

**A STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF APPLYING “READERS’ THEATER” AS  
ENGLISH REMEDIAL INSTRUCTION FOR UNDERACHIEVERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the effectiveness of applying Readers’ Theater as remedial instruction for underachieving students. The participants of the study are 49 underachieving Freshman English students. The experimental group was taught using Readers’ Theater as remedial instruction, and the control group received regular remedial instruction. The purpose of the study is to assess the effectiveness of instructing underachieving English learners using Readers’ Theater by measuring changes in their speaking and reading abilities, English learning outcomes, and English learning attitudes. Qualitative data was obtained by administering pre- and post-tests gauging oral reading fluency, English learning achievement, English self-efficacy, English learning anxiety, and English learning motivation as well as collecting interview data to gain a deeper understanding of student reactions to the use of Readers’ Theater. The results of the study indicate that the experimental group performed significantly better than their control group counterparts in terms of oral reading fluency, English learning achievement, English self-efficacy and English learning motivation, but did not display significantly lower English learning anxiety. Furthermore, the incorporation of diverse teaching strategies in a comfortable and supportive learning environment facilitated the successful application of Readers’ Theater.

Key Words: Readers’ Theater, remedial instruction, English teaching

**INTRODUCTION**

In Taiwan, English learners are generally unable to communicate effectively (Lin & Su, 2003), and this problem is especially serious among students in technical and vocational colleges (Liauh, 2010; Ministry of Education, ROC, 2007). Chang (2007) indicated that a poor English foundation for technical and vocational college students causes

English learning anxiety and fear. Liou (2012) also pointed out that without effective remedial instruction, most technical and vocational college students would fall behind, and they would often abandon English learning. It is a known fact that English does not receive as much attention as technical subjects in technical and vocational schools, which provide fewer learning resources and equipment and are less successful in developing students' English learning interests and self-efficacy. Therefore, it is important for technical and vocational college English teachers to help students overcome their English learning difficulties and strengthen their learning capabilities.

In recent years, many technical and vocational colleges have been implementing remedial instruction under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. English remedial instruction has become a part of the school curriculum in order to strengthen the English proficiency of underachievers. However, remedial instruction is different from traditional instruction. Instead of just "imparting knowledge," teachers must continuously adjust teaching objectives, textbooks, and methods according to the students' learning needs, assess learning achievements to accommodate learning progress, and help the students strengthen their weak areas (Chuang & Yang, 1996). However, some studies (Chang, 2006; Wang, 2005) have indicated that while the importance of remedial teaching is obvious to teachers, many teachers do not believe they can enhance the students' motivation and interest because the students' learning progress is limited. Therefore, it is important to explore ways to develop innovative and effective remedial teaching methods to assist underachieving students.

Readers' Theater (RT) has been gaining increasing attention in recent years due to its positive learning outcomes, specifically when applied to beginners or underachievers (Corcoran & Davis, 2005). The purpose of RT in language teaching classrooms is to enhance students' English listening, speaking, reading, and writing performances (Tsou, 2006). For example, Keehn, Harmon, and Shoho (2008) suggested that students using RT can develop word decoding and cognition skills. In addition, the U.S. National Reading Panel (2000) has clearly indicated that oral fluency is the key to reading proficiency because it affects reading effectiveness and understanding (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004). One of the key features of RT is repetitive oral reading exercises, which allows students to become familiarized with reading content and progressively improve their reading skills. Because fluent readers usually

become high-achieving students (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), using RT as English remedial instruction to enhance underachieving students' English reading (including oral reading) fluency is worth exploring.

Most studies on the subject (Hsieh, 2008; Hsu, 2012; Peng & Peng, 2010; Tian & Wu, 2012; Wu, 2012) have focused on the contexts of English remedial instruction in primary and secondary schools and rarely on technical and vocational colleges. This is unfortunate because RT was first applied in adult education before it was introduced into early education (Moran, 2006). There is therefore a need to explore the application of RT in an English remedial instruction setting for students of technical and vocational colleges and universities. Based on the motivations described above, the questions of the study are listed as follows:

1. How does integrating RT as remedial instruction for English underachievers affect their English learning achievements?
2. How does integrating RT as remedial instruction for English underachievers affect their English learning attitudes?
3. How do English underachievers react to the implementation of RT as remedial instruction?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The Importance and Implications of English Remedial Instruction**

The purpose of remedial instruction is to have teachers design learning activities to provide more learning opportunities to help underachieving students reach the prescribed minimum standards, thus achieving the concept of individualized learning (Lee, 2002). According to an English test report for the 2002 academic year conducted by the Language Training and Testing Center (LTTC) and commissioned by the Ministry of Education in Taiwan, only 21.7% of two-year university students, 18.3% of four-year university students, and 6% of two-year vocational college students pass the elementary level (first stage listening and reading) of the General English Proficiency Test (GEPT), and over 80% of students cannot meet the prescribed English proficiency requirement for junior high school graduates (Lin & Su, 2003); this was hence met with an outcry for English remedial instruction. In addition, improving English comprehension has become a common goal for

various colleges in recent years, and this has been manifested in the prescription of a threshold requirement for graduation. It is therefore necessary to provide remedial instruction to help underachieving students resolve their academic difficulties.

Instead of just teaching according to the syllabus and schedule, teachers involved in remedial instruction have to change their textbooks and course schedules to meet students' learning needs and help them remediate their shortcomings. Some empirical studies (Sheu, 2010; Tsai, et al., 2011; Wu, 2005) have verified the significant changes in the academic performances of students who received English remedial instruction. Although these studies lack descriptive data on the remedial courses and the students' learning history and difficulties, they indicated an increase in learning achievement for the majority of the underachieving students.

From the perspective of learning, technical and vocational college students tend to develop fear and frustration towards English because their schools lack English learning support (Lin & Su, 2003). Therefore, scholars (Mclaughlin & Vacha, 1992) have maintained that English remedial instruction should provide students with student-centered instruction to increase learning motivation and reduce negative experiences from learning setbacks. In other words, teachers should strengthen interaction with students while monitoring learning progress and provide appropriate assistance to help them develop an active and independent learning attitude (Chen, 2003). This means that the prerequisite for successful remedial instruction is the development of student self-efficacy. Therefore, the purpose of English remedial instruction transcends not just enhancing the students' English abilities. Remedial instruction also focuses on increasing the students' learning interests and developing their learning attitudes.

#### **Relationship between RT and Language Learning**

Readers' Theater, usually referred to as RT (Shepard, 2005), is an activity that enables learners to read-aloud, and it is the simplest method for text interpretation through theater (Walker, 2005). The readers express the ideas, opinions, and emotions of the characters through their voices, facial expressions, or gestures. No background props, line memorization, makeup, lighting, or costumes are needed, and therefore it is convenient to implement at the teaching site. Teachers can choose or

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write scripts to fit individual students' levels and allow students time to practice, discuss, and understand the content of the script, or even stimulate students' creativity by allowing them to modify or create the script. Generally speaking, RT provides enjoyment, interaction, cooperation, and purpose in language learning. More importantly, RT also provides emotional support for underachievers.

Lengeling, Malarcher, and Mills (1995, March) further indicated that RT can guide students to a deeper understanding of the language, content, and learning process in foreign language classrooms. Each student can use repetitive reading to practice correct pronunciation, intonation, and emotional delivery, and learn to use language to express the intent of the script to the audience. The U.S. National Reading Panel (2000) is certain of the value of repetitive reading. Their experiments confirmed that repeated reading can enhance reading fluency, word interpretation, and text understanding (Reutzel & Hollingsworth, 1993). Tsou (2005) suggested that oral reading fluency is the most important and meaningful method to measure reading level. Hasbrouck and Tindal (2006) also emphasized the importance of accuracy (correctly read words) and rate (the number of correctly read words per minute) in RT. By calculating the correct number of words read per minute, teachers can use quantitative information to determine students' reading fluency and comprehension levels. This method is practical and feasible for the majority of teachers.

### **Research on RT and Teaching English Underachievers**

According to Worthy and Prater (2002), the most important function of RT is to enhance the development of language listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In particular, RT can enhance the students' vocabulary familiarity and oral reading fluency, and therefore increase their reading comprehension (Tsou, 2012). Rinehart (1999) conducted a RT experiment with 22 elementary school students with reading difficulties. The results indicated significant progress in the students' language accuracy and fluency, as well as enhanced motivation in classroom participation. Similarly, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) found that oral reading fluency is closely related to comprehension, and fluent readers are usually high-achieving students. Therefore, the RT learning method, which cultivates oral reading fluency, can provide opportunities for underachieving students to become successful language learners

(Flynn, 2004). Keehn (2003) observed 66 elementary students who participated in a RT study and found that high-achieving students showed significant improvements in their text reading and test scores while underachievers showed significant improvements in their reading comprehension, oral reading speed, and emotional deliveries. In addition, according to Worthy and Prater (2002), intensive and repetitive oral practice enables progressive improvements for underachievers with reading difficulties, which also helps them develop good reading and practice habits. These studies show that the benefits of RT are far-reaching.

In Taiwan, these studies are similar to overseas studies, in that they concentrate on exploring how to use RT to improve the reading abilities of elementary school students (Hsieh, 2008; Hsu, 2012; Peng & Peng, 2010; Wu, 2012) rather than how to assist the adult underachieving English learners. However, RT was first applied in adult education before it was introduced into early education (Moran, 2006). One common characteristic of adult underachievers is that they lack the confidence to speak English. As a result, they experience anxiety and failure during their learning experiences, and some even avoid learning English. Therefore, effective implementation of RT for adult underachieving students is a worthwhile research topic. The researchers reviewed three of the more recent studies conducted. In the first study, Peng & Peng (2010) indicated an improvement in English reading comprehension with the application of RT in a fourth-grade class of 65 students. They noted, however, that performance anxiety may have influenced the students' reading attitudes. Hsu (2012) used RT in a classroom of 11 junior high school students and found that RT improved their English reading fluency and English learning motivation. Finally, Tian & Wu (2012) monitored 35 seventh graders for fifteen weeks and found that RT use improved classroom interaction, English learning motivation, and pronunciation skills. RT was not found to have a positive influence on English learning achievement, however. Besides the topic of using RT in English teaching settings as discussed above, few studies have explored whether RT can facilitate a successful English learning process for students in technical and vocational colleges and universities. This study thus investigates the application of RT in university English remedial instruction to determine its effectiveness in improving underachieving students' English oral fluency and learning achievement

in line with the learning objectives of English classes in technical and vocational colleges and universities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study used a quasi-experimental, nonequivalent groups design to administer pre- and post-tests. The participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups. The students in the experimental group were exposed to RT as part of their remedial instruction, while the control group only received regular remedial instruction. The students' English learning achievement, oral reading fluency, and learning attitudes were measured before and after instruction. Interviews were also conducted to gain a better understanding of student reactions to the application of RT in the English remedial program.

### **Setting and Participants**

The participants in this study were freshman English underachievers from a university of science and technology in northern Taiwan. The university stipulated that the bottom 49 students who score below the passing mark of 60 in the first semester of freshman English be automatically enrolled for remedial instruction the following semester. The remedial classes are held twice a week, 50 minutes each time, over 15 weeks (from early March to late June, 2012). The 49 students were randomly divided into two groups, with 25 assigned to the experimental group (11 females and 14 males) and 24 assigned to the control group (10 females and 14 males). To offset the difference between teaching styles, both classes were taught by the same instructor. The female instructor holds a Master's degree in TESOL, has six years' experience in English remedial instruction, and two years' experience coaching junior high school students for interscholastic RT competitions.

### **Instruments**

*One-Minute oral reading assessments.* The researcher developed two "One-Minute Oral Reading Assessments" based on Hasbrouck and

Tindal's (1992) "One-Minute Oral Reading Fluency Probe" and Rasinski's (2003)<sup>1</sup> "One-Minute Reading Probe" as reading fluency measurement indicators for the students. The two oral reading assessments evaluate the students' speaking and reading abilities in the pre-test and post-test. The two tests were reading passages of 160 words each using words and grammatical structures within the range of the elementary level of the GEPT. The "One-Minute Oral Reading Assessment" was used as an indicator to measure the students' oral reading fluency.

*English learning achievement.* The students' semester grades in their regular English course were examined using the paired-samples *t*-test and served as a basis for measuring their learning progress and achievement. The students' grades were also used as indicators to gauge the effectiveness of RT when used as remedial English instruction. The qualitative research data included observations, video recordings and interviews. The classroom was observed for a total of ten times. A total of 7 and 10 taped interviews were conducted with the teacher and the students, respectively.

*English learning attitudes.* The researcher also prepared an "English Learning Attitudes" questionnaire to explore the students' self-efficacy, learning anxiety, and learning motivation, and conducted a descriptive statistical analysis based on the results. The researcher referenced and modified Bandura (1982) and Wu and Chen's (1992) "Motivated Learning Strategy Scale" to create questionnaire items for the "English Self-efficacy" questionnaire; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986a, 1986b) "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale" (FLCAS) to create items for the "English Learning Anxiety" questionnaire; and Gardner's (2004) "Attitude/Motivation Test Battery" (AMTB) to create items for the "English Learning Motivation" questionnaire. To put things in perspective, the English Learning Attitudes questionnaire comprised items measuring English self-efficacy, English learning anxiety, and English learning motivation (see Appendix). The questionnaire was

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<sup>1</sup> Hansbrouck and Tindal's (1992) "One-Minute Oral Reading Fluency Probe" and Rasinski's (2003) "One-Minute Reading Probe" were referenced and used as the first tests to assess the participants' levels. The contents of the test were based on what the students have learned before or tailored to their reading levels. The students were required to read for one minute at their usual reading speed. The teacher then calculated and recorded the correctly read words. If a student's level was low (at or below 20%), then he or she was required to receive further evaluation.



validated by three university professors from the Department of Foreign Languages and the Department of Applied Linguistics, and these professors were consulted for concept clarification and amendments to the questionnaire items. After reaching a consensus, the questions were designed to fit the English remedial instruction to increase its pragmatic validity (Yin, 2001).

The draft version of the questionnaire was first distributed to ten students to obtain their input, after which it was then adapted to modify the items. Then, 92 freshmen participated in the pilot study in which they were invited to complete the revised version of the questionnaire comprising 23 questions. The construct validity of the questionnaire was evaluated using the results from the literature review and was verified through factor analysis to ensure congruity between questionnaire theory and design. The scales were evaluated using factor analysis in Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and factors with an eigenvalue of more than 1 were selected. Each scale had a factor, which is consistent with the factors proposed in the research's theoretical framework. The factor loading of all the items were over .40 and the explained variances were 73.65%, 67.86%, and 60.06% for self-efficacy, learning anxiety, and learning motivation, respectively. These results indicate that the construct validity of these scales were ideal.

Questionnaire reliability provides information on the consistency of the questionnaire items (Brown, 2001). In this regard, Cronbach's Alpha was used to ensure the construct reliability of the questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha of the individual categories in the questionnaire were: self-efficacy = .89, learning anxiety = .82, and learning motivation = .80. Cronbach's Alpha of the three categories indicated good reliability.

#### **Teaching Design and Implementation**

*Teaching content.* Lessons<sup>2</sup> in the control group primarily consisted of reviewing class material from the regular freshman English course, with the addition of teaching/learning handouts. Lessons<sup>3</sup> in the experimental

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<sup>2</sup> Main Teaching Materials (reading): Adams, Crawford, Finnie, and Gormley (2009). Outlook 1. Heinle Cengage Learning. Basic conversation and dialogue teaching and learning handouts

<sup>3</sup> Main Teaching Materials (reading) : Adams et al. (2009). Outlook 1. Heinle Cengage Learning. Remedial Teaching Aids (plays and scripts): Malkoc (1993). Easy Plays in English. Regents/ Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

group included the reading of four short plays in addition to reviewing class material from the regular freshman English course. The additional material develops students' reading skills and helps improve their oral reading abilities.

*Teaching methods.* Underachieving English learners have a smaller vocabulary size and have serious difficulties reading and expressing themselves. To help improve these skills, the class content included vocabulary building, oral reading, and reading comprehension. The following section elaborates on the course design for both the experimental and control groups.

Table 1. *Teaching Methods Used in the Experimental and Control Groups*

Experimental Group	Control Group
Introduction to oral reading skills Watching RT DVD clips Textbook or script group discussion (including vocabulary building and sentence writing) Oral reading, repetition, group discussions, role assignments, and practice Performing and video recording, discussion, and review	Vocabulary word and sentence review and explanations by the teacher Rotation oral reading and repetition peer work Individual textbook oral reading Writing summaries Conversation practices

#### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Before receiving remedial instruction, each student was asked to take a one-minute reading fluency test. The students' Reading Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) rates for a 160-word passage were then recorded. The English Learning Attitudes questionnaire was also administered to all of the participants to gauge whether there was a difference in English learning attitudes between the two groups. Furthermore, the researcher recorded the students' English scores from the previous semester to gauge whether there was a difference between English reading fluency and academic scores. After the completion of the remedial course, the researcher conducted an interview with ten randomly selected students from both groups.

This study used SPSS for Windows 19.0 to conduct quantitative data analysis and conducted student interviews for qualitative analysis. The study employed the following data analysis methods and answered the following research questions: (1) a paired sample t-test was administered before and after the treatment to assess improvements in students' English oral fluency, learning outcomes, and learning attitudes; (2) an independent paired sample t-test was administered on the data derived from the control and experimental groups before and after the treatment to gauge improvements in students' English oral fluency, learning outcomes, and learning attitudes; and (3) interviews were conducted to measure student reactions to RT instruction.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Analyzing Learning Achievement

*Comparing students' pre-treatment performances.* As can be seen in Table 2, the t-values as derived through the independent samples t-test are -.41 and -.79, while the p-values are .69 and .44. None of the values reached significance, indicating that the two groups were homogeneous in terms of English learning performance.

Table 2. *A Comparison of Experimental and Control Group Students' Pre-treatment English Abilities*

	M	N	SD	t	p
<b>WCPA (out of 160 total words)</b>					
The experimental group vs.	86.40	25	9.62	-.41 <sup>n.s.</sup>	.69
The control group	87.33	24	6.01		
<b>English learning achievement (First semester grade)</b>					
The experimental group vs.	50.08	25	5.43	-.79 <sup>n.s.</sup>	.44
The control group	51.17	24	4.15		

n.s. p > .05

*Oral fluency.* This study employed the paired sample t-test to analyze the differences between the experimental and control groups' English oral fluency pre- and post-test results (Table 3). The independent samples t-test was also used to measure differences in oral fluency in both groups following remedial instruction (Table 4).

Table 3. *Oral Fluency Pre- and Post-test Results*

Group	Test	M	N	SD	t	p
The experimental group	pretest	86.40	25	9.62	-15.72***	.000
	posttest	126.40	25	14.65		
The control group	pretest	87.33	24	6.01	-7.69***	.000
	posttest	103.25	24	10.78		

\*\*\* p <.001

Table 4. *Oral Fluency Independent t-test Post-test Results*

WCPA (out of 160 total words)	M	N	SD	t	p
The experimental group vs. The control group	126.40	25	14.65	6.28***	.000
	103.25	24	10.78		

\*\*\* p <. 001

As can be seen in the paired sample t-test results in Table 3, the t-values of the experimental and control groups are -15.72 and -7.69, respectively, both of which reached the .001 significance level. This indicates that both experimental and control groups displayed significant improvements in their English fluency following 15 weeks of English remedial instruction. However, it is clear from the independent t-test post-test results in Table 4 that the t-value is 6.28, which reached the .001 significance level and indicates that the oral fluency (M=126.40) of the experimental group students is significantly greater than that of students in the control group (M=103.25).

*English learning achievement.*

Table 5. *A Comparison of Pre- and Post-test English Learning Achievement*

Group	Test	M	N	SD	t	p
The experimental group	pretest	50.08	25	5.43	-18.78***	.000
	posttest	72.48	25	6.74		
The control group	pretest	51.17	24	4.15	-14.81***	.000
	posttest	65.33	24	5.24		

\*\*\* p <.001

Table 6. *A Comparison of Experimental and Control Group Students’ Independent t-test Post-test English Learning Achievement*

English learning achievement (Second semester grade)	M	N	SD	t	p
The experimental group vs. The control group	72.48	25	6.74	4.13***	.000

\*\*\* p<.001

As can be seen in the paired sample t-test results in Table 5, the t-values of the experimental and control groups are -18.78 and -14.81, respectively, both of which reached the .001 significance level. This indicates that both experimental and control groups displayed significant improvements in their English learning achievement following 15 weeks of English remedial instruction. However, it is clear from the independent t-test post-test results of the two groups’ second semester grades in Table 6 that the t-value is 4.13, which reached the .001 significance level and indicates that the English learning achievement (M=126.40) of the RT-exposed experimental group students is significantly greater than that of students in the control group (M=103.25).

As can be seen from Tables 4 and 6, students in both experimental and control groups saw significant improvements in their oral reading fluency and academic achievement following two hours of English remedial instruction for 15 weeks. It is also worth noting, however, that the oral reading fluency and academic achievement of the RT-exposed experimental group students are significantly greater than those of their control group counterparts. This study found that applying RT in the English remedial teaching process not only enhances students’ oral reading ability but also their overall English learning achievement. This echoes past findings (Hsu, 2012; Keehn, 2003; Rasinski, 2003) that laud the positive effects of RT instruction on underachieving students’ oral reading fluency and learning achievement. RT provides English underachievers a purposeful and meaningful opportunity to practice repetitive oral reading and comprehend the texts being read (Tsou, 2006; Walker, 2005).

**Analyzing Learning Attitudes**

*Comparing students' pre-treatment learning attitudes.* As can be seen in Table 7, there were only minor differences between the mean difference of the experimental and control groups' English self-efficacy, English learning anxiety, and English learning motivation. The t-values as derived through the independent samples t-test are 1.26, -.51, and -.52, while the p-values are .21, .61, and .61. None of the values reached significance, indicating that the two groups were homogeneous in terms of English learning attitudes.

Table 7. *A Comparison of Experimental and Control Group Students' Pre-treatment English Learning Attitudes*

	M	N	SD	t	p
<b>English self-efficacy</b>					
The experimental group vs.	1.92	25	.52	1.26 <sup>n.s.</sup>	.21
The control group	1.77	24	.30		
<b>English learning anxiety</b>					
The experimental group vs.	2.89	25	.57	-.51 <sup>n.s.</sup>	.61
The control group	2.97	24	.64		
<b>English learning motivation</b>					
The experimental group vs.	2.31	25	.46	-.52 <sup>n.s.</sup>	.61
The control group	2.38	24	.51		

n.s.  $p > .05$

Table 8. *Experimental Group English Learning Attitude Pre- and Post-test Results*

English learning attitude	Test	M	N	SD	t	p
English self-efficacy	pretest	1.92	25	.52	-6.31***	.000
	posttest	2.60	25	.60		
English learning anxiety	pretest	2.89	25	.57	2.63*	.000
	posttest	2.58	25	.51		
English learning motivation	pretest	2.31	25	.46	-3.99**	.002
	posttest	2.79	25	.28		

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  \*  $p < .05$

As can be seen in the paired sample t-test results in Table 8, there were differences among the average values of all three learning attitude factors in the experimental group. The t-values of the experimental

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group’s English self-efficacy, English learning anxiety, and English learning motivation are -6.31, 2.63, -3.99, respectively, and their p-values all reached the significance level. This indicates that the experimental group displayed significant increases in their English self-efficacy and English learning motivation and a significant decrease in English learning anxiety following English remedial instruction using RT.

Table 9. *Control Group English Learning Attitude Pre- and Post-test Results*

English learning attitude	Test	M	N	SD	t	p
English self-efficacy	pretest	1.77	24	.30	-2.37*	.026
	posttest	1.97	24	.43		
English learning anxiety	pretest	2.97	24	.64	3.51**	.002
	posttest	2.52	24	.40		
English learning motivation	pretest	2.38	24	.51	-.64 <sup>n.s.</sup>	.526
	posttest	2.47	24	.47		

\*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01 n.s. p > .05

As can be seen in the paired sample t-test results in Table 9, there were also differences among the average values of all three learning attitude factors in the control group. The t-values of the control group’s English self-efficacy, English learning anxiety, and English learning motivation are -2.37, 3.51, and -.64, respectively. The p-values for English self-efficacy and English learning anxiety reached the significance level, but English learning motivation did not. This indicates that the control group saw an increase in English self-efficacy and a decrease in English learning anxiety but did not see a significant increase in English learning motivation following English remedial instruction.

There were only minor differences in the pre- and post-test results among the three English learning attitude factors between the two groups. The researcher therefore conducted further analysis and comparison of the post-test results for English learning attitudes.

Table 10. *A Comparison of Experimental and Control Group English Learning Attitude Post-test Results*

	M	N	SD	t	p
<b>English self-efficacy</b>					
The experimental group vs.	2.60	25	.60	4.24***	.000
The control group	1.97	24	.43		
<b>English learning anxiety</b>					
The experimental group vs.	2.58	25	.51	.49 <sup>n.s.</sup>	.032
The control group	2.52	24	.40		
<b>English learning motivation</b>					
The experimental group vs.	2.79	25	.28	2.96**	.005
The control group	2.47	24	.47		

\*\*\* p < .001, \*\* p < .01, n.s. p > .05

As can be seen in the independent sample t-test results in Table 10, the post-test t-values of the experimental and control groups' English self-efficacy and English learning motivation are 4.24 and 2.96, which reached significance levels of .001 and .01, respectively. However, the t-value for English learning anxiety of .49 did not reach the .05 level of significance. This indicates that while students in the experimental group displayed higher levels of English self-efficacy and English learning motivation, they did not exhibit significantly different levels of English learning anxiety from students who were not exposed to RT instruction.

The results suggest that exposure to RT increases learning confidence and motivation and decreases learning anxiety. Echoing the findings from Rinehart's (1999) report, this study found that RT training has a direct correlation to self-confidence and motivation. According to Rinehart, students can begin to realize their English capabilities through successful learning experiences. Because each student learns at a different rate, it is extremely important to provide them with enough time to practice. In addition, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) found that the problem with foreign language learning is sometimes the learning experience itself, especially in terms of speaking, which causes the most learning anxiety. A frustrating learning experience may lead students to stop communicating in or avoiding the use of the foreign language. This study's findings showed that while RT did not reduce English learning anxiety, it can provide more chances for practice that are likely to promote actual English usage in real life communication contexts.



**Students' Responses to RT Teaching**

The interviewer asked questions about English learning ability and English learning attitudes in an effort to gain a better understanding of student reactions to the two types of instruction.

*Experimental group.* In terms of learning outcomes, students in the experimental group saw improvements in their diction and speaking ability through observation and practice. "...I feared that my peers wouldn't understand what I was saying, so I forced myself to speak more clearly and more accurately...." (ES1) "I memorized more words and used them more frequently in daily life; English is starting to feel more practical..." (ES4) "...besides improvement in my speaking ability, I also developed broader diction and can read much faster ..." (ES6). Many students indicated that they were able to understand more by performing in the theater and repeatedly hearing the same scripts. "...my English is awful, but the oral readings and performances were pretty easy and I was able to improve my listening skills..." (E S7). However, many students indicated that they still felt pressure when speaking English on stage. "...it became pretty easy and fun to listen to others read out loud, but I felt stressed when it was my turn to do oral reading..." (ES3). As stated by Chard, Pikulshi, and McDonagh (2006), readers must have adequate vocabulary volume and decoding capabilities in order to improve their oral fluency. Besides achieving oral fluency, the students' improvements were also reflected in their academic performance in their original/regular English courses.

In terms of learning attitudes, many students concurred that RT training improved their confidence in English use. RT instruction makes classes interesting, and encourages students to participate actively and feel a sense of achievement. "I have more confidence and I believe that I will improve more if given more opportunities to practice... Seeing how well others speak English made me want to improve myself..." (ES3) "When the audience applauded and laughed after my oral reading performance, I enjoyed the feeling very much and felt a great sense of accomplishment." (ES6). The primary reason for improvements in English learning motivation was attributed to the teacher's use of discussion and group work in the classroom. "I have learned to collaborate with others through group activities. Learning English together with my classmates yields better results for me..." (ES5) "... The oral reading and performing opportunities of this course allowed me to realize the fun in group discussions and collaborations..." (ES2).

However, the interview data indicated that a few students still displayed signs of learning anxiety which may be a result of previous long-term learning setbacks. *“I have more courage to speak English in public, but I still get nervous on stage, and very simple lines are a challenge... (ES8)”*; *“... I was able to improve my listening ability, but I still feel a lot of pressure when I have to perform on stage... (ES7).”* Therefore, the teacher may have to pay particular attention to help increase the underachievers’ successful experiences in learning to encourage them to stay positive when learning English. In addition, good teacher-student interaction and classroom atmosphere, as well as mutual support among peers can also reduce tension and pressure, improve motivation to participate in classroom activities, and stimulate creativity.

**Control group.** In terms of learning outcomes, the students in the control group indicated that remedial instruction gave them opportunities to practice English and improve their weaknesses but that they are still afraid of communicating with people in English. *“...I have become relatively relaxed and no longer worry about grammar when writing in English (CS3) ....”* *“My vocabulary knowledge is enriched, but I still cannot come up with the right words to express myself during a conversation... (CS5)”* Therefore, remedial instruction should also focus on improving speaking skills and communication. *“...I hope I can see significant improvements in my speaking ability ...so I can gradually become more comfortable using English...” (CS2).*

In terms of learning attitudes, the students in the control group indicated that remedial instruction helped them become more confident in English class. *“My confidence increased significantly after this course. ...I did not perform well, and I hope to do better the next time...” (CS3); “We must practice repeatedly for textbook readings and assignments, which helped me significantly on my tests. In addition, the teacher would discuss our mistakes in class, which helped me a lot because it allowed me to see and understand how to improve my shortcomings.” (CS10)* The students indicated, however, that they were still not confident using English in daily conversation. *“I am beginning to have some confidence... but I still worry about conversing in English, especially with native English speakers... I am still not fluent enough to talk to them... (CS4)”*. Some students even reported experiencing high levels of anxiety when speaking English. *“The biggest problem is my anxiety about speaking English... although more learning opportunities can increase my confidence... I feel anxious or stressed using English...”*

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(CS10); "There is some pressure of not knowing what and how to do things, and this makes me feel extremely nervous about speaking English... (CS1)." Through discussions, students can deepen their impression and understanding of the reading passages. Underachievers would not feel isolated because they are reading and practicing in group settings, and the pressure may be lowered for reticent students. Students can also be exposed to multiple opportunities to increase their reading rate, accuracy, and understanding of the texts. Furthermore, students are not forced to mindlessly regurgitate textbook content and can focus on understanding to gradually take charge of their own learning process.

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The quantitative and qualitative data from the study were analyzed, and the results were examined and discussed to produce the following conclusions and suggestions.

#### Conclusions

*RT instruction helps underachieving students improve their oral reading abilities and English learning achievement.* The oral reading abilities and English learning achievement of students in both experimental and control groups significantly increased following 15 weeks of English remedial instruction. RT-exposed experimental group students, however, showed marked improvements over their control group counterparts in both aspects.

*RT instruction helps underachieving students improve their English self-efficacy and English learning motivation but did not reduce their English learning anxiety.* RT-exposed experimental group students showed significantly higher English self-efficacy and English learning motivation, but not lower English learning anxiety, following remedial instruction. Control group students who were taught using regular remedial instruction methods also showed significantly higher English self-efficacy and lower English learning anxiety, but not higher English learning motivation, following remedial instruction. Independent sample t-test results indicate that experimental group students had significantly higher English self-efficacy and English learning motivation than their control group counterparts following remedial instruction. While the experimental

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group saw a significant decrease in English learning anxiety, there was not a significant difference to the anxiety levels of the control group.

*Diverse teaching methods and positive teacher-student interaction can improve the students' learning motivation.* The interview records indicated that the scaffolding used to assist the students during the RT teaching process was diverse and inspiring. In addition to good teacher-student interaction, group discussions, video recordings, and oral reading and performance assessments all strengthened the students' comprehension. This enables RT to become an effective English remedial instruction tool.

#### **Limitations**

The participants are freshman English underachievers from a university of science and technology in northern Taiwan, whose general learning characteristics may be different from regular university students. Therefore, different learning characteristics and course contents may yield different results. Therefore, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution.

#### **Suggestions**

*Teaching implementation.* Readers' Theater (RT) is a positive addition to English remedial courses and can help underachieving students improve their oral reading abilities and English learning achievement. The results of the study show that exposing underachieving students to RT can help them improve their oral reading abilities and increase their vocabulary size. Instructors therefore should guide their students through RT training, which includes repetitive reading exercises, reading out loud, and role playing. In addition to increasing vocabulary size and improving reading and comprehension abilities, RT exposure can also establish a communication- and expression-based learning model that can achieve the language-learning objective of improving students' reading, listening, speaking, and writing skills.

Furthermore, incorporating RT into English remedial programs can increase underachieving students' English self-efficacy and English learning motivation but it was not shown to reduce their English learning anxiety. The results of the study showed that successful learning experiences help students improve their English self-efficacy and learning motivation. However, classroom anxiety is often caused by

weaker communication skills. This in turn affects students' willingness to participate in class and their learning outcomes. Teachers should lead students to engage in meaningful and effective repetitive reading strategies and master lesson content, which might help lower students' anxiety levels and aversion to negative English learning experiences. It can thus be concluded that incorporating RT into regular English classrooms can provide students with much more positive and successful learning experiences and can help underachieving students improve their learning attitudes.

Finally, RT instruction incorporates social learning strategies and should help increase underachieving students' willingness to learn. However, students' communicative abilities can be exposed to scrutiny and inspection in the classroom and can heighten their learning anxiety. The results of the study indicate that engaging students in peer learning activities such as cooperative learning, small group discussions, and evaluating learning through recorded sessions effectively boost underachieving students' oral reading abilities. These social learning strategies provide students opportunities to practice their English communication skills in a real context and encourage underachieving students to participate in instructional activities. Increased interaction between peers increases students' willingness to participate in classroom activities and reverse negative emotions towards English learning.

*Future studies.* Future studies may investigate the impacts of RT on the participants' vocabulary size, listening skills, and grammar concepts. Expansion in these relevant research topics can build and expand on the findings of this study.

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**APPENDIX**

English Learning Attitudes Questionnaire

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>				
1. I am confident in my ability to learn English.	4	3	2	1
2. I am confident in my ability to perform well in English class.	4	3	2	1
3. I am confident in my ability to perform well in English tests.	4	3	2	1
4. I am confident in my ability to master the English learning strategies introduced by the teacher.	4	3	2	1
5. I am confident in my ability to learn English effectively.	4	3	2	1
<b>Learning Anxiety</b>				
1. I feel shy and uncomfortable speaking English in front of my classmates.	4	3	2	1
2. I feel nervous and uneasy when I have to speak English in class.	4	3	2	1
3. I do not feel confident expressing myself in English during class.	4	3	2	1
4. I do not feel comfortable volunteering my answers in English class.	4	3	2	1
5. I feel more anxious and stressed going to English class more than any other class.	4	3	2	1
6. I feel unhappy and depressed going to English class.	4	3	2	1
7. I worry about not being able to keep up in English class.	4	3	2	1
8. I worry about making mistakes in English class.	4	3	2	1
<b>Learning Motivation</b>				
1. I have a feeling that I will learn a lot in English classes.	4	3	2	1
2. I will read aloud in English classes.	4	3	2	1
3. I will participate in activities in English classes.	4	3	2	1
4. I will ask the teacher or my classmates for help when I see a word I cannot pronounce.	4	3	2	1
5. When I see a new English word, I will try to say it out	4	3	2	1

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loud.				
6. My English will get better as long I keep practicing.	4	3	2	1
7. I will complete English homework on time.	4	3	2	1
8. I'm willing to read lines from an English play on stage.	4	3	2	1
9. I will review what I learn in English class.	4	3	2	1
10 I will practice speaking in English with my classmates.	4	3	2	1

## 應用「讀者劇場」於低成就學生英語補救教學之成效研究

周啟亭

經國管理暨健康學院

本研究探究應用「讀者劇場」於低成就學生補救教學之成效。研究對象是 49 位英語低成就大一學生。實驗組接受讀者劇場融入英語補救教學，控制組接受一般英語補救教學。研究目的為瞭解讀者劇場對英語低成就學生在口語閱讀、英語學習成就和英語學習態度的改變情形。量化資料包括口語流暢度評量、英語學習成就、英語自我效能、英語學習焦慮和英語學習動機調查問卷前後測。並且蒐集訪談資料，以更深入了解學生對讀者劇場教學的反應。研究結果顯示，實驗組學生在口語流暢度、英語學習成就、英語自我效能、英語學習動機方面，皆顯著高於控制組學生，但英語學習焦慮並未顯著低於控制組學生。此外，教師以多元的教學策略，以及溫暖、支持性的學習環境可促進讀者劇場實施成效。

關鍵詞：讀者劇場，補救教學，英語教學