A Comparison of Seventh Grade Thai Students' Reading Comprehension and Motivation to Read English through Applied Instruction Based on the Genre-Based Approach and the Teacher's Manual

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to compare the English reading comprehension and motivation to read of seventh grade Thai students taught with applied instruction through the genre-based approach and teachers' manual. A randomized pre-test post-test control group design was used through the cluster random sampling technique. The data were analyzed by basic statistics, the *t*-test for independent samples and the *t*-test for dependent samples. The experimental group students taught with applied instruction through the genre-based approach showed significantly higher scores in reading comprehension of and motivation to read English than those in the control group taught by methods according to the teacher's manual at a .05 confidence level.

Keywords: applied instruction through the genre-based approach, reading comprehension, motivation to read English

1. Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

A report from the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) has revealed that the English proficiency of the Thai population is continually decreasing according to global rankings based on average Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores, specifically ranking 56th and 57th out of 60 countries in 2011 and 2013, respectively (IMD report, 2013-2014). The rankings were related to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) that demonstrated the level of English skills amongst Thais was ranked 48th with very low proficiency out of 63 countries and territories in 2014 (EF EPI report, 2014). In addition, the average scores for the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) in the English language, as stated by the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS), Ministry of Education (2014), were below 50 percent, equivalent to 22.54, 16.19, 30.49, 28.71, 30.35, and 27.46, respectively, from 2009 to 2014 for 9th grade students as well as 12th grade students (O-NET report, 2009-2014). All reports have indicated that English proficiency levels of Thais is below the global average as a result of literacy skills in the English language, with a minority of considerably below age-appropriate levels, especially in terms of reading. A number of researchers have conducted various studies into English reading skills of Thai students and identified the main factor that causes inferior reading skills in a Thai context, being the instructional process for reading in Thailand is not effective enough to improve foreign language acquisition. The grammar-translation method, mostly used to teach reading, appears to only help Thai students with surface fluency in reading English. The study of Hermida (2009) suggested that surface fluency in reading skills leads students to directly accept meanings contained in the text without consideration, studying text in an isolated manner, including words, phrases, and grammatical structures, in order to understand the information superficially. It neither assists students in interpreting what the writer's intended meaning was or enhance reading comprehension, nor improve long-term retention of reading ability. Research has shown that most Thai teachers nowadays make use of the grammar translation method to teach reading, usually lecturing the text. This phenomenon is caused by not having enough exposure to practice reading and learn English through a variety of strategies, affecting the accessibility of reading comprehension and higher-order cognitive skills (Cheethanom, 2010; Padungkit, 2009). Another effect, besides lackluster reading comprehension skills that result

from the ineffective teaching process, is that Thai students lack the motivation to read English. This is mainly a consequence of the teaching process that is used in class not encouraging students to read. Resultantly, students may get bored, find it difficult to comprehend the text in English, and quit reading altogether. Conversely, many researchers say that skills and motivation go hand-in-hand. The more effectively the teaching process is applied, the more intrinsic motivation and sophisticated literacy skills the students gain (Cambria & Guthrie, 2010).

Furthermore, most Thai teachers that teach English do not acquire great proficiency in the English language themselves as determined by a survey in collaboration with the University of Cambridge in February 2006. The major revelation was that more than 60 percent of the 400 teachers surveyed were below the minimum standard of English language proficiency and teaching methodology required to instruct English classes effectively (Kaewmala, 2012). It is for this reason that most Thai English teachers do not use English to teach in the classroom, and the school-based learning atmosphere in the Thai context does not motivate students to develop appropriate English language skills. To date, studies have focused on the instructional process and teaching methodology that needs improvement in Thailand.

In 2015, Thai citizens, especially learners at educational institutes, are required to have a higher level of English language proficiency in order to become part of the Asian Economic Community (AEC), a symbol of integration into economic and social globalization. Communicative demands in English as an official language is an important issue for Thai citizens so as to be able to cope adequately with several affairs, like making international agreements, creating provisions for a free flow of services, and interacting with economic immigrants within their communities. The skill of reading English is a vital factor for Thais to access information and keep them up-to-date. The Thai Ministry of Education has been promoting policies to begin the process of aligning English teaching and learning with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to benchmark language ability and communicative language teaching (CLT) as the teaching methodology to emphasize English from the basic to tertiary levels (Ministry of Education, 2015; Kitjaroonchai, 2013). With this, Thailand will begin to adopt the latest trends in English teaching, a first step towards additional promotion of the English language. This led to the reason why the 7th grade students were the chosen ones as the sample group in this research. As the resut of this level which is the beginning of secondary school, the students would have been more proficient in English if they had been focused on good basic language skills.

Concerning the new trends in teaching reading, many investigations have suggested that the genre-based approach to instruction is a compelling way to improve skills and raise motivation. The approach was developed from systemic functional linguistic (SFL) approach. The steps involved in the teaching instructions based on the approach start with learning the structures of the target genre through independent writing. The approach promotes understanding, analysis, synthesis, solving problems, and thinking meta-cognitively in order to decode texts efficiently and to become equipped with knowledge about the features of texts for constructing effective written text. Therefore, the overall goal of the approach is to learn languages through mainstream text types based on language use in a social context or for a particular purpose in a situation (Piyaprom, 2012, p. 32). As a result of gaining knowledge on genres, the learner's awareness will be raised according to the purposes and organization of the texts as well as how language works to achieve a particular social aspect or target context (Hyland, 2002, p. 125; Rattanavich, 2013, pp. 50-62). A number of researchers in Thailand, as well as in other countries, have seen positive findings and considerable value in using the genre-based approach in English teaching and learning (e.g. Elashri, 2013; Emilia, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Kongpetch, 2006; Myskow & Gordon, 2010). The majority of the literature has demonstrated that the approach helps learners reach their communication goals, encourages more highly critical thinking, makes progress regarding skills for reading and writing, and enhances motivation to comprehend texts analytically. In one instance, the instruction based on genre pedagogy was experimentally employed as the theoretical framework for the new Australian curriculum in primary and secondary schools to improve student literacy starting in 2008 (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2012; Catholic Education Office Melbourne [CEOM], 2010). In the early years of the curriculum, the results exhibited a definite improvement in student literacy. In Southern Australia, mentioned in a case study of Saracini-Palombo; & Custance (2011), teachers applied the genre-based approach to teaching at a school and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) achievement of students in their reading was significantly greater, higher than state and national averages for grades 3, 5, and 7. The report also showed that the difference in the average achievement of students in reading in 2008, 2014, and 2015 is substantially above that of the base year (NAPLAN report, 2015).

These outcomes provide evidence for the genre pedagogy being effective, and that ultimately, this is a very challenging issue for a number of researchers when applying the approach or other throries to develop and support the integrated teaching process of English language skill (Lucantonio, 1991; Badger & White, 2000;

Kim, 2006). For example, Badger and White (2000) and Kim (2006) experimented with using the genre and process approaches together as an alternative in a model called the "process-genre approach" to improve literacy skills. The research affirmed that this dual instructional model works best in helping students learn organizational structure as well as linguistic features of a certain genre and contribute to amplifying student's reading and writing potentials. The aforementioned findings from the literature taken together, the present study investigated whether an applied instruction through the genre-based approach could improve Thai students' English reading skill.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

1) To compare the reading comprehension of seventh grade Thai students taught with the applied instruction through the genre-based approach and the teacher's manual.

2) To compare the motivation to read in seventh grade Thai students taught with the applied instruction through the genre-based approach and the teacher's manual.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

Hypothesis 1. Reading comprehension of students taught with the applied instruction through the genre-based approach and teachers' manual is different.

a) The post-test for the reading comprehension of students taught with the applied instruction through the genre-based approach is higher than the pre-test.

b) Reading comprehension of students taught with the applied instruction through the genre-based approach is different from that taught with the teacher's manual after the experiment.

Hypothesis 2. The motivation of students to read when taught with the applied instruction through the genre-based approach is higher than when taught with the teacher's manual after the experiment.

1.4 Reseach Questions

Research question 1: Is there a significant difference in reading comprehension between the experimental group and the control group after the treatment is given?

Research question 2: Is there a significant difference in reading motivation between the experimental group and the control group after the treatment is given?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Assumptions for Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the result of innate brain mechanisms that develop through the steps that connect brain circuits. In addition, it is influenced by experiences and background knowledge that readers bring to the text and text comprehension. This enables readers to construct, extend, and examine the meaning of the text they read. Having internalized various ideas, readers are more able to easily express their own critical responses which include identifying the intended audience and author's purpose (Dechant, 1982; Widdowson, 1983). Goodman (1972) has explained that reading comprehension consists of three components as follows:

Schema is the process of applying decoding skills with word knowledge, substantial background knowledge, and the readers' own experiences to the ideas written in the text.

Metacognition enables readers to interpret, integrate, critique, infer, analyze, connect, and evaluate ideas in texts. Readers are also capable of sequencing, summarizing, comparing and contrasting, drawing conclusions, distinguishing, and problem-solving.

Text structure is a method of involving language procedures for selecting appropriate vocabulary, grammatical rules, and pragmatic connections governing language use to convey reader's reflections of the texts.

2.2 The Theoretical Rationale of the Genre-based Approach

The genre-based approach was derived from systemic functional linguistics (SFL), introduced by M.A.K Halliday, that is concerned with the relationship between language and its functions in social settings (Hyon, 1996, p. 696). The approach focuses on the organization of the text and the textual features that are used in a socio-cultural context. Learning different genres is the means of language acquisition in order to gain understanding of the different communicative purposes and linguistic features in various situations, such as reporting, discussing, explaining, narrating, etc. In order to apply the approach to instructional process for reading and writing skills, Callaghen and Rothery (1988) developed the teaching and learning cycle that includes three phases of instruction: modeling, joint negotiation of text, and independent construction. Modeling is

considered the stage of learning language patterns through genre analysis. This phase involves the explicit teaching of patterns of lexico-grammatical and rhetorical features to enhance a learner's understanding and interpretation of particular communicative situations. Joint negotiation of text is the stage of combining a learners' background knowledge with the structure and features of genre in focus learned in the modeling phase to compose new text as the teacher guides or assists learners to organize material into coherent text. Independent construction requires learners to draw the schematic structures and linguistic features they have learnt in the previous stages to write their own text. This phase also encourages learners to be self-learning and build collaborative skills (Lin, 2006; Martin & Rose, 2005; & Pramoolsook, 2012).

2.3 The Applied Instruction Based on the Genre-based Approach

Many researchers have tried to draw from the effectiveness of the genre-based approach by improving, integrating, or adapting appropriate instructional theories and teaching techniques. For instance, Hyon (1996) created a new model of genre-based instruction previously described as having three phases -- adding one more stage called "building knowledge of the field" to foster the learners' knowledge of key features of the social circumstances and connecting it with the content of the genre. Likewise, others have developed instructional methods based on the disadvantages of the previous genre-based instruction. The result of a study by Byram (2004) claimed that the 3-phase instructional process neglects learners' self-sufficiency and does not maintain the learners' autonomous English learning skills or genuine interest, being the basis for constructing their own spoken and written texts to use for a particular communicative purpose. Another concern is that previous genre-based instruction does not build on and activate learners' prior knowledge (schema) in an obvious manner. This issue affects reading comprehension, which is how understanding new information to be learned is made ineffective. Continuously extending a learners' background knowledge is the way to control a learning situation and comprehend texts given accessibly (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012). With reference to the thoughts on development in genre-based instruction, this study seeks to apply the previous model of teaching and learning genres, including the three phases, by adding two more steps - 'building up context' and 'reflection' - as the first and last steps of teaching to improve reading skill. The first additional step is founded upon the strategies of building up prior knowledge through activities that interact with people, places, authentic media, and experiences to validate and expand a learners' schema before relating the new information. The other additional final step is related to activities employing strategies that promote reflective thinking that can help learners extend comprehension beyond the literal level, think critically about the connection of prior knowledge with new ideas to bring learning into sharper focus for learners, retain skills, and, in essence, become the basis for further learning. The continual practice of the reflection step also helps students become autonomous learners (Richardson, Morgan, & Fleener, 2011).

2.4 The Instruction Based on Teacher's Manual

Teacher's manual in the field of teaching English as a foreign language in traditional Thai education system is a guide book of which content is designed mainly based on the requirements of The Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E.2551 (A.D.2008). According to Thai educational context, there are a variety of teacher's manuals catered in response to the four strands: Language for Communication, Language and Culture, Language and Relationship with Other Learning Areas, and Language and Relationship with Community and the World enabling learners to acquire a favorable attitude towards foreign languages and the ability to use foreign languages for communicating in various situations, to create a positive and a lifelong impact on learner, and to gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge and references of the community (Ministry of Education: 2008). Teacher's manual generally provides lesson guidelines for teaching English relating to the textbook designed to be used with students who are studying English at different levels of proficiency and in different situations. It includes pre-tests, progress tests, a set of photocopiable tests for each of the units, activities which teachers can apply to their own varied teaching settings, games which allow students to have fun while learning English and exercises for practicing English individually, in pairs, and in groups. This leads Thai teachers mostly follow instructional methods in teacher's manual presented in three steps of Presentation, Practice, and Production.

2.5 Reading Motivation

In the field of reading, many researchers define motivation as goals and beliefs that uniquely explain a significant proportion of variance in reading comprehension. Intrinsic motivation is also positively associated with reading achievement and fosters the growth of lifelong reading. McGeown (2013) concluded that learners who are intrinsically motivated to read will be more engaged in what they are reading. As a result, intrinsically motivated learners will acquire a richer or deeper understanding of what they have read. Wigfield & Guthrie

(2010) stated that the three main factors that fully capture the nature of intrinsic motivation are interest, dedication, and confidence. High-achieving readers are portrayed as having obtained confidence, a powerful contributor to become lifelong readers with a commitment to reading to suit various purposes and a range of interrelated sources of information and societal benefits.
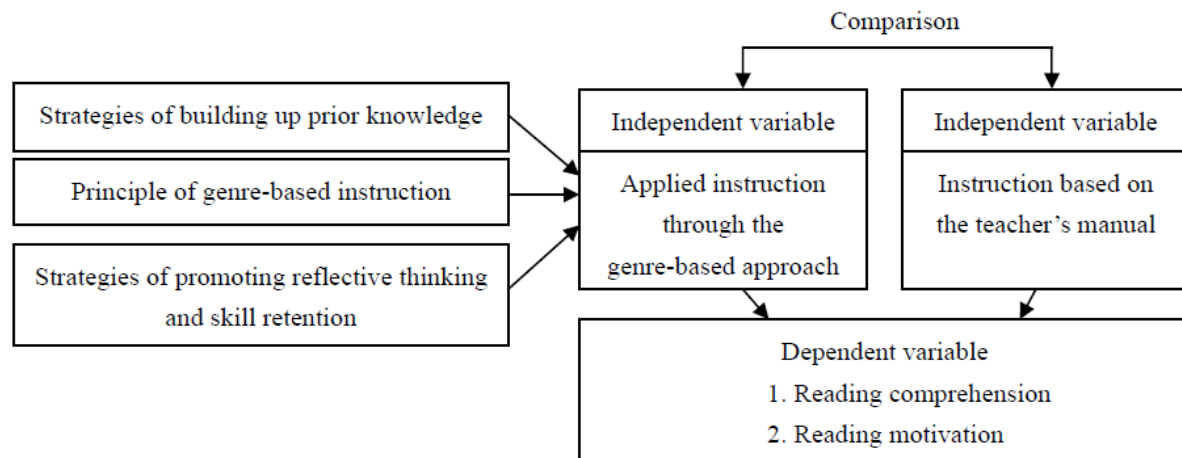
2.6 Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A Randomized Control Group Pretest-Posttest design was used in the study.

RE T_1　　　　　X　　　　　T_2

RC T_1　　　　　~　　　　　T_2

[RE = Randomized experimental group　　RC = Randomized control group

X = Experimental group treatment　　　　~ = Control group treatment　　　　T_1 = pre-test　　T_2 = post-test]

3.2 Sample of the Study

The study sample comprised two groups of seventh grade students (n = 60) who enrolled for the first semester (May-October 2015) course of English 1 (EN21101) at Wat Rajadhivas School in 2015. They were assigned, through a cluster random sampling technique, to an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of 30 students).

3.3 Research Instruments

The research instruments employed for data collection included a multiple-choice reading comprehension test (with a reliability of 0.85, calculated by Kuder-Richardson's (KR-20) coefficient), and five choice Likert scale questionnaires on reading motivation (with a reliability of 0.95, calculated by the Cronbach alpha coefficient).

3.4 Treatment of the Study

In nine weeks, with 18 teaching hours (excluding pre-test and post-test sessions), the experimental group was taught with the applied instruction through the genre-based approach and the control group with the teacher's manual. The instruction to both groups was planned as three units for 18 teaching hours, 2 hours per week. The steps of teaching for each group were planned as follows:

Experimental group:

Step 1: Building up context – let students perform activities based on strategies to build up prior knowledge before reading texts of each genre, such as graphic organizers, anticipation guides, or factstorming

Step 2: Deconstruction – let students perform reading activities to learn schematic structure and linguistic features of each genre.

Step 3: Joint construction – let students in groups combine their own experiences with the construction of each genre and organize their ideas for pre-writing.

Step 4: Independent construction – let students in groups write their own texts in the target genre.

Step 5: Reflection – let students perform activities based on strategies to promote reflective thinking and skill retention to connect what they have learnt with new ideas that bring learning into sharper focus, and engage learners to employ language both in the written and spoken manner in a variety of situations naturally.

Control group:

Step 1: Presentation – The teacher gains students' attention by showing pictures or video clips relating to the text.
– Let students know learning objectives before reading texts.

–The teacher introduces new vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures to students.

Step 2: Practice – Let students, in small groups, read the text.

– The teacher asks questions regarding the text to verify the students' understanding.
– Let each group perform reading assignment and present their answers.

Step 3: Production – Let each group discuss the answer presented for correction.

– The teachers review all the students' mistakes and explain how to correct them.

– Let students summarize the lesson with spoken or written language.

3.5 Data Analysis

Each hypothesis was tested with SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics 23, 2015) as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Comparing the scores of the reading comprehension test between the experimental and control groups' pre-test and post-test, and using a *t*-test for dependent samples for within-group analysis. For independent samples, a *t*-test was utilized to compare significant differences in reading comprehension between the experimental and control groups.

Hypothesis 2. The data of the experimental and control groups were analyzed using basic statistical methods ($\overline{X}$ and S.D.) and the reading motivation results using the rating criteria (least, little, moderate, much, and most). For independent samples, a *t*-test was made use of to compare the significance of the experimental and control groups.

4. The Results of the Study

The results of the study correspond to the two following questions:

Research question 1: Is there a significant difference in reading comprehension between the experimental group and the control group after the treatment is given?

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the experimental group registered significantly different reading comprehension scores than did the control group at the .05 confidence level.

Table 1. Test of significant differences in reading comprehension within the experimental and control groups using *t*-test for dependent samples and between groups using the *t*-test for independent samples

Group	n	Within group Reading Comprehension Scores		t	p-value	Between group Reading Comprehension Scores		t	p-value
		$\overline{X}$	S.D.			$\overline{X}$	S.D.		
Experiment	30	Pretest 13.03	5.39	9.10*	.000	18.57	5.23		
		Posttest 18.57	5.23					7.13*	.000
Control	30	Pretest 9.87	2.66	1.83*	.078	10.90	2.71		
		Posttest 10.90	2.71						

* p-value < .05.

Research question 2: Is there a significant difference in reading motivation between the experimental group and the control group after the treatment is given?

The data presented in Tables 2 and 3 show that the experimental group registered significantly higher reading motivation scores at the confidence .05 level with the applied instruction than did the control group with instruction through the teacher's manual.

Table 2. Test of significant differences in reading motivation between the experimental and control groups using the *t*-test for independent samples

Group	n	Reading Motivation Scores		t	p-value
		$\overline{X}$	S.D.		
Experiment	30	3.52	0.55	2.08*	.042
Control	30	3.22	0.56		

* p-value < .05.

Table 3. Analysis of basic statistical data in reading motivation between the experimental and control group

Reading motivation	Experimental group		Control Group	
	$\overline{X}$	S.D.	$\overline{X}$	S.D.
1. I try to finish reading the whole text.	3.57	0.97	3.07	0.74
2. I like to search for more information if I don't understand important lines in the reading text.	3.5	0.94	2.97	0.93
3. I like to help my friends with their reading assignments.	3.17	1.05	2.7	1.24
4. I try to learn the definitions of any words I don't understand.	3.7	0.88	3.7	1.15
5. I try to find ways to read faster.	3.53	0.86	3.2	1.10
6. I only try to read more to improve my grades.	4.2	0.71	3.83	0.95
7. I will have to read because the teacher assigns me work to do.	2.8	0.96	3	0.83
8. I don't like reading anything with too many paragraphs.	3.43	0.81	2.9	1.01
9. I try to complete reading assignments or tests by myself to check my understanding.	3.43	0.86	3.23	1.04
10. I try to find details in the reading text to answer questions.	3.6	0.77	3.4	1.00
11. Reading activities make me feel bored.	3.33	1.06	3.1	1.18
12. If I don't understand the text, I will read it again.	3.7	0.92	3.07	1.17
13. I set and achieve my reading goals.	3.3	0.95	3.1	0.92
14. I am willing to work hard to read better.	3.7	0.84	3.5	1.01
15. If a text is interesting, I don't care how hard it is to read.	3.57	1.07	3.13	0.94
16. I always quit reading when I have to read difficult texts.	3.53	0.82	2.87	1.07
17. It is important for me to find the main idea in each reading text.	3.33	0.99	3.03	1.19
18. Although I get bad reading grades, I continue to improve my reading skill.	3.93	1.05	3.73	0.87
19. I will find what my weak point in reading skills is and try to improve it	3.34	1.00	3.23	0.97
20. Reading is important and a skill worth retaining in the long term.	3.67	1.09	3.63	1.10
Total	**3.52**	**0.55**	**3.22**	**0.56**

The data interpretation; 1.00-1.80 = Least, 1.81-2.60 = Little, 2.61-3.40 = Moderate, 3.41-4.20 = Much, and

4.21-5.00 = Most.

5. Discussion and Finding

The results of this study can possibly be explained as follows:

1) By using the applied instruction through the genre-based approach, the students of the experimental group had significantly more reading comprehension than that of the control group. This is because the additional step of the teaching process, 'building up context', activates students' prior knowledge through pre-reading. This stage helps students develop a coherent interpretation of the given text through combining textual information with the information a student brings to text. It can also be useful for teachers to help students restructure or replace their prior knowledge with new schema which students make use of when they can relate what they already know about a topic to the facts and ideas in the text. Besides, by applying a genre-based approach to the instructional process, the students in the experimental group experienced more varied learning strategies than those in the control group, practicing their reading skills in more text analysis and encountering more varying text types, schematic structures, and linguistic features. These engaged students to think meta-cognitively in order to interpret, connect, and evaluate ideas in the texts, as well as to learn text structures to comprehend what can be read effectively. In addition, the reflection phase extended comprehension beyond the literal level, assisting students to retain language structures they have learnt to use in both spoken and written languages for different communicative purposes. The instructional process is linked to the schema, metacognition, and text structure, the main components leading to students' effective comprehension in reading.

2) Even though the students in the control group had collaboratively studied and practiced reading skills through instruction based on the teacher's manual, their experience in building up prior knowledge and analyzing text types was less than that of the students of the experimental group who had much more of an opportunity to recognize their schema, practice analyzing schematic structures and linguistic features, and integrate what they learnt previously to produce spoken or written language with their own ideas through learning activities.

3) The instructional process of the experimental group could better generate reading motivation than that of the control group. This is mainly because the teaching method in the experimental group enhanced students' analysis in reading texts of each genre by themselves in order to comprehend texts more precisely than students in the control group, where it was emphasized to complete a reading assignment on each topic one at a time. The continual practice in analyzing text types of the experimental group helped students feel confident enough to read and become self-regulated readers.

6. Conclusion

In comparison of the study, the results of the scores in the pretest and posttest were significantly different between the experimental and control group. They show that seventh grade Thai students taught through the applied instruction based on genre-based approach can improve their reading comprehension significantly much better than those in the control group taught through instruction based on teachers' manual. The students of the experimental group have significantly higher motivation in reading than those of the control group, which are relevant to the stated hypotheses. For further studies, the applied instruction through Genre-based approach can be adapted to other teaching of reading programs in schools at different levels with variety of genres or the language choices.

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