

The Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA) and the Traditional Approach Using Tales of Virtue based on His Majesty the King's Teaching Concepts in Seventh Grade Students' Reading Comprehension

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Received: June 12, 2016 Accepted: July 9, 2016 Online Published: July 10, 2016

doi: 10.5539/elt.v9n9p18

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n9p18>

Abstract

This study compares the English reading comprehension and ethical awareness of 7th grade students, when using either a directed reading-thinking activity (DR-TA), or a more traditional approach, involving tales of virtue based on His Majesty the King's teaching concepts. A randomized control group pretest-posttest design was used for the study, and the data were analyzed using one-way MANOVA and t-tests for dependent samples. The results showed a significant difference in English reading comprehension, and ethical awareness of learning English reading, between both groups at .01 level. Students through the DR-TA method had significantly higher English reading comprehension, and increased ethical awareness, at the .01 level.

Keywords: Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA), English reading comprehension, ethical awareness, tales of virtue

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduce the Problem

English proficiency is important for Thai people. Although English has been taught in Thailand for a long time, most Thai students do not meet English proficiency standards, as evidenced by the results of the O-NET (Ordinary National Educational Test) taken by 9th grade students over the past several years. National average scores were 16.19%, 30.49% and 28.71% in 2010, 2011, and 2012, respectively (Office of National Education Standards and Quality Assessment, 2013). With results being well under 50%, the need to focus on developing English proficiency in Thai schools, is clear.

This low level of English proficiency may be attributed to factors such as poor English teaching, as well as students' lack of listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills. Thai secondary school students have been found to consistently have a low level of reading abilities, including identifying English sentence structures, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Other related problems, such as a lack of qualified English teachers, continued use of teacher-centered teaching methods, problems with curriculum design, teaching material, testing, and a general disinterest amongst students in learning English have also been found. These have resulted in the level of English teaching in Thailand to be below that of many other countries (Chawwang, 2008; Raksuthi, 2010; Sukvivat, 2011).

In light of these issues, this study aims to improve students' English reading skills by applying the DR-TA. The method, developed by Stauffer (1969) and then adapted by Tierney et al. (1995), involves practicing thinking processes, guessing, checking information obtained from reading, and integrating background experience with new information. It is a student-centered teaching method, which has been shown to allow students to better understand and learn during lessons. A number of Thai and international studies have shown the efficacy of DR-TA in improving reading skills (Imamhem, 2012; Talal & Hameed, 2012; Erliana, 2011).

In addition, the students' moral development is also important. Thailand currently faces various problems, such as crime, on a national scale, which may reflect a general moral decline amongst Thai people. Stronger moral values need to be installed in learners, and teaching language skills can play its part in this process. By

improving reading skills through the DR-TA, certain teaching materials could then be used to help instill morality in students. For example, stories with strong morals are appropriate for teaching reading skills, as well as allowing students to have fun by increasing engagement in lessons. The morality tales have a considerable effect on implanting desirable qualities in children and teenagers in various stages of learning (Sukchoterat, 1994; Kammanee, 2003; Sintapanon, 2010).

Based on previous research, the current study employed the DR-TA method to teach English reading skills. This method is designed to allow students to progress through learning processes, improve their English reading comprehension, and raise their ethical awareness, ultimately resulting in students with better knowledge, skills, qualities, and morality.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To compare English reading comprehension and ethical awareness of 7th grade students between experimental and control groups, after being taught using DR-TA, and a traditional approach through tales of virtue based on the King's teaching concepts.
- 2) To compare English reading comprehension of the experimental group before and after they are taught through the DR-TA, using the tales of virtue based on the King's teaching concepts.
- 3) To compare ethical awareness of the experimental group before and after they are taught through the DR-TA, using the tales of virtue based on the King's teaching concepts.

1.3 Research Questions

- 1) Are there significant differences in English reading comprehension and ethical awareness between experimental and control groups, after using DR-TA, and the traditional approach through tales of virtue based on the King's teaching concepts?
- 2) Is there significant improvement in English reading comprehension of the experimental group after being taught through the DR-TA?
- 3) Is there significant improvement in ethical awareness of the experimental group after being taught through the DR-TA?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

- 1) 7th grade students taught through DR-TA, and the traditional approach by using the tales of virtue based on the King's teaching concepts, have different English reading comprehension skills and ethical awareness.
- 2) 7th grade students taught through DR-TA using the tales of virtue based on the King's teaching concepts have higher English reading comprehension skills.
- 3) 7th grade students taught through DR-TA using the tales of virtue based on the King's teaching concepts have higher ethical awareness.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Directed Reading-Thinking Activity

Appropriate teaching preparation, as well as the use of practical tips and strategies, is a crucial factor in conveying messages to learners, and fostering their learning processes. Many studies have analyzed innovative approaches and tools to improve learners' English skills, particularly reading. One intriguing method for teaching reading skills is Directed Reading-Thinking Activity (DR-TA), created by Stauffer (1969) and then adapted by Tierney et al. (1995). The modified method focuses primarily on practicing thinking processes, guessing, checking information obtained from reading, and connecting background knowledge with new knowledge. In this method, readers through guessing overall reading content before starting to read, are able to set their reading objectives. Then, readers are allowed to read by using their own judgment and exercise thinking skills before, during, and after reading. The method can be applied to all levels of texts, in order to improve students' reading ability accordingly. In implementing the method, students are at the center of learning, with the teacher taking the role of a facilitator, assisting students in connecting background knowledge and new information, promoting understanding of reading content and encouraging students' learning until they can do so on their own (Stauffer, 1969, pp. 19-20). It is based on the following premises:

- 1) *Children can think.* Within the limits of their experiences and language facility, they can size up a situation, conjecture about it, and reach conclusions.
- 2) *Children can act purposefully.* They can anticipate, plan, enjoy realization, and remember.

- 3) *Children can examine.* They can study a situation or a set of circumstances, note details, make associations, ask questions, modify their concepts, and form new concepts.
- 4) *Children can use their experiences and knowledge.* They are able to recall related experiences, remember ideas learned, and make meaningful associations and discriminations.
- 5) *Children can weigh facts and make inferences.* They can determine the complexities of a situation, sensing its subtleties, and be guided thereby.
- 6) *Children can make judgments.* They can decide between right and wrong, fairness and unfairness, yes and no, and success and failure.
- 7) *Children can become emotionally involved.* If they are active participants in a situation, they can become involved to the degree that enthusiasm is evident.
- 8) *Children do have interests.* Their likes and dislikes have been studied and catalogued many times. Thus, they are quick to recognize what they do and do not want, and are quite straightforward about saying so.
- 9) *Children can learn.* One of the prime differences in learning between children and adults may be attributed to motivation and previous experience. The laws of learning are themselves not a distinguishing factor.
- 10) *Children can make generalizations.* Research has shown that when children have mastered a principle with one kind of material, they can apply that principle to other kinds of materials.
- 11) *Children can understand.* Their understanding depends largely upon the degree to which they are motivated by a recognized need or purpose, and the background of relevant experience they possess.

2.2 Steps of Instruction in DR-TA (Tierney et al., 1995, pp. 214-216)

1) **Phase 1: Directing the reading-thinking process.** This involves three steps:

1.1) *Predicting:* Each student either receives or locates a copy of the selection; the teacher directs the student to study either the title or the pictures on the first page:

- a) What do you think a story with this title might be about?
- b) What do you think might happen in the story?
- c) Which of these predictions do you agree with?

When the teacher introduces the DR-TA, they initially familiarize students with the strategy for dealing with unknown words. That is, if students encounter such words, the teacher would expect the students to implement the following steps in the specified order:

- a) Read to the end of sentence
- b) Use picture clues, if available
- c) Sound out the word
- d) Ask the teacher for help

1.2) *Reading:* The teacher directs students to read a segment of the story silently to check their predictions. The teacher is responsible for ensuring that students read for meaning, observing reading performance, and helping students who request help with words.

1.3) *Proving:* After students have read the first segment, teachers ask them to close their books, and the comprehension check begins. Questions serve to guide the students' examination of the evidence, their evaluation of their previous predictions, and their generation of new predictions.

“Were you correct?”, “What do you think now?” and “What do you think will happen?” questions encourage students to screen their ideas and to make predictions about events to come. Then students read the next segment of text, and with each new segment, continue the predicting-reading-proving cycle.

2) **Phase 2: Fundamental skill training.** The second phase entails reexamining the story, selected words or phrases, and pictures or diagrams, for the purpose of developing concurrently students' reading-thinking abilities, and other reading-related skills. These include word attack, the use of semantic analysis, concept clarification and development, power of observation, and reflective abilities. The format of these activities varies, but in many cases is also similar to the suggested exercises in the teacher's editions of texts, workbooks, or skill books that accompany most basic reading systems.

2.3 Tales of Virtue based on the King’s Teaching Concepts

This refers to fictional stories based on His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej’s teachings, as provided to his Thai subjects on various occasions. The tales deal mainly with moral lessons, which learners can apply in their daily life. In addition, they make learners feel proud of their Thainess and become patriotic, since His Majesty the King is often referred to as the ‘father’ of his Thai citizens. There are nine tales of virtue intending to teach sufficiency, honesty, cooperation, conserving resources, responsibility, self-evaluation, perseverance, speaking and acting truthfully, and giving (Punyachand, 2014).

2.4 Ethical Awareness of Students via Learning with DR-TA through Tales of Virtue based on the King’s Teaching Concepts

Ethical awareness is important in shaping morals of students, and maintaining peace in Thailand. The DR-TA method, with the use of tales of virtue based on the King’s teaching concepts, is a mixed method to teaching reading skills, aiming to teach learners to think critically whilst reading texts (Stauffer, 1969). This is in line with findings of a number of educators, e.g. Kuhapinan (2002: Foreword) and Sintapanon (2010: Foreword), who have stated that such tales create a fun and pleasant atmosphere whilst increasing language knowledge and creativity. This leads to instilling moral values in children and teenagers throughout learning stages. Therefore, using the DR-TA method alongside tales of virtue can be expected to improve students’ reading skills, and promote their ethical awareness at the same time.

2.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework of the study is summarized in Figure 1.

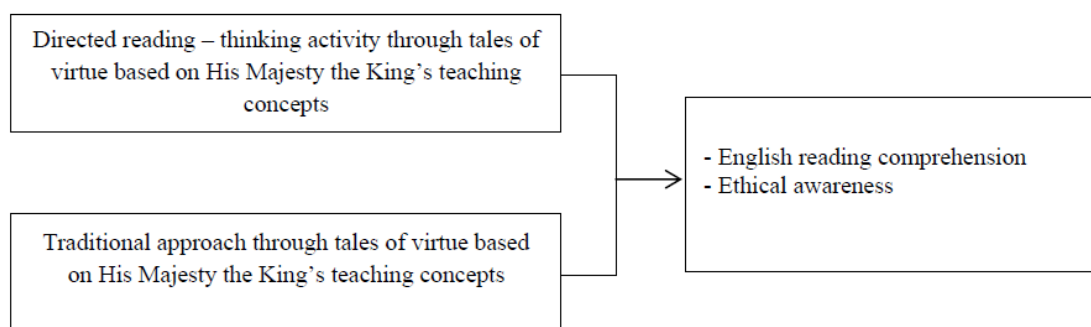


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of this study

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

A randomized control group pretest-posttest design was utilized in the study. The experimental group was taught through DR-TA, and the control group was taught through a traditional approach using tales of virtue based on His Majesty the King’s teaching concepts, in 10 weeks with 20 teaching hours, including pretest and posttest sessions (Table 1).

Table 1. Research design

Group	Pretest	Experiment	Posttest
ER	T ₁	X	T ₂
CR	T ₁	~X	T ₂

R = Random assignment E = Experimental group C = Control group T₁ = Pretest.

T₂ = Posttest. X = DR-TA method. ~ X = Traditional approach.

3.2 Population and Sample

The participants in this study (n=537) were 7th grade students at Triamudomsuksanomklao School, Bangkok, Thailand. Students were from two classes, with 50 students enrolled in Basic English in the first semester of the 2015 academic year. They were selected using cluster random sampling, and the sampling units were divided into two groups. The experimental group was taught through DR-TA, and the control group was taught using the traditional approach.

3.3 Research Instruments

The study used two kinds of instruments; the test and the questionnaire. Tests included one multiple choice and cloze test reading (with a reliability of 0.87, calculated by Kuder-Richardson), and five-choice Likert scale questionnaires on ethical awareness (with a reliability of 0.92, calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient).

3.4 Data Analysis

Each hypothesis was tested using SPSS computer program as follows:

- 1) Hypothesis 1: Scores compared the 7th grade students' reading and ethical awareness between the two student groups, with pretest and posttest being analyzed using basic statistical analyses (\bar{X} and S.D), and one-way MANOVA. Finally, line graphs were used to summarize results of data analyses.
- 2) Hypothesis 2: Scores compared English reading comprehension of the experimental group, before and after being taught through the DR-TA using tales of virtue based on His Majesty the King's teaching concepts, using the t-test for dependent samples, and a line graph was used to summarize results of data analyses.
- 3) Hypothesis 3: Scores compared ethical awareness of the experimental group, before and after being taught through the DR-TA using tales of virtue based on His Majesty the King's teaching concepts, using the t-test for dependent samples, and a line graph was used to summarize results of data analyses.

4. Results

The results of the study correspond to the three questions as follows:

Research question 1: "Are there significant differences in English reading comprehension and ethical awareness between the experimental and control groups, after using DR-TA and a traditional approach through tales of virtue based on the King's teaching concepts?" (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of pre-test-post-test scores in English reading comprehension, and those of pretest-posttest scores in ethical awareness

Group	English reading comprehension				Ethical Awareness			
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	\bar{X}	S.D	\bar{X}	S.D	\bar{X}	S.D	\bar{X}	S.D
Experimental	15.90	4.87	23.04	4.50	119.44	14.58	134.54	7.13
Control	15.94	5.90	20.46	4.49	123.92	9.59	130.34	7.05

The data presented in Table 2 shows that the mean and standard deviation of pretest-posttest scores in English reading comprehension, and those of pretest and posttest scores in ethical awareness in the experimental group and the control group differ. The mean and standard deviation of posttest scores in English reading comprehension in the experimental group were higher than their counterparts in the control group (\bar{X} in the experimental group = 15.90_(Pretest), 23.04_(Posttest); S.D in the experimental group = 4.87_(Pretest), 4.50_(Posttest), whereas \bar{X} in the control group = 15.94_(Pretest), 20.46_(Posttest); S.D in the control group = 5.90_(Pretest), 4.49_(Posttest)). Likewise, in terms of ethical awareness, the mean and standard deviation of post-test scores in the experimental group were higher than their counterparts in the control group (\bar{X} in the experimental group = 119.44_(Pretest), 134.54_(Posttest); S.D in the experimental group = 14.58_(Pretest), 7.13_(Posttest), while \bar{X} in the control group = 123.92_(Pretest), 130.34_(Posttest); S.D in the control group = 9.59_(Pretest), 7.05_(Posttest)).

Table 3. Summary of the comparison between the experimental and control groups of students' reading comprehension and ethical awareness using one-way MANOVA

Source	Dependent Variable	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Group	English reading comprehension	166.41	1	166.41	8.24**	.005
	ethical awareness	441.00	1	441.00	8.77**	.004
Error	English reading comprehension	1980.34	98	20.21		
	ethical awareness	4925.64	98	50.26		
Total	English reading comprehension	49453.00	100			
	ethical awareness	1759402.00	100			
Corrected Total	English reading comprehension	2146.75	99			
	ethical awareness	5366.64	99			

Wilks' Lambda				
Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	p-value
.86	7.67**	2.00	97.00	.001

**p – value<.01

The data presented in Table 3 indicates that the experimental and control groups were significantly different in terms of English reading comprehension and ethical awareness at the .01 level (F-statistic = 7.67**, p-value = .001). The experimental group scored significantly higher than control group in English reading comprehension and ethical awareness. (F-statistic = 8.24**, p-value = .005 in English reading comprehension; and F-statistic =8.77**,p-value = 004 in ethical awareness).

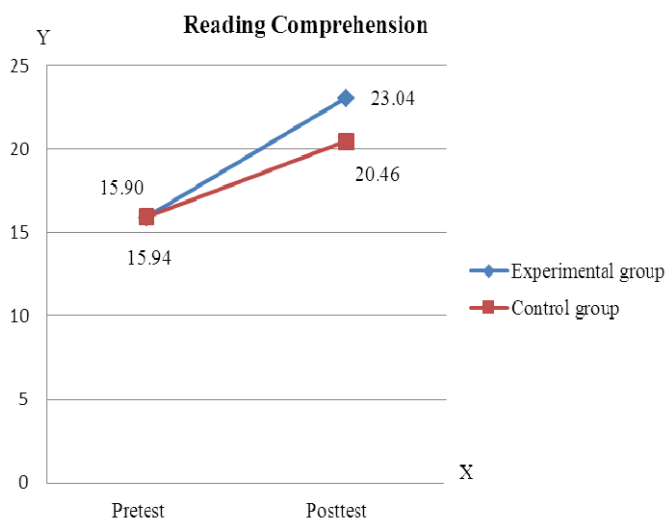


Figure 2. Graphical comparison between the experimental and control groups of students' reading comprehension

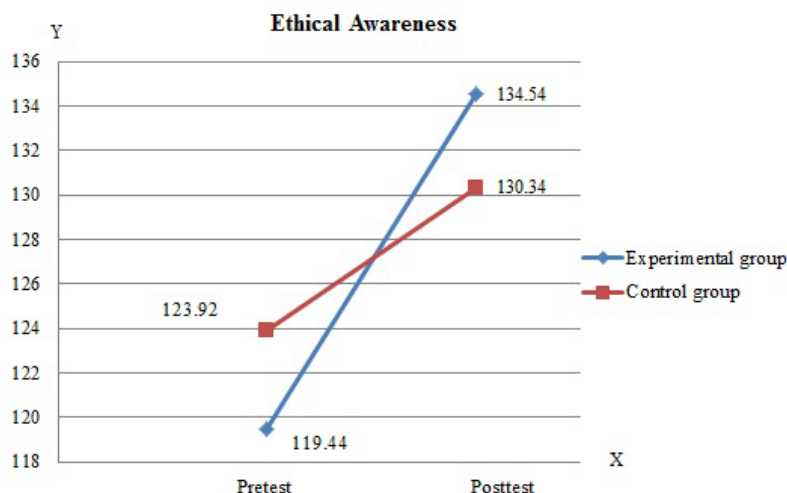


Figure 3. Graphical comparison between the experimental and control groups of students’ ethical awareness

Research question 2: Is there significant improvement in English reading comprehension of the experimental group after being taught through the DR-TA?

Table 4. The comparison of scores in English reading comprehension before and after being taught through the DR-TA using t-test for dependent samples

English reading comprehension	Pretest			Posttest			<i>t</i>	p-value
	n	\bar{X}	S.D	n	\bar{X}	S.D		
Experimental group	50	15.90	4.87	50	23.04	4.50	15.87**	.000

**p – value <.01.

The data presented in Table 4 indicates that the experimental group showed significantly improved English reading comprehension at the 0.01 level, after being taught through the DR-TA using tales of virtue based on the King’s teaching concepts ($\bar{X} = 15.90_{(Pretest)}, 23.04_{(Posttest)}$, $S.D = 4.87_{(Pretest)}, 4.50_{(Posttest)}$, $t = 15.87^{**}$).

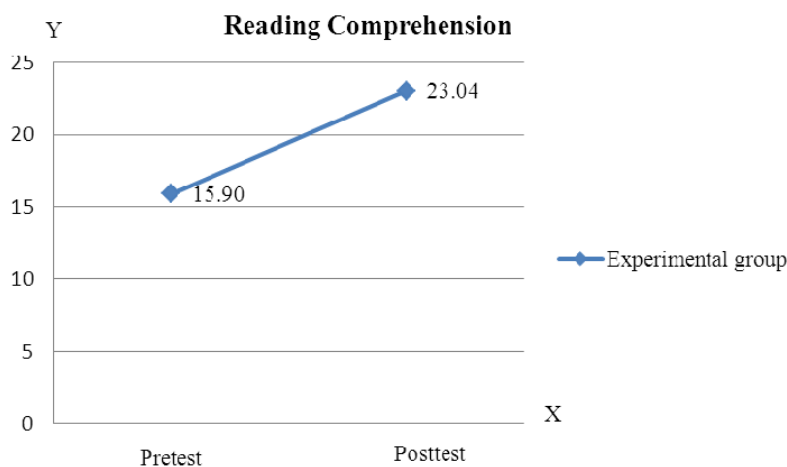


Figure 4. Graphical comparison of scores in English reading comprehension before and after being taught through the DR-TA

Research question 3: Is there significant improvement in ethical awareness of the experimental group after being

taught through the DR-TA?

Table 5. The comparison of scores in ethical awareness before and after being taught through the DR-TA using t-test for dependent samples

Ethical awareness	Pretest			Posttest			<i>t</i>	p-value
	n	\bar{X}	S.D	n	\bar{X}	S.D		
Experimental group	50	119.44	14.58	50	134.54	7.13	9.39**	.000

* **p – value < .01.

The data presented in Table 5 indicates that the experimental group booted significantly in ethical awareness at the .01 level after being taught through the DR-TA using tales of virtue based on the King’s teaching concepts ($\bar{X} = 119.44_{(Pretest)}, 134.54_{(Posttest)}$, S.D = $14.58_{(Pretest)}, 7.13_{(Posttest)}$, $t = 9.39^{**}$).

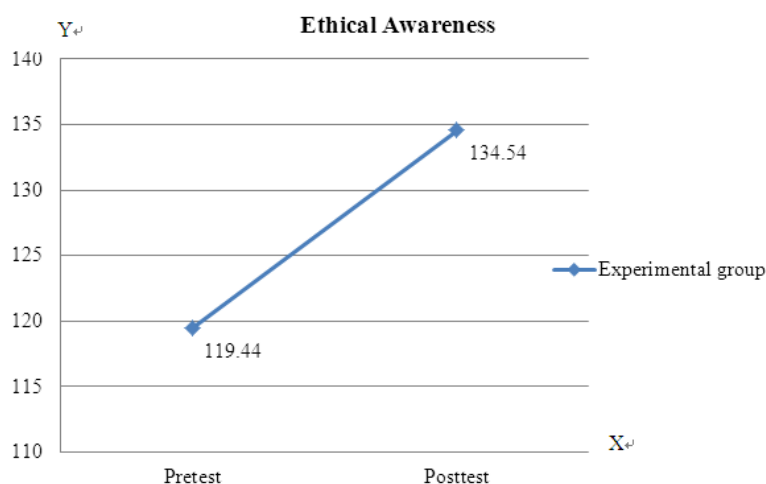


Figure 5. Graphical comparison of scores in ethical awareness before and after being taught through the DR-TA

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study reveal that the DR-TA method, through tales of virtue based on His Majesty the King’s teaching concepts, improve development in English reading comprehension and ethical awareness, compared to the traditional approach alone.

Experimental and control groups showed significant differences in English reading comprehension and ethical awareness. The experimental group obtained higher average scores than the control group, possibly because the DR-TA, together with the teaching material, was more appropriate for teaching reading skills. This method, along with the teaching materials, tended to allow students to practice reading skills, go through thinking processes, guess the content of unfamiliar texts, scrutinize information elicited from reading, and connect their knowledge and experience to reading.

In combining DR-TA and tales, students also set their own reading objectives, by speculating about reading content prior to reading. This may have aroused students’ curiosity about the text, and enabled them to perform reading activities more purposefully, and to focus more whilst reading. In addition, the tales of virtue allowed students to distinguish vice from virtue, which is an inherent theme in tales of this kind. Moreover, as the DR-TA is a student-centered teaching approach, with teachers as facilitators, it can help students connect background knowledge and new information, resulting in greater insights into texts being read, and deeper learning. In making sense of the meaning of new information quickly, learners appeared to benefit from existing schemata, permitting learners to make connections between schematic concepts and new information. Readers who have schemata of a subject can grasp new information about similar subject matters more quickly than those who do

not have them (Rattanavich, 2007).

In addition, according to the findings, the posttest mean scores of the experimental group were higher than the pretest scores in English reading comprehension and ethical awareness. It is also possible that because the DR-TA and the teaching material together were more suitable for the learners, they enjoyed reading it. Better understanding of texts, and teaching whilst employing the tales of virtue, will raise learners' ethical awareness, since the tales chiefly aim to instill morality. The DR-TA aims to teach learners to think critically whilst reading texts, so the students can understand texts and ethical awareness together. The findings correspond to the results of many studies on DR-TA in Thailand and elsewhere, which have also shown a general improvement in English reading comprehension (Erliana, 2011; Imamhem, 2012; Talal & Hameed, 2012).

In conclusion, this study postulated that DR-TA would be able to improve English reading comprehension and ethical awareness. After being instructed through the DR-TA, using tales of virtue based on His Majesty King's teaching concepts, students in the experimental group obtained significantly higher average scores in English reading comprehension and ethical awareness, compared to the control group.

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been possible without the kind support and assistance of many people. First, the author gratefully acknowledges my advisor, Assoc Prof. Dr. Saowalak Rattanavich, who offered constant advice and guidance till the completion of the study. Deepest gratitude is due to Assoc Prof. Nipa Sripairoj, Dr. Pornpimon Prasongporn and Dr. Wilailak Langka for all comments and suggestions in research methodology. Special thanks also go to Mr. Piyapong Promnont for his kindness and assistance.

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