

Simplified Readers as Comprehensible Input in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

Some twenty years ago, Stephen Krashen presented to the ESL/EFL profession his now-famous distinction between language learning and language acquisition. As a corollary, he also introduced his Input Hypothesis, i.e., language learners acquire language only when they receive comprehensible input. One method for language learners to receive comprehensible input is through reading material that is at an appropriate level of difficulty. Krashen has suggested that one suitable type of reading material is the “simplified,” or “graded,” reader. This article explores the suitability of using simplified readers as a source of comprehensible input in the EFL classroom. A study was conducted with university students in Taiwan who read simplified readers as part of their one-year freshman English course. As part of the study, pre- and post-year reading tests were administered along with a student questionnaire at the end of the course. The results of the tests and the questionnaire suggest reading ability showed clear improvement by the end of the school year. Implications of the results and recommendations for future research into the use of simplified readers are then suggested.

Keywords: acquisition, comprehensible, input

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以簡易版小說讀本做為英語教學中 具適讀性的輸入性教材

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摘要

大約二十年前，史帝芬克萊順向教授英語為外語或第二語言的專業教師，提出了現今著名的「學習語言」和「獲取語言」之間的區分。依其推論，他也提出了他的輸入性教材假設理論：那就是只有當學生接受具適讀性的輸入性教材時，才能夠獲取語言。對語言學生而言，接受具適讀性的輸入性教材的一個方法，是經由閱讀適當難度的讀物。克萊順建議，簡易版小說讀本或難度分級讀物，就是適當的類型。本文探討使用簡易版小說讀本，做為英語教學中具適讀性的輸入性教材之來源的適當性。這項研究借由臺灣的大學生來進行：簡易版小說讀本的閱讀，是他們在為期一學年的大一英文課程中的一部分。這項研究尚包括學年初和學年末的閱讀測驗，以及課程終了時對學生所做的問卷調查。測驗和問卷的結果顯示，學生的閱讀能力在學年末時明顯進步。筆者認為，這結果的內在意義：即未來對簡易版小說讀本的使用之研究，是值得推薦的。

關鍵詞：獲取，具適讀性的，輸入性教材。

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I 、 Rationale for this Research

English is now widely recognized as the world's dominant international language. There are now more than 100 nations where English is learned as a first, second, or foreign language(Crystal, 1997, P.3). The British Council estimates that a staggering one out of six people on the globe is currently learning English (Crystal, 1997, P.103) .

In Taiwan, the government has felt an increasing need to upgrade the English level of its people. Students now begin formal study of English at the fifth-grade level of primary school. Taiwan's recent entry into the World Trade Organization has highlighted the island's desire to keep up with growing international economic competition and to become a more active participant in world affairs. Foreign Affairs Minister Eugene Chien has said:

English is now the most important language in international communication, and by raising the national standards, Taiwan citizens can interact with foreigners much more readily and help the country get on the fast-track in joining the international community. With more of our citizens able to comprehend and express themselves in English, we will also broaden our world view, get to know more about people of other countries, and become more familiar with international affairs. (Pan, 2002, P.1)

II 、 Research Problem

If Taiwan's citizens are going to become more integrated into the world community, a greater facility in using the dominant international language will be essential. Surveys of EFL students, faculty members, and administrators at Taiwanese universities indicate that reading is considered to be the skill most crucial to academic success (Sims, 1996) . The ability to read is essential for students to pass their exams and later to secure positions in the working world. The ability to read English well is especially important for university students since many of them will eventually secure jobs in which they will interact with the world outside of Taiwan, a world that is becoming increasingly interdependent.

Traditionally, reading is the skill most emphasized in the EFL classroom. The importance of reading is evident, but the question remains, what is a good method to improve that ability? Simplified readers have been used as one tool for raising reading ability for a number of years. Some researchers, however, oppose the use of simplified readers and prefer that students use only authentic texts (Anderson and Armbruster, 1986; Davison, 1986; Wallace, 1988) . The purpose of this research was not to enter the debate with critics of the readers. The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that simplified readers are one viable tool for raising the English reading ability of university freshman in Taiwan. Stephen Krashen's hypothesis of comprehensible input as applied to reading has provided much of the theoretical basis for this investigation.

III 、 Review of the Literature

Stephen Krashen has proposed that there is a distinction between second language learning and second language acquisition (Krashen, 1981, 1982, 1983). Language learning refers to knowledge of the formal grammar and rules of a language. Language acquisition refers to the informal, “picking-up” of a language. He argues that acquisition is central to developing competence in a language; learning is only peripheral. The teacher’s goal is to encourage acquisition.

Krashen’s theory has not been without its critics from the time of its inception. Ellis (1985, 2002), for example, rejects the claim that such a clear distinction can be drawn between learning and acquisition. He cites studies indicating that learners can benefit from formal grammar instruction in the classroom. Krashen has responded to his critics many times, reiterating his contention that formal grammar-based learning does not produce the results that his “Natural Approach” to language acquisition does (Krashen, 1992, 1993a, 2002a).

Necessary to Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition is his Input Hypothesis. In this hypothesis, he proposes what he feels is the most direct method of helping language learners to acquire a second language. This method is what he calls his “Natural Approach” to teaching English. The teacher’s responsibility is to ensure that the students receive enough input that is comprehensible to them. Input that is optimal should be: 1 、 comprehensible 2 、 interesting and/or relevant 3 、 not grammatically sequenced 4 、 in sufficient quantity (Krashen, 1982, 1985). Krashen uses the formula “ $i + 1$ ” to describe the goal of language acquisition. In this formula, “ i ” = the learner’s current competence, and “ 1 ” = the learner’s next level. In order to move from “ i ” to “ 1 ”, the acquirer must receive input that is comprehensible to him/her.

Krashen has also received criticism for his Input Hypothesis. It has been argued that Krashen's "i" and his "i+1" are not definable or quantifiable. In addition, comprehensible output is also necessary for learner competence to emerge (Ellis, 1985; Swain, 1985, 1995). In response, Sims (1996) notes that while "i+1" may not be precisely definable or quantifiable, Krashen's hypothesis remains a helpful guideline for the EFL teacher. As for the matter of "comprehensible output", Krashen contends that there is but scant evidence to support such criticism (Krashen, 1994, 2002b). After some two decades since proposing his Input Hypothesis, Krashen insists that his view remains the best explanation for how people acquire a second language:

Evidence for the Input Hypothesis remains very strong. In second and foreign language acquisition method comparisons, students in classes containing more comprehensible input consistently outperform those containing less: At the beginning level, students in Total Physical Response classes, and Natural Approach classes do at least as well, or better, on grammar tests. At the intermediate level, students in sheltered classes (content courses made comprehensible for intermediate students) do as well or better than comparisons (and acquire subject matter at the same time). (Krashen, 2002b, P. 395)

Krashen has emphasized the importance of reading for language acquisition. He notes that those who read more in a second language perform higher on comprehension exams than those who read less (Krashen, 1993b). Language learners can acquire language through reading material that contains vocabulary and structure that is only a bit beyond their current level of competence, i.e., "i +

1". Material that is too far below their current ability will not be useful enough in order for them to progress. Material that is well beyond their comprehension will overwhelm and cause discouragement. Krashen relates his Input Hypothesis to reading in the following:

The reading hypothesis is a special case of the comprehensible input hypothesis. It claims that reading for meaning, especially free voluntary reading, is comprehensible input, and is the source of much of our competence in literacy, our reading ability, writing style, much of our vocabulary and spelling competence, and our ability to use and understand complex grammatical constructions. (Krashen, 2002c, P.5)

Krashen (1993b, 1994) especially supports extensive reading for pleasure, or free voluntary reading. Extensive reading may be defined as the reading of large amounts of material for pleasure and information. Such material is usually chosen by the students and is comprehensible to them. The value of such reading may be summarized as follows : 1 、 Several studies suggest that more reading leads to greater literacy development ; 2 、 Students who participated in free reading programs outperformed children who were taught by traditional methods ; 3 、 People who reported more free reading, read and wrote better than those who reported less free reading ; 4 、 Language is too vast and complex to teach and learn one rule or item at a time, thus traditional instruction can not account for literacy development ; 5 、 Literacy development is quite possible without conscious learning or output. (Sims, 1996, pp.22-23)

A number of studies suggest the benefits of extensive reading. Students who

did extensive reading have scored higher on reading comprehension tests than those who received only traditional skill-based instruction (Sims, 1996; Mason and Krashen, 1997; Lao and Krashen, 2000) . While not necessarily conclusive, such evidence tends to support Krashen's contention that reading material which is enjoyable and comprehensible will raise readers' overall reading ability.

Krashen recommends that one useful tool of an extensive reading program is the "simplified," or "graded," reader (Krashen, 1993b, 2002c) . Material that has been simplified to meet the needs of learners is a good source of comprehensible input. Others have also supported the use of simplified readers as an essential part of an extensive reading program (Sims, 1996; Hill, 1997; Day and Bamford, 1998) .

How will teachers know whether a particular simplified text is really suitable for their students? Krashen gives the following criteria:

.....do members of the intended audience understand it? Do they enjoy it? Do they find it interesting? Would they read it on their own (not as an assignment) ? If the answers to these questions are in the affirmative, second language acquisition theory tells us that $i + 1$ will be there, that the reading is linguistically appropriate and it will help the reader acquire more of the target language. (Krashen, 1982, P. 186)

There are two types of texts that can be considered simplified for EFL purposes. The first type consists of texts that have been simplified from material originally written for an audience of first language readers. These texts are often classics whose copyrights have already expired and are now in the public domain. The

second type of simplified reader is material written specifically for second language learners. The motivation for writing such materials stems from the desire to communicate more easily (Day and Bamford 1998, pp.56-57) . These types of texts better train students in automaticity, i.e., the ability to understand material automatically so that one's attention is left free for comprehension.

While acknowledging Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Day and Bamford suggest their own perspective on how it relates to extensive reading:

To reformulate Stephen Krashen's famous designation of second language comprehensible input, the materials for this "automaticity training" (Samuels, 1994, P. 834) must be at " $i - 1$ " where " i " is the student's current level of acquisition. This $i - 1$ is in contrast to Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis, in which, for further acquisition to take place, the comprehensible input has to contain elements that are slightly beyond " i " --that is, " $i + 1$." The reason for $i - 1$ is that the goal of the automaticity training is developing a large sight vocabulary rather than the learning of new linguistic elements. Of course, $i - 1$ text is an ideal target when learning to read; inevitably, material includes $i - 1$ vocabulary and syntactic structures as well as i (the reader's current level of linguistic competence) and some $i + 1$ (elements that the reader has not yet mastered) . But as long as the bulk of the vocabulary and grammar is well within the reader's competence -- $i - 1$ --without too many $i + 1$ distractions, the development of a sight vocabulary is possible. (Day and Bamford, 1998, pp. 16-17)

Although the use of extensive reading has become more popular in EFL programs in recent years, some have raised objections. The basic objections to an extensive reading program can be summarized as follows:

First, expense. A fairly healthy library is needed to implement this program, and the cost can be daunting for many schools, especially those in the developing world. Second, extensive reading is a student centered activity which takes control out of the teacher's hands and puts it into the student's hands. While this frees teachers for other activities, it is also a radical, and sometimes threatening change for traditional school systems. Third, it simply appears too simple and too unstructured: students lounging around reading comic books, magazines, and novels doesn't fit many pre-conceived notions of what a language program should be about. Many traditional educators balk at this approach even though it is meant to be a relatively small part of an overall program. (Schackne, 2002, P. 7 of article)

Krashen is aware of such criticism and so has conceded that teachers may play a key role in choosing which texts are to be included in the regularly assigned readings for an EFL course:

In selecting what students will read, I think that teachers should consider their own interests as well. The teacher's enthusiasm for a book will add a charge to the teaching, and make it much more interesting. The goal is to find texts that are interesting for both students and teachers. To keep interest alive some teachers select

different texts every year. What is crucial, however, is that teachers be allowed and encouraged, to select the particular texts they want to teach. (Krashen, 2002c, P. 25)

Krashen classifies simplified readers in the category which he calls “sheltered popular literature.” Sheltered subject matter is teaching material that has been made comprehensible especially for students at the intermediate level (Krashen, 2002c) . The focus of this study is not on the use of simplified readers as part of an extensive reading program per se. This study considers whether many of the same benefits claimed for extensive reading can also be obtained when simplified readers are used as sheltered popular literature in a more structured EFL course.

IV 、 Research Method

With Schackne’s caveats in mind, this research attempted to evaluate the use of simplified readers as the main part of the regular reading assignments for a university English course. During the 2001-2002 school year, three freshman English classes at a university in central Taiwan were taught reading mainly through using simplified readers. All three classes were classified as intermediate level according to the results of a pre-course placement exam administered by the university. As per Krashen’s recommendation (see above) , sheltered popular literature is considered to be ideal for use with intermediate level students.

All of the students participating in this study were Non-English majors. All were natives of Taiwan and had had at least 6 years of prior formal instruction in English. The three classes consisted of 88 students from 17 different departments.

The great variety of departments gave the study a broad representation of the university's students. Students came from each of following departments: Chemical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Industrial Design, Business Management, Animal Husbandry, Food Science, Landscaping, Restaurant and Hospitality, International Trade, Accounting, Finance, Statistics, Chinese, Japanese, History, and Philosophy.

All of the classes had the same teacher (i.e., this researcher) and were all taught using the same methods and curriculum. No effort was made to isolate one group of students from another in order to experiment with different materials. The main concern was to help improve the English reading ability of the students. As a result, a conscious effort was made to treat all of the students well and equally.

For this course, the students were assigned simplified readers classified to be at the intermediate level. The students were asked to read a total of seven simplified classic novels during the course of the school year, ranging in word totals from about 1,400 to 2,300 per book Oxford and/or Longman Classics of the following simplified readers were assigned: *Jane Eyre*, *Tales From The Arabian Nights*, *A Christmas Carol*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Moby Dick*, *King Solomon's Mines*, and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

The students were given approximately one month per book to complete each of the simplified novels. During the month given to each novel, a brief review and discussion of the contents were carried out in class. At the end of each book, students were given a basic quiz of its contents. In addition, at the end of each semester students were asked to write a report on a character from one of the novels that they preferred most.

Although the vast majority of the assigned reading for this course consisted of the simplified readers, the students were also assigned one English reading skills

textbook. In addition, the students also read other English material for their other courses. The amount of outside reading in English the students may have done was difficult to control or measure for at least two reasons : 1 、 The study was conducted over a fairly lengthy time, i.e., nine months. 2 、 The students were from many different departments and so had a greater or lesser variety of outside reading requirements to meet.

Both quantitative and qualitative assessments were used to estimate the improvement in reading proficiency : 1 、 A standardized multiple-choice placement exam was given to the students at the beginning of the school year in September just prior to the course. A similar standardized exam was given to the students in June at the conclusion of the course. 2 、 A survey was also given to the students one week before the end of the course. In this survey, students were asked to assess how they felt their reading ability had improved and to rate the importance that they felt the various English texts had made in their improvement.

The pre and post-course exams administered by the university were produced by a reading committee consisting of members of its Foreign Language and Literature Department. Although the exams measured grammar and listening ability in addition to reading, only the reading part of the exams has been considered as part of the analysis for this study. The reading section of each of these exams contained two passages of approximately 300-400 words in length. Ten questions were asked at the conclusion of each passage testing the following: main idea of the passage, main idea of paragraphs, general comprehension, vocabulary in context, pronoun reference, and inference. The exams were intended to be objective in nature, the purpose of which was to be a generally accurate measure of the students' English reading ability.

The exams given before and at the conclusion of the course were similar in

difficulty and nature. The scores of the students from the beginning of the school year and at the end of the year are included in the statistical analysis for this article. No curves of the final scores were included in the statistics.

The next section contains a discussion of the pre and post-course exam results. Also included is a discussion of the students' responses to the questionnaire. The survey questions are given in the appendix to this article.

V、Findings

The students from the 17 different departments were assigned by the university to comprise three classes. One was designated Liberal Arts, one was Management, and the other was Engineering and Agriculture. Each of the students took a pre- and post-course English exam which included a reading section worth 40 points. The scores which follow are the mean out of a possible total of 40:

<u>Class</u>	<u>No. of Students</u>	<u>Pre</u>	<u>Post</u>	<u>Improvement</u>
Liberal Arts	27	16.9	24.4	44.4%
Management	31	22.1	24.5	10.9%
Engineering, Agriculture	30	<u>18.8</u>	<u>26.8</u>	<u>42.6%</u>
		19.2	25.2	31.25%

It is natural to expect that students' reading scores will improve between the beginning and end of a freshman English course. The scores above do indicate a clear improvement for all of the three classes. While there was some difference between classes regarding the amount of improvement, the overall amount was in excess of 30%. Although the improvement in test scores is significant, it can not be

conclusively proven that the results were due primarily to the use of the simplified readers.

It is necessary to inquire further as to why the students' reading scores improved. Just prior to taking the final post-course exam, students were asked in a questionnaire to evaluate their own rate of reading improvement and to give the possible causes for that improvement. The students were asked to evaluate their improvement in general reading ability, comprehension ability, reading speed, and vocabulary. They were also asked to rate the suitability of the material they read (i.e., was it appropriate for their level of reading ability) and also the enjoyableness of what they read. The issues of speed, vocabulary, suitability, and enjoyableness were included in the questionnaire because of the bearing these matters have on Krashen's concept of comprehensible input. When reading material is genuinely comprehensible, these additional factors will naturally be present.

On a scale from 5 to 1 (5 = strongly agree 1 = strongly disagree) , students were asked to rate themselves on each of the following. Below is a discussion of the results for each of the main sections of the questionnaire, based on the 84 students who responded.

1 、 Reading Ability

My English reading ability improved this year:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
4	42	35	3	0	3.56

The students seemed to mildly agree that their overall English reading ability improved throughout the year. It is conceivable that if the questionnaire had been given after the final exam results had been announced, the students would have given more confident, optimistic answers.

2、Comprehension

The simplified stories helped improve my reading comprehension ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
7	62	14	1	0	3.89

The reading textbook helped improve my reading comprehension ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
5	41	33	5	0	3.55

The English textbooks I used in other classes helped improve my reading comprehension ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
3	22	51	8	0	3.24

From the above, students seemed to feel that the simplified readers did more to improve their reading comprehension than their skill-based reading textbook or the English books they used in other courses.

3、Speed

The simplified stories helped improve my reading speed:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
10	55	18	1	0	3.88

The reading textbook helped improve my reading speed:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
3	35	40	6	0	3.42

The English textbooks I used in other classes helped improve my reading speed:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
1	17	55	11	0	3.10

These statistics suggest that students felt the simplified readers did more to improve their reading speed than either their skill-based reading textbook or the English books they used in other courses.

4 、 Vocabulary

The simplified stories helped improve my vocabulary ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
6	47	23	8	0	3.61

The reading textbook helped improve my vocabulary ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
5	37	33	9	0	3.45

The English textbooks I used in other classes helped improve my vocabulary ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
3	24	46	11	0	3.23

By a fairly small margin, the students seemed to feel that the simplified readers were more instrumental in improving their vocabulary ability than either their skill-based reading textbook or the English books they used in other courses.

5 、 Suitability

The simplified stories were suitable for my level of English reading ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
16	50	15	3	0	3.94

The reading textbook was suitable for my level of English reading ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
9	43	27	4	0	3.67

The English textbooks I used in other classes were suitable for my level of English reading ability:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
3	32	36	13	0	3.30

The above statistics suggest that the students felt the simplified readers better matched their level of reading ability than either their skill-based reading textbook or English books they used in other courses.

6、Enjoyableness

I enjoyed reading the simplified stories:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
19	51	12	2	0	4.04

I enjoyed reading the reading textbook:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
3	23	39	16	3	3.08

I enjoyed reading the English textbooks I used in other classes:

<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>mean</u>
2	26	39	15	2	3.13

From the above, the students seemed to feel that the simplified readers were more enjoyable to read than either their skill-based reading textbook or the English books they used in other courses.

The findings indicate that the students' reading ability showed improvement between the beginning and end of the school year. The difference in scores between the pre- and post-course exams was substantial. In addition, the evidence suggests that the students themselves believed their own reading ability had improved as a result of the course and that the use of the simplified readers played an important role.

The significance for the use of simplified readers in the classroom is also borne out by the students' responses to the other questions on the questionnaire. In every major category: comprehension, speed, vocabulary, suitability, and enjoyableness,

the responses indicated a clear preference for the simplified readers over either the reading textbook or the English texts used in other courses.

Regarding comprehension, the students felt the simplified readers to be useful. A major component of Krashen's Input Hypothesis is that material used in a language course needs to be understandable. The simplified readers seem to have been at the "i" level and were able to bring most of the students to the hypothetical "i + 1" level. Compared to the other English reading material the students used during the year, the simplified readers were the most comprehensible of anything they read.

Regarding speed, the students felt the simplified readers to be useful. Krashen's Input Hypothesis predicts that fluency (in either speaking or reading) can eventually be expected from students who receive comprehensible input (Krashen, 1983). Students reading material at the proper "i + 1" level can be expected to read that material faster as they become more accustomed to it and become naturally prepared to move to the next level. Compared to the other English reading material the students used during the year, the simplified readers were more helpful in increasing their reading speed than anything else they read.

Regarding vocabulary, the students felt the simplified readers to be useful. As noted above (Krashen, 2002c) , reading is the main source for improving vocabulary. If the material is at an appropriate "i + 1" level, vocabulary development can be expected. The questionnaire results regarding vocabulary ability improvement were not as marked as in the other categories. However, compared to the other English reading material the students used during the year the simplified readers did more to improve their vocabulary ability than anything else they read.

Regarding suitability, the students felt the simplified readers were appropriate

for their level of English reading ability. The issue of suitability is directly related to Krashen's concept of "i + 1." According to Krashen, it is important for the students themselves to feel that the material they are working with is fit for them. The responses to the questionnaire suggest the simplified readers more nearly approximated the ideal "i + 1" level than anything else the students read during the year.

Regarding enjoyableness, the students felt the simplified readers were pleasurable to read. In fact, the students' positive response to this question was the strongest of any of the categories on the questionnaire. A main reason Krashen (1993b) advocates simplified readers is that they are enjoyable for the students. Krashen argues that students who enjoy what they read are more likely to want to read even more. If students enjoyed what they read in their English class, it can be expected that their attitude towards continuing to learn English will be more positive after their formal studies are concluded.

VI 、 Implications and Suggestions For Future Research

The results of the standardized exams and the students' responses to the questionnaire support the use of simplified readers as comprehensible input in the EFL classroom. Simplified readers that are at a proper level for the students can not only qualify as comprehensible input, but can also play a significant role in improving the students' overall reading ability. On the basis of the results of this study, it is recommended that those who are teaching English at the university level consider including simplified readers as a regular component of their reading curriculum.

The findings of this study do not suggest that using simplified readers is the only way to teach reading to EFL students. The findings do not even prove that using simplified readers is necessarily the best way. However, the findings in this paper suggest that using simplified readers is one legitimate method of teaching reading to university students and may be adopted by teachers to whatever extent they feel comfortable in using them.

For those who wish to pursue the implications of this study and do further research, the following may be suggested:

- 1、Teachers who prefer a more traditional, structured type of curriculum may attempt to replicate the results of this study. That is, they may assign several simplified readers to their students during the school year and administer reading comprehension exams before and after the course to test how much their students' reading ability has progressed.
- 2、Teachers who wish to experiment with extensive reading may arrange for a purchase of a much larger selection of simplified readers for their students to choose from and read throughout the school year. Both before and after the course students may be administered reading comprehension exams to judge how much their reading ability has progressed.
- 3、A study may also be conducted using two control groups. At the beginning of the course, the students are given a reading comprehension exam. The students from one group then read simplified readers chosen by the teacher as part of a traditional, structured program. The students from the second group are free to choose their own simplified readers. At the conclusion of the course, the two groups can then be given the same reading comprehension exam to compare results. For such a study to have greater validity, it would perhaps be best if the reading ability of the two groups were fairly equal at the beginning of the course

and that the simplified readers they had access to were at a similar level of difficulty.

VII 、 Conclusion

This study set out to test the hypothesis that simplified readers are suitable as comprehensible input in the EFL classroom. The results suggest that such reading material meets Krashen's criteria as comprehensible input if the material is at an appropriate level for the students. Simplified readers are suitable, enjoyable, and a useful tool for raising the reading ability of university students in Taiwan. While this study could not deal with all issues regarding the use of simplified readers, it is hoped that it will encourage further research into this interesting and useful topic.

Appendix

SURVEY ON READING IMPROVEMENT

Please give your opinion by writing only one answer for each question.

5- strongly agree

4- agree

3- not sure

2- disagree

1- strongly disagree

1 、 My English reading ability improved this year.

2 、 The simplified stories helped improve my reading comprehension ability.

- 3 、 The reading textbook helped improve my reading comprehension ability.
- 4 、 The English textbooks I used in other classes helped improve my reading comprehension ability.
- 5 、 The simplified stories helped improve my reading speed.
- 6 、 The reading textbook helped improve my reading speed.
- 7 、 The English textbooks I used in other classes helped improve my reading speed.
- 8 、 The simplified stories helped improve my vocabulary ability.
- 9 、 The reading textbook helped improve my vocabulary ability.
- 10 、 The English textbooks I used in other classes helped improve my vocabulary ability.
- 11 、 The simplified stories were suitable for my level of English reading ability.
- 12 、 The reading textbook was suitable for my level of English reading ability.
- 13 、 The English textbooks I used in other classes were suitable for my level of English reading ability.
- 14 、 I enjoyed reading the simplified stories.
- 15 、 I enjoyed reading the reading textbook.
- 16 、 I enjoyed reading the English textbooks I used in other classes.

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