



**PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING TO ENHANCE ENGLISH
READING SKILLS: A CASE OF CHINESE EIGHTH
GRADE STUDENTS**



**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate participants' perceptions of implementing the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) method in their English reading class and to understand the advantages and disadvantages of PBL in this context. Through a mixed-methods approach, a questionnaire was administered to a group of Chinese students ($n = 44$) studying English in China. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants. The questionnaire data were analyzed to obtain mean values and standard deviations. Additionally, content analysis was conducted on the interview data. The results indicated that students were most satisfied with the effectiveness of PBL in cultivating reading comprehension skills ($x=4.73$), followed by satisfaction with reading activities ($x=4.70$) and reading materials ($x=4.64$). Semi-structured interviews revealed that students enjoyed learning through various tasks approximating real-life situations in their reading class and found that various reading activities and diverse reading materials effectively enhance reading abilities and critical thinking. However, challenges were encountered during the PBL-based instruction, including handling complex real-life situations in the reading curriculum. Students emphasized the need for teachers to provide more guidance and support. One implication of this study is that the PBL method has great potential for assisting L2 learners in studying a second language successfully.

(Total 66 pages)

Keywords: Problem-based Learning, Reading Skills Development, Critical Thinking

Student's Signature..... Thesis Advisor's Signature.....

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This chapter introduces the current background of English language teaching generally and the challenges encountered by Chinese students in their English reading endeavors. Furthermore, it includes research objectives, research questions, the scope of the study, definition of terms, and significance of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

In contemporary society, English plays a crucial role in the advancement of science, the economy, trade, and education, among other domains. In fact, proficiency in English facilitates global communication and enhances mutual understanding among citizens worldwide. It also fosters the exchange of cultural elements and innovative ideas across nations (Syakur & Azis, 2020). Moreover, the increasingly important role of English in the Asia-Pacific region is obvious. Nunan (2003) claimed that "... the emergence of English as a global language is having a considerable impact on policies and practices in all countries surveyed" (p. 589). He contended further that notwithstanding the paramount importance of English within the region, problems persist concerning the execution of the English curriculum, the adequacy of local English educators' readiness, and a disjuncture between the theoretical underpinnings of pedagogy and the pragmatic realities of the classroom. Such issues have been protracted in their manifestation within the educational landscape of China.

In China, English education at the compulsory level has faced significant challenges (Cheng & Wei, 2021). Simultaneously, there are new requirements outlined in the latest education policy. These requirements emphasize that English instruction should prioritize the development of students' foundational learning skills, cultural awareness, communicative competence, and a deep understanding of the value of

knowledge, as opposed to rote memorization of textbook content. Furthermore, it is essential to nurture students' practical abilities in gathering and analyzing information, problem-solving, and collaborative teamwork. Additionally, students are encouraged to actively employ English learning strategies, broaden their scope of English learning, cultivate effective study habits, and enhance their English reading proficiency to boost reading efficiency.

In 2018, China's Ministry of Education officially released the English curriculum standards for general junior schools. For the first time, these standards explicitly defined the core attributes of English education, encompassing language proficiency, cultural awareness, learning capabilities, and critical thinking skills. It is evident that the value of English learning extends beyond language proficiency alone. It also encompasses its nurturing value, which includes emotions and values. This involves gaining cultural insights from various countries through English learning, fostering correct cultural values, and promoting respect for cultural diversity. In the process of enhancing English proficiency, we must not only focus on improving students' understanding of the English language and establishing a well-structured learning system but also prioritize the development of their overall capabilities. After conducting research on English teaching, Moody et al. (2018) concluded that teachers need to align their teaching practices with the cultivation and enhancement of students' core qualities. This approach enables students to not only acquire subject knowledge but also facilitates their holistic development, fostering both critical thinking and character development. Consequently, with this emphasis on values cultivation, teachers should design reading lessons that incorporate real-life scenarios. By doing so, students will have the opportunity to engage with and explore problems within these real-life contexts, thereby sharpening their critical thinking skills.

In English teaching activities, reading plays a pivotal role in accessing learning resources. For many junior school students who have limited access to English resources, reading instruction serves as an essential avenue not only for enhancing their language proficiency but also for deepening their understanding of English culture. Consequently, reading has consistently remained a primary focus in

language instruction. As Changai (2015) pointed out, the reform of English teaching necessitates not only strengthening traditional classroom instruction but also enhancing students comprehension of English. This shift from previous teaching methods towards a more diverse approach is a crucial element in junior school English education. It not only aids in improving English language proficiency but also serves as a major means of practical application.

However, several issues persist in terms of English reading proficiency among junior school students. For instance, there has been limited progress in fundamentally reforming previous teaching approaches. Furthermore, teachers often remain constrained by the traditional examination-focused education system, leading them to prioritize exam-related goals and inadvertently overlooking students genuine interest in English (Tao, Zheng, Lu, Liang, & Tsai, 2020). Additionally, many teachers neglect the development of engaging themes or authentic contexts, fail to delve deeply into the thematic significance, and lack thorough textual analysis. In current English teaching, teachers continue to occupy a dominant role while students often assume passive roles as mere recipients of instruction. Teachers tend to focus more on vocabulary and basic grammar instruction, often explaining or translating sentence by sentence. However, there is a noticeable lack of emphasis on nurturing and guiding students' critical thinking. Consequently, it is evident that students' logical thinking skills, such as hypothetical reasoning and the ability to analyze and summarize, remain underdeveloped. This deficiency is particularly pronounced in English reading, where students' comprehensive language skills have become a weak point. These observed phenomena have contributed to a decline in students' academic performance (Sari & Faiz, 2021). Hence, in English teaching, reading proficiency holds significant importance as it not only shapes language application by the students but also influences the overall quality of their language skills. Therefore, teachers should prioritize the cultivation of students abilities in various aspects and explore more effective methods to enhance the quality of teaching (Ghufron & Ermawati, 2018).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study was conducted in a traditional junior school in Lingbi County, China. Like most EFL contexts, English instruction in China focuses heavily on reading skills development at the expense of the other skills. This has to do with the exam-oriented education widely practiced in China. Therefore, traditional and outdated teaching methods have been observed. One of the ramifications of this practice is that most Chinese EFL students find the reading class inconducive to English skills development, including critical thinking, turning students into inactive learners, simply waiting for the teacher to impart knowledge to them.

Firstly, many teachers hold outdated beliefs and employ outdated teaching methods. Numerous educators still adhere to antiquated classroom teaching philosophies, resulting in excessively lecture-based lessons. The reading course is teacher-centered, with the teacher speaking from the front of the classroom and the students listening passively. The teacher asks questions, and the students respond, but this process leaves students in a very passive state, neglecting the cultivation of their initiative and innovative thinking. Simultaneously, teachers often use outdated teaching methods, lacking comprehensibility and practical application in their teaching skills. The reading instruction process typically involves passages, language points, and translation, which are simplistic teaching methods that hinder students' ability to learn independently. This approach also affects students' capacity and awareness of solving real-world problems on their own, ultimately dampening their motivation and initiative in learning English. Consequently, students' interest in English diminishes (Chhabra, 2021).

Secondly, teachers often overlook the development of students' overall qualities. Currently, the prevailing educational approach in this school prioritizes exam results as the ultimate educational objective. Within the traditional, exam-focused, and grammar-centric reading classroom, many teachers tend to emphasize the analysis of grammatical elements such as vocabulary, phrases, and sentence patterns in an effort to enhance students reading performance. Unfortunately, this focus often neglects the broader structural and content aspects of the reading materials.

Thirdly, from the student perspective, they lack interest and confidence in learning English. Classroom observations revealed that more than half of the students exhibited reluctance when it came to tackling reading comprehension questions. This prevalent issue highlights the absence of effective reading strategies and methods to guide the reading process, contributing to the fear and lack of confidence displayed by over half of the students when confronted with reading-related tasks. This lack of interest and confidence ultimately hinders students' progress in improving their reading skills.

Therefore, the aforementioned issues pertaining to improving students reading ability and developing effective reading strategies require urgent attention. The researcher contends that PBL offers a viable solution to this array of challenges. PBL, as an innovative approach to reading instruction, prioritizes student-centered learning. In this method, students collaborate individually or in groups, with guidance from the teacher, to utilize their existing knowledge and resources to acquire relevant knowledge and skills. Through this problem-solving process, students are encouraged to become self-reliant in the learning process so that they could understand the issues at hand, which would ultimately improve their English reading skills (Aulia, Laeli, & Ulwiyah, 2023).

1.3 Research Objectives

1.3.1 To ascertain perceptions of the participants towards the effectiveness and implementation of the PBL methods.

1.3.2 To investigate perceived advantages and disadvantages of PBL, aiming to gain insight into their attitudes and perspectives towards this teaching methodology.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 What are the perceptions of the participants towards the implementation of the PBL method in their English reading class?

1.4.2 What are perceived advantages and disadvantages of PBL in the reading class?

1.5 Scope of the Study

1.5.1 Location of the Study

In total, there are over a hundred classes in the middle and high schools, with nearly 10,000 enrolled students and 552 staff members.

1.5.2 Population and Sample of the Study

Population: In the second semester of 2023, at Frist Middle School in Lingbi County, China, there were 18 eighth-grade classes comprising a total of 856 students.

Sample: A convenient sampling method was employed to select the sample. Out of a total of 856 participating students, a sample of 44 students were chosen purposively. In fact, the class was considered an intact group where the PBL method was used to teach.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) was defined in this study as a student-centered teaching approach accompanied by the exploration of real-world problems. The process began with teachers preparing well-structured questions to engage students. Students then discussed these questions in groups, collaborate to seek information, and present their findings. This iterative cycle led to the discovery of new questions, promoting continuous exploration. Teachers served as facilitators throughout, guiding analysis and problem-solving, while conducting evaluations and summaries to enhance understanding and nurture students' problem-solving skills.

English reading skills are defined as a comprehensive set of abilities including the identification of the main idea, supporting details, and conclusions within a text. These skills also encompass a range of sub-skills, such as skimming, scanning, inference drawing, contextual guessing, critical analysis and so on.

Grade 8 Students are defined in this study as the cohort of students in their second year of junior school education within the Chinese junior school system. Typically aged between 13 and 14, these Grade 8 students encounter more profound subject matter across various disciplines, necessitating the development of independent learning, problem-solving, and collaborative skills. Concurrently, this stage of education also witnesses significant social, emotional, and interest-related growth.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of the research participants toward PBL in their English reading class and also to ascertain their perceived advantages and disadvantages of learning English reading through PBL.

The PBL approach is grounded in constructivist theory, cooperative learning theory, and humanistic theory, with a primary emphasis on fostering students' capacity to apply their knowledge in practical contexts. In this approach, students take on a central role, while teachers serve as facilitators and guides throughout the learning process. Through the PBL teaching model, students engage in problem-solving through a combination of independent learning and collaborative group work.

For teachers, the PBL teaching method disrupts the traditional teacher-centered approach, infusing fresh inspiration into English reading instruction, and enriches the educational theories and teaching practices in Chinese junior schools.

For students, the PBL method is believed to enhance their interest in learning English, equips them with the skills to tackle complex challenges in the future, and empowers them to pursue lifelong learning and self-improvement.



CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction Problem-Based Learning

2.1.1 Problem-Based Learning

PBL has been variously defined by several scholars. For example, Tawfik, Gish-Lieberman, Gatewood, and Arrington (2021) suggest that PBL is a teaching approach that accentuates contextualized problems and places learners at the forefront. Hmelo-Silver (2004) views PBL as an instructional approach that encourages students to delve into problem-solving techniques. Tan (2021) posits that PBL fosters meaningful, real-world situations and supports learners in applying knowledge to develop problem-solving skills, thus constituting a pedagogical strategy. Cosgun and Atay (2021) propose that the classroom environment in PBL serves as an effective tool for nurturing creativity and critical thinking skills. Reed, Mullen, and Boyles (2021) contend that PBL facilitates students self-discovery of problems through collaborative group work, prompting them to devise solutions and enhancing their analytical and critical thinking abilities.

In the same vein, some scholars also conceptualize PBL as a learning methodology. Wood (2014) suggests that the crux of PBL lies in placing students in challenging scenarios, enabling them, under teacher guidance, to identify and address problems, fostering a learning environment driven by inquiry. Chung (2019) proposes that learners actively draw upon their past experiences, integrating theory with practice, to devise viable solutions for specific problems, thereby embodying the essence of PBL.

In the light of curriculum, Kretchmar (2008) regards PBL as a comprehensive concept that integrates both curriculum and process. As a curriculum, PBL consists of a meticulously curated series of problems that necessitate learners to grasp essential knowledge, proficiently solve problems, and augment their autonomous learning strategies and teamwork skills. As a process, PBL involves a coherent series of integrated steps, wherein students must fully engage to comprehend problem-solving methods, thereby facilitating task completion.

In conclusion, PBL serves not only as a learning methodology but also as a teaching approach, defined herein as a pedagogical framework. PBL entails a teaching model wherein students engage in autonomous learning and group discussions to analyze a sequence of problems presented by the instructor. This approach encourages students to actively explore and resolve issues, thereby enhancing their language proficiency and problem-solving capabilities. By embracing this teaching methodology, the objective is to bolster students analytical and problem-solving proficiencies while fostering teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity. In a nutshell, PBL is intended to empower students.

2.1.2 Characteristics of PBL

The PBL teaching approach exhibits a set of distinctive characteristics, including the following:

1) Problem-centered

The application of the PBL teaching method is inherently tied to the concept of problems, which permeate the entire teaching process and exert a direct influence on students learning outcomes (Hung, 2019). In PBL instruction, educators furnish students with authentic and meaningful problem scenarios, enabling them to grasp the underlying knowledge embedded within these problems. The efficacy of problem formulation stands as a critical step in the execution of PBL. Consequently, in the

context of actual reading instruction, the establishment of problems should adhere to several guiding principles.

Authenticity. In PBL instruction, a significant proportion of problem scenarios are derived from real-life situations (Amaya Chávez, Gámiz -Sánchez, & Cañas Vargas, 2020). While students routinely encounter numerous challenges in their daily lives, not all of these issues capture their attention or interest. It is incumbent upon teachers to establish a connection between the subject matter and students' real-life experiences. By doing so, problems can resonate with students, kindling their enthusiasm for learning and facilitating effective knowledge acquisition.

Hierarchy. In the hierarchy of questioning within Problem-Based Learning (PBL), the approach typically begins with straightforward inquiries that serve to introduce the focal point (Purichia, 2015). This initial stage aims to prevent students from feeling overwhelmed or losing confidence. Subsequent questions are incrementally more challenging, designed to foster a positive thinking process and intellectual growth among students, ultimately fulfilling the instructional objectives. Naturally, the difficulty level of the questions should align with the students' proximal developmental zone, ensuring that the challenges presented are within their reach. When students encounter appropriately challenging material during their learning journey, it tends to stimulate their interest and motivation. This, in turn, aids students in identifying meaningful problems and assists them in constructing a systematic knowledge framework.

Differentiation. Teachers should consider the varying proficiency levels of their students and tailor their questions accordingly. Specifically, teachers should be mindful of their students' diverse levels of English proficiency and craft questions that are suited to each group. Students with lower English proficiency should be presented with simpler questions, while those with higher proficiency can be challenged with more complex inquiries. This approach ensures that students' enthusiasm and motivation for learning remain intact, and it provides every student with an

opportunity to actively engage in the classroom and express their opinions (Brouwer, Jansen, Severiens, & Meeuwisse, 2019).

2) Student-centered

In the context of PBL, students are not reliant on teachers solely for the delivery of knowledge. Instead, once a problem is presented by the teacher or identified by the students themselves, students are organized into groups. Within these groups, they engage in activities such as problem analysis, information collection, hypothesis generation, hypothesis testing, and ultimately, problem resolution. Throughout this process, students actively seek answers to their questions, with the teacher assuming a guiding and supportive role as needed. Consequently, student autonomy is significantly bolstered. This characteristic is why PBL is ideally suited for fostering active learners, embedding learning within the framework of authentic problems, and instilling a sense of responsibility in students for their own educational progress (Savery, 2015).

3) Combination of self-learning and cooperative learning

In the realm of PBL teaching, the teacher assumes a multifaceted role, transitioning from being the sole source of knowledge to becoming the architect of problem scenarios, the guide through the problem-solving process, the collaborator in knowledge acquisition, and the catalyst for student engagement. Teachers carefully consider students' existing knowledge, abilities, and experiences, and they craft scenarios and create conditions that ignite students' innate initiative and enthusiasm for learning. From the students' perspective, they acquire knowledge under the guidance of their teachers while experiencing the joy of independently unraveling complex problems. In this transformative learning process, students no longer serve as passive vessels awaiting the infusion of knowledge. Instead, they become proactive protagonists, relying on their capacity for self-directed learning to gather information, analyze data, and tackle challenges. Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all problems within the purview of PBL teaching can be resolved by individual

students in isolation. Consequently, educators must collaborate with students to establish diverse learning communities. This cooperative effort fosters students sense of collaboration and communication skills, enabling them to engage in substantive discussions where the exchange of ideas and insights becomes the cornerstone of their educational experience (Ali, 2019).

2.1.3 Process of PBL

Yuling (2011) outlined the process of integrating PBL into English reading, which researchers have adapted to fit the current teaching context, as depicted in Figure 2.1.

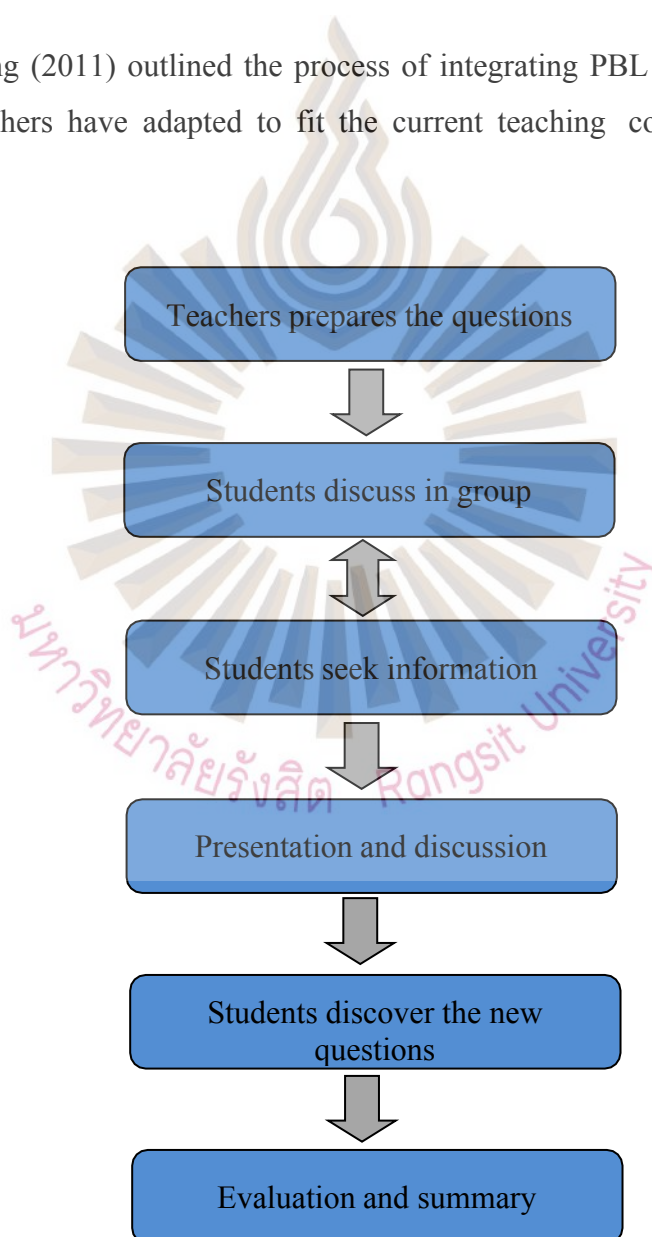


Figure 2.1 Process of PBL

Source: Yuling, 2011

Teachers prepares the questions. Teachers play a pivotal role in the initial phase by formulating well-structured questions. To facilitate effective learning outcomes, educators must possess a clear objective and a strong commitment to imparting the questions they have crafted to students. This transparent communication of questions serves as a fundamental catalyst for students to engage in knowledge exploration, a crucial determinant of successful teaching outcomes.

Students discuss in group. The collaborative aspect comes to the fore as students convene in groups to discuss their findings. Each member contributes their individual insights and comprehension of the problem at hand. Here, the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator, guiding the discussion. Subsequently, the teacher encourages students to delve deeper, continuously scrutinizing and exploring, thereby fortifying their knowledge foundation.

Students seek information. In the subsequent phase, students embark on a quest for information. They diligently gather pertinent resources and utilize various means to resolve the presented problems, often extending their efforts beyond the confines of the classroom. To optimize this process, each study group should delineate their tasks with precision, and teachers should be readily available to offer guidance and support when needed.

Presentation and discussion. The next phase involves presentation and discussion. A representative from each group is designated to deliver a comprehensive summary statement pertaining to the problem being studied. During this stage, the teacher plays a crucial role by highlighting key knowledge points. This step promotes active engagement and knowledge consolidation among the students.

Students discover the new questions. Each group designates a representative to present their findings. The teacher highlights key knowledge points, fostering active engagement and knowledge consolidation among the students.

Evaluation and summary. Subsequently, the teacher conducts an evaluation and summary of the content covered. This process is instrumental in crystallizing students' cognitive structures and enhancing their understanding of the subject matter. Acknowledgment and praise are extended to groups or individuals who have actively participated in classroom activities. Teachers should be generous in their praise, as it plays an indispensable role in nurturing students' motivation to learn.

In sum, PBL requires the cooperation between teachers and students and among students themselves. PBL is pivotal on the notion that learning any subject matter, including EFL reading, requires a concerted effort and that the learner should be given autonomy and flexibility in tackling problems that could oftentimes occur during the learning process. It is no exaggeration to state that PBL makes the learning in the classroom confers an experiential experience for the learner. After all, learning a foreign language, especially learning to read in the language, should mean the learner can do something with the acquired skills in real-life situations.

2.2 Problem-Based in Reading

2.2.1 Definition of Reading

Within the spectrum of language skills encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing, reading comprehension stands out as the most crucial. Lambe (2018) posits that reading comprehension involves the process of extracting information from context and amalgamating existing elements to construct a new, coherent understanding. According to Farha and Rohani (2019), reading comprehension assumes a vital role in language learning, given that reading constitutes one of the most prevalent forms of input in language acquisition. This is important for the general EFL context. Nurjanah (2018) underscores that reading comprehension holds a prominent position among the English language skills that learners must cultivate. Consequently, a strong command of reading comprehension significantly enhances students' ability to comprehend various types of reading materials.

2.2.2 Three Models of Reading

Throughout the history, reading has always been highly emphasized in language teaching. This article elaborates on the importance of reading from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In terms of theoretical research, three models are considered the most representative theories explaining the reading process.

In 1972, Gough proposed the bottom-up reading model, which essentially suggests that readers engage in text comprehension from the bottom up. In the actual reading process, readers primarily focus on recognizing small units and then gradually understanding larger units. This model overly emphasizes the interpretation of small portions of text while neglecting the grasp of the overall text, as readers are unable to make rapid predictions about the text.

Goodman proposed the top-down model. to compensate for the shortcomings of the bottom-up model, Goodman (1970) posits that reading is a process of predicting content, confirming assumptions, and correcting errors. Readers do not need to accurately identify and understand every word and phrase; instead, they need to utilize their existing language knowledge and cultural background knowledge to capture the essential information in the text. In other words, readers, as the focal point of reading, play an active role in exploring the relationships between sentences or paragraphs. This model emphasizes the importance of individual existing knowledge and experience. This is why different readers can obtain different reading information and experiences when reading the same text. It is worth noting that excessive focus on existing knowledge can influence readers' judgment of textual information. Readers predict textual information based on experience, often overlooking the content expressed by the text itself, thereby neglecting specific vocabulary and grammar items. In other words, this model has its limitations; it overly emphasizes higher-level reading skills, which can affect the development and utilization of readers lower-level reading skills.

In contrast, the interactive model of reading not only involves the extraction of information from the text but also activates the contextual knowledge that readers employ in the reading process. This model posits that reading is akin to a dynamic dialogue between the reader and the text. Readers utilize information from the text to construct new knowledge, thus fostering a reciprocal interaction between the reader's background knowledge and the textual content (Rumelhart, 1977). This interactive approach to reading has garnered recognition among researchers and is often acknowledged as a comprehensive and nuanced perspective on the reading process (Gamboa-González, 2017).

In summary, the bottom-up model allows readers to focus on smaller linguistic units, such as words and phrases. The top-down model, on the other hand, takes into account readers existing knowledge and personal experiences. The interactive model involves the alternating or simultaneous occurrence of both models based on actual needs. Therefore, the interactive reading model is currently one of the most popular reading models.

Given the popularity of the interactive model in L2 English reading education, PBL should lend itself to this approach, for it encourages meaningful interaction of the learners with not just other peers but with the tasks at hand as well.

2.3 Previous Research Related to this Study

Over the past decades, a number of researchers have conducted studies investigating the benefits of PBL in various educational contexts. For instance, Almulla (2019) discusses the PBL methodology as a means to foster learning competencies and cultivate self-directed learning skills. Papilaya and Tuapattinaya (2022) assert that PBL allows students to develop reading skills while engaging in problem-solving tasks, highlighting its distinct advantages over traditional methods in enhancing students independent learning, interest, and teamwork. Further, Iskandar, Jannah, and Wicaksono (2021) advocate for the use of problem-based learning in English reading instruction, emphasizing its role in improving teaching quality,

fostering students' innovative abilities, and enhancing their overall comprehensiveskills.

Taking PBL to the next level, Ali (2019) emphasize that PBL is an instructional approach that tasks students with solving real-world problems individually or collaboratively, diverging from traditional lecture-based or textbook-centered learning methods. Notably, PBL promotes self-directed learning by engaging students in skill development. By linking learning to students daily experiences and accentuating critical and analytical thinking, problems are selected to evoke curiosity. Syahfutra and Niah (2019) suggests that implementing this model in English reading instruction significantly contributes to enhancing students reading skills.

Along the same line, Setyo, Fathurahman, Anwar, and PdI (2020) application research on PBL, a detailed exposition was provided regarding the fundamental steps of employing PBL for English reading. These steps encompassed posing questions, analyzing and solving problems, evaluating issues, summarizing, and reflecting. Simultaneously, emphasis was placed on creating valuable and meaningful problem scenarios, fostering students' awareness of issues in English reading. Moreover, S. M. Ali and Hasanah (2024) argue that without altering the instructional content, the application of the PBL teaching method fosters the development of language proficiency, demonstrating the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing language skills. Amir, Mehboob, Sethi, and Jamil (2022) corroborates this viewpoint, noting improved student performance in the classroom. In comparison to traditional reading instructional methods, students are more inclined towards posing, analyzing, and solving problems.

In addition to the aforementioned studies conducted in the typical ESL/EF contexts, a number of Chinese researchers have over the years conducted the following studies on different areas. For instance, whereas Peipei (2016) applied problem-based learning in teaching English newspaper reading, utilizing this approach to ignite students interest, bolster their motivation, cultivate critical thinking, and promote initiative and collaboration, thereby facilitating learning in the course, Gao

(2015) applied PBL in the processes of previewing, teaching, and expansion training, concluding that PBL is an open teaching model that can flexibly adapt to instructional content changes. This not only enhances cooperative communication among students but also connects fragmented English knowledge, contributing to students actively constructing language knowledge.

Shu (2016) utilized an open class as an illustration to examine the practical application effects of PBL teaching in high school English reading classes. The instructional process was delineated into four steps: initiating autonomous exploration from teacher-posed questions, sharing findings based on exploration, engaging in group cooperative learning, and concluding with summarization and thematic elevation.

In the context of junior school English teaching, Lu (2021) pointed out that adopting the PBL teaching method enables students to systematically acquire knowledge, understand various perspectives, and enjoy the learning process.

Ying (2017) experimental research validated the viability of incorporating PBL teaching methods into junior school English reading instruction. The four-step breakdown of the PBL teaching method encompassed scenario creation and question posing, problem analysis and resolution, resource integration and conclusion derivation, and evaluation and application. A positive stance was maintained towards this teaching approach, substantiated through questionnaire surveys, paper tests, classroom observations, and interviews, confirming the efficacy of PBL in enhancing the quality of junior school teaching.

Qin (2015) comprehensively delineated PBL from three facets: basic connotations, theoretical frameworks, and characteristics. Additionally, experimental research was conducted to implement PBL in English reading classes. Findings indicated that PBL, as a problem-centered, student-centered, and team-centered teaching model, fortifies students' intrinsic motivation and confidence.

Liu (2016) precisely articulated the instructional procedures of PBL, taking into account students' cognitive levels and learning characteristics. Through literature scrutiny, classroom observations, and interviews, issues surrounding PBL teaching in elementary school reading instruction were summarized.

In conclusion, researchers are dedicated to fostering students' problem awareness, cooperative spirit, and lifelong learning abilities. Regarding participants in PBL reading instruction, researchers emphasize student autonomy, with teachers playing the roles of facilitators and guides. However, current research in this area has its limitations, reflected in two aspects. Firstly, while PBL has gradually gained attention in China, research on PBL predominantly focuses on higher education, and empirical studies at the junior school level are not extensive enough. Secondly, most studies on PBL are theoretical descriptions, and there is a need for more specific analyses of teaching practices. Given the emphases of the previous studies reviewed above, this study aims to extend the edge of knowledge regarding perceptions of the use of PBL in the reading classroom. It is hoped that knowledge to be gained from the current study will serve as another piece of evidence concerning the usefulness of PBL in English language teaching.

2.4 Theoretical Basis of PBL

2.4.1 Constructivist Theory

Constructivism holds significant prominence in modern education and has exerted a substantial influence, particularly in the domain of science education. Rooted in cognitive development, constructivism has been subject to various interpretations. Bevevino, Dengel, and Adams (1999) characterizes constructivism as an overarching ideology, while Simpson posits it as a theoretical framework delineating the interpretation of acquired knowledge to foster cognitive innovation (Simpson, 2001).

Carter, Larussa, and Bodner (1987) posit that learning unfolds as a gradual process within the realm of cognitive architecture. This process involves the active

construction of knowledge, which serves to enrich the reservoir of information within an individual's cognitive framework. This cognitive architectural process is also subject to influences from various external factors. Notably, prior knowledge exerts a significant impact on students. When they encounter new information that is related to what they have previously learned, it tends to be readily assimilated. In alignment with Bodner, Duffy (1996) contends that an individual's understanding of the world is fundamentally shaped by their own experiences. It is, therefore, instinctual to further elaborate upon facts through personal experiences. Hence, it is evident that constructivism places considerable emphasis on the role of prior knowledge. Expanding upon these viewpoints, it becomes apparent that the central tenet of constructivism revolves around the idea that learners should actively construct their own knowledge, drawing from their unique experiences. Consequently, within the constructivist framework, learning is viewed as an active process, far removed from mere passive reception. Importantly, this construction of knowledge is inherently personal and cannot be substituted or replicated by others.

In light of the aforementioned, Savery and Duffy (1995) suggest that teaching encompasses not only the transfer of knowledge to learners but also emphasizes the significance of students prior knowledge and the necessity of leveraging their own experiences to build their internal knowledge systems. In this pedagogical context, teachers should not disregard students' individual experiences but rather assist them in leveraging these experiences to acquire additional knowledge, actively construct their understanding, and develop a knowledge network. Throughout this process, the teacher transcends the traditional role of a leader and assumes the position of a facilitator, aiding students in their learning journey. Moreover, the teacher's role extends to fostering student autonomy in learning by creating contexts that empower them to think and learn independently. Guided by the teacher, students must learn to explore autonomously, unearth new knowledge, and construct their knowledge systems. It is within this constructivist framework that PBL finds its theoretical foundation.

In other words, PBL emphasizes learning within the context of complex and authentic problem situations. Through pre-established problem scenarios, students can access content of personal interest. They collaborate with peers to delve into the new knowledge concealed behind the problem, ultimately arriving at a solution. PBL frequently leverages prior knowledge as the foundation for problem-solving and aims to progressively kindle students' curiosity for inquiry. It encourages learners to construct knowledge through their own cognitive processes and actions.

2.4.2 Cooperative Learning Theory

The emergence of cooperative learning in the United States dates back to the 1970s. It has since become an indispensable pedagogical strategy in English language education, facilitating the development of students' collaborative abilities and enhancing their overall learning performance. As elucidated by Johnson, D., & Johnson, R., (2009), cooperative learning typically encompasses five fundamental elements: (1) active interdependence. At the heart of group work lies the concept of active interdependence. It underscores the necessity for collaborative efforts among group members, emphasizing that in collective achievement, no individual operates in isolation. Group members mutually promote each other, rendering each member's contribution integral to the group's success. (2) Face-to-face Facilitation. Facilitation in a face-to-face manner is a cornerstone of cooperative learning. It ensures that each student enjoys an optimal environment for group learning, fostering mutual assistance and shared accomplishments. (3) Individual responsibility. It can be argued that within a cooperative learning context, every group member assumes individual responsibility while being afforded the space for personal development. Individual responsibility serves as a pivotal element that amplifies the significance of collaboration in group learning. (4) Social skills. Teachers play a pivotal role in equipping students with the requisite social skills for effective cooperative learning. Enhancing communication between teachers and students, as well as among group members, elevates the efficiency of cooperative learning. Clear and precise communication among group members is paramount. Lastly, (5) Group self-assessment. Evaluating the group process, describing group members' behavior, and identifying areas for improvement

in teaching behaviors are integral to the concept of group self-assessment. Groups also need to reflect on the dynamics of cooperation among their members, recognizing that it profoundly influences the ultimate effectiveness of teaching and learning. After an in-depth examination of cooperative learning, Wang Jian categorized this pedagogical approach into three distinct levels: firstly, peer-to-peer learning. This level entails amicable collaboration among peers, fostering a sense of camaraderie in the learning process; secondly, group work and discussion. At this level, students engage in cooperative endeavors, such as research or interest-driven learning, thereby strengthening their collaborative relationships within the group; and finally, whole group learning. This stage involves whole-group participation, often employing techniques like role-playing. Such activities are designed to heighten students interest in learning through immersive group interactions (Jian, 2004).

In primary and secondary school teaching activities, educators frequently employ cooperative learning as a means to enhance teaching efficacy, considering it a fundamental and highly efficient approach to collaboration. Benson (2005) further posited that self-regulated learning comprises three key components: firstly, learning management; secondly, cognitive construction; and finally, learning content. In other words, learners not only need to possess a profound understanding of the learning objectives but also must autonomously select their own methods and determine the evaluation criteria based on their existing knowledge. To effectively achieve the learning objectives, group members should leverage their diverse experiences and optimize the learning conditions through collaborative discussions.

Given the gist of collaborative learning above, it is only fitting to include it in the implementation of PBL. This is because one of the initial steps in the implementation of PBL is the formation of student groups, whereby students collaboratively address problems through group-based learning and mutual deliberation. Consequently, this pedagogical approach has found comprehensive application within the context of PBL, with the theory of cooperative learning offering invaluable theoretical guidance for the facilitation of teaching and learning activities in educational settings.

2.4.3 Humanistic Theory

The Humanistic theory experienced rapid development during the 1870s, with notable figures such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow leading the way. They shared a common emphasis on understanding the needs, motivations, and potential of students, which played a pivotal role in advancing the field of educational psychology. The humanistic perspective regarding the role of teachers has gained widespread acceptance and continues to influence contemporary educators. In this view, teachers assume the role of facilitators throughout the teaching and learning process, transcending the mere transmission of knowledge.

Patterson and Joseph (2007) particularly extolled the virtues of personality-centered and process-oriented humanism. According to Rogers, students' interest and motivation in learning can be ignited when they perceive the content they are studying as meaningful and valuable. This underscores the pivotal role of non-cognitive factors in shaping the learning experience and achieving greater depth in learning. Consequently, teachers are encouraged to actively immerse themselves in experiences related to the subject matter, thereby creating an authentic learning environment. In such a context, students naturally recognize the value in what they are learning, leading to heightened interest and a spirit of exploration.

It is worth noting that PBL perfectly aligns with this notion of immersive, engaging experiences. As facilitators of learning, teachers craft real-life situations that resonate with students and provide them with the necessary resources. The ultimate aim of this approach is not merely to help students acquire proficiency but to empower them to proactively seek knowledge, shifting from passive recipients to active participants in the learning process. In this regard, humanism provides a solid theoretical foundation for the development and implementation of PBL.

All in all, the underpinning theories of PBL are remarkably rich and comprehensive. Grounded in these theoretical foundations, educators can effectively apply this pedagogical method within the English classroom, ultimately enhancing the efficiency of teaching and fostering a more engaging and participatory learning environment.

2.5 Conclusion

English reading constitutes a crucial facet of English language acquisition. The current landscape of English reading instruction in junior schools presents a duality. On one hand, some educators prioritize explicating linguistic knowledge points during reading instruction, aiming to enhance students reading proficiency. On the other hand, students grapple with the pressure of memorizing English reading materials, leading to diminished interest in the subject. This, combined with limited mastery of reading skills and a restricted vocabulary repertoire, compounds the challenge of learning to read. Exploring the integration of PBL into junior school English reading instruction could potentially provide valuable insights and enrich the arsenal of resources available for refining teaching methodologies in this context. By embracing innovative approaches like PBL, educators can foster a more dynamic and engaging English reading experience for students, ultimately bolstering their proficiency and kindling their genuine interest in the subject.



CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

This chapter describes the research methodology including research design, research sites, population and sample, research instruments, validity and reliability of research instruments, data collection, and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

In the present study, the researcher employed a mixed-methods approach to assess the English reading proficiencies of 44 students in Lingbi County, China.

An explanatory mixed-methods design, which integrated both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, served as the methodological framework for this study. This approach is considered particularly advantageous when investigating multifaceted and intricate issues (Molina-Azorin, 2016) (Gerrish & Lacey, 2010). To conduct this research, an initial phase entailed the utilization of quantitative research methods, primarily through the administration of questionnaires. Subsequently, qualitative data were gathered via semi-structured interviews. Finally, a comprehensive analysis and comparison of the two datasets were undertaken, aiming to address the research questions that guide this study.

Table 3.1 Research Design

Research Step	Participants	Organization/People Involved
1.Questionnaire Design	The Researcher	3 Experts for IOC
2.Semi-Structured Interview	The Researcher	3 Experts for IOC
3.Questionnaire Design and Structured Interview improvement	The Researcher	----

Table 3.1 Research Design (Cont.)

4.Questionnaire distributed to target samples	One group of 44 students	Chinese junior school eighth graders
5.Semi-Structured Interviews	7 students of 44 students (15%)	7 students in the eighth grade of junior schools in China
6.Data Analysis	1.Questionnaires 2.Semi-Structured Interviews	1.Mean and S.D 2.Content Analysis

3.2 Research Sites

The First High School of Lingbi County, located in Anhui Province, China, is a full-time high school comprising over 100 classes. This institution provides education for students ranging from junior school to senior high school. Distinguished by its status, it holds several prestigious designations, including being recognized as a provincial special school, a provincial model school for standardization of language and writing, and a provincial civilized unit. Given the fact that Grade 8 students have undergone more than six years of English language instruction and that English reading assumes significant importance during this stage, Grade 8 students were purposively selected as an intact group for this study.

3.3 Population and Sample

3.3.1 The Research Population

856 students from Lingbi County First Middle School who enrolled in 18 Grade 8 classes in the 2nd semester of the academic year 2022 served as the research population. Their age range was between 13 and 14 years.

3.3.2 The Research Sample

Of the 856 students enrolled, a group of the students ($n = 44$) were purposively selected to constitute an intact group which was taught English reading skills development through the PBL method.

3.4 Research Instruments

This study employed two primary research instruments: questionnaires for the collection of quantitative data and semi-structured interviews for qualitative data gathering.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

The researcher devised a questionnaire to gauge the students' interest in reading English following the assessment. The questionnaire's design drew an inspiration from the survey designed by Wigfield and Guthrie (1997), albeit with slight modifications tailored to align with the research questions and the specific teaching context. This questionnaire was expected to require approximately 10 minutes for completion and involved the all study participants. Comprising 20 questions distributed across three dimensions, the questionnaire encompassed various aspects of reading. The first dimension pertained to learners' beliefs about reading (questions 1-6). The second dimension explored the role of reading activities (questions 7-13), while the third dimension delved into the role of reading materials (questions 14-20). It is important to note that the questionnaire was administered anonymously and employed a Likert scale with scores ranging from 1 to 5.

3.4.2 Semi-Structured Interview

To supplement quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were employed. The semi-structured interview format offers flexibility, allowing for the inclusion of additional questions as needed (Keenan, Van Teijlingen, & Pitchforth, 2005). This means that during the actual interviews, the order of questions can be adjusted, some questions may be omitted, and new questions may be introduced, all aimed at

facilitating meaningful and productive conversations. Furthermore, research interviews represent purposeful interactions between one or more individuals, thus encouraging the use of concise and clear questions (DiCicco - Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In other words, this format is more conducive to student engagement as it allows them to share their perspectives and experiences in an open and flexible environment. Examples of interview questions are as follows: (1) How did you enjoy the reading class taught through real-life situations or problems and which requires you to think critically; (2) To what extent do you feel that your reading comprehension skills e.g., locating the main idea and supporting details, skimming, scanning and drawing conclusions have improved owing to the reading class; and 3) Have you encountered any problems in the process of implementing the new teaching method? What suggestions do you have?

3.5 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

3.5.1 Validity of Questionnaires and Semi-structured Interviews

In this study, three experts were invited to validate the research instruments using the Index of Item-Objective Congruence (IOC) to determine the extent to which the instruments aligned with the intended learning objectives. Each of the three experts was asked to select one of three options, with scores ranging from -1 to 1, reflecting their judgment of the match between the instrument items and the learning objectives. The scoring criteria for the experts are as follows:

+1: The experts are confident that the items clearly align with the learning objectives.

0: The experts are not convinced that the items match the learning objectives.

-1: The expert believes that the items do not match the learning objectives.

The formula for calculating IOC is $\frac{\sum r}{n}$. $\sum r$ represents the sum of individual expert scores and 'n' represents the number of three experts. If two experts point 1 and the other expert points 0, the result will be: $1+1+0=2$, then divide 2 by three experts, the result will be 0.67. If one expert score is 1 and the other two experts are 0, the result will be $1+0+0=1$, then $IOC=1/3=0.33$. Consequently, if the calculated score for an item is less than 0.67, it indicates a need for modification. Conversely, if the score is equal to or greater than 0.67, it suggests that the Item can be retained.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Questionnaire Design

The researcher designed a survey questionnaire with the aim of gathering insights into various aspects related to the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in eighth-grade English reading classes. The questionnaire, consisting of 20 questions, was administered to the participants ($n = 44$). The researcher analyzed the data collected from the questionnaire to assess participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding PBL in English reading classes. The analysis aimed to provide quantitative insights into the effectiveness, acceptance, and challenges associated with implementing PBL in this educational context.

3.6.2 Semi-Structured Interview

The researcher conducted content analysis on the qualitative data collected from the semi-structured interviews to identify themes, patterns, and insights. This analysis aimed to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, experiences, and opinions regarding the implementation of PBL in eighth-grade English reading classes. By systematically analyzing the interview transcripts, the researcher sought to uncover nuanced perspectives on the effectiveness, advantages, challenges, and suggestions for improvement related to PBL in this educational context. The findings from the content analysis provided qualitative insights that complemented the

quantitative data collected through the survey questionnaire, offering a comprehensive understanding of the impact and implications of PBL in English reading instruction at the eighth-grade level.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Researchers collected relevant data from eighth-grade students studying at Lingbi First Middle School through questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

3.7.1 Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure the research adheres to ethical standards, researchers sought approval from relevant institutions before collecting data and protecting the identities of all participants (including questionnaire respondents and semi-structured interviewees).

3.7.2 Approval from Relevant Institutions

Prior to data collection, researchers submitted applications to Lingbi First Middle School for authorization to conduct questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, enabling data collection from the sample of this study.

3.7.3 Participant Anonymity and Confidentiality of Information

Researchers strictly maintained the anonymity of all participants and the confidentiality of their viewpoints. Participants responses and information were used solely for research purposes, reported as aggregated findings, and not disclosed individually.

3.8 Data Analysis

3.8.1 Questionnaire Data Analysis

The purpose of the survey questionnaire was to understand students' attitudes, perceptions, and feelings regarding the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in English reading classes. Forty-four students were administered a questionnaire comprising 20 questions. The collected data were analyzed by calculating mean and standard deviation to quantify students overall cognitive levels and attitudes towards PBL teaching methodology. Likert's scale of 5 points explains frequency levels ranging from 1 to 5. The range of scores is interpreted as follows: 3.5-5.0 = high usage of the strategy; 2.5-3.49 = moderate usage of the strategy; 1.0-2.49 = low usage of the strategy.

3.8.2 Semi-Structured Interview

Regarding semi-structured interviews, following the completion of the questionnaire survey, the researcher conducted interviews with students. During the interviews, students were guided to express their experiences, opinions, and feelings regarding PBL teaching methodology through questioning. The researcher gathered information from students' responses and employed content analysis to gain a deeper understanding of students learning approaches within PBL, including their observations of challenges and advantages during the implementation of PBL.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis

This chapter aims to reveal insights into two main aspects through result analysis: 1) investigating students' perspectives on the implementation of PBL in English reading classes; and 2) understanding the advantages and disadvantages of PBL in reading classes. Quantitative data was collected through questionnaire surveys, while qualitative data was gathered via semi-structured interviews with volunteers from an eighth-grade class at Lingbi County First Middle School. Different research analysis methods were employed to interpret different types of data.

To analyze questionnaire data, mean scores and standard deviations were utilized. Qualitative data involved researchers' content analysis. This chapter encompasses the data analysis of instruments used in the study, outlined as follows:

4.1 Analysis of Questionnaire Data

The primary objective of this study was to understand participants' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and implementation of PBL in English reading classes. At the conclusion of the study, a questionnaire consisting of 20 questionnaire items using a Likert scale was prepared and administered to the sample group. The questionnaire was divided into three parts: Part One: Learners beliefs about the efficacy of Problem-Based Approach to developing reading comprehension (items 1-8); Part two: The role of reading activities (items 9-13); Part three: The role of reading materials (items 14-20). Each of the 44 participants (N=44) in the study received a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were utilized to analyze the questionnaire results.

Table 4.1 Mean and Standard Deviation

No.		Mean	S. D	Interpretation
Part one	Learners' beliefs about the efficacy of Problem-Based Approach to developing reading comprehension			
1	Being given a reading task with some problems to solve helps me to read better.	4.84	0.568	High
2	Being told to identify the nature of the problem(s) in a reading task helps me to read effectively.	4.68	0.674	High
3	Brainstorming ideas among group members about the reading task enables me to better understand the main problem.	4.70	0.668	High
4	Having an opportunity to seek more information about the problem and solution to the assigned reading helps me learn better.	4.75	0.686	High
5	Having the ability to discover new questions to the problem encourages me to try harder for solutions to the reading task.	4.80	0.632	High
6	Evaluating and summarizing main problems and solutions to them help to think clearly and critically.	4.77	0.605	High
7	Actively engaging in critical thinking allows me to probe solutions even further which helps me to read more efficiently.	4.75	0.751	High
8	Working in a small group instead of reading by myself allows me a lot of opportunity to learn reading skills e.g., skimming, scanning, locating the main idea and so on.	4.57	0.728	High
	In total	4.73	0.664	High

Table 4.1 Mean and Standard Deviation (Cont.)

No.		Mean	S. D	Interpretation
Part two	The role of reading activities			
9	You actively participate in English reading activities such as group discussion or text analysis.	4.80	0.632	High
10	You will take the initiative to participate in reading-related social activities, such as sharing reading experiences with classmates.	4.66	0.713	High
11	You would choose to join an online English reading club or book discussion group.	4.73	0.624	High
12	You will pick English extracurricular books to read from time to time, such as newspapers or storybooks.	4.64	0.780	High
13	You will finish your reading task for the day.	4.68	0.740	High
	In total	4.70	0.698	High
Part three	The role of reading materials			
14	The reading materials contain challenge points for a group discussion.	4.75	0.730	High
15	The length of reading materials is appropriate to help sustain my interest and attention.	4.55	0.695	High
16	The reading materials have not only content in words but also supportive elements such as pictures, colors, cartoons that would make the materials interesting to read.	4.57	0.695	High

Table 4.1 Mean and Standard Deviation (Cont.)

17	The passages used in class usually contain topic relevant to real-life situations and therefore it is relatively easy to understand.	4.59	0.787	High
18	The reading materials contain enough information for me and my friends to carry on a discussion among us.	4.73	0.660	High
19	The reading materials contain topics that encourage me and my friends to think critically and systematically in order to find possible solutions.	4.68	0.639	High
20	The reading materials have various real-life topics that make the reading class interesting enough.	4.59	0.658	High
	In total	4.64	0.695	High
	Questionnaire Average	4.69	0.686	High

From Table 4.1, it is evident that in the first part of the student opinion questionnaire titled “Learners’ beliefs about reading,” nearly all students strongly agree with the statements. The overall average score is 4.73 (SD=0.664). The highest average score is 4.84 (SD=0.568), corresponding to the statement: “Being given a reading task with some problems to solve helps me to read better.” This reflects discussions related to the problem-based learning approach utilized in the course, where students engage in discussions on various topics. Conversely, the lowest average score is 4.57 (SD=0.728), attributed to the statement: “Working in a small group instead of reading by myself allows me a lot of opportunity to learn reading skills such as skimming, scanning, locating the main idea, and so on.” However, the overall score of 4.73 (SD=0.664) indicates a very high level of agreement.

In the second part of the student opinion questionnaire titled “The role of reading activities,” students strongly agree with the first statement: “You actively

participate in English reading activities such as group discussion or text analysis.” The overall average score for this statement is 4.70 (SD = 0.698). The highest average score is 4.80 (SD = 0.632), corresponding to the statement: “You will pick English extracurricular books to read from time to time, such as newspapers or storybooks.” Conversely, the lowest average score is 4.64 (SD = 0.780), attributed to the statement: “You will pick English extracurricular books to read from time to time, such as newspapers or storybooks.”

In the final part of the opinion questionnaire titled “The role of reading materials,” all students strongly agree with the statement. The overall average score is 4.64 (SD = 0.695). The highest average score for a statement is 4.75 (SD = 0.730) for the statement: “The reading materials contain challenging points for group discussion.” The statement “The length of reading materials is appropriate to help sustain my interest and attention” received the lowest average score of 4.55 (SD = 0.695).

As indicated in the table, the overall average score across all factors (Pertains to learners' beliefs about the efficacy of PBL to developing reading comprehension, The role of reading activities, and the role of reading materials) is 4.69 (SD = 0.686). This indicates that students' views on the PBL approach fall within the highly consistent category on the Likert scale. With an average score of 4.69 (SD = 0.686), the questionnaire data suggests that students in the sample group hold positive views towards the instructional use of problem-based learning methods.

4.2 Analysis of Semi-Structured Interview Data

The interview data were analyzed through thematic analysis processes. Following Merriam (2016), several rounds of coding were in place, beginning with open coding by tagging any unit of the data collected that appeared to be relevant to the study. This was followed by axial coding whereby tagged categories sharing some similarities were grouped together, culminating in selective coding. It was in the selective coding stage that a core category was developed, resulting in salient or main themes. These are discussed below.

Theme 1: Educational Benefits of PBL

Having learned English reading comprehension through the PBL approach, several participants received first-hands benefits of the approach in terms of heightened interest in the lessons, practical values, increased understanding, significant improvements in reading skills, and critical thinking skills. For example,

Interviewee 1 argued that “I found the reading class taught through real-life situations interesting and practical. It made me think deeply about the connection between the text content and the world around us.” Not to be outwitted, interviewee 3 put it that “The reading class using real-life problems was enjoyable because it connected the content with our lives, making learning more meaningful and memorable.” Along the same line, interviewee 4 said, “Learning through real-life situations in the reading class excited me. It helped me understand the text better and improved my critical thinking skills.” Additionally, interviewee 7 put forth that, “It was initially difficult to understand and interpret real-life situations in the reading class. Increasing interactive discussions and group activities might help with understanding.”

Theme 2: Renewed Perspectives towards Reading

To my delightful surprise, some participants expressed their willingness to learn reading through the PBL approach because of its ability to create new and refreshing perspectives towards reading. For instance,

Interviewee 6 suggested that “The reading class through real-life situations was a refreshing change. It pushed me to go beyond the text and analyze how concepts apply to real situations.” This is corroborated by the ideas shared by interviewee 2 that, “My reading comprehension skills have improved significantly because of this course. I feel more confident in quickly browsing, finding information, and understanding complex texts.” In the same vein, interviewee 7 argued that “I liked the teaching of real-life problems in the reading class because it made me think outside the box and apply what I learned to the real world.” Shifting slightly to renewed confidence,

interviewee 2 said, “My reading comprehension skills have improved significantly because of this course. I feel more confident in quickly browsing, finding information, and understanding complex texts.” And the same holds true for interviewee 5, who put it that, “I have made notable progress in my reading comprehension skills. I am more confident in understanding complex texts and drawing accurate conclusions.” Furthermore, interviewee 1 argued that, “I feel that my reading comprehension skills have greatly improved. Now I can better locate the main idea, identify supporting details, and draw conclusions from the text.” To corroborate the response of interviewee 1, interviewee 3 suggested that, “I noticed a significant improvement in my reading comprehension skills. Now I can skim through texts quickly while still understanding key information.”

It should be noted that the PBL approach is no panacea for all reading ills. As such, certain participants expressed concerns about learning how to read through this arguably practical mode of learning. The themes that follow exemplify such concerns.

Theme 3: PBL-Related Challenges

Several participants felt that they had encountered some challenges in the PBL-based reading class. For example, interviewee 1 said, “During the implementation of the new teaching method, I sometimes encountered difficulties in handling complex problems. I hope the teacher can provide more guidance and support.” This sentiment was echoed by interviewee 4 that, “I found it challenging to handle complex real-life situations in the reading class. Increased support from classmates and the teacher could make the learning process smoother.” What is more, interviewees 3, 6 and 7 shared the same thought that sometimes a lack of specific guidance from the teacher made it all the more difficult for them to carry out assigned tasks successfully. In this respect, interviewee 3 said, “I had trouble understanding how to apply critical thinking to solve problems in the reading class. I hope more examples and explanations can be provided to help with understanding.” Similarly, interviewee 6 put forth that, “Implementing the new teaching method requires adapting to different ways of thinking, which can be challenging. Setting clear goals

and providing structured guidance would be helpful.” To cap it off, interviewee 7 managed to say the following: “It was initially difficult to understand and interpret real-life situations in the reading class. Increasing interactive discussions and group activities might help with understanding.”

The results of the present study demonstrated that students responded positively to the reading course structured around real-life scenarios. They found this teaching approach engaging, practical, and it challenged them to think deeply about the relationship between the text and the real world. Notwithstanding the aforementioned benefits and renewed perspectives toward PBL, it is not without criticism. That is, PBL appeared to pose some challenges to the participants, especially when the steps involved in implementing the PBL approach is not clear to all stakeholders.



CHAPTER 5

Summary, Discussions, and Recommendations

This chapter presents the Summary drawn from the data analysis, discusses the research findings, and provides recommendations for current and future studies.

5.1 Summary

This study had two research objectives: the first objective was to determine participants' perceptions of the effectiveness and implementation of PBL methods; the second objective was to explore participants' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of PBL. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to achieve these research objectives.

The first objective of the study was to determine participants' perceptions of the effectiveness and implementation of PBL methods. This was investigated through a questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of 20 statements divided into three parts: Part one: learners' beliefs about the efficacy of Problem-Based Approach to developing reading comprehension (items 1-8); Part two: The role of reading activities (items 9-13); Part three: The role of reading materials (items 14-20). Analysis revealed the mean and standard deviation for each questionnaire item. The highest factor was "Pertains to learners' beliefs about the efficacy of Problem-Based Approach to developing reading comprehension," $\bar{X}=4.73$ (SD = 0.664), while the lowest factor was "The role of reading materials," $\bar{X}= 4.64$ (SD = 0.695). The researchers identified the lowest two mean scores in the questionnaire as follows: 1) The length of reading materials is appropriate to help sustain my interest and attention, $\bar{X}= 4.55$ (SD = 0.695). 2)

Working in a small group instead of reading by myself allows me a lot of opportunity to learn reading skills e.g., skimming, scanning, locating the main idea and so on, $\bar{X}=4.57$ (SD = 0.728). 3) The reading materials have not only content in words but also supportive elements such as pictures, colors, cartoons that would make the materials interesting to read, \bar{X} 4.57 (SD = 0.695).

Students generally perceived the problem-based learning approach to be highly effective when implemented in English classes, particularly in improving reading comprehension skills. Students held a positive attitude towards this teaching method, believing that learning through real-life situations, engaging in various reading activities, and using diverse reading materials could effectively enhance their reading abilities and learning experiences.

The questionnaire results indicated that students rated the effectiveness of problem setting and reading activities in problem-based learning methods highly, reflecting the positive impact of this teaching approach in stimulating student interest and improving reading skills. However, there were certain perceived differences and expectations among students regarding aspects such as the length of reading materials, group collaborative learning, and diversity of reading materials, highlighting the need for teachers to be more flexible in addressing students' needs in instructional design.

The second objective of this study was to explore participants' perceptions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of Problem-Based Learning. This was accomplished through semi-structured interviews conducted with 7 volunteer students in face-to-face settings. The data from these interviews were analyzed using content analysis techniques.

From the insightful feedback received during the interviews, it is evident that integrating real-life situations into reading classroom teaching is highly regarded as an effective instructional strategy by students. They expressed a positive attitude towards this approach, emphasizing that it not only enhances enjoyment but also fosters deep reflection on the connections between texts and real-world scenarios, thereby

promoting critical thinking skills. Moreover, students reported notable improvements in reading comprehension, demonstrating increased confidence in identifying main ideas, recognizing supporting details, and drawing conclusions from texts.

However, students encountered challenges during the implementation phase, particularly when dealing with complex real-life scenarios that demanded more guidance and support. Therefore, a key recommendation arising from this study is for teachers to prioritize providing adequate support and guidance when designing and implementing PBL methods. This proactive approach will assist students in overcoming challenges, enhancing their reading comprehension skills, and maximizing the benefits derived from this innovative teaching approach.

5.2 Discussion

This section delves into the research questions posed in the study and presents a nuanced analysis of participants' perceptions towards the implementation of Problem-Based Learning in their English reading class, as well as the perceived advantages and disadvantages associated with this approach.

Participants' perceptions of the PBL method in their English reading class were generally positive, indicating a belief in its effectiveness for developing reading comprehension skills.

The data revealed favorable attitudes towards PBL, with the highest mean score attributed to the item “Pertaining to learners' beliefs about the efficacy of Problem-Based Approach to developing reading comprehension” ($\bar{X} = 4.73$). This underscores the perceived effectiveness of PBL in enhancing reading skills among students. However, variations in responses were noted concerning the length of reading materials and the dynamics of group collaborative learning. This finding appears to corroborate research conducted by (Papilaya & Tuapattinaya, 2022).

Furthermore, students emphasized the engaging nature of PBL, particularly when integrated with real-life situations. They expressed that this approach facilitated a deeper understanding of reading materials and the application of comprehension skills to practical scenarios. Despite positive sentiments, challenges such as maintaining interest in lengthy reading materials and adapting to collaborative learning dynamics were acknowledged. These points were congruent with those reported in studies conducted by (Ali, 2019).

These varying perceptions highlight the importance of considering individual student expectations and learning styles when designing PBL activities, emphasizing the need for diverse teaching resources and flexible instructional methods to accommodate different preferences.

Participants acknowledged several benefits associated with PBL implementation in the English reading class. They appreciated the engagement and challenge offered by real-life scenarios, which promoted deeper understanding and practical application of reading skills. PBL was recognized for stimulating critical thinking, boosting reading confidence, and fostering independence in learning. Notably, students reported significant progress in various reading comprehension skills, including main idea identification, detail recognition, skimming, scanning, and drawing conclusions. The perceived benefits of the PBL approach as discussed in the present study could find strong support by research conducted by (Peipei, 2016).

Despite the positive aspects, challenges emerged during the transition to PBL. Students noted difficulties in navigating complex real-life situations within reading tasks, underscoring the need for more guidance and support from teachers. Some students also expressed a learning curve associated with PBL, requiring additional time and effort to adapt to its self-directed and reflective nature.

Participants' positive perceptions highlight PBL as an effective method for enhancing reading comprehension skills through real-life applications. Variations in responses underscore the importance of addressing individual student expectations and

learning preferences in PBL design. The study emphasizes the critical role of teachers in providing structured support and guidance to facilitate student adaptation and success within the PBL framework. In conclusion, the discussions encapsulate the multifaceted perceptions towards PBL implementation, emphasizing its potential benefits and the need for tailored support to optimize student learning experiences within the English reading classroom.

5.3 Recommendations

Recommendations for future research

Research could be conducted that investigates the role of the PBL approach in other educational contexts either in China or elsewhere with different groups of L2 English learners to see whether and to what extent the PBL approach could assist them in their attempts to improve English reading skills.

Additionally, given that PBL is an empowering educational tool, research might also be done to appreciate both the strengths and limitations of the approach when implemented with L2 English learners at varying levels of English proficiency.

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APPENDIX A

LETTERS OF INVITATION FOR THREE IOC EXPERTS

มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต Rangsit University



STC.4800/1137

13 May 2024

Subject: Invitation to be our IOC (Item Objective Congruence) expert

Dear Dr. Anuchit Toomaneejinda,

Miss Chunxia Li student number 6204954, a student in the Master of Education (Bilingual Education) who has already completed her coursework and thesis proposal defense on 27 March 2024. Her research is entitled "Problem-based Learning to Enhance English Reading Skills: A Case Study of Chinese Eighth Grade Students". Currently, she is in the stage of collecting and analyzing data. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Saksit Saengboon is her advisor.

Miss Chunxia Li has finished designing her research instruments. Thus, the college would like to invite you to validate these instruments. The package has been attached herewith.

I truly appreciate your kind support in this matter and hope that you will accept my invitation.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Anchalee Chayanuvat', is written over a large, faint watermark of the Rangsit University logo.

Assistant Professor Anchalee Chayanuvat, Ed.D.
Program Director of Bilingual Education
Suryadhep Teachers College
Rangsit University

มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต Rangsit University

RSU มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต
RANGSIT UNIVERSITY

มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต
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F. (66) 2791 5757
E. info@rsu.ac.th

STC.4800/1138
13 May 2024
Subject: Invitation to be our IOC (Item Objective Congruence) expert
Dear Dr. Pitaya Thipwajana,

Miss Chunxia Li student number 6204954, a student in the Master of Education (Bilingual Education) who has already completed her coursework and thesis proposal defense on 27 March 2024. Her research is entitled "Problem-based Learning to Enhance English Reading Skills: A Case Study of Chinese Eighth Grade Students". Currently, she is in the stage of collecting and analyzing data Assoc. Prof. Dr. Saksit Saengboon is her advisor.

Miss Chunxia Li has finished designing her research instruments. Thus, the college would like to invite you to validate these instruments. The package has been attached herewith.

I truly appreciate your kind support in this matter and hope that you will accept my invitation.

Sincerely yours,

Anchalee Chayanuvat
Assistant Professor Anchalee Chayanuvat, Ed.D.
Program Director of Bilingual Education
Suryadhep Teachers College
Rangsit University



STC.4800/1139

13 May 2024

Subject: Invitation to be our IOC (Item Objective Congruence) expert

Dear Dr. Pilanut Phusawisot,

Miss Chunxia Li student number 6204954, a student in the Master of Education (Bilingual Education) who has already completed her coursework and thesis proposal defense on 27 March 2024. Her research is entitled "Problem-based Learning to Enhance English Reading Skills: A Case Study of Chinese Eighth Grade Students". Currently, she is in the stage of collecting and analyzing data Assoc. Prof. Dr. Saksit Saengboon is her advisor.

Miss Chunxia Li has finished designing her research instruments. Thus, the college would like to invite you to validate these instruments. The package has been attached herewith.

I truly appreciate your kind support in this matter and hope that you will accept my invitation.

Sincerely yours,



Assistant Professor Anchalee Chayanuvat, Ed.D.
Program Director of Bilingual Education
Suryadhej Teachers College
Rangsit University

มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต Rangsit University



APPENDIX B

ITEM OBJECTIVE CONGRUENCE FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Item Questionnaire by 3 Experts

Evaluation questions	Expert	Expert	Expert	Average	Remarks
	1	2	3		
Being given a reading task with some problems to solve helps me to read better.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
Being told to identify the nature of the problem(s) in a reading task helps me to read effectively.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
Brainstorming ideas among group members about the reading task enables me to better understand the main problem.	+1	+1	0	0.67	Accepted
Having an opportunity to seek more information about the problem and solution to the assigned reading is helps me learn better.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
Having the ability to discover new questions to the problem encourages me to try harder for solutions to the reading task.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
Evaluating and summarizing main problems and solutions to them help to think clearly and critically.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
Actively engaging in critical thinking allows me to probe solutions even further which helps me to read more efficiently.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
Working in a small group instead	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted

of reading by myself allows me a lot of opportunity to learn reading skills e.g., skimming, scanning, locating the main idea and so on.					
You actively participate in English reading activities such as group discussion or text analysis.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
You will take the initiative to participate in reading-related social activities, such as sharing reading experiences with classmates.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
You would choose to join an online English reading club or book discussion group.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
You will pick English extracurricular books to read from time to time, such as newspapers or storybooks.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
You will finish your reading task for the day.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
The reading materials contain challenge points for a group discussion.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
The length of reading materials is appropriate to help sustain my interest and attention.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
The reading materials have not only content in words but also supportive elements such as	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted

pictures, colors, cartoons that would make the materials interesting to read.					
The passages used in class usually contain topic relevant to real-life situations and therefore it is relatively easy to understand.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
The reading materials contain enough information for me and my friends to carry on a discussion among us.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
The reading materials contain topics that encourage me and my friends to think critically and systematically in order to find possible solutions.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
The reading materials have various real-life topics that make the reading class interesting enough.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted

The logo of Rangsit University, featuring a stylized flame or sunburst design in the center, surrounded by a circular arrangement of rays. The text "มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต" and "Rangsit University" is written in a semi-circle below the logo.

APPENDIX C

**ITEM OBJECTIVE CONGRUENCE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต Rangsit University

Item Semi-structured interview by 3 Experts

Evaluation Questions	Expert 1	Expert 2	Expert 3	Average	Congruence
How did you enjoy the reading class taught through real-life situations or problems and which requires you to think critically.	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
To what extent do you feel that your reading comprehension skills e.g., locating the main idea and supporting details, skimming, scanning and drawing conclusions have improved owing to the reading class you've attended?	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted
Have you encountered any problems in the process of implementing the new teaching method? What suggestions do you have?	+1	+1	+1	1	Accepted



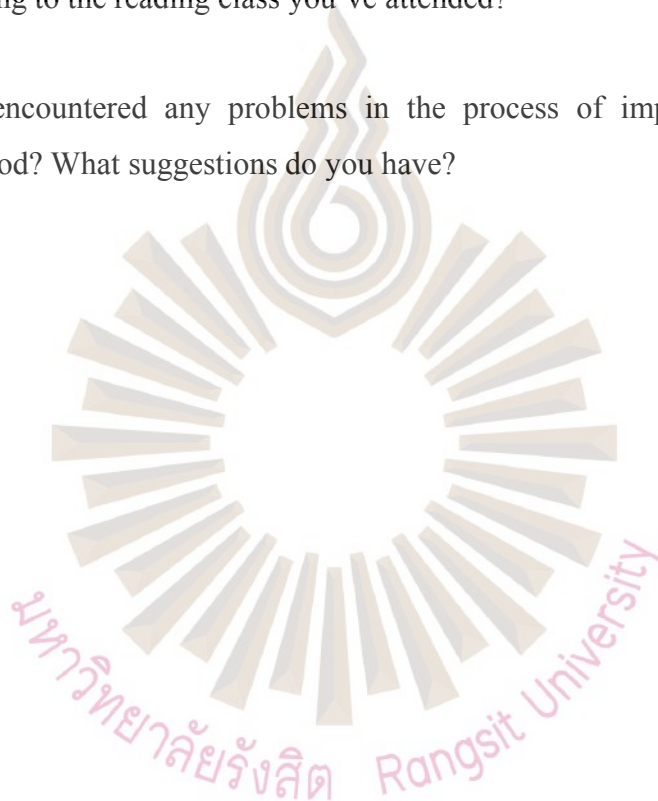
APPENDIX D

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

มหาวิทยาลัยรังสิต Rangsit University

Semi-Structured Interview Question

1. How did you enjoy the reading class taught through real-life situations or problems and which requires you to think critically.
2. To what extent do you feel that your reading comprehension skills e.g., locating the main idea and supporting details, skimming, scanning and drawing conclusions have improved owing to the reading class you've attended?
3. Have you encountered any problems in the process of implementing the new teaching method? What suggestions do you have?



Research title: Problem-Based Learning in Enhancing the Reading Skill in English: A Case of Chinese Eighth Grade Students

Dear Students,

This questionnaire is part of a postgraduate study at Rangsit University to gain insight into your interest in reading English.

Your responses will be kept completely confidential and the data collected will be used only for research purposes in the field of education. The researcher sincerely appreciates your participation and your feedback is vital to this study. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,
Chunxia Li



BIOGRAPHY

Name	Chunxia Li
Date of Birth	Mar 3,1991
Place of Birth	Suzhou, China
Education Background	Anhui Sanlian University, China Bachelor of Accounting, 2016 Rangsit University, Thailand Master of Education in Bilingual Education, 2024
Address	Suzhou, China
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