Developing Academic and Content Area Literacy: The Thai EFL Context

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of Academic Literacy-Based Intervention (ALI) on 30 undergraduate Thai university students' English reading proficiency. Based on the English reading proficiency test, these students were sub-classified into 2 groups, 15 in the high English reading proficiency group and 15 in the low English reading proficiency group. They participated in ALI for over 10 weeks. Quantitative data were then collected through the English Reading Proficiency Pre-Test and Post-Test. Qualitative data were obtained through the Classroom Observation Record, a Semi-Structured Student Group Interview and the Students' Accomplishment Record. Results yielded by the English Reading Proficiency Test showed that, comparing the high and low reading proficiency students, the low proficiency students made a statistically significant improvement (p<0.05) in English reading proficiency. It is suggested that academic literacy can be integrated into the teaching of English-language reading, especially for the benefit of struggling readers. Moreover, some psychological factors, namely, outcome expectancy, causal attribution, and awareness of success and failure, appear to play a crucial role in reading proficiency improvement.

INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen English become the de facto standard foreign language of Thailand. While its prominence as a lingua franca extends throughout Asia, Thai students study English as a foreign language. In media, business, tourism, government publications, and public signs, English is widely used and has become an essential skill for professional advancement in urban areas (Baker, 2008). Indeed, over the past decade, education in Thailand has seen a growing number of international schools, foreign colleges and universities, and even some undergraduate and post-graduate programs using English as the language of instruction (Wiriyachitra, 2002) in an attempt to accommodate strategic efforts toward globalization and internationalization. Access to global information notwithstanding, academic English literacy has become ubiquitous in today's Thai society and is closely associated with better educational/professional status and business opportunities. Many even believe that English language literacy can pave the way for academic and career success. For example, Scarcella (2003) stressed that "[w]ithout knowledge of academic English, individuals may be excluded from participation in educated society and prevented from transforming it" (p. 7).

Though English has been commonly used as a language of instruction in Thai education, today many Thai students are struggling with using English as a language of instruction in academic contexts and even for general communication. This development has become an issue of great concern, as academic language is not acquired during the early years of second language acquisition, whereas the use of English across the curriculum in tertiary education requires advanced academic skills for content comprehension. According to Snow and Uccelli (2009), academic language has both linguistic and pragmatic challenges that make it more demanding than general communicative language.

Generally speaking, Thai students regard English as overly challenging to acquire and tend to react negatively to learning the language. They tend to bring to their English-language classroom certain beliefs rooted in past experiences, and such beliefs can be influential on their later study. They ascribe past failures to their lack of ability rather than to inadequate effort. Such ascription has an effect on their expectation of future performance. Causal attribution is critical in performing a difficult task. According to Weiner (1986), causal attribution varies among effort, ability, teachers, task difficulty, or even luck. Students' motivation will be increased if they attribute their poor performance to internal, controllable factors such as effort and strategy use. Conversely, if their attribution is to uncontrollable factors, like luck or inherent ability, their motivation toward future performance will be decreased (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). This notion has also been supported by Dörnyei (2009), who pointed out that the self-system, namely self-images, ideal self and learning experience, is associated with motivation in second language learning.

This study aims to propose Academic Literacy-based Intervention, which is a reading instructional model that promotes English reading proficiency. Apart from an emphasis on content materials, this instructional approach integrates into its framework such psychological factors as outcome expectancy and casual attribution regarding reading. The study also aims to investigate the effects of this intervention on Thai undergraduate students with different levels of English reading proficiency.

Academic/Content Area Literacy

Literacy for second and foreign language teaching extends beyond the ability to produce and interpret texts. It also involves "a critical awareness of the relationships between texts, discourse conventions and social and cultural contexts" (Kern, 2000, p. 6). In this study, academic literacy is grounded on the integration of different perspectives on academic English. First, characteristics of academic language literacy and content literacy focus on language elements, genres, convention and rhetoric, and schemata (Gunning, 2003). L1 knowledge and affective, social, and strategic reading variance seem to provide some of the key components of L2 literacy (Bernhardt, 2005). Meanwhile, as Kern (2000) put it, literacy development requires more than a linguistic component. Sociocultural, cognitive and psychological aspects of literacy for L1 and L2 contexts deserve consideration. Johns (1997) also observed that literacy is developed by exposure in a variety of contexts, so that learners learn to recognize different genres in each context. It also requires individuals' interaction and mediation to interpret texts, and knowledge of forms to serve their purposes in developing literacy. Moreover, as noted in van Lier's (2004) discussion of social interaction in learning, this concept has a lengthy heritage going back to Vygotsky. Lastly, Gee (2002) proposed a sociocultural view of literacy, which emphasizes discourse, situated meaning, and identity. That model stresses reading that goes beyond literal meaning or grammar and vocabulary toward an understanding of some specific culture and text meaning.

The academic literacy framework presented in this study is, therefore, a multidimensional framework comprising four main dimensions: language, cognitive, socio-cultural, and affective/psychological. The language dimension entails knowledge and general

literacy in L1 and L2. The cognitive dimension includes learners' schemata, thinking, and use of strategies. The sociocultural dimension refers to contextualized discourse, a variety of genres, interaction of learners and texts, social practices, and the cultural background of language users. Lastly, the affective/psychological dimension deals with learners' personal attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Academic Literacy-based Intervention (ALI)

The development of the ALI framework involved a careful review of literacy and motivational theories, namely second/foreign language literacy theories (Kern, 2000; Gunning, 2003; Bernhardt, 2005; Johns, 1997; Gee, 2002), social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Pajares, 2005; Schunk, 2003), and self-attribution theory (Weiner, 1986). The concept of these theories were then synthesized and formulated into four main ALI constructs: Language, Cognitive, Socio-Affective, and Strategic.

The instruction that develops academic English literacy addresses these constructs in an appropriate balance. The cognitive construct involves knowledge of specific content and domains and sociocultural knowledge. This includes the use of materials and content that is appropriate to learners' levels of background knowledge and tailored to their comfort level. In other words, it is an attempt to make a connection between the text and the students' schema. The affective construct refers to creating a supportive and responsive learning environment where learners feel comfortable to learn. In relation to this construct, the teacher provides praising feedback that specifically emphasizes effort and persistence, not ability. The socio-affective construct includes social interaction between peers, peer observation, peer modeling, peer coaching, and peer tutoring. Peer supports help students feel less anxious; their confidence increases when they observe the achievements of their equal peers. Finally, the strategic construct involves the use of strategies, especially self-regulatory strategies, raising awareness of valuing past accomplishment, outcome expectations, and causal attributions. In short, the characteristics of classroom instruction designed to address the concepts of academic literacy development involve collaborative efforts within the peer group, awareness of the causes of previous successes and failures, valuing effort and persistence, and self-regulatory practice for life-long learning.

The instructional process used to support ALI was adapted from the pedagogy of mutiliteracies (New London Group, 1996). It consists of four components: Situated Practice, Overt Instruction, Critical Framing, and Transformed Practice and Evaluation (see Appendix).

In situated practice, the first reading-encounter stage, students are encouraged to become immersed in the text and respond spontaneously to it. This component activates their background knowledge toward the passage they are going to read, and helps them establish relevance between the text and their lives. In so doing, the reading becomes purposeful for students and they can begin to learn from known and new information, which, in turn, helps them become stronger and more confident readers (Johnson, Freedman, & Thomas, 2008). At this stage, the students are equally required to set their reading goal and make a reading plan, as well as identifying their outcome expectancy for their reading. These are self-regulatory strategies, which are key parts of the strategic component of ALI. Outcome expectancy is based on the assumption that when people have a high perception of their capability of performing a task, they will value the outcome highly, which, in turn, will increase their motivation in being more closely engaged in the task (Pajares, 1996).

The overt instruction component focuses on lexical, syntactic and discourse relationships, and text genres. Through the teacher's direct guidance, individual activities, and peer collaborative practices, the students explore the linguistic and discourse components of the text overtly. However, they are also encouraged to learn that reading is much more

than grammar, vocabulary, and literal meanings; it equally involves structural and organization relationships, as well as specific, social, and cultural meanings. This awareness helps them interpret texts meaningfully and find the relationship between syntactic and semantic knowledge.

The critical framing component involves the students' critical and reflective responses to the text. Through a group interview, the students develop their reaction to what they read in order to become active readers. They also establish their identity and role as critical readers while reflecting upon the text. Working mainly with peer groups prevents students from feeling insecure about contributing their opinions. They are equally afforded the opportunity to observe their peers' thinking processes while also developing their own way of thinking.

The last component—transformed practice and evaluation—concerns activities that involve reformulation and redesign of existing texts. This stage ensures the teacher that the students are indeed learning all the components of literacy, that is, knowledge, skills, critical thinking, effective communication, and problem solving, and not just comprehending the text literally. In this stage, students evaluate themselves in various formats, including the process and products of reading. One of these evaluations is self-assessment and it involves rating their own reading performance between 0 and 10 following the completion of all the unit's reading activities. The evaluation is conducted based on students' satisfaction and sense of accomplishment after completing the tasks. Students are also encouraged to make a causal attribution to some controllable factors as efforts rather than innate ability.

In all four components, ALI's four constructs, Language, Cognitive, Strategic and Socio-Affective are applied, and these constructs play a vital role in every instructional process.

THE STUDY

Study Objectives and Research Questions

The purposes of this study were to (a) propose Academic Literacy-based Intervention as a reading instruction that promotes English reading proficiency and (b) investigate the effects of Academic Literacy-based Intervention on the English reading proficiency of the students at different levels of initial proficiency. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent does Academic Literacy-based Intervention increase reading proficiency?
2. To what extent does Academic Literacy-based Intervention affect the reading proficiency of students with different initial levels of reading proficiency?

Study Context

The study reported here was conducted at a public university in the north of Thailand. At this university, English is used as the medium of instruction across the curriculum. Students are required to complete six compulsory English courses. Academic Literacy-based Intervention was implemented in the Academic Reading and Writing course, which is the second English course in the curriculum. This course focuses on reading strategies information searching, note-taking techniques, and summary writing.

METHOD

Participants

The participants (*N* = 30) were undergraduate students from various study programs and all of them were Thai. They were enrolled in the Academic Reading and Writing course in the second semester of academic year 2010. They were an intact group and were assigned to the experiment of Academic Literacy-based Intervention by the university's registration system.

Prior to the experiment, students took the Academic Reading Module pre-test of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and were classified into high (*N*= 15) and low (*N*=15) levels of English reading proficiency based on these test results. The classroom activities were videotaped during the first and the last three weeks of the class. During each reading unit, students completed an Accomplishment Record, and after the end of the unit, they conducted an individual reading and kept a learning log. This was a part of their self-access learning. Following the experiment, these students took the IELTS' Academic Reading Module post-test, and ten of them were selected to participate in a group interview. Five of them were from the low reading proficiency group and five from the high reading proficiency group.

Materials

Instructional Treatment (ALI)

The ALI lessons consisted of three units and an instructional manual. Each unit focused on one academic content topic according to the students' interest survey. The topics represented the General Education courses for the students under study. The three most selected topics chosen for developing reading texts for this course were Languages and Cultures, Psychology, and Science and Technology. Each unit covered six hours of in-class learning and six hours of self-access learning. The sample materials were validated by three experts and pilot tested with a group of 42 students who did not belong to the study's sample group but were from the same target setting.

The main foci of ALI involved literacy practice, critical and responsive reading, reading strategies (e.g., collaborative strategies, graphic organizers, summary writing), self-regulatory strategies, and practice of self-attribution. ALI reading practice included interpretive, critical, and responsive reading. The ALI materials are excerpts of academic reading texts from authentic subject-matter textbooks on Psychology, General Science, and Social Sciences. For their self-access hours, ALI students conducted three Individual Reading Projects in which they chose to read any passages related to the topics of their in-class readings; each time, the students had to complete the Individual Reading Project Worksheet and submit it to the teacher. The learning experience of this project was then discussed in Semi-Structured Student Focus Groups.

Research Instruments

The IELTS' Academic Reading Module

The purpose of this test is to measure the academic reading proficiency of those who want to study or train in English-speaking universities or institutions of higher education. The test consisted of 3 reading passages, 40 items. The passages used in the test were based on authentic texts, and were taken from sources such as magazines, journals, books, and newspapers. The task types were multiple choice, cloze, and matching. The passages were all

on academic reading topics. The total word count for the three passages was between 2,000 and 2,750 words. The test time was 1 hour (British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, University of Cambridge ESOL Examination & IELTS International, 2008) and each question carried one mark.

Classroom Observation Record

The Classroom Observation Record (COR) was used to capture the performances of the teacher and students during the treatment based on videotape recording during weeks 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9. The COR consisted of two parts. Part one was a narrative observation report of general performances and activities occurring during the classes. Part two was a reflection based on the four instructional stages of Academic Literacy-based Intervention framework, namely situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice and evaluation**.**

Semi-Structured Student Group Interview

The Semi-Structured Student Group Interview format was chosen because it was deemed culturally appropriate for the Thai context; it allows students to have a combination of reassuring structure with ongoing group interaction around the interview questions. It revealed students' reactions and reflections on their learning experiences while participating in the Academic Literacy-based Intervention. The interview took place after students had completed the ALI (week 13). Five ALI students from the high reading proficiency group and five from the low proficiency group participated in the interview, which was arranged into two different sessions for each group. Each session lasted about half an hour. There were 10 prompts for the group interview based on the ALI framework.

The main focus of the group interview was on the students' reading experience in class. Each student observed their performance from the videotape and reflected on their learning experience based on their Student Accomplishment Record. The students' interview contributions were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and categorized based on the instructional components of ALI.

Student Accomplishment Record

In each learning module, ALI student groups completed the Student Accomplishment Record, a self-regulatory strategy worksheet encouraging students to keep track, reflect, and assess their own learning. It consists of two parts: an Accomplishment Plan and an Accumulative Growth Record. In the Accomplishment Plan, students set their reading goal, made a reading plan, and established an outcome expectancy before they read. After reading, they summarized the activities they had done when they read, the peer they worked with, and the strategies they used in each learning unit. They also assessed themselves in terms of whether the strategies and the tasks were helpful and successful. Then, they evaluated themselves and reflected on the cause of their outcome. In the Accumulative Growth Record, students kept a record of the scores that they accumulated during the ALI and plotted a graph of their learning development. All students submitted their Accomplishment record to the researcher at the end of each learning unit. The data from that Record was used as a part of the Group Interview.

RESULTS

The results from the IELTS' pre-and post-test (see Table 1) indicate that the students in ALI made a significant improvement, $t(29) = 2.42$, p< 0.05, on their English reading

proficiency after the ten weeks of treatment. The effect size of the ALI's pre-test and post-test mean scores, calculated using Eta squared, displays a value of 0.16, which suggests a small difference (Cohen, 1988). This indicates that ALI could improve Thai university students' English reading proficiency.

Table 1. Findings of English Reading Proficiency Pre- and Post-tests

		n	*Mean*	*SD*	**Mean Difference**	*df*	*t*	**sig**	**Effect Size**
ALI	Pre-Test	30	8.67	4.68					
	Post-Test	30	11.86	3.69	3.26	29	2.42	0.02*	0.16

Note. *p< 0.05

To further investigate the effects of ALI on students with initially high and low proficiency, a paired sample t-test was conducted to evaluate the impact of ALI on students who had high and low English reading proficiency. The results indicate that after 10 weeks of ALI, there was no statistically significant improvement among the students who had initially high proficiency (Mean = 11.69, SD =2.28, $t(14)$ = 0.98, p> 0.05 (Table 2). However, there was a statistically significant improvement among the students who had initially low proficiency (Mean = 9.90, SD = 4.15, $t(14)$ = 5.23, p< 0.05). The eta-squared statistic indicated a medium effect size (0.66).

Table 2. A Comparison of English Reading Proficiency Pre-Test and Post-Test of ALI High and Low Proficiency Students

Group		*n*	*Mean*	*SD*	**Mean Difference**	*df*	*t*	**sig**	**Effect Size**
ALI	Pre-Test	15	12.5	2.66					
High	Post-Test	15	11.69	2.28	0.76	14	0.98	0.34	
ALI	Pre-Test	15	4.60	2.06					
Low	Post-Test	15	9.90	4.15	5.18	14	5.23	0.00*	0.66

Note. *p<0.05

With regard to qualitative data, the results were analyzed based on the four components of ALI instruction as follows.

Situated Practice

The data revealed the students' impression on their first encounter with the reading texts. The Classroom Observation Record shows clear evidence that students were able to make a connection between the texts and their background knowledge. These informed data were supported by the findings from the Semi-Structured Student Group Interview, during which both the high and low proficiency groups felt that the passages used in ALI were difficult for them. Most of them said that their first impression of each text was that the passage did not look motivating and, further, that there were a lot of unknown words that could obstruct their comprehension. However, they did not feel that the passages were unreadable because the instruction guided them to connect the text to their background experience. As one student expressed:

> *At first glance, it looked like a difficult passage. But I didn't feel so bad with it. I think it was okay. I was trying to think about how much "technology"* [the topic of one of the reading units] *influenced my life. Then, it made me curious to read about how technology can change our brain structure. (Student #H2)*

Moreover, a student in the low proficiency group mentioned that, despite the difficulty, the texts looked readable. The paragraph format helped the student go through it without any problems. Each paragraph was separated by a direction asking students to summarize the idea of what they had just read before advancing to the next paragraph. Such an inter-paragraph pause made reading a long and difficult text look less discouraging as one student put it:

> *Reading and pausing at each paragraph made it easy for me to read and comprehend the text part by part. It's better than reading long stretching texts all the way to the end without stopping at each paragraph. (Student # L1)*

In their Students' Accomplishment Record, most students placed their emphasis on vocabulary because they stated that their goal was to learn more vocabulary and their plan was to use a dictionary while reading. A few of them said that their goal was to know more about psychology and culture, which was the topic of one of the reading units.

Overt Instruction

At this reading stage, the students were explicitly taught some vocabulary, sentence structures, and reading strategies. Data from the Focus Group Interview reflected diverse comments from the students, especially with regard to reading strategies. Despite the three types of reading strategies taught overtly in class, the Classroom Observation showed that in the first reading unit, there was no evidence indicating the use of diverse reading strategies by either the high or the low proficiency students. Almost all of the students relied on the use of dictionaries, which was not one of the strategies taught in class. Most of the students used a concept map. In the observation of the last reading unit students also used additional reading strategies, including summarizing, guessing of main ideas, and highlighting texts.

These data are consistent with the students' report in the Group Interview, in which both groups of students found that the ALI strategies, especially concept maps, facilitated their comprehension. A student in the low proficiency group found graphic organizers helpful for her to persist in reading as she put it: "The concept map obliged me to try to get the main point of the passage so as to be able to create and expand a map" (Student # L2). However, some students felt that some strategies, such as vocabulary logs, did not help them understand the passage effectively, as revealed by a student in the high proficiency group: "There were so many words that I don't know and the vocabulary log cannot cover all of them. So, I did not find it helpful" (Student # H2).

From the perspective of self-regulatory strategies, the Students' Accomplishment Plan indicated clear evidence of students setting specific and achievable goals, making explicit and doable plans for their reading tasks, selecting strategies that helped them understand the text better, and identifying sources of difficulties they encountered while reading. Some of student goals included learning more words, understanding the passage, and practicing reading. Their plans varied from finding a main idea of the text, highlighting the words they did not know and guessing the meaning, talking and exchanging ideas about the text with their friends, to making a summary of the text. They also indicated that their difficulties in completing the reading tasks were text difficulty, complex sentence structures, and unknown technical words.

During the Group Interview, all of the high proficiency students recounted that they had read according to their plan and that they took advantage of self-assessment to improve their performance:

> *I did read and underline the vocabulary as stated in my plan. After the self-assessment, I felt that I didn't understand the passage enough. So, I went back and re-read it several times. (Student # H 3)*

I think making plan and assessing our own performance is helpful. I learnt to find out what I missed while reading. When I read the first passage, I didn't understand most of it. But in the second and third ones, I began to figure out how to read and I think I learnt more techniques. (Student # H 5)

In contrast, the low proficiency students reported that though they did make their reading goals, plans, and self-assessment in class as the teacher had guided them, they did not really read with their goals in mind as they read the texts. A student reported that, "I only read on and underlined the parts that I think were important. No plans. No goals" (Student # L 4). Similarly, another low proficiency student said she had her goals and plans but she did not think she would apply them to her future reading:

I did what I had to do in class, but I didn't think I would apply it to future reading because each passage is different and each reading situation is different. I might not apply the same technique in every situation. (Student # L2 & L3)

Critical Framing

Even though it was shown by the Classroom Observation that students were quiet most of the time and they did not seem to volunteer to share their opinion with the class, it was observed that they indeed listened attentively to the teacher. They were able to answer quite effectively the teacher's questions, and when asked to perform some activities, they did so without much reluctance. It was also noted that the students tended to reserve their responses unless they were called upon. Furthermore, they reported an unsafe classroom atmosphere that made them feel uncomfortable when being called upon:

In general, the class was not stressful, but it started to seem threatening when you (the researcher as a teacher of the class) called upon each student. You provided very limited time for us to think about the answer and we were afraid of saying things in English and making mistakes. (Student # H1)

However, when allowed to participate in their L1, it was found that students were more active in sharing their opinions with the class, and were able to make a critical response toward the passage. However, because they did not feel comfortable expressing their opinion in English, they were assigned to write their English response to the critical questions after reading, and present it orally in class. The following is an excerpt of their response toward the passage, 'The Impact of Culture on Psychology':

I think I am an individualist because I always have my space. I don't want to live with friends every time. I have goals and I can complete it by myself. I don't care if other people don't like me, but I care about my family. On the other hand, if I work with other people in groups, I always respect their ideas. (Student # H2)

Cultures possibly make each individual different because of the environment. People who live in the same family or same culture usually have some similar behavior. But if they live in different environment, they usually have different behavior. Beliefs also have an impact on cultural difference. If they have different beliefs, the culture will be different, too. (Student # L4)

Transformed Practice and Evaluation

At this final stage, students identified their source of difficulty and their success/ failure in reading. It was found that students attributed their success and failure to a lack of effort and persistence, as one of the high proficiency students remarked in the Students Accomplishment Plan, "I'll try to read and re-read so as to understand the passage better"

(Student # H1). Two low proficiency students wrote in their Students Accomplishment Plan the following: "I think I'm improved and I must study vocabulary a lot" (Student # L2), and "I still don't like reading long and difficult passages but I think I will develop my reading next time" (Student # L5). The data are consistent with the findings from the Semi-Structured Student Group Interview. Most students in both the high and low proficiency groups agreed that awareness of their successes and failures helped them learn to read better. Many students in the high proficiency group said that the awareness of what they could and could not do encouraged them in their future reading:

> *When we know that we can do it, we feel encouraged to try more in the next reading. (Student # H1)*

> *I know what I should improve and it makes me want to try harder. For example, I know that in reading this passage, I need to know more words. I'll try to learn vocabulary more. (Student # H 4)*

> *I looked back to the part that I didn't understand and re-read it. I also apply this practice [being aware of success and failure] to reading other passages. But sometimes, I still don't understand what I read. (Student # L1)*

> *Being aware of success and failure makes me realize about my ability. I learnt to monitor my comprehension, seeing how much I understand when reading the passage at this level of difficulty. (Student # L2)*

One student in the low proficiency group thought differently. Though she remarked that practicing awareness of success and failure was a good way to assess herself, she did not think it would be necessary for her to develop such an awareness: "I think it's good as it makes me know how much I can do, but I don't see the reason why I should apply it in my future reading" (Student # L4). Thus, it can be concluded that both the high and low proficiency students regarded the awareness of successes and failures as contributing certain advantages to their reading. Both groups reported that the ability to identify the sources of success and failure enabled them to realize their strengths and weaknesses, as well as how to improve their reading skills. When asked, in the Group Interview, to compare ALI with their reading classes in the past, high proficiency students felt that ALI was different from their previous reading practice in that it helped them learn more vocabulary and, apart from reading skills practice, they gained more knowledge from the reading passages as two students observed during the group interview:

> *This reading instruction helps me learn more new words and I gain general knowledge that is beyond practicing reading like reading course that I've previously taken. (Student #H 1)*

> *It's different from my reading courses in the past. Most of them focused on finding main idea and that was it. I only knew that when it came to reading, all we had to do was finding a main idea. I didn't know more than that. In this course, I learnt that we read, and we talked about it; we wrote about it." (Student #H3)*

A low proficiency student stated that he had learnt more than reading. He was able to attain some syntactic knowledge and other higher-order skills: "I've learnt to analyze sentence structures and I have to try to give opinions about the passages" (Student #L 4).

DISCUSSION

The findings discussed thus far shall be further examined under the aspects of the ALI design and levels of reading proficiency.

(a) The Design of Academic Literacy-based Intervention

ALI Components

Guthrie, Wigfield, Barbosa, Perencevich, Taboada, Davis, Scafiddi, and Tonks (2004) examined the effects of Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) on reading comprehension and engagement. The findings of this study revealed that because CORI combined multiple strategies instruction and motivational support, it could increase reading comprehension. Similar to CORI, the main ALI components included a variety of strategies (i.e., a motivational practice consisting of dealing with materials that are relevant to students' background and interest, providing supportive atmosphere, learning to make an appropriate self-attribution, and keeping persistent in reading) and encompassed different features (i.e., language, cognitive, strategic and socio-cultural dimensions). Such a set of constructs enables ALI to facilitate overall literacy, rather than focusing on reading as a discrete skill.

In addition, ALI stresses the role of using the L1 in L2 literacy development. Even though ALI aims to promote academic English literacy, it allows students to use their L1 in acquiring L2 literacy. This component of the ALI framework was built on contemporary research and practice advocating the use of L1 as the best tool to help learners access and engage in their L2 processing and acquisition (Butzkamm, 2003; van Lier, 2006; Swain, Kirkpatrick & Cummins, 2011). Therefore, during class activities and group work, students could choose to present their work orally in either the L1 or L2. This is to encourage students whose L2 is still inadequate to participate in class, so that they can develop their self-efficacy and use their L1 to assist their L2 acquisition, especially in dealing with the cognitively-demanding content of academic texts.

ALI Instruction

The four stages of the ALI instructional process take students beyond the literal and interpretive level of reading comprehension. In the Situated Practice and the Overt Instruction stages, students acquire comprehension when they learn to establish connections between the text and their background knowledge, interpret the contents, and conceptualize the main point of the texts. Thereafter, their comprehension is restated in the two subsequent stages, the Critical Framing stage and the Transformed Practice and Evaluation stage. These two final stages emphasize the role of students' active response to a text. Thus, ALI is an instructional method that aims to develop both skill and literacy simultaneously. In addition, because ALI includes psychological components, it provides motivational support to the students as well while underscoring the critical and reflective nature of reading.

ALI Materials

In ALI, the goal of content literacy is to positively impact students' achievement, especially struggling readers, rather than solely affecting general reading comprehension. As Brozo and Flynt (2007) have stated, content literacy helps students build motivation and academic vocabulary as it prompts them to use the language as a tool to communicate their content knowledge meaningfully and purposefully. In addition, McCabe, Kraemer, Miller, Parmer, and Ruscica (2006) found that the format of reading texts may affect students'

reading self-efficacy, especially underachieving students. Some students are intimidated by the appearance of a textbook, and this intimidation can have a negative influence on their self-belief. In ALI materials, the paragraphs in each passage are separated by questions that required students to pause and summarize the main points of the paragraph just read before continuing on to the next. As one of the low proficiency students voiced in the Group Interview, this format helped her keep reading and not give up even though, at first glance, she found the text difficult.

During the Semi-Structured Student Group Interview, both high and low proficiency students described their first impression of ALI materials as difficult and said that there was a large number of vocabulary, including technical words, they did not know. However, they admitted that the passages were not impossible to read and comprehend. Students found that activities in Situated Practice helped them feel more confident to read the texts because those activities helped them develop some ideas about what the text would be about. Pajares (2005) stated that the challenge of tasks has to be at an appropriate level, so that it energizes—not paralyzes—students; when they succeed in those given tasks, they can feel self-rewarded and inspired to face more challenging tasks.

(b) Levels of Reading Proficiency

According to the post-test mean scores of both high and low proficiency students, ALI did not help initially high-proficiency students make any significant improvement. However, it did help low-level students. A possible explanation why high proficiency students did not make significant improvement could be because they were already using a large number of language learning strategies to help them learn effectively (Griffith, 2008). Moreover, as Cook (1989), Schramm (2008), Grabe (2009), and Alsheikh (2011) have already suggested, good readers already read with goals in mind, and have both knowledge and control of reading strategies and metacognitive awareness. It is possible then that the high proficiency students in this study already possessed the knowledge and skill of self-regulatory strategies and reading strategies as used in ALI. When ALI was administered to them, they might not have found these strategies new to them and hence, they did not make noticeable improvement in their performance.

In contrast, the low proficiency students could benefit from multiple-strategies practice through ALI. Moreover, the use of the L1 in classroom activities might help these students feel more comfortable with taking risks. As observed in the Classroom Observation Record, some students volunteered to answer questions without being called upon when they knew that they could use their L1 to share their opinions and responses to the text. The text format used in ALI materials makes students feel that they can persist in reading as confirmed by the comment from a low proficiency student in the Semi-Structured Student Group Interview.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The study reported here has ascertained that ALI promotes English reading proficiency and reading self-efficacy in all student levels, especially among those with low initial reading proficiency. Content literacy that focuses on multifaceted components, namely, language, cognitive, strategic and socio-cultural components, should be fostered in the EFL classroom, so that students may become even more motivated in reading. Equally, students should be helped to become accustomed to the process of self-regulated learning to read with a goal. In addition, making a causal attribution assists students in becoming aware of their own successes and failures, thereby developing a sense of how to improve their reading skill to cope with future reading challenges. The study's findings also suggest that reading

instruction that is both reflective and responsive is likely to increase students' reading proficiency.

It follows that literacy instruction should be applied in reading instruction so as to promote English reading proficiency. In this study, the students reported that ALI was 'deeper' than reading courses that they had taken previously, and ALI made them feel that reading was meaningful. General reading practice may not be sufficient to make students take advantage of the overwhelming resources in a knowledge-based society. This is because skill-based reading practice deals with language aspects that may help students get only the gist of what they read. In contrast, literacy practice demands the application of multifaceted skills and knowledge of language, cognition, metacognition and sociocultural constructs. Armed with such skills and knowledge, students are better able to understand concepts, be critical and aware of their understanding, and, ultimately, adjust their thinking to ensure deep learning (Wilson, Grisham, & Smetana 2009).

In sum, academic literacy using authentic content materials should be integrated in reading instruction because it ensures student success. Even though students first perceived the materials as difficult, they felt that the texts were motivating. Most importantly, when students succeeded in comprehending the texts, regardless of text difficulty, they felt self-rewarded and self-assured. Teachers are therefore strongly counseled to provide appropriate scaffolding techniques and strategies along with specific feedback to assist students at all levels to overcome the difficulties of challenging texts.

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APPENDIX

Instructional Model of Academic Literacy-based Intervention (ALI)

Language Construct
General literacy in L1 and L2

Cognitive Construct
Content and domain knowledge

Strategic Construct
Self-regulatory strategies
Outcome expectancy
Causal Attribution

Socio-Affective Construct
Supportive and Responsive atmosphere
Specific feedbacks

Situated Practice
- Set proximal goal
- Make accomplishment plan
- Make outcome expectancy
- Access/Assess Prior knowledge
- Make connection to students' experiences
- Immerse in text
- Respond spontaneously to text

Overt Instruction
- Focus on lexical, syntactic, discourse relationships and genre of the text
- Individual and collaborative practices

Critical Framing
- Critical questions and responses

Transform Practice and Evaluation
- Reflections and reactions on the story, reading goal and reading outcome
- Summary writing (Oral and written collaborative individual summary)

summary and

Teacher's Roles
1. Demonstrate and model reading and strategies
2. Help students refine a mastery/proximal goals
3. Help the students practice lack-of-effort explanation when they perform poorly
4. Provide specific rather than general compliments
5. Avoid the appearance of unsolicited help
6. Help students document their growth

Student's Roles
1. Make reading accomplishment plan. (set goal, identify reading activities, assess reading performance)
2. Read orally, individually and with peers
3. Be reading models for peers
4. Identify reading difficulties
5. Select strategies demonstrated by teachers
6. Reflect on reading behavior
7. Make causal attribution and keep accumulative reading growth

Increases in English Reading Proficiency