sentences	Vocabulary and conjunctions used incorrectly in at least three sentences
<b>Punctuation and capitalisation</b>	Three or more punctuation and capital letter errors	Three or more punctuation and capital letter errors	Three or more punctuation and capital letter errors
<b>Spelling</b>	Three or more spelling errors	Three or more spelling errors	Three or more spelling errors

Table 8.2. Writing Task Rubric

The scores were converted to give the rank of 'Advanced' to students with a score between 10 and 12, 'Intermediate' for scores between 7 and 9, and 'Beginner' for scores between 4 and 6.

## Findings

1. The students were able to write different types of sentences after the introduction of the key elements and structure of each type and in a controlled practice task. Although some students had a few grammatical errors and misspellings, most used the basic conjunctions in compound and complex sentences correctly. With words provided and the wh- questions technique, the students slightly improved their writing because they knew what to write. While correcting students' answers, I realised that providing a model helped to scaffold their writing skills. In the focus group discussion, students revealed that the movie segment they watched at the beginning of the lesson did not help them much in writing because they preferred sharing such ideas orally.
2. In the focus group discussion, an important finding was that students stated that teachers usually focus on giving scores in their writing tasks, but the students preferred receiving written feedback on how their writing can improve. They want their teachers to comment on their writing with some actionable and positive feedback. Interestingly, most students seemed to feel more confident in writing sentences after receiving feedback from the teacher in person because they could correct their mistakes immediately and resubmit their work. Another very important finding was that some students are concerned about peer checking, because sometimes their friends cannot point out the errors.

**A point worth mentioning is that some students tried to translate Thai to English using Google Translate. I suggested that they not do this and gave students an online dictionary website or application instead.**





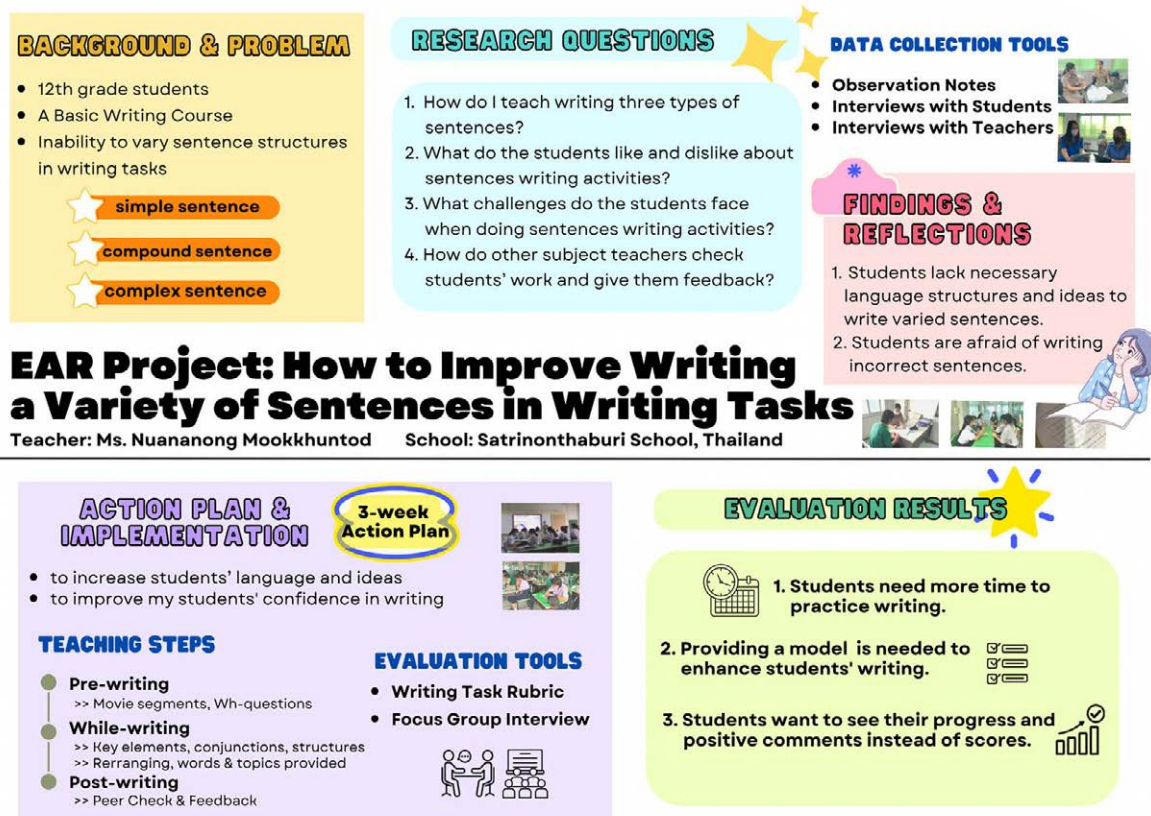


Figure 8.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

The points identified in the research experience include the importance of giving students more time and opportunities to practise writing, providing them with models and a scaffold to start developing their writing skills, and giving constructive feedback and positive comments rather than just scores. This is because students need to better understand how to make progress, which in turn makes them more effective writers. These are essential considerations to be able to improve the writing skills of beginners.

Compared with Chang's study on peer review in L2 writing classrooms (Chang, 2016), my study instead highlights the teacher's role in providing feedback (although there were some similarities in terms of the goal of improving writing quality through feedback). I argue that students show greater improvements in draft quality when they receive feedback from their teacher rather than from their peers. This suggests that while peer feedback can be valuable, it may not be as effective as teacher feedback because some students are concerned or sceptical about peer commentary, which is often vague. In this study, rubrics were prioritised as guidelines, so as to help students become more independent and aware of writing criteria. This is a useful tool that can help students understand what is expected of them and how to make progress in improving their writing.

## References

Chang, C.Y.H. (2016). Two decades of research in L2 peer review. *Journal of Writing Research*, 8 (1), 81–117.



# Chapter 9

## How to improve students' pronunciation skills?

—  
Pheerapol Muprasert



**Teaching experience**  
10 Years

**Area of interest in teaching**  
Pronunciation Teaching

## Introduction

I teach English students in Grades 4 to 6 (10–12 years old) in a primary school in Wat Pho-Jae School, a rural school in Samut Sakhon Province, Thailand. There are on average 30 students in each class. Although some of them come from other provinces, most of them live in Samut Sakhon. The students are well-behaved, respectful, and friendly, and they try their best to complete the tasks they are given. However, the students find it difficult to learn and correctly pronounce the letters of the English alphabet.

This research was designed to help the students in bettering their English pronunciation. The students had difficulty in pronouncing accurate English sounds due to interference from their mother tongue and the complex spelling system of English. Communicating in English with standard pronunciation is important because non-standard pronunciation can lead to breakdowns in understanding. This study focused on minimal pairs, e.g. /t/ and /d/ for chair and share. It also looked at final consonants, e.g. 'bus' and 'with'. It also included other interesting aspects, i.e. initial consonants, short and long monophthong vowels, diphthong vowels, clusters, and blended sounds, which are all important features.

The students were taught how to pronounce the letters of the alphabet correctly, including sound blending. My research findings suggest that the actions taken were generally successful. The students were better able to match the letters of the alphabet with their corresponding sounds more accurately than they had done before.

## Method

As the researcher, I formulated five questions for the exploratory phase of the investigation:

1. What do the students think about pronouncing English letters/sounds accurately?
2. How do the students pronounce English letters/sounds after I teach them?
3. How do the students review to practise English alphabetic pronunciations after the class?
4. How do I demonstrate how to pronounce English letters/sounds?
5. What activities do I use in the class to help the students to pronounce English letters/sounds accurately?

To collect information from my students, I created a focus group schedule which consisted of nine open-ended questions. To find out what the students found difficult or easy during a pronunciation lesson, I arranged four 40-minute focus groups, each with 3–4 students. I asked them how they felt about the instructions, the lessons, the activities used in the class, and what problems occurred. These questions also asked students about their attitudes, confidence levels, achievement levels, and out of school activities in relation to pronunciation activities. However, the students' responses were quite alarming. They spoke up and stated that they viewed English pronunciation as being so difficult that they felt unable to learn and correctly pronounce any English sounds confidently. Moreover, they felt unable to pronounce characters from the English alphabet because they found it difficult to associate the letters with their corresponding sounds. Lastly, because they had just started to learn English formally from Grade 4, they lacked the belief that they could achieve anything of importance.



I invited fellow teachers to observe my classes, as per the task for colleagues in Table 9.1 below. The eight questions focused on my activity in relation

to creating positive conditions for learning about pronunciation.

Observation Criteria	What happened
<div>1. How does the teacher provide instructions for pronouncing English letters/sounds during an activity?</div> <div>2. How does the teacher demonstrate pronunciation of English letters/sounds? For instance, using the mouth, lips, and tongue.</div> <div>3. How often does the teacher encourage peer support activities to enhance students' pronouncing English letters/sounds with confidence?</div> <div>4. How does the teacher monitor student engagement in the preparation and delivery of pronouncing English letters during an activity/task?</div> <div>5. How does the teacher encourage students to practise unfamiliar English letters/sounds accurately?</div> <div>6. How does the use of a dictionary in the class enable students to become aware of the phonetic transcription of a word?</div> <div>7. What kind of websites/mobile apps are used by the teacher to improve students' pronouncing of English letters/sounds?</div> <div>8. What kind of opportunities are given by the teacher to practise pronouncing English letters/sounds (such as recording oneself, reading aloud)?</div>	

Table 9.1. Observation Schedule

The observation confirmed that students found it difficult to learn and correctly pronounce letters from the English alphabet. It showed that this was not because of a lack of attention and participation in class. Nevertheless, the students were still unable to pronounce the English letters correctly, even though I had engaged them in a variety of pronunciation activities. I reflected on both the student and teacher feedback by asking, ‘How can I teach the students to know how to pronounce English sounds accurately?’

My actions to remedy the situation began with teaching pronunciation more systematically. This involved:

- Teaching pronunciation became a part of every class and was used as a warm-up activity in the 10–15 minutes before I began teaching.
- Using flash cards with minimal pairs to differentiate between letters (such as /l/ and /r/ alive and arrive and also /t/ and /j/ chair and share).



- Teaching pupils how to pronounce specific alphabet letters by modelling with a focus on lips, mouth, and breathing.
- Asking students to shadow and mimic as much as they could.
- Introducing students to important features such as final consonants, which pose a particular problem for Thai learners, e.g. ‘bus’ and ‘with’.
- Addressing initial consonants, short and long monophthong vowels, diphthong vowels, clusters, and blended sounds.

## Findings

My research findings show that the action research had a positive impact. From analysis of pronunciation alphabet worksheets, and records made in my reflective journal and by my peer observations, I found that two-thirds of the class could identify the sounds of the alphabet. Importantly, this also happened when the letters were jumbled up. This strongly suggests that the students had truly learned the sounds (instead of memorising them). Importantly, almost all of the students (93%) reported higher levels of satisfaction and belief after more explicit instruction. For instance, when I wrote the English alphabet on the whiteboard during my teaching time, my students were able to identify the letters and pronounce the sounds more accurately. Moreover, according to the focus group feedback, they stated that they are more confident

when pronouncing the sounds of the letters because their awareness and knowledge has become more secure through greater teacher support.

**Another important point is the value of a reflective research journal. This helped me capture my thoughts, impressions, and observations. The content included observations of which students knew how to use their lips, mouth, and tongue, and how to breathe during articulating the sounds of the English alphabet.**

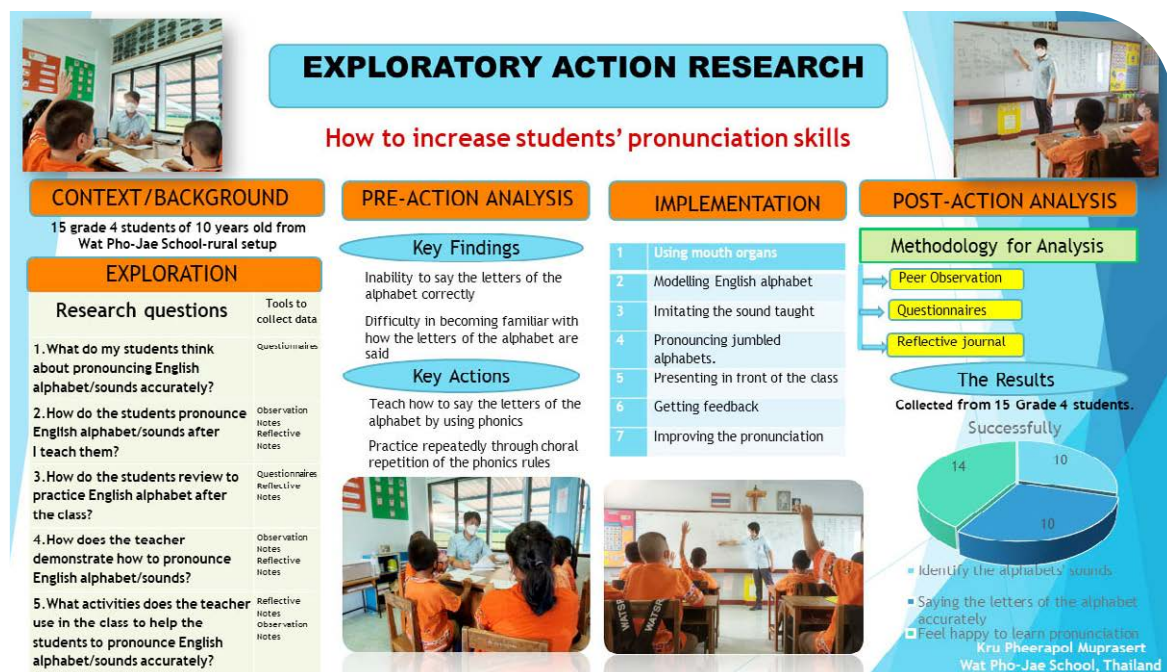


Figure 9.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

This research project has provided many valuable lessons. It is easy to forget that students, like teachers, are human beings with opinions and feelings. Instead of speculating about what is going on, it is better to ask students directly and find out. If there is a problem, it is natural for a teacher to question the content or activities that are used. The needs and interests of the students must come first. I am a firm believer that all students can learn,

regardless of where they come from, how they grew up, or what grade they are in. If we know what is causing the problem, we can concentrate on that.

As a result, the benefits go not only to students in helping them to improve their English pronunciation, but also to their teachers in allowing them to adjust their lesson plans. This action plan not only helps students to considerably improve their pronunciation, it also helps the teacher to better understand how to teach pronunciation to students in the right way.



# Chapter 10

## Improving students critical thinking skills through the use of the QARED model

---

Tharach Puttarak



<b>Teaching experience</b> 14 Years	<b>Area of interest in teaching</b> Speaking, Listening, Grammar and Teaching Evaluation
--	--

## Introduction

Bunyawat Witthayalai School is located in Lampang, in the northern part of Thailand. One of the many goals of the school is to promote students to have 21st century skills, specifically critical thinking and problem-solving skills. My study refers to the class 'English for Presentations' and attempts to blend critical thinking skills with giving presentations and develop critical presentation skills. In classes with oral presentations, students are expected to present information critically. However, when students present information, they do not display the ability to think critically about a topic or supporting information. For instance, students might copy and paste from the internet without engaging in any thinking. Another issue is that students provide very broad information lacking in detail or specifics. Students may also include irrelevant information or details when presenting on a topic. These observations from my teaching suggest that students do not display criticality when they search for, select, and present information. These issues are increasingly important to the education of upper secondary school students in Thailand. As the nation moves towards its goal of a competency-based curriculum by 2024, active learning is gaining more attention. In fact, because one of the six core areas of the competency-based curriculum is higher-order thinking skills (Equitable Education Fund, 2021, p.21), this study is extremely timely for curriculum development.

## Method

The study included 43 students from Grade 12 (typically 17 years of age) who were in the Science, Mathematics, and English programmes. The 'task-teach-task' approach was used to identify issues particular to the cohort of students in my class currently. In this approach, students were first asked to present without direction or influence from the teacher. This allowed me to observe and then tailor the 'teach' phase to the immediate needs of these students (as opposed to using approaches created for students of previous years). The second 'task' allowed students a second chance to re-do their presentation and hopefully improve following input.

The topic assigned to students in both tasks was 'the medicinal benefits of perilla seeds'. The students were instructed to cover or include the three following areas in their presentations:

- WHAT benefits perilla seeds provide.
- HOW these benefits work.
- WHY they think these benefits can be trusted.

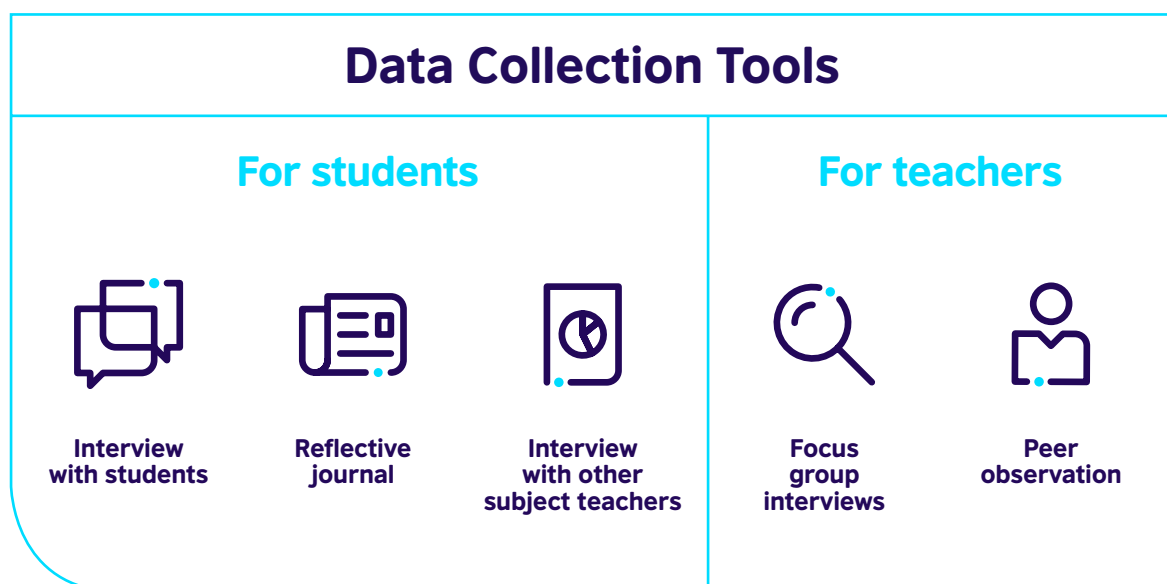


Figure 10.1. Data Collection Tools

In the first 'task', I found that while students could assert their main point or main line of enquiry, none of them displayed adequate reasoning or evidence in their presentations. As discussed in the introduction, the issue was that students presented

broad information without any explanation, included irrelevant information, and/or copied and pasted whatever they found without analysing the information.

To help the students stay focused, I developed a critical thinking model called ‘QAREP’. QAREP is based on Cottrell (2014)’s critical thinking skills as the stages or steps students should follow to complete the objectives and outcomes successfully. Table 10.1 below gives an overview of the QAREP steps and

what each letter represents. As can be seen in the table, the main assessment, in accordance with Cottrell, is in the A, R, and E steps. These are the most visible stages for an audience and provide most of the evidence base of whether or not students displayed criticality.

Letter	Stands for	Description of what students should do
Q	Question	Students should engage in questioning by asking ‘What do I want to know’.
A	Assertion	Students should assert their chosen main point/line of enquiry.
R	Reasons	Students should engage in reasoning by providing arguments or ideas.
E	Evidence	Students should provide evidence for their reasoning (data, statistics, and facts).
P	Presentation	Students deliver a presentation containing A, R, and E.

Table 10.1. QAREP Model





Although A, R, and E contain most of the students' preparation work, the presentation (P) is very important because it allows for peer review. The audience — fellow students — pay close attention to the A, R, and E steps to gauge whether the presenter has made a strong enough case.

The six-step sequence of activities I used to employ the QAREP model is described in Table 10.2.. This table displays the events in order and acted as a lesson plan.

Actions taken by the teacher	Actions taken by students
The teacher applies a 'task-teach-task' model by asking students to present without any specific input from the teacher. The teacher evaluates their unaided performance during their presentations.	Students research, prepare, and present.
The teacher asks students to brainstorm about critical thinking, criticality, and what elements might be included in critical thinking presentations.	Students discuss and share their ideas.
The teacher provides examples of QAREP, especially A, R, and E (Table 10.1) through videos of desirable presentations which are models.	Students reflect on the content of the presentation videos.
The teacher presents on what Q, A, R, E, P is through student activities (e.g. worksheets).	The students learn from the teacher and complete activities to reinforce understanding.
The teacher asks students to re-do the presentation (i.e. task-teach-task).	The students present on the same information as in step 1.
The teacher evaluates the students' presentations on the basis of A, R, and E (Table 10.1).	The students incorporate feedback by editing their presentations.

Table 10.2. Activities Undertaken to Enhance Criticality in Presentations



## Findings

The 42 students who did their initial presentation (task-teach-task) failed to display any ability to provide reasoning or evidence. However, when engaged in their second try of the same presentation (task-teach-task), their performances improved without exception. For example, in the first round of presentations, one student asserted their line of argument, as follows:

### Assert

'Perilla seeds can prevent depressive disorder'.

However, this claim lacked any development. Nevertheless, after the QAREP model was introduced and the activities (Table 10.2) completed, the student could expand and develop through reasoning:

### Reason

'The reason is because perilla seeds are rich in Omega-3 and Apigenin. Omega-3 contains Docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA) and Eicosapentaenoic Acid (EPA).'

Furthermore, the student could provide some evidence to support their claim:

### Evidence

'Chinese researchers from Guizhou University found that the essential oil from perilla seeds can reduce depression symptoms in rats'.

**Thus, after being introduced to the QAREP model, engaging in activities such as watching examples of presentations, and being given a second chance, all students displayed the ability to reason and provide evidence.**



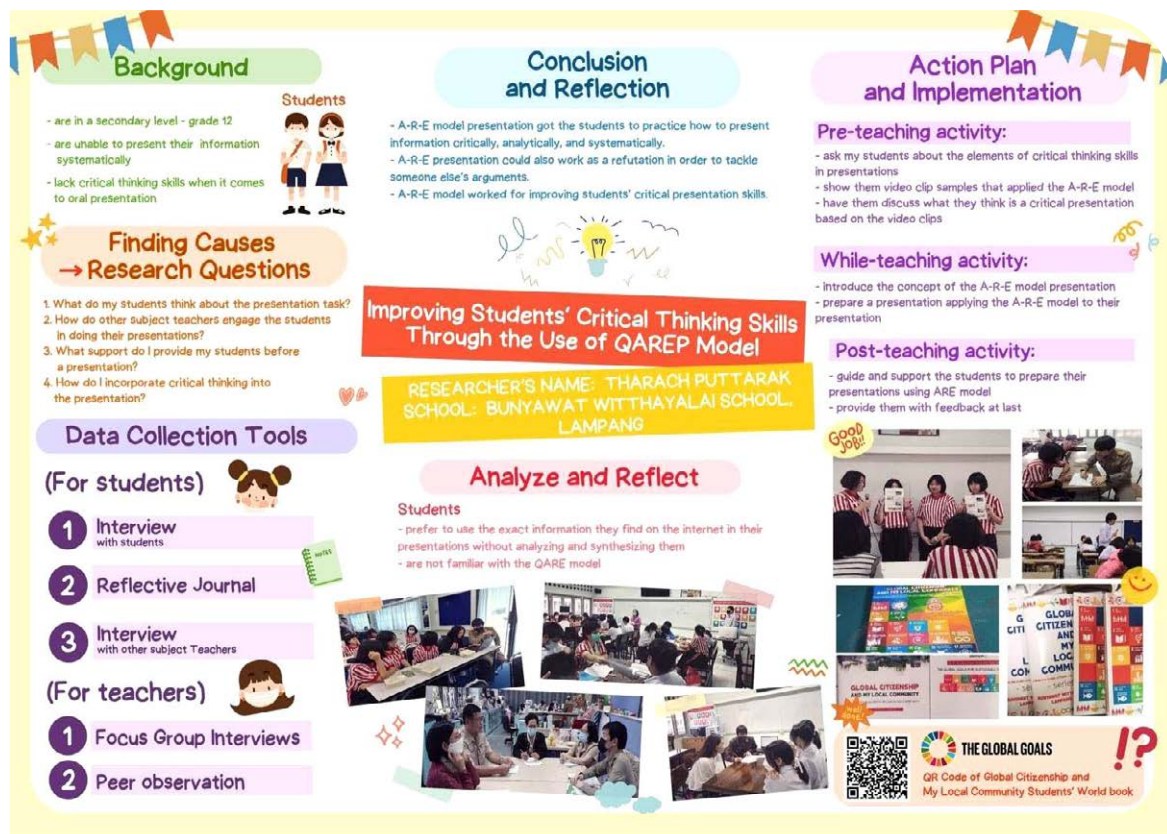


Figure 10.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

Interestingly, the last step in the QAREP model, Presentation 'P', was found to be extremely important for the students. Because they listened to their friends' presentations, and questioned, commented, and — importantly — made a decision about whether or not to believe their friends' information, they seemed to become more critically aware. For instance, when presenters (their friends) covered or addressed the steps in the model successfully, the audience did not have many questions to ask. This reinforced the idea in students' minds that the information was generally more trustworthy and credible. Nonetheless, if the audience questioned or highlighted any issues, this signalled to others that there may be some reason to question the credibility or trustworthiness of the information. Lastly, a very interesting point was that in my QAREP model, the Q was also found to be influential. Students not only used Q when starting their own presentations, but also used it when listening to those of their friends.

In conclusion, the steps taken in the QAREP model appeared to improve students' criticality. The task-teach-task approach also appeared to have an effect on the improvement. Even though students improved their critical thinking presentation skills, it took a long time for them to understand how to present their information in the A, R, and E pattern because they were extremely unfamiliar with this requirement or need. If critical thinking is to be improved among Grade 12 students, it will require additional time for teachers as well as space on the syllabus.

## References

Cottrell, S. (2014). *Critical Thinking Skills: Developing effective analysis and argument*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Equitable Education Fund (EEF) (2021) *Teachers and Equitable Education*.

# Chapter 11

## Perceptions of students and issues in teaching and learning writing

---

Anuchit Tharamanit





**Teaching experience**  
27 Years

**Area of interest in teaching**  
Grammar and writing teaching

## Introduction

Grammar plays a vital role in second language acquisition (SLA) and contributes to students' learning of four skills of English, namely speaking, reading, writing and listening. Teaching English by integrating grammar into writing is therefore an area worthy of investigation. In addition, because Year 12 students (between the ages of 17 and 18) often need to use English writing skills at university, grammatical accuracy is an important pursuit. It helps students convey their meaning appropriately and this was one of the main drivers behind my decision to investigate grammatical competence in upper secondary students. Task-based language teaching and GPAS 5 Step (Gathering, Processing, Applying 1, Applying 2, Self-regulating) were used in the study in order to get students engaged in collaborative writing group work. This underpinned the exploratory action research approach.

## Context (School and Learners)

In academic year 2022, 375 Year 12 students of Takpittayakhom School in Tak Province, Thailand took part in this study. They were in science-math, and art-math programmes and had enrolled in the Fundamental English course. These students tend to make grammatical mistakes and produce confusing sentences. These sentences often lack a subject and a predicate, therefore appearing fragmented. The students' ideas are advanced and appropriate; however, their usage is often grammatically incorrect. The exploratory questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do I teach my students the process of writing?
2. What kinds of common grammar mistakes do my students make?
3. What do my students find difficult about doing a free writing task?
4. What do the students like or dislike about writing task types (e.g. cover letters and recipes)?

## Method

The preliminary investigation was implemented by using three data collection tools: 1) video recordings, 2) attitude questionnaires, and 3) observation forms.

A questionnaire was administered to Year 12 students in the first semester of academic year 2022 to gauge the attitudes towards teaching and learning writing among Thai upper secondary level students, and how they feel about the class. The attitude questionnaire was divided into three aspects: 1) students' perceptions of teaching and learning writing, 2) issues in teaching and learning writing, and 3) open-ended questions responding to teaching and learning writing.

The findings from this initial stage revealed that it is challenging for students to think in Thai but write in English. Mainly, students experience high levels of uncertainty when they embark on beginning, outlining, and drafting their writing. They believe that their knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is too limited, and the time needed to work out whether their word choice is appropriate for their intended meaning increases foreign language anxiety levels. In descending order, the main difficulties students encountered when writing were grammar (83.33%), vocabulary (64.58%), and word choice (18.75%). The strongest preference was for the teacher to correct their writing and give them some feedback. Overall, students reportedly like the process of writing and the ways the teacher can help them to refine their task. However, their main dislike about writing tasks was that writing requires grammatical competence and they dislike grammar.



In the implementation phase, students were asked to produce written English within the topic of ‘food’, because this is an accessible and relevant area for students. First, students were asked to write out instructions for how to prepare a certain dish (this was linked to a module called ‘Good Food for All’). Here, grammatical accuracy is necessary in that the students need to clarify points in a process. For example, using subordinating conjunctions — such as after, as soon as, and before — is essential to connect sentences. This task also elicits use

of the the imperative, passive structures and the past participle. In task-based language teaching, it is important to create meaningful tasks, and this was judged to fit this criterion. Another task was to write a cover letter (this was linked to a module called ‘Education and Future Career’). This elicited the use of tenses — for example, present perfect and past simple to communicate the students’ previous work experience; and present simple to convey their personal attributes. The details for this task are provided below:

Task Details	
<p><b>Instructions:</b> Read the job advertisement given below and write a job application letter using simple, compound, and complex sentences (100–150 words).</p> <p><b>Situation:</b> You saw this advertisement for a job from the Nation last week. Write a letter applying for the job (100–150 words).</p>	<p><b>Urgently Needed Waiter/Waitress</b></p> <p>A new Japanese restaurant called The Subaru is looking for young and friendly part-time staff who are Thai and between 17 and 25 years old. Pay and duties will be based on experience and ability. If interested, please email Mr. Taka Kawamura at kawamura@thesubaru.com</p>

Table 11.1. Task Details

Classroom Activities Action Plan		
Pre-writing stage	While-writing stage	Post-writing stage
<p>Students looked at pictures and the teacher researcher tried to elicit the words relating to the pictures. For example, pictures relating to cooking verbs and cooking utensils were shown, and students were encouraged to produce the correct terms, meanings, and spellings together.</p>	<p>Students were asked to underline the target vocabulary. They were asked the meanings of these words, the corresponding parts of speech, and how accessing an online dictionary* can help them to understand the writing task.</p> <p>Students were asked to focus on sentence structures and explain how the sentences are formed. The students did controlled practice (e.g. completing a passage using given words) and semi-controlled practice (e.g. rearranging jumbled words to write a correct sentence). Students were grouped and they planned how to write according to the topic given and by using the target vocabulary and grammar they had learned.</p> <p>Lastly, students wrote their own first draft and submitted it to the teacher for corrective feedback.</p> <p>*<a href="https://dictionary.cambridge.org/">https://dictionary.cambridge.org/</a></p>	<p>I asked my students to write simple, conversational-type questions with a template in which the students had to fill in the vocabulary they had explored deeply and had learned. The students undertook a practice conversation with their partner; this led to output through a speaking activity in front of the class (with scripts allowed to help students with learning loss (which was a result of school closures and the switch to online delivery caused by the recent COVID-19 pandemic) to feel less anxiety or stress).</p> <p>I also provided the students with a matching type test, wherein they read the definition and matched it with the vocabulary using contextual clues.</p> <p>Lastly, I conducted an informal check whilst summarising the lesson and gave short feedback.</p>

Table 11.2. Classroom Activities Action Plan



Figure 11.1. Pre-While-Post Stages

During the pre-, while-, and post-writing stages, data was collected to evaluate the effectiveness or drawbacks of the student activity. This can be seen in Table 11.3.

November to December 2022		
Pre-writing stage	While-writing stage	Post-writing stage
<p>Before the pre-writing stage, a peer conference between the researcher and observers (both Thai and foreign teachers teaching English) was held. The researcher made an appointment with observers and explained the components of the observation form.</p> <p>The plan for gathering data began in the second semester of academic year 2022. The action plan was evaluated by analysing students' writing tasks and peer observation. In addition, the classroom observation was conducted twice (November to December).</p>	<p>In the while-writing stage, observation forms were used by two observers. They observed the teaching and jotted the information down on the provided observation forms. The Year 12 students were taught by the researcher at the regular class time. The peer observation was carried out in class from November to December during the second and the fourth weeks of the month.</p>	<p>In the post-writing stage, the scoring rubric for writing tasks was used.</p> <p>After completion of all the learning activities, teacher correction was carried out by collecting the students' writing during the action plan. When checking the task, the researcher paid attention to the target grammar and vocabulary learned in class. The researcher utilised direct corrective written feedback. The students checked the teacher's corrections and noticed what kinds of mistakes had been made. The researcher asked the students to get into groups and hold peer conferences to help polish their writing.</p>

Table 11.3. Data Collection Tools and Procedures

## Findings

This study found that a cooperative learning environment proved beneficial. Students appeared to be more responsible and creative when working as part of a group. This environment also helped to achieve the process writing approach. Importantly, group work appeared to foster social skills and raise students' self-esteem. Other findings included:

1. Using pictures is a good ice-breaking activity to motivate the students during Warm-up questions. The students were engaged in the activity and actively answered the guided questions using visual input.
2. The use of online dictionaries is helpful and necessary for the writing task in that the students can recognise words, practice their spelling, and use them as target vocabulary in writing tasks.
3. Both controlled and semi-controlled practice tasks are essential for the students to revise learned material and practice the target structures.
4. Working in groups encourages students to exchange their ideas about their writing and about the position they have chosen.
5. The students like the ways in which the teacher corrects their writing tasks, and they are more aware of common mistakes.
6. For sentence organization practice, I introduced the format of a cover letter. In class, students reported that they expect and value a writing framework (as opposed to a blank sheet).

**Overall, run-on sentences were a commonly found issue. Some of the students do not associate words with the desired genre easily, such as 'advertised' or 'interested'.**

Furthermore, they do not possess the wide range of descriptive adjectives needed to describe their own attributes. In addition, they continued to write in simple sentences. Some of them still misused words that express sequences, such as first, second, and finally. This shows that grammar improvement needs more time because developing grammar knowledge is an ongoing process. Although group work was generally positive, some groups mentioned that a few students did not pay attention when in groups and were rarely willing to accomplish the task. This is a known issue with group work and requires careful monitoring and teacher-led assistance.





## Perceptions of Students and Issues in Teaching and Learning Writing

### EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

The exploratory questions for this study were as follows:

1. How do I teach my students the process of writing?
2. What kinds of common grammar mistakes do my students make?
3. What do my students find difficult about doing a free writing task?
4. What do the students like or dislike about writing task types (e.g. cover letters and recipes)?



### METHODS

The preliminary investigation was implemented by using three data collection tools: 1) video recordings, 2) attitude questionnaires, and 3) observation forms.

A questionnaire was administered to Year 12 students in the first semester of academic year 2022 to gauge the attitudes towards teaching and learning writing among Thai upper secondary level students, and how they feel about the class. The attitude questionnaire was divided into three aspects: 1) students' perceptions of teaching and learning writing, 2) issues in teaching and learning writing, and 3) open-ended questions responding to teaching and learning writing.

### FINDINGS

This study found that a cooperative learning environment proved beneficial. Students appeared to be more responsible and creative when working as part of a group. This environment also helped to achieve the process writing approach. Importantly, group work appeared to foster social skills and raise students' self-esteem.



**AUTHOR: Dr. Anuchit Tharamanit**  
Senior Professional Level Teachers,  
Takpittayakhom School, Thailand

### CONTEXT (SCHOOL AND LEARNERS)

Three hundred and seventy-five secondary six students of Takpittayakhom School in Tak province, Thailand in the academic year 2022 took part in this study. They were in science-math, and art-math program who enrolled the Fundamental English course (E33101-33102).

### CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND ACTION PLAN

#### Pre-writing Stage



#### While-writing Stage



#### Post-writing Stage



### DISCUSSION

Importantly, I mainly used direct written corrective feedback so that the students were aware of – and felt comfortable correcting – mistakes, as well as comprehending what my intentions were. I sometimes used indirect written corrective feedback through an error correction code, such as sp. (spelling), A (a missing word) and ? (unclear information). This feedback took place both in the margin and within the written text. The students tended to have a limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary so they valued the teacher's corrections. Students appreciated the opportunity to write more than one draft because they were able to be made aware of their mistakes with the previous work. They told me that they were more secure with and reliant on direct corrective feedback.

QR Code Scan for information.



Figure 11.2. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

The stimulus pictures played a crucial role as a visual input to trigger the meaning of words associated with cooking. The use of online dictionaries (e.g. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/> and <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>) boosted students' knowledge of vocabulary words and word choices in that they reviewed some learned vocabulary and gained knowledge on new target words used in the writing task. The students were able to understand the meaning of cooking verbs and how to use them by internalising the example of sentences from the dictionary.

Importantly, I mainly used direct written corrective feedback so that the students were aware of — and felt comfortable correcting — mistakes, as well as comprehending what my intentions were. I sometimes used indirect written corrective feedback through an error correction code, such as sp. (spelling), (a missing word) and ? (unclear information). This feedback took place both in the margin and within the written text.

The students tended to have a limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary so they valued the teacher's corrections. Students appreciated the opportunity to write more than one draft because they were able to be made aware of their mistakes with the previous work. They told me that they were more secure with and reliant on direct corrective feedback.



# Chapter 12

## Students difficulties in learning vocabulary in reading and writing classes

---

Kanchanokchon Woodeson



**Teaching experience**

28 years

**Area of interest in teaching**

Reading comprehension teaching and active learning teaching

## Introduction

I am an English teacher for students in Grades 10–12 (16–18 years old) at Ammartpanichnukul School, Krabi Province. Krabi is a coastal town approximately 400 miles south of Bangkok. Although it has a population of around 300,000, it has high levels of domestic and international tourism, with direct flights to Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, and even Sweden. As such, even though students reside far from the capital, English can be heard in the main tourist areas of their hometown.

Vocabulary, an important aspect of learning a foreign language, plays a crucial role in communication. Communicating through reading, speaking, writing, and listening requires a strong and diverse vocabulary. The main problem identified for this research was that students tend to struggle with acquiring a sufficient bank of words. In particular,

it takes a long time for students to fully understand the meaning of a word, which creates issues for the teacher in terms of progressing through the semester plan on time. One area in which this lack of vocabulary and superficial understanding of word meaning causes particular problems is in reading comprehension classes. As a result, I was eager to conduct an investigation into how to improve and help support the students who face such difficulties in vocabulary acquisition.

## Methods

To begin to understand the problem, I used a focus group discussion with my students to understand the ways in which they try to learn vocabulary and how much importance they attach to it. Table 12.1 lists what I found from this discussion.



### How students improved their vocabulary

Surfing the Internet	Watching movies, e.g. Harry Potter, Bridge to Terabithia	Watching television series
Listening to English music	Memorising new words	Reading English passages
Asking teachers and peers	Doing English exercises online	Learning from context

Table 12.1. How students improved their vocabulary

Students also gave feedback on their reasoning for wanting to acquire vocabulary. A major motivation was to improve communication in English. They also mentioned social and entertainment reasons as important factors. Improved vocabulary would help them to talk to foreign friends online, better understand 'memes', listen to music more easily, and help whilst travelling abroad and when watching movies. Another reason for wanting to improve their vocabulary was that it was seen as important when applying for scholarship opportunities. I used a second focus group later in the research to get students' impressions of the changes and innovations I made.

Another step was peer observation. In the third week of my research, a fellow teacher observed two of my classes and gave me feedback. The plan was to take action and then, after the action, conduct another focus group to get feedback on the students' impressions of the adapted teaching approach. I kept a reflective journal, which helped me to assess and evaluate the situation throughout the process.

To make vocabulary acquisition more interesting, engaging and — importantly — effective, I developed a number of approaches which I hoped would improve matters in relation to reading comprehension.

1. When starting a new reading lesson, I selected 10–15 words from the passage and asked students to match a definition to its corresponding word, initially without assistance. Once they had tried to match them, I showed the students pictures which represented the words. Depending on their progress, I also included some hints (in the form of prompts) to help them complete the task for all the words.
2. Another activity was to create a table of vocabulary related by form — for example, educate (v), educator (n), education (n) — to help the students with roots and prefixes/suffixes (i.e. morphological instruction).
3. I also allotted time to pronunciation, with students being tasked with practising the appropriate pronunciation of words at least three times.
4. To foster greater understanding of the meaning, three activities were designed, namely:
  - Using the context as clues
  - Composing songs using the words
  - Making multiple sentences by using the vocabulary item(s).



## Findings

An important finding from the second focus group was that the students were able to understand difficult vocabulary without using the dictionary. Furthermore, they remarked that they were able to use such vocabulary in sentences correctly. Despite this, the meaning of the words when used in idiomatic expressions caused confusion. Therefore, it is vital for English teachers to develop appropriate strategies to meet students' needs and expectations when learning new vocabulary.

Another interesting finding came from a statement from the peer observation. Apparently, students were more engaged when definitions were given in English as opposed to Thai. Giving simple definitions in English seemed to allow the students to hear the words pronounced and used correctly in a sentence; this gave the students example sentence structures for the vocabulary being introduced.

Nevertheless, students still experienced problems. Parts of speech and affixes (prefixes, suffixes, and word roots) remained issues. Some students struggled with pronouncing words, handwritten spelling, and maintaining grammatical control. The main issue was that despite the new approaches, the appropriate meaning of the words was still a challenge for some students.

Overall, in the second focus group interview, the students reported that the actions taken to enhance their vocabulary acquisition had a positive effect. However, students from language programmes seemed to be able to incorporate new and additional language-learning strategies more easily than students who did not have a language specialism, e.g., science programmes.



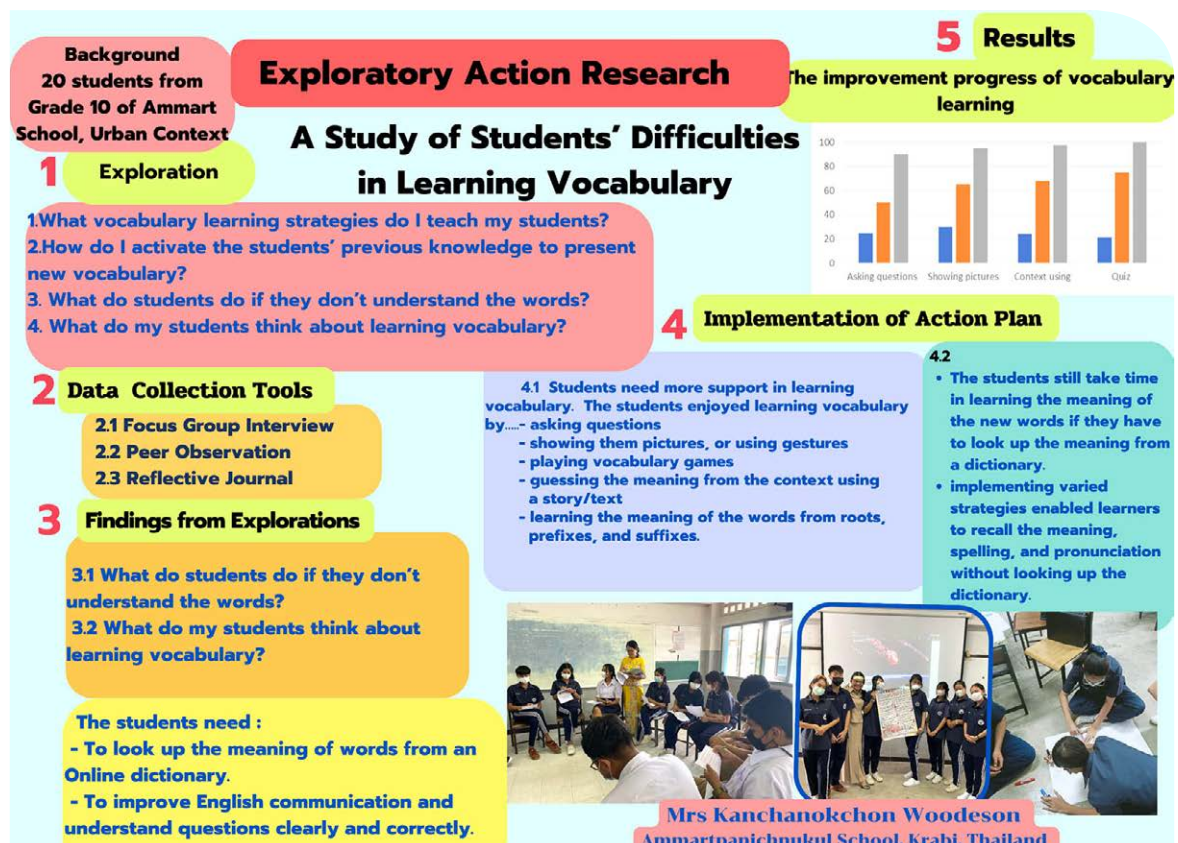


Figure 12.1. Poster Presentation

## Discussion

One of the most challenging teaching strategies for incidental vocabulary learning is guessing from context. Helping students guess from context and use clues in the text can not only increase their reading speed but also help them learn vocabulary in relation to the related contexts. However, this requires time and careful planning.

One important point is that because I teach the lesson mostly in English, the students appear to highly value the opportunity to learn vocabulary and reading through the medium of English. A student stated that 'It is another way to learn English vocabulary and imitate how to make sentences when I want to communicate in English.'

It is also important to consider the 'learning to read' and 'reading to learn' aspect. Learners need to embrace the value of reading to improve their vocabulary. In my view, nothing improves English vocabulary and usage more than avidly reading books. It is critical for students to recognise their own strengths and to broaden their vocabulary learning potential.

This study was created to support the students in solving problems related to learning vocabulary and to help lessen the time needed to understand the meaning of difficult words. My research results indicate that, despite there being confusion when dealing with idiomatic expressions, many students are able to understand difficult vocabulary without using a dictionary and to also use these words in sentences appropriately.

Students' vocabulary mastery can be encouraged or discouraged by both formal and informal language-learning environments. To support students' vocabulary learning, it is essential to create a pleasant learning environment and provide fruitful guidance. Therefore, it is important that teachers implement the appropriate strategies to meet the students' needs and expectations.





#### **British Council**

254 Chulalongkorn Soi 64, Siam Square,  
Phyathai Road, Pathumwan, Bangkok 10330


T +66 (0) 2 657 5678

F +66 (0) 2 253 5311

[info@britishcouncil.or.th](mailto:info@britishcouncil.or.th)

#### **Follow us on**

 [BritishCouncilThailand](#)

 [@thBritish](#)

 [Britishcouncil\\_th](#)