

Teaching Chinese Reading in Primary Thai Schools : The Teacher's Beliefs, Perceptions and Practices

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study were to 1) examine the Chinese native teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the reading techniques that could be used, and 2) identify how Chinese native teachers taught primary Thai students to read Chinese. The target group was 40 Chinese native teachers at Huaxing Chinavia Language Institute in Bangkok, Thailand. The research conducted in October, 2020, adopted a mixed method. The questionnaire and semi structure interviews were used to collect data. The 36 filled-out questionnaires were returned. The individual semi-structured interview was made with 8 volunteers. The quantitative data were analyzed with frequencies and percentages, while the semi-structured interview scripts were analyzed and interpreted based on Litchman (2013) 's 3 Cs Content Analysis Technique. The findings on the beliefs and perceptions of the 36 Chinese native teachers teaching Chinese reading, showed that Role-play reading (87.5%), Bottom-up reading (75%), and Story reading (75%) could be used to teach reading. They were aware that happy class atmosphere was very important. The teachers taught their classes with different activities, watching videos (100%), words cards (87.5%), and story books (87.5%). It was recommended that the teachers be trained with updated teaching theories and reading techniques as well as classroom research to improve their teaching.

KEYWORDS: Teaching Chinese, Reading techniques, Primary Thai Schools

Introduction

Currently, the Ministry of Education of Thailand has decided to offer Chinese courses in all primary and secondary schools (Office of the Education Council Ministry of Education Thailand, 2017). Therefore, as the number of

Chinese students was increasing, more problems or challenges of how to best teach Chinese reading to Thai students who study Chinese as a Foreign Language have emerged (Masuntisuk, 2013). The problems faced by the Chinese

language teachers in teaching non-native students are often on their teaching beliefs, styles, pedagogy and classroom management strategies besides personal skills such as communication and cross cultural understanding (Xui, 2012; Liao et al, 2017).

When language learning is discussed, many experts often say that parts of a language are often listening, speaking, reading and writing, while grammar and vocabulary are the key to learning a language well (Pinter, 2006; Darancik, 2018). Ideally, students must be taught to learn all these core skills in integrated manners. However, traditionally, reading and writing were two key skills for students for their students (Kim, 2017). To learn a foreign language, for many people, reading seems to be the easiest skill because reading and listening are receptive skills in which decoding skill is necessary. For reading, a learner is allowed time to go over the text unlike listening (Martin, 2010).

Reading is a lifelong skill to be used both at school and throughout life (Williams, Hedrick and Tuscklnski, 2008). Reading is also a language skill that is the foundation of academic achievement (Dwiastuty and Sulhan, 2018). In today's world, individuals need to learn how to be lifelong learners. Reading is the key to having a better and fulfilling life because it develops personal growth, shapes the thinking process and enhances critical thinking skill (Chotitham and Wongwanich, 2014).

This study aimed at exploring how Chinese reading was taught by Chinese native teachers. The target population of this research was Chinese native teachers. Based on the theory of

second language acquisition, students do not learn the mother tongue in the same way as they do the second on the foreign language (Vygotsky, 1962; Yadav, 2014). Thus, it is worth knowing how the native Chinese teachers coped with challenges, what reading theories they relied on most and which techniques the teachers used in teaching Thai students. How Chinese was taught was a challenge for Thai students because Thai, their mother tongue, is different from Chinese, especially in terms of the visual appearance. The findings from this study would be useful for the field of Chinese language teaching and learning, especially in the area of teacher training so that the Chinese native teachers could be best prepared for their jobs

Research Objectives

- 1) To study the Chinese native teachers' beliefs and perceptions about the reading techniques that could be used
- 2) To identify how Chinese native teachers taught Thai students to read Chinese

Scope of Study

Population

This study was conducted at Huaxing Chinavia Language Institute in Bangkok Thailand, whose main responsibility was to supply native Chinese teachers to primary schools in Bangkok and nearby provinces. The data collection process started from October 1st. to October 30th. The population of research were 40 Chinese native teachers teaching Chinese in Thailand, who taught in primary schools in Bangkok but the data were from 36 returned questionnaire.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The following figure shows the framework of the study:

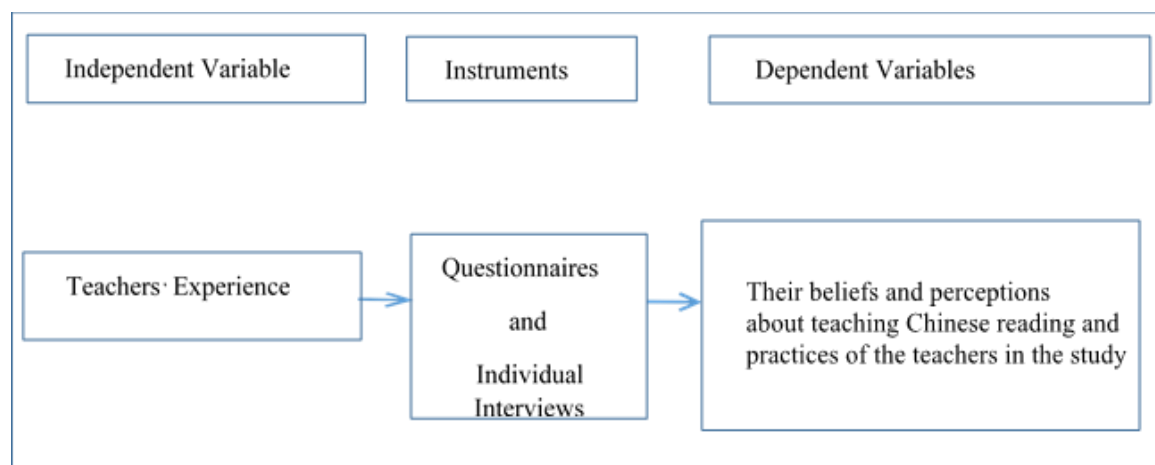


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Literature Review

The literature review covers two major keywords of the study. They are: 1) the Reading Techniques, and 2) the Reading Theories. It also discusses some related researches which revealed what reading techniques could be used to enhance Chinese reading achievement.

1. Reading Techniques

For most teachers, teaching reading techniques play a key role in the process of reading comprehension but most readers may have their reading strategies to tackle the texts read. In language teaching, some experts define ‘approaches’, ‘techniques’ and ‘methods’ in different ways, while others use them interchangeably. For example, Larsen-Freeman (2000) presents ‘The Grammar-Translation Method’, ‘The Direct Method’ and ‘The Audio-Lingual Method’, while Scrivener (2005) uses the

word ‘Method’ for the notion of ‘ways to teach’ but keep ‘Approach’ to describe the broader areas such as ‘Person-centered Approaches’ and ‘Lexical Approaches’ In this study, ‘techniques’ were what the teachers used in delivering their lessons and ‘theories’ were the concepts of teaching that the teachers depended on to prepare the lessons.

Experts in the field have suggested a large number of reading techniques. For example, Kennedy and Chinokul (2020) conducted a study examining “the Effect of the Scaffolded Reading Experience using a Graphic Novel on the English Reading Comprehension and Reading Motivation of Thai EFL students.” Another study by Liengtrakulchar and Prasarsaph (2020) was on “the Effects of Using Storyline Method an English Reading Comprehension Skills of 12th Grade Students.”

Certainly, these are more reading techniques in use in teaching a foreign

Language. This study proposed 8 reading techniques. They were Bottom-up techniques, Top- down techniques, Pre-reading techniques, During- reading techniques, Post- reading techniques, Skimming, Scanning and Predicting reading techniques (Dildora & Miravaz, 2020). because the Chinese teachers in the study had been trained in using these techniques and these techniques were mainly used in class.

Top- down and Bottom- Up Techniques

According to a number of researchers (Sornoza Tituana & Alvarez Caballero, 2017; Van Cahn, 2020 and Yamaguchi, 2020), Bottom-up is one of the teaching and learning reading techniques. This technique typically puts its emphasis on text-based features. The reader starts by reading words, phrases, sentences, and the longer text that often emphasize text- based features. It shows signs of a lower-level reading process. Teachers preferring using this technique believe that the small units form the whole

Reading begins with the smallest elements

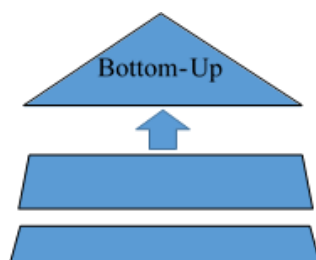


Figure 2: Illustration of the Bottom-up Technique

Suraprajit (2019) points out that the top-down reading technique not only extracts meaning from the text, but also connects the information in the text with the knowledge gained by the reader in the reading process. Reading is a dialogue

between the reader and the text. It is an active cognitive process. The reader's background knowledge plays a vital role in the creation of meaning. For this technique, the teacher places importance in understanding the gist and the supporting details

Reading begins with the reader's background knowledge

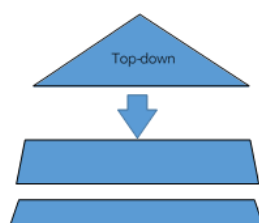


Figure 3: Illustration of the Top-down Technique

Reading Activities

Pre-reading activities are instructional activities carried out before students conduct the real reading activities. Pre-reading activities activate students' background knowledge as well as make students understand the goal of reading, learning activities and students' interest in learning (Aziz, Mustafa & Amalia, 2017).

Activities during the reading phase include taking notes, reacting, predicting, selecting important information, questioning the author's position, evaluating and incorporating the text into one's own experience. Since dictionaries, texts, and teachers are often the primary concerns in reading classes, these processes can be most complex in a classroom setting. In order to encourage students to read actively, teachers usually suggest that students practice the following techniques during the reading (Nikolova, Jainta, Blythe & Liversedge, 2016).

Post-reading techniques activities are essentially determined by the purpose of reading and the type of information extracted from the text. The effects of post-reading word-focused activities on vocabulary acquisition and the extent to which the effects are mediated by learners' working memory (Yang, Shintani, Li & Zhang, 2017).

According to Wahyuningsih (2018), skimming is high-speed reading that can help you save time and get through lots of material quickly. The purpose is to get the "Gist", a major point of information of the

text. Gulo (2020) also points out the importance of understanding the whole text.

Scanning means reading slowly and carefully to pick out certain key words or phrases. It allows readers to pick out specific information from a text. It does not mean reading word by word: it means reading carefully. Scanning technique is most useful for picking out the key learning points that can be extracted from the reading text (Wahyuningsih, 2018; Yopez Flores, 2020).

Prediction is fundamental to comprehension. According to Martin et al. (2020), predicting is the strategy most relied upon as one begins reading. The benefit of this technique is it can prepare the reader's mind to absorb, interpret, check, and confirm information. Studies have shown that good readers are mentally prepared to read a text; they have certain expectations that they confirm, reject, or refine as they read.

This study also investigated the techniques used by the teachers, who filled out the questionnaires.

2. Reading Theories

In this study, six common reading theories were studied as follows: The Bottom-up theory, the Top-down theory, the Schema theory, the Vocabulary theory, the Reader-response theory and the Role-play theory.

2.1 The Bottom-up Theory

According to Nunan (2003), 'Bottom-up reading theory' means "students start with the components: words, grammar and sentences." The bottom-up is the basis of the text. This

means that the reader relies on language in the message, combinations of sounds, meaningful words, and grammar. The reader processes information from the most basic or smallest parts of the language such as sounds to the larger parts such as words, phrases, clauses, and sentences.

The bottom-up approach to reading was influenced by behaviorist psychology of the 1950s, which held that learning was based on habit formation and brought about by repeated connections between stimuli and responses (Suraprajit, 2019).

2.2 The Top-down Reading Theory

In the top-down reading model, the emphasis is placed on a student's engagement with the text. It is not enough to get students to simply know the word they see, understand its general meaning and know how to pronounce it if reading aloud. The goal of the top-down reading theory is to get students to become active readers (Oliver & Young, 2016). On the other hand, the top-down theory of reading is designed to teach children to read using the theory that it is the brain of the reader and not the words on the page that make sense of what is written (Suraprajit, 2019).

2.3 The Schema Theory

The Schema theory explains how readers use prior knowledge to understand and learn texts (Bilqis, 2017). Schema is a significant concept that needs to be understood since it has been found the basis for cognition and information processing originates from it (Campos Serrano, 2019). "Schema is an active organization of past

reactions, or experiences, which must always be supposed to be operating in any well-adapted organic response". In other words, the function of schema is to provide experience and prior knowledge through the representation of concepts of an individual. The more concepts one has about the world, the better understanding the reader can make out of the text.

2.4 The Vocabulary Theory

As one of the knowledge fields in language, vocabulary plays an important role in language acquisition. Hiebert, Goodwin and Cervett (2018) analyze that vocabulary development is an important aspect of language development for learners. The more words one know, the better understanding one can have about the reading text. However, everybody knows that words have shades of meaning. This has been the reason for rising interest for researches on vocabulary.

2.5 The Reader's Response Theory

Richards and Lockhart (1994) observe that each reading activity is a unique experience in which the reader is involved in ethical, intellectual, social and aesthetic terms as a whole. Reading is an act which is actualized in the form of a "transaction" between the text and the reader, so it is very important for readers to read texts using the read- response theory.

2.6. The Role-play Theory

Role-play theory has a lot of promoting effects on Chinese reading: enthusiasm of learning, development of intelligence, learning of Chinese pinyin, improving reading ability and increasing vocabulary

(Sun, 2018). When learners adopt roles in learning a language, they will learn how to perform in various situations with appropriate language. It is a way to learn a target language in real situations.

Researches by Swardiana (2014) and Suraprajit (2019) state the influence of teachers' beliefs student learning achievement in foreign languages. The first study was how to improve students' reading comprehension using Directed Reading Thinking. Her study illustrated a classroom action research in English class using Directed Reading Thinking Activity, confirming that reading can be improved by refining students' reading skills and comprehension. The second study investigated the differences between the Bottom-up and the Top-down model and the perception of reading strategies among Thai university students. The results of the study suggest that both Top-down and Bottom-up strategies be employed in all stages including Pre-reading, While-reading, and Post-reading. However, Top-down strategies were mostly used by in academic and business reading. The findings of this study provided some insight into the use of reading strategies among Thai university students. It implies that they seem to frequently use reading strategies before they read a text.

To conclude, there are several theories of reading leading to a number of teaching techniques or methods for the teachers to select for their own teaching. Thus, it can be said that the teachers' beliefs that certain ways of teaching are good can be trusted

and perceptions (ideas and thoughts about what they are like) have great influence on the choice of reading theories and techniques.

Research Methodology

This study used the mixed methods approach. The survey questionnaires were filled out by a group of 36 respondents. They were young Chinese native teachers, and this group of teachers did not have lots of experience in teaching. They only had a workshop for 3 months to prepare for teaching in Thailand. Then, semi-structured interviews were organized to collect qualitative data from eight volunteering interviewees.

Three experts were invited to validate each instrument. After a score of 0.95 was obtained from the IOC activity, a pilot-test was conducted with a convenience sample of 30 participants from another group at Chinese native teachers who were teaching in Thailand. The Cronbach's alpha (α) score of the questionnaire was 0.965

Data Collection

The quantitative data collection was conducted in October 2020, and it was carried out in two weeks on the Online questionnaire consisting of 45 items in 3 parts. 36 Chinese teachers in Thai primary schools from Huaxing Chinavia Language Instituted participated in an Online questionnaire survey.

Qualitative data was collected from 8 Chinese native teachers who volunteered in Online individual interviews. The researchers maintained interview guidelines throughout for ethical observation. Each interview lasted 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis used frequencies and percentages to analyze the demographic characteristics of the questionnaire respondents and to determine the teachers' teaching beliefs in teaching and their preferred teaching techniques.

The qualitative interview data collected from the Chinese native teachers were analyzed by using the three Cs coding system: Coding, Categorizing and Concept. It is the process of selecting the central or category, systematically relating to other categories, validating those relationships and filling in categories that need further refinement and

development" (Lichtman, 2013).

Findings

The findings were reported based on the two instruments: 1) the questionnaire; and 2) the semi-structured interview.

Part 1 of the questionnaire revealed that this group of teachers were between 25-30 years old. They had an average level of Mandarin. The majority of the teachers were master's degree holders. Tables 1, 2, 3 show the frequencies and percentages from the highest to the lowest of the items in Part 2 (The Teachers' Beliefs in Teaching Reading), Part 3 (The Commonly Used Techniques) and one Open-ended Question of the questionnaire.

Table 1: Part 2 The Teachers' Beliefs in Teaching Chinese Reading

No.	The Teachers' Beliefs	Frequencies	Percentages
14	Teachers should stimulate students' interest in exploring new words in reading.	35	97.2
11	Activities such as role plays, singing and dancing help students to understand the reading texts.	34	94.4
12	Students should be encouraged to use their imagination while reading.	34	94.4
13	The teacher should encourage the students to guess the new words in order to better grasp the texts.	34	94.4
15	Teachers should guide students' reading passion according to knowing Chinese cultural background.	34	94.4
7	The teacher should explain the new words before reading the article.	29	80.6
1	Students should be taught to memorize vocabulary.	28	77.8
2	Students should be taught to read the main sentences.	28	77.8
6	Teachers should teach students to catch the keyword in reading Chinese.	28	77.8

Table 1: Part 2 The Teachers' Beliefs in Teaching Chinese Reading (Cont.)

No.	The Teachers' Beliefs	Frequencies	Percentages
8	Teachers should let students read by themselves.	28	77.8
4	Reading aloud is also good way to learn Chinese reading.	26	72.2
5	Teachers should read with the students word by word.	26	72.2
10	Teachers should teach students to know the meaning of the texts.	25	69.4
9	Teachers should focus on grammar in the reading texts.	23	63.9
3	Students learning a foreign language should be taught differently from when they learn the mother tongue.	23	63.9

Based on the findings of Table 1 (Items 1-15), it is clear that a strong majority of the teachers believed that vocabulary knowledge was very important (Items 14,13, 7, 1, 6). This group of teachers were aware that the teachers must groom passion for reading in their students and students should be allowed to use their imagination. They were interested in using role-play activities, singing and dancing (Items 15, 12, 11). The frequencies in Items 3, 9 and 10 show that some of the teachers (only a little over 60% of the group) were aware that native students and non-native students should be taught differently and maybe grammar teaching is not ideal for teaching reading. The teachers showed that they had got some good ideas

but they were still pulled towards the traditional way of teaching Chinese reading such as vocabulary memorization and reading the words in the sentences for meaning.

For Part 3, the questionnaire respondents were asked to express their preferences for the eight common reading techniques each of which has four indicators: 1) I use this technique in my classroom 2) I feel comfortable using bottom-up in my classroom 3) I integrate bottom-up in my activities, and 4) I believe that if students use this techniques, they will improve their reading skill

Table 2: Part 3 The Commonly Used Reading Techniques

No.	Reading Techniques	Frequencies	Percentages
1	Bottom-up technique	35	97.2
6	Scanning	34	94.4
4	During reading technique	32	88.9
5	Post- reading technique	32	88.9
3	Pre-reading technique	28	77.8
8	Predicting reading technique	26	72.2
7	Skimming	25	69.4
2	Top-down technique	23	63.9

Based on the findings of Table 2 of the questionnaire: It was found that most teachers preferred the Bottom-up technique (97.2%). The following top three techniques this group chose were scanning (94.4%),

during reading technique (88.9%) and Post-reading technique (88.9%). It is also obvious that fewer teachers preferred to use skimming (69.4%) and Top-down technique (63.9%).

Table 3: Part 3 The Teachers' Perceptions of Other Teaching Techniques

Reading Techniques	Frequencies	Percentages
Role-play teaching reading technique	6	17
Story teaching reading technique	6	17
Bottom-up reading technique	5	14
Game reading technique	4	11
Interactive reading technique	4	11
Situational teaching reading technique	4	11
Schema reading technique	4	11
Flipping class reading technique	3	8

Through frequency count, although not all questionnaire respondents gave the answer to this question, the top three choices were 1) Role-play teaching technique, 2) Story teaching technique and 3) Bottom-up teaching technique.

The findings from the semi-structured

interviews are shown in Figures 4, 5 and 6. The teachers' responses were coded and the following four themes emerged: 1) Beliefs of the Teachers, 2) Theories of Reading Techniques, and 3) Teaching techniques.

As for beliefs that influenced the teachers' teaching, the teachers' responses

demonstrated that they were sensible and reasonable although they did not have many years of experience and still green in the teaching career. They were aware that lively

and happy classroom atmosphere was the most important factor conducive for student learning.

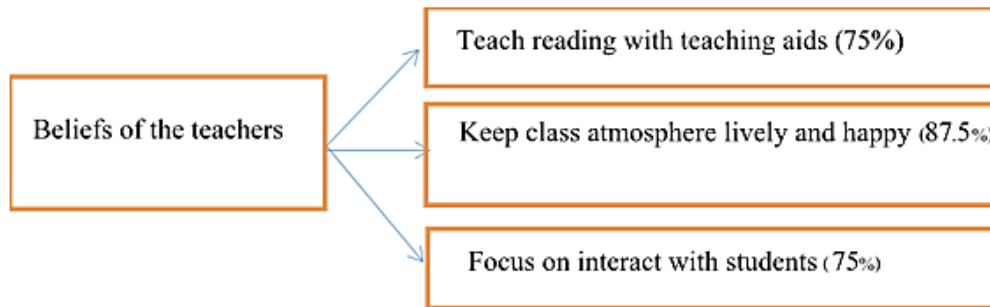


Figure 4: Beliefs of the Teachers

According to the responses of eight interviewees, teachers found that they preferred to teach reading by keeping the class atmosphere lively and happy. For the

interviewees, interacting with students was necessary and thus teaching by using teaching aids was helpful.

The following figure shows the Reading Techniques the teachers used.

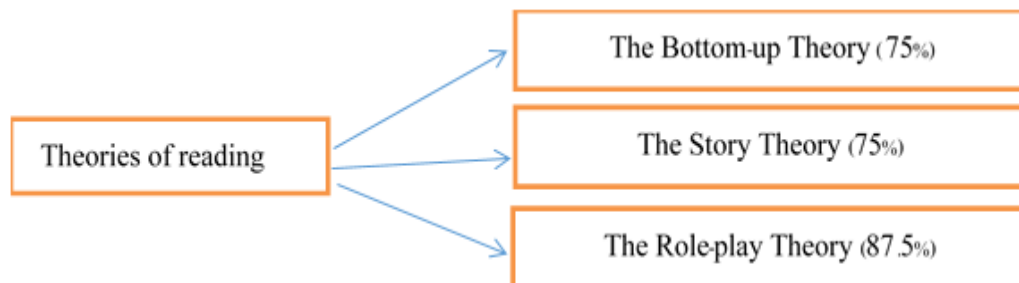


Figure 5: Theories of Reading

The responses of eight interviewees point out that the teachers believed that the Role-play Theory, followed by the Bottom-

up Theory and the Story Theory could benefit students.

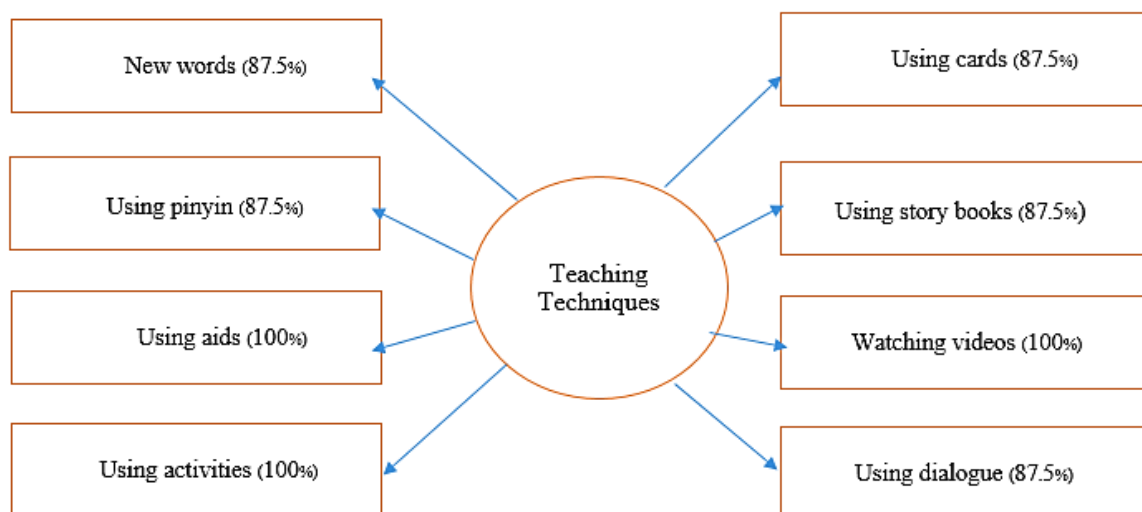


Figure 6: Teaching Techniques

The responses of eight interviewees indicated that they preferred to use aids, videos, and activities when teaching reading. However, they also taught by using some new words, cards, story books and pinyin.

Discussion

Based on the findings, the teachers realized that student learning could be enhanced if the lessons were fun and relaxing. They preferred the Role-play theory most. The second theory that most teachers practiced was the Bottom-up theory. This is in line with the reading theories and the researches in the field of reading ((Sornoza Tituana & Alvarez Caballero, 2017; Van Cahn, 2020 and Yamaguchi, 2020). However, they also placed great emphasis on vocabulary teaching. If they handled it well to attract the attention of the students, it would be helpful. As a group of teachers with one or

two years' teaching experience, they had the right perceptions and beliefs about foreign language teaching. Their practices were also based the theoretical framework of teaching Chinese reading.

However, three issues have emerged. The first issue was the beliefs and perceptions of the teachers. Teachers were found to be one of the key factors for student learning achievement (Swardiana, 2014; Suraprajit, 2019). That means this group of teachers were young and could be further developed. More training would help shape proper teaching beliefs and perceptions and the field of teaching and learning Chinese would have more qualified teachers. Earlier, they may have been taught and trained using the techniques they were familiar with and they were not experienced enough to explore other complex techniques. That's why the teaching techniques used by this group of teachers were not diverse. More training on

updated techniques and teaching theories may have to be given from time to time to achieve the teachers' teaching experience. Berliner (1994), cited in Andrews (2007:120) proposed the five stage models of teachers' development: Stage 1: Novice level (1st year teachers), Stage 2: Advanced beginning level (2nd year and 3rd year teachers), Stage 3: Competent level (3rd year and 4th year teachers and more experienced teachers) Stage 4: Proficient level (5th year teachers), Stage 5: Expert level (after at least 5 years). This means no one teacher can stop his or her learning and teaching experience is accumulated over time.

The second issue was the teachers' preference for the Bottom-up Approach. This is not wrong but these theories would seem to offer traditional ways of teaching reading if the lessons were not planned well. The Bottom-up Approach is oriented towards offering more teacher-directed teaching and may not sufficiently stimulate student learning. Grabbe and Stroller (2019) present the opposite point of view stating that the critical factor in teaching L2 reading is to help students understand that different tasks and different activities involve differing demand on comprehension. There have been other researchers who see that other theories may also be effective (Oliver & Young, 2016;

Suraprajit, 2016; Campos Serrano, 2019; Hiebert, Goodwin and Cervett, 2018).

The third issue is the teachers should be encouraged to look for teaching techniques that lead to happy learning. One way is they should be supported in doing classroom-based research of the techniques of their choice. Examples of the attempts are studies conducted by Kennedy and Chinokul (2020) and Liengtrakulchar & Prasarsaph (2020).

Recommendations

For researchers who want to investigate teaching Chinese reading in Thailand, future research can focus on how Chinese native teachers teach Chinese reading to high school and college students to find out the teaching techniques that are most appropriate to them.

Other researchers are advised to conduct a similar study on a large scale, for example, including all the Chinese teachers of teaching reading in Thailand, native or non-native Chinese teachers.

Besides, it may be worth exploring further what happens in the classroom by studying how the three major approaches: Bottom-up reading technique, Role-play reading technique and Story reading technique are used in teaching Chinese reading. The findings from this study will contribute to the knowledge about the field of teaching Chinese reading

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