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# The Impact of the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) Approach on Reading Comprehension in Year Four Students

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## Abstract

*This study aimed to investigate the impact of teaching methods on the English reading comprehension ability of Year 4 students at Heathfield International School. Thirty-four students were split into two groups: an experimental group taught using the TPRS method and a control group taught using traditional methods. The experiment was conducted over six weeks during the first semester of the 2025 academic year. The study employed three unit plans and a test of English reading comprehension. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations (S.D.), inferential statistics, and a dependent samples t-test. The results indicated that the experimental group showed a significantly higher gain in performance than the control group in the posttest ( $p < .05$ ). The findings suggest that students who learnt through TPRS showed significant improvement from pre-test to post-test, indicating that the integration of storytelling, relevant vocabulary, and engagement in interactive physical activities encourages students to achieve better comprehension and motivation. These findings endorse TPRS as an efficacious pedagogical method for primary education students learning English as a foreign language. Further studies could involve the study of long-term outcomes of TPRS on various language skills and on a larger or more varied group of students, as well as how individual aspects of TPRS can affect learner engagement and comprehension.*

**Keywords:** Reading Comprehension, Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS), EFL Learners, Thailand, Story-based Pedagogy, Primary Education

## Introduction

Reading comprehension is a crucial ability for learning a language and achieving general academic success. It involves not only decoding skills but also higher-order processes, such as inference, incorporating prior knowledge, and critical interpretation (Castles et al., 2018; Snow, 2002). In Thailand, although English has become more significant in the educational process, students' reading proficiency levels are low (EF English Proficiency Index, 2025). The teaching and learning approaches that have been practiced are more traditional and teacher-centred, concentrating on the literal understanding of information as opposed to higher-order thinking and communicative learning (Chomchiya & Dunworth, 2008). New pedagogical models have been devised to establish more significant and interactive language learning experiences. Blaine Ray developed Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) in the 1990s as an extension of Asher's (1977) Total Physical Response (TPR), with the aim of using storytelling and reading tasks

to develop contextualised input, low-anxiety, meaningful interaction through gesture and repetition, and narrative exchange, which increases vocabulary learning and understanding (Ray & Seely, 2019).

Although Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) has been recognised as a potential pedagogical method that combines comprehensible input, storytelling, physical reaction, and contextual learning in Thailand (Ray & Seely, 2019), empirical studies on the subject have been limited, specifically at the primary level and in bilingual education settings. The literature has largely studied either primary or secondary levels within the Thai setting, and there is a gap in the effectiveness of TPRS in young bilingual students' reading comprehension. To address this gap, this study aims to pursue the following research objectives: (1) to compare the reading comprehension of Year 4 students taught using the TPRS method and those taught using traditional methods, and (2) to compare the pre-test and post-test reading comprehension scores of Year 4 students taught using the TPRS method. This research is anticipated to have practical implications for English language teachers by showing how storytelling-based instruction can be implemented as a way to make reading activities more interesting and effective for young bilingual learners. The findings will also contribute to the growing number of evidence-based practices in EFL education, particularly in Thai bilingual classrooms.

### **Reading Comprehension**

Reading comprehension refers to the capacity of the reader to make meaning, assess, and determine the text being read. Word reading refers to the ability to decode the signs in a text. Language comprehension refers to understanding the meaning of words and phrases. These are the interconnected skills that are important for reading comprehension. According to Nuttal (1996), reading for comprehension refers to an aspect of reading in which a person obtains information in a text to improve knowledge acquisition which includes entertaining facts, ideas, emotions, and other aspects. According to Snow (2002), reading comprehension is the process of meaning-making and creation during interactions

with written texts.

Wallace (1992) considers reading with comprehension a process of interpretation in which the reader is involved with the text as a channel of communication. Readers would want to know the author's objective. Word decoding and language comprehension should be distinguished when reading. Language understanding is the skill of perceiving words, phrases, and texts. Reading comprehension involves the ability to read, analyse, and infer the meaning of words. It involves reading between the lines and drawing correct information from a book. Understanding enables the learning of knowledge, both in the form of facts, concepts, emotions, and any other aspect. As a form of communication, the reader is involved in an interpretative process that responds to the content. Comprehension is also fundamental, and understanding the author's intent is an important skill in reading.

### **Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)**

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) was created by Blaine Ray as an extension of Asher's TRP-S during the late 1980s. His works aimed at making TPR more effective, namely, the research efforts were directed at ways of learning a foreign language through interesting and relevant contexts and the means of memorising vocabulary in long-term memory to facilitate further oral and written production. Dr. Stephan Krashen and Dr. James Asher had a direct impact on Ray's approach.

Asher (2009) hypothesised that comprehensible input is more prone to long-term memory retention than input with low comprehension, where only short-term memory results are obtained. TPR works effectively because it provides comprehensible input that is highly realistic to encourage intimate and personal experiences among students.

This teaching methodology is based on the fact that the brain needs Comprehensible Input (CI) which involves a clear, repeated message that enables students to understand language (Krashen, 1982). The contexts in which the words are learned include gestures and actions which are applicable to the students' experience. This method uses situations and stories based on students' individual experiences,

such as preferences, hobbies, and sporting activities. This improves the learner's involvement, making it reality-based and personalised ([Adipat, 2021](#)). According to [Ray and Seely \(2019\)](#), a storyline can be variable, but the narration approach is flexible. A story can be presented in different tenses, either in the past, present, or future. Students can tell the story in many ways; they are free to choose certain words and how to put them together to form sentences that deliver the story, which improves students' fluent oral presentation.

### The Components of TPRS

TPRS employs storytelling in a distinct manner, setting it apart from other methods and approaches that incorporate storytelling. The narratives are not merely recounted; they are also engaged with through listening, reading, and writing. Regular comprehension assessments were conducted using the circling technique. In instances of insufficient understanding, additional pre-teaching is implemented, resulting in a deceleration of the entire process of learning. The implementation of storytelling using TPRS principles involves three primary steps ([Ray Seely, 2019](#)).

#### Step 1: Establish Meaning

The teacher initially establishes the meaning to introduce the beginning of the narrative by translating from the target language into students' native language, using other types of Total Physical Response (TPR), or gestures. It enforces a conscious limitation on the input, especially regarding grammatical aspects and terminology.

#### Step 2: Asking a Story

The teacher presents a narrative of their classroom experience. The class narrative is constructed through the formulation of questions using the target structures. It is occasionally referred to as "enquiring" into the narrative. The objective of the narrative is to deliver engaging and understandable inputs. The narrative is brief, straightforward, and engaging in nature. It contextualises the target structures and offers repetitions. The narrative was delivered gradually, incorporating regular comprehension checks and contributions from the students.

#### Step 3: Reading and Discussion

In this phase, students engage with narratives primarily derived from oral storytelling activities. Reading relies on the material presented in the previous two steps. It presents the content in an alternative format to the original. Reading may occur at a higher level than spoken language in the classroom, as students can understand a broader range of vocabulary and grammatical structures due to increased control over the input.

### Research Questions

- To what extent do Year 4 students in the experimental group taught using the TPRS method demonstrate reading comprehension compared to those in the control group taught using traditional methods?
- To what extent does TPRS instruction enhance the reading comprehension of Year 4 students in the experimental group?

### Methodology

The study employed a quasi-experimental design featuring a comparison of outcomes between the experimental group (TPRS) and the control group (traditional instruction), as well as a comparison of outcomes in the experimental group before and after the TPRS intervention.

### Participants

The population of this study consisted of 50 Year four students from the academic year 2025 at Heathfield International School in Bangkok, Thailand. Through purposive sampling, 34 students were selected based on their reading exam scores. They were divided into two groups: 17 Year 4 students in the experimental group taught using the TPRS teaching method, and 17 Year 4 students in the control group taught using traditional methods.

### Research Instrument

Two research instruments employed in this study included three unit plans and an English reading comprehension test.

### Unit Plans

The researcher developed three instructional units implemented over six periods within five weeks, with

each unit consisting of two lessons. Derived from the content of the storybook Alien Blast Off! written by Cath Jones (2021), subthemes were used to create a cohesive thematic unit based on the theme of space and alien encounters as follows.

- Unit 1: “I Can Make My Spacesuit” and “I Know an Alien”
- Unit 2: “UFO” and “Spaceship Journey”
- Unit 3: “Blast Off and Beyond” and recap.

The text was simplified and modified according to the students’ language ability without changing the plot or target words. The reading instruction was designed based on the TPRS method in accordance with three main stages: (1) establish meaning, (2) ask a story, and (3) read and discuss.

Three experts in the field of English language teaching rated the unit plans based on a five-point rating scale: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1) to validate the quality of the unit plans (Srisasard, 2010). The evaluation results reported a very high level of consensus on each of the three units in terms of the quality and effectiveness of the lessons, with average scores of 3.76, 4.71, and 4.76, respectively.

After revising the unit plans based on the experts’ suggestions, the researcher conducted a pilot study using one lesson with 20 Year 5 students who had similar characteristics to those in the main study, to examine whether students faced any difficulties, such as time allocation, direction of the activities, and materials. The results after the pilot revealed that some activities had to be removed or shortened to fit the time limit. Additionally, some students found the instructional language too complex, resulting in directions and language use being simplified to improve the clarity and understanding of the content. In addition, several students struggled with listening to and following oral directions, which affected the flow of the activities. Consequently, the directions were modified to be clearer and more direct.

### English Reading Comprehension Test

The Cambridge English Young Students Exams - B1 Preliminary Schools Exam ([Cambridge Assessment English, 2022](#)) was adapted to use as an English reading comprehension test, to estimate the students’ reading comprehension ability after

implementing the Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) approach. There were 20 multiple-choice questions, each with four answer options. The test contents were validated by three specialists in English language teaching using the Index of Item Objective Congruence (IOC), and scores ranged from +1 (highly congruent) to -1 (not congruent). The IOC scores of the test items ranged from 0.67 to 1.00, showing that the contents were valid and aligned with the objectives of the study. However, item 20 was revised based on expert feedback to ensure clarity and objectivity.

Subsequently, a pilot was conducted by the researcher with 20 Year 5 students who had similar characteristics to the major study to determine the item difficulty, discrimination indices, and reliability of the test. The analysis revealed that the difficulty of the test items ranged from 0.40 to 0.90 which indicated that the items were of moderate to appropriate difficulty. The discrimination indices ranged from low to very high, suggesting that most items were able to distinguish effectively between high- and low-achieving students. The overall reliability of the test, as measured by the Kuder–Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), was 0.781, demonstrating that the test possessed high internal consistency and was suitable for assessing students’ English reading comprehension in the main study.

### Data Collection and Analysis

To determine the effectiveness of the TPRS method in enhancing reading comprehension, an English reading comprehension pre-test was administered one week before the instruction. Moreover, the researcher introduced the concept of reading instruction employing the TPRS method to students. The three developed unit plans were implemented over a four-week period. Finally, a week after completing the instruction, a post-test was administered. Quantitative data were obtained from the analysis of pre- and post-tests using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, and inferential statistics, specifically a dependent-samples t-test.

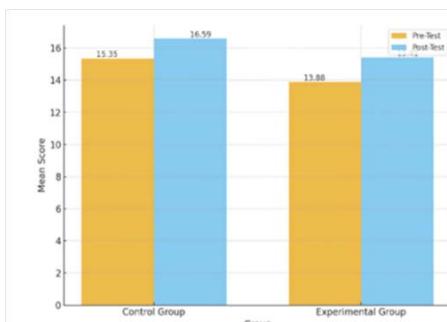
### Results

This section presents the findings of the effectiveness of the Teaching Proficiency through

Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) approach in improving Year 4 students' English reading comprehension. The comparison between the pretest and posttest scores of the control and experimental groups was calculated from descriptive statistics, mean scores, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation to discover the overall improvement in students' reading comprehension.

**Table 1 Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores of the Control and Experimental Groups**

Statistic	Control Group (n=17)		Experimental Group (n=17)	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Number of Items	20	20	20	20
Mean	15.35	16.59	13.88	15.41
Maximum	20	20	20	20
Minimum	9	11	4	2
Standard Deviation	3.16	2.74	5.34	4.74



**Figure 1 Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Mean Scores for the Control and Experimental Groups**

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the improvement in the English reading comprehension of both the control and experimental groups after the instruction was implemented. The control group's mean pre-test score was 15.35 (S.D. = 3.16), and the mean post-test score was 16.59 (S.D. = 2.74). This represents an increased improvement of 1.34 points, suggesting that traditional instruction produced a small but positive gain in students' reading comprehension, with an effect size of  $d = 0.42$ . The minimum score was raised from 9 to 11, and the decrease in

the standard deviation indicated that the group's performance became slightly more consistent after TPRS implementation.

In contrast, the experimental groups who had been taught through the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling approach showed greater performance. The mean score increased from 13.88 (S.D. = 5.34) in the pretest to 15.41 (S.D. = 4.74) in the posttest, reflecting an increased improvement of 1.53 points, with a small effect size of  $d = 0.30$ . Although the minimum score decreased from 4 to 2, the overall results showed development in students' reading comprehension and reduced variation in scores after TPRS implementation. The reduction of the standard deviation indicates greater consistency in the performance of the students, which implies that the TPRS method was useful to students at varied levels of proficiency.

In summary, the findings demonstrated that the two instructional methods enhanced students' reading comprehension, although the TPRS method produced a very slight increase compared with the traditional method. A comparison of post-test scores between groups revealed that the between-group effect size was relatively small ( $d = 0.30$ ), indicating a minor difference between the two groups. Although traditional instruction produced a slightly higher within-group effect size ( $d = 0.42$ ) than the TPRS method ( $d = 0.30$ ), this does not necessarily imply that traditional instruction was more effective than TPRS. Students receiving TPRS instruction showed a greater mean improvement (1.53 points) but had greater variability in their scores, reducing the effect size. This suggests that while TPRS had a beneficial effect on the students, the individual learning outcomes were inconsistent based on students' language proficiency and engagement level.

Tables 2 and 3 below demonstrate a significant improvement in students' English reading comprehension, analysed using a dependent samples t-test.

**Table 2 Statistical Analysis of Pretest and Posttest Reading Comprehension Scores of the Control Group (n=17)**

Test	Mean	S.D.	Mean Difference	t	Sig.
Pretest	15.35	3.16			
Posttest	16.59	2.74	-1.24	0.02	<.05

\*p<.05

**Table 3 Statistical Analysis of Pretest and Posttest Reading Comprehension Scores of the Experimental Group (n=17)**

Test	Mean	S.D.	Mean Difference	t	Sig.
Pretest	13.88	5.18			
Posttest	15.41	4.60	-1.24	0.04	<.05

\*p<.05

Tables 2 and 3 show the results based on the dependent samples t-test, pretest, and posttest scores from both the control and experimental groups, which showed statistically significant improvements in their English reading comprehension. The mean score from the control group increased from 15.35 (SD = 3.16) in the pretest to 16.59 (SD = 2.74) in the post-test, yielding a mean gain of 1.24. The traditional method showed a statistically significant improvement ( $t = 0.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ), indicating that the improvement was small but meaningful in enhancing reading comprehension. However, the TPRS method showed greater improvement, with a mean difference of 1.53 ( $t = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) compared to 1.24 in the control group. The findings suggest that the TPRS method was effective in improving Year 4 students' reading comprehension skills.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The findings showed that Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) is an effective method for improving students' reading comprehension. Regarding the first research objective, which aimed to compare the reading comprehension of Year 4 students taught using TPRS and those taught through traditional methods, the findings showed that the experimental group demonstrated more progress than the control group. With regard to the second research objective, which

aimed to compare the pre- and post-test reading comprehension scores of Year 4 students taught using the TPRS method, the findings also showed a significant within-group gain. Together, these findings indicate that learning through meaningful stories is a more efficient and engaging learning process than the traditional teacher-centred approach.

These findings are consistent with [Krashen's \(1982\) Input Hypothesis](#) which states that when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level ( $i + 1$ ), language acquisition occurs naturally. The stories used in the TPRS classroom provide students with comprehensible input in varied contexts and enable children to acquire vocabulary as well as language structure naturally through repetition in listening and reading.

The power of TPRS is its ability to combine and integrate the elements of contextual clarity, repetition, and emotional engagement. By listening to and reading stories that have a combination of both familiar language and vocabulary, students learn words in contextual situations, which process them deeper with semantic processing ([Bulan & Kasapoglu, 2021](#); [Nation, 2022](#); [Zeng, 2025](#)). Story structure also promotes the prediction of content, gaining meaning, and drawing connections with personal experiences, which are primary elements of higher-order comprehension ([Watts, 2013](#)). This is in line with the conclusion of Li and Yan(2024), who found that reading in realistic conditions and reading different media improved the reading comprehension of EFL learners in comparison with reading vocabulary or grammar in isolation.

As opposed to the rote memorisation nature of conventional classrooms, TPRS provides the repetition of contexts by reusing vocabulary and sentence structure in meaningful contexts, which allows students to better apply their new knowledge to new reading situations and encourages long-term retention ([Ray & Seely, 2019](#)). This is consistent with [Ponguagoon and Lornklang \(2022\)](#), who found that fourth-grade students taught with TPRS had higher vocabulary recall and reading scores than those who participated in traditional instruction.

In addition, TPRS helps reduce the emotional factors that hinder language learning. According

to [Krashen's \(1982\)](#) Affective Filter Hypothesis, learners with low anxiety and high motivation have better language acquisition performance. The use of gestures, humour, and storytelling in TPRS helps create a relaxing and friendly atmosphere that motivates students to answer questions and decreases their fear of making mistakes. The results of this qualitative research are consistent with those of [Dongsanniwas and Sukying \(2024\)](#), who stated that elementary school students in Thailand have higher confidence and motivation when participating in TPR activities. Reducing emotional barriers is another factor that affects the development of reading comprehension.

Overall, the current research contributes to the shift towards communicative and student-focused teaching in EFL classrooms, which results in learner autonomy, the use of contextual language, and meaningful interaction, as emphasised by [Adipat \(2024\)](#). These findings are also consistent with those of [Bersamin et al. \(2024\)](#) and [Zeng \(2025\)](#), who pointed out that language exposure and storytelling with meaningful texts also yielded a higher level of motivation and reading comprehension among students. Therefore, TPRS which combines storytelling with the concept of comprehensible input, is a pedagogically sound and developmentally appropriate approach for young bilingual learners in Thailand. This study has relevant implications for EFL pedagogy as it provides empirical data on the efficacy of story-based, low-anxiety teaching in achieving reading comprehension, engagement, confidence, and long-term learning. These findings reveal the importance of incorporating TPRS into EFL curricula to provide more valuable, interactive, and sustainable EFL learning experiences.

### Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the results and limitations of this study, several directions for further research can be proposed. These suggestions will widen the range of participants, allocate more mixed-methods techniques, and investigate other variables that can impact the reading comprehension of elementary school students.

First, in future studies, the sample size must be larger and more representative to increase the

general validity of the research findings. Extending the research to other schools, grade levels, or geographical environments will help better understand the impact of TPRS on students in other educational environments. Moreover, longitudinal research could be conducted to show the impact of TPRS on other abilities such as speaking, listening, and writing to determine whether the results would be maintained over time.

Second, a mixed-method research approach, which involves the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, will enable more detailed research. For instance, classroom observations, interviews, and teacher reflections will contribute to the researchers' understanding of the impact of TPRS on student motivation, engagement, and learning behaviours.

Lastly, future studies may incorporate TPRS with digital media or multimedia technology to encourage students' interest and innovation new pedagogical strategies that would be applicable within the contemporary classroom setting that values technology as learning aids.

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