The Effects of Remedial English Class Using Systemic Phonics to Improve Students’ Pronunciation, Spelling and Reading Comprehension

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the effects of systematic remedial phonics instruction on the development of pronunciation, spelling and reading comprehension skills. The participants of this study were eight Mattayom Suksa 1 (Grade 7) students with low English proficiency. They were studying at Banthungsala School located in Huay Yod District of Trang. This study adopted the one-group-pre-test-post-test design to conduct an experiment. The data was collected both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative data was collected from three tests: pre-, post-, and retention tests. The qualitative data was collected from classroom observations and interviews. Each student was observed throughout the entire experiment. They were also interviewed individually on four occasions after the end of each unit. It was found that there was a significant increase in the post test scores (from 16.54% to 56.06%) at the level of .01 with large effect size (3.38). The results of the retention test taken four weeks after the post test revealed that the scores decreased to 49.11% with small effect size (0.37). The results indicated systematic remedial phonics instruction could help improve the participants’ pronunciation, spelling, and reading comprehension skills. However, the participants found the target words which did not follow phonics rules problematic. It is recommended that students with low English proficiency require a lot of time to practice reading with various reading activities coupled with using whole-word approach.

Key words: phonics instruction, pronunciation, reading comprehension
1. Significance and background of the study

English is a language accepted as an international language for communication and its use has increased rapidly. Learning English is, therefore, very important and essential for daily life as a tool for communication. Building understanding for culture and realizing culturally diversified world society, studying and exchanging knowledge in many different fields with countries worldwide can help develop learners and enable them to better understand themselves and others using all their language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Department of Academics, 2001). Fox (2008) states that English pronunciation helps students improve their language skills. Learning and pronouncing new words are a way of building word banks. In addition, pronunciation helps students to read aloud fluently and clearly with confidence and result in students’ understanding of what they will learn at a higher level.

For the above reasons, Ministry of Education (2008) announced the implementation of the Basic Education Core Curriculum, B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) as the core curriculum, and English is designated in the Foreign Languages Area for students to learn throughout the basic education curriculum so that they are competent in all the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the curriculum, Learning Standards and Indicators for the Foreign Languages Area are clearly identified. Learners’ quality is measured in four Educational Levels: students finishing Pratom Suksa 3 should have foreign language skills in listening and speaking; those finishing Pratom Suksa 6, and Mattayom Suksa 3 should have foreign language skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Even though the Ministry of Education has set the Learning Standards for each Educational Level, to measure standards of students nationwide, standardized tests are administered by the National Institute of Educational Testing Service (NIETS). For English, the three-year (2008-2010) O-NET average scores for Pratom Suksa 6 and Matthayomsuksa 3 were: in 2008 a standardized national test for Pratom Suksa 6 students was not administered, in 2009 and 2010 the average scores were 31.75 and 20.99. For Mattayom Suksa 3, the average scores for the three years were: 32.42, 20.00, and 16.19, respectively. For Ban Thung Sala School, the average scores for Pratom Suksa 6 were 27.38 and 9.00. For Mattayom Suksa 3, the average scores were: 30.33, 26.07 and 16.99, respectively. As can be seen, the average scores nationwide for Pratom Suksa 6 and Mattayom Suksa 3 students were lower than 50 percent for all the three years with a decreasing trend each year. For Ban Thung Sala School, the average scores for Pratom Suksa 6 students were lower than those of the national average score every academic year, especially in 2010, the average score of
Pratom Suksa 6 student was only 9.00 percent. It was found that in Educational Opportunity Expansion Schools (primary schools that also provide lower secondary education i.e. Mattayom Suksa 1- Mattayom Suksa 3) secondary school students, particularly, of the school that the researcher teaches, are students with low to moderate learning achievement who usually cannot pass a secondary entrance examination. They have serious problems with their English subject due to a lack of basic knowledge of English. They cannot read English even simple words like *bus, tree, room, four*, etc. However, they can tell the meanings of words if they hear them when the teacher reads them out loud. From an observation during an examination, it was found that when they learn new or difficult words, students write their pronunciations in Thai next to the new words. They can read the words but very slowly and incorrectly. Some of the students cannot remember and do not know all the twenty-six letters of English. Therefore, their teacher has to find a way to solve the problem in both reading and writing from the very beginning, i.e. reading aloud and spelling even though these students should be able to read and write short and simple sentences as designated by the Ministry of Education (2008) in the Learning Standards and Indicators for the Foreign Languages Area for Mattayom Suksa 1 students specified in Standard T. 1.1 Indicator 2 that students can read aloud short statements, tales and poems correctly especially initial sounds and ending sounds of words, stress and intonation observing the principle of readings; for the writing skill, Standard T. 1.2 Indicator 3 specifies that students should be able to write expressions showing needs, asking for help, agreeing and refusing to give help in different situations appropriately.

Many studies have found that Thai students have a pronunciation problem due to differences between the sound system of English and Thai. Some sounds in the English language do not exist in the Thai language such as linking sounds, ending sounds etc. As a result, some students cannot pronounce words because they don’t know the relationships between the alphabet and its sound when they see the alphabet, especially new words that they have never seen. They also have problems spelling words. Students are not confident and pronounce words incorrectly resulting in miscommunication. Moreover, they cannot answer questions if they do not understand while listening to English. (Charuwan Saising, 2003; Chiranan Mekwong, 2004; Phubet Khai-chiyaphum, 2007; Intithra Sriprasit, 2009).

Another problem for Thai students is the English writing skill because it is a complicated skill. To be able to write, a person must have had ability in listening, speaking and reading. The basic level of learning emphasizes writing correctly which is important and necessary for all students (Ministry of Education, 2001: 21-22) starting from the basic level.
to a higher level (Ministry of Education, 2008: 37). Thus, the teacher needs to correct students’ writing from the beginning, which is spelling. If the teacher doesn’t correct mistakes made by students, they will continue making mistakes.

Because pronunciation and spelling are important foundation for learning English, Inthira Sriprasit (2008) studied a research conducted by the American National Reading Research Panel on teaching methods for reading and writing to kindergarten to Grade 6 students and found that the most effective method for teaching pronunciation and spelling starts from phonemic awareness or sound decoding before reading words, followed by letter-sound correspondence. This made reading word easier and correctly. Hence, phonics is a style of language learning through learning the correspondence of letters and their sounds; learning the sound of the letter and understanding correctly the sound system focusing on the bottom-up approach and moving up to fluent reading, reading comprehension, and moving on to learning at a higher level as show below.

**Figure 1: The Bottom-up approach**

Source: National Institute for Literacy (USA), in Inthira Sriprasit, 2008

Even though teaching only phonics cannot enable students to understand what they read, it serves as the foundation for students to read unfamiliar words, so continuous practice is needed (Clymer, 1996). Many researchers proposed phonics for reading development which can enhance students’ reading ability. Ehri et al (2001) found that using phonics to teach reading could develop students’ reading ability making them achieve in reading at a higher level. Adams (1990) found that using systemic phonics helps students to be better in word recognition and spelling than the whole language approach. Ali (2007) compared using systemic phonics and memorizing words to teach kindergarten 3 students to read and spell. It was found that students learning through phonics had higher scores for their post-test than those learning through memorization. This is in accordance with Fatina Sumali (2011) who studied the effects of using phonics on Pratom Suksa 5 students’ ability in reading and
writing vocabulary and found that using phonics in teaching could help students develop their pronunciation and word recognition but not spelling.

Because learners who learn English as a foreign language do not know many words in English and cannot use them very well yet (Inthira Sriprasit, 2009; Adams, 1990), they need help from their teacher or people around them as Vygotsky (1978; in De Bot et al., 2005) claims “Social interaction is important to cognitive development”. In teaching the teacher can make learning happen because some people cannot learn new things on their own; however, with a little help they can do it.

From the success seen in research conducted with different groups of learners mentioned above, it can be concluded that phonic approach to reading is a method for students to learn the association between sounds and letters. They can see how the sounds that we speak are associated with the letters and they can read each word out loud easily and clearly starting from basic knowledge of phonemic awareness before reading the sounds in each word. Nevertheless, reading using the phonic approach does not correspond with the content of the Basic Education Core Curriculum, B.E. 2551(A.D. 2008) in which the regular contact hours are limited. At Ban Thung Sala School, students’ foundation of the English language is not adequate and thus to teach students to read efficiently through the use of phonics, systemic phonics is needed from a very basic level to gradually higher levels.

Hence the researcher used the phonic approach to teach a remedial course to Mattayom Suksa 1 students who had problems in pronunciation and spelling words in English in order to help them read correctly and able to decode sounds of unfamiliar words and so that they can read aloud at the word level and at the short simple sentence level as well as spell words in English. Because it is very necessary for learners to learn new words at the same time as reading and writing them in short sentences to make learning new words meaningful. (Inthira Sriprasit, 2009; Adams, 1990)

2. Research questions

1. Can remedial teaching using phonics develop students’ pronunciation, spelling and reading comprehension? If yes, what is the effect size?

2. How much can students retain their ability in pronunciation, spelling and reading comprehension after attending remedial classes where the phonic approach is used? If yes, what is the effect size?

3. What are students’ opinions on the phonics teaching?
3. Research procedure

3.1 The population was eight Mattayom Suksa 1 students of Ban Thung Sala School who took Foundation English 1 in the first semester of the academic year 2011. For observation purpose, the students, selected by purposive sampling, were divided into three groups according to the criteria given by the Ministry of Education: 1. excellent (3 students who are highly co-operative) 2. good (3 students who are moderately co-operative), and 3. average (2 students who are sometimes co-operative). The results of the test given after the remedial course showed that the students who were in the same group received the same range of score. The three students in the highly co-operative group got an average score in the range of 60 percent or more; the three students in the moderately co-operative group received an average score in the range of 55-59 percent; and the two students in the average co-operative group received an average score in the range of less than 50 percent.

3.2 Research instruments

3.2.1 Target vocabulary The researcher studied the Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 to learn the learning framework and the scope of English in the curriculum; the Primary School English Curriculum B.E. 2539 to know the words in word bank for the primary school level at Mattayom Suksa 1 students should know. After that the researcher explored the word bank of a US online language school curriculum and found that the list of 366 words corresponded with those in the Thai primary school curriculum. Then the researcher selected 100 words according to the phonic sounds that are taught in Jolly Phonics Program. They consisted of: 35 short-vowel words (19 one-syllabic words; 13 two-syllabic words, and 3 three-syllabic words); 21 long-vowel words (18 one-syllabic words; 3 two-syllabic words); 26 diphthong-words (23 one-syllabic words, and 3 two-syllabic words; 18 clustered-words (7 short-vowel words, 5 long-vowel words, and 6 diphthong words). However, the consonant clustered words were neither included in the test nor in the remedial classes due to limited time. The teacher needed to provide phonemic awareness activities. Therefore, the teacher taught 82 target words and tested 53 words which represented each sound in Jolly Phonics Program.

3.2.2 Remedial teaching plans The phonics teaching method was used three periods a week totaling 30 periods divided into three major parts: part one consisting of 3 periods for teaching the sounds of Aa to Zz; part two was for teaching phonemic awareness; and part three for teaching the target words using the phonics method. The teaching plans covered 7 alphabet groups and their sounds grouped according to Jolly Phonics Program, a systemic basic reading program widely used in Australia and New Zealand (Bowey, 2006):
3.2.3 Pre-test, post-test and retention test One test paper was used for all the three purposes consisting of an achievement test on reading aloud, writing and reading comprehension. In the test, 53 target words were tested for measuring students’ achievement. The test was piloted with students of an Educational Opportunity Expansion School whose average O-NET score for English was relatively the same as that of the subjects of this study. After that the test paper was improved in the number of target words and choices and then it was tested by experts before being administered to the subjects. The number of the target words was reduced to 53 from the total 100 target words. The test consisted of 6 parts (378 marks) total, each with the same set of target words: 1) matching pictures with word (53 marks); 2) sentence comprehension (20 marks); 3) spelling (53 marks); 4) reading 53 words aloud (106 marks), if the student could read the word with its ending sound quickly, he/she would get 2 marks; if the student read the word correctly but slowly and jerkily, he/she would get only 1 mark and 0 mark if reading it incorrectly; 5) reading 20 sentences aloud (106 marks) and only the 53 target words were scored using the same criteria as part 4; 6) reading fluency of 40 words in one minute (40 marks). Parts 4 to 6 of the test were administered outside school hours. To oppose to familiar with the test, the researcher rearranged the items in each part and also rearranged the choices.

3.2.4 Semi-structured interview In order to obtain in-depth information after the teaching and learning using phonemics method and doing a post-test. The subjects were interviewed one by one for 5 minutes each. The questions were adapted from a previous study and the test was tested by experts before being used. The questions covered the following points: 1) Did the phonics teaching method help develop your pronunciation and spelling, and how?; 2) What activities did you enjoy?; 3) What teaching aids and activities helped develop your pronunciation and spelling?, and how?; 4) What benefits did you receive from the phonics class?; 5) Did you review the lessons out of class time?; and 6) What problems did you have while studying English?

4. The Experiment

The total number of experimental hours was 18 hours. The population was 8 students. The time of one hour was allotted to Parts 1 to 3 of the test while Parts 4-6 were tested after school hours. The remedial classes using phonics were taught 3 thirty-minute periods a week totaling 30 periods for 10 weeks. Picture cards with words, word cards, sentence strips, and
worksheets were used to help learners to know and understand the lessons more. The first 3 periods were spent doing activities in reviewing the sounds from Aa to Zz singing a phonic song A-Z, writing in the air, letter pronunciation, writing word cards, finding word cards corresponding with the sounds heard. In teaching phonemic awareness, the activities used included making words and putting them in the wall pockets, searching words heard, filling in missing words, sounding words, and dictation. In teaching the target words using the phonics method, many activities were used such as matching words with pictures, sounding the words, dictation, filling in the missing words, finding pictures with contexts, reading sentence strips, and writing simple sentences to describe pictures.

When all the lessons were taught, a post-test was given to the subjects who were given one hour to do the first three parts of the test. Then Parts 4-6 of the test were administered outside the class hours. For each period, students’ learning behavior and behavior during the class was recorded. Four weeks after that, the test with all the six parts was given to the students again to test retention. In addition, the students were each interviewed four times. The first interview was conducted after the first three hours. The second interview was conducted after the teaching and learning of phonemic awareness. The third interview was conducted after the teaching and learning of the target words using the phonics method. The fourth interview was conducted after the retention test. Figure 2 provided the schematic procedures of the experiment.

Figure 2: Schematic procedures of the experiment

5. Results of the study

The results of teaching remedial English using the systemic phonics method to develop students’ ability in pronunciation, writing, and reading comprehension after results of the pre-test, post-test, and retention tests were analyzed are as follows:
Table 3: Results of the pre-test and post test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Difference %</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 2: Words writing</td>
<td>12.27%</td>
<td>65.33%</td>
<td>53.06%</td>
<td>-21.608</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 4: Words reading</td>
<td>14.15%</td>
<td>57.32%</td>
<td>43.17%</td>
<td>-14.795</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 5: Sentence reading</td>
<td>7.79%</td>
<td>50.12%</td>
<td>42.33%</td>
<td>-14.658</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 6: New words reading</td>
<td>15.95%</td>
<td>56.57%</td>
<td>40.62%</td>
<td>-12.315</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1: Picture-Word Matching</td>
<td>34.21%</td>
<td>69.58%</td>
<td>35.38%</td>
<td>-12.525</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3: Picture-Sentence Matching</td>
<td>41.25%</td>
<td>76.25%</td>
<td>35.00%</td>
<td>-14.000</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (378)</td>
<td>16.54%</td>
<td>59.06%</td>
<td>42.52%</td>
<td>-19.505</td>
<td>Es 3.38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Statistically significant at 0.01

Table 3 shows that the results of the post-test was higher than those of the pre-test with the average score of 16.54 percent for the pre-test and that of the post-test was 59.06 percent and the difference was statistically significant at the level 0.01. Thus, it can be concluded that using phonics in teaching reading could help increase the students’ pronunciation, writing and reading comprehension by 42.52 percent. The score that increased the most was for words writing for which the increase was 53.06 percent followed by words reading with an increase of 43.17 percent, sentence reading, new words reading, word recognition, and sentence comprehension, respectively. The effect size was 3.38 which is considered a large size.

Table 4: Results of the post-test and retention test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test Type</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Retention test</th>
<th>Difference %</th>
<th>t-test</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Part 1: Picture-Word Matching</td>
<td>69.58%</td>
<td>69.82%</td>
<td>+0.24</td>
<td>-0.158</td>
<td>.088</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 5: Sentence reading</td>
<td>50.12%</td>
<td>42.57%</td>
<td>-7.55</td>
<td>5.024</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3: Picture-Sentence Matching</td>
<td>76.25%</td>
<td>66.25%</td>
<td>-10.00</td>
<td>3.347</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 4: Words reading</td>
<td>57.32%</td>
<td>45.40%</td>
<td>-11.92</td>
<td>.206</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 6: New words reading</td>
<td>56.57%</td>
<td>44.38%</td>
<td>-12.19</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2: Words writing</td>
<td>65.33%</td>
<td>45.99%</td>
<td>-19.34</td>
<td>8.828</td>
<td>.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59.06%</td>
<td>49.11%</td>
<td>9.95</td>
<td>2.445</td>
<td>Es 0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Statistically significant at 0.01
In Table 4, the results of the post-test and of the retention test revealed that the average post-test score was 59.06 percent but that of the retention test decreased to 49.11 percent. Thus, it can be concluded that after four weeks the students’ score for word recognition (matching pictures with words) increased from that of the post-test by 0.24 percent. The score of sentence reading decreased the least at 7.55 percent; the students’ scores for other parts also decreased as follows: 10 percent for sentence comprehension; 11.92 for word reading; 12.19 for new words reading; the score for words writing decreased the most at 19.34 percent. The results of the retention test show that phonic reading could help the students with their pronunciation, writing, and reading comprehension; however, the ability decreased and the decrease was statistically significant at the level 0.01. Nevertheless, the students’ average score did not decreased much with the overall decrease of the average score for the post-test of 9.95 percent and the effect size was 0.37 which is a small size.

In addition to this, students’ behavior during the class was recorded and used in the interviews in order to obtain in-depth information. The results of the behavior observation obtained additionally from the interviews are shown in Table 4.

Table 5: Results of interviewing the students individually

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>After Periods 1-3</th>
<th>After Periods 4-10</th>
<th>After Periods 11-30</th>
<th>After retention test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Cooperative (N = 3)</td>
<td>- Remembered all the letters with more accuracy</td>
<td>- Practiced pronouncing correctly</td>
<td>- Read immediately when seeing some words such as look, happy, game</td>
<td>- Could read words that they remembered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Pronounced the letters correctly</td>
<td>- Pronounced and made out words more quickly by</td>
<td>- Confused with diphthong words like read, hide, juice</td>
<td>- Could read short sentences but slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Wrote the letters correctly</td>
<td>- looking at the same ending sound like cat, hat, rat, fat</td>
<td>- Often read with no ending sounds</td>
<td>- Had to spell and make out words from sounds when seeing new words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Practiced writing on their own</td>
<td>- Liked putting word cards in correct order and enjoyed pronouncing them</td>
<td>- Could read more sentences but slowly and could tell more meaning of sentences</td>
<td>- Confused with diphthong words such as mouth, point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Helped one another and asked the teacher for help when unsure</td>
<td>- Read with more fluency</td>
<td>- Practiced on their own</td>
<td>- Often not pronounced ending sounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>After Periods 1-3</td>
<td>After Periods 4-10</td>
<td>After Periods 11-30</td>
<td>After retention test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately Cooperative</td>
<td>- Singing helped them remember more letters (could not remember all the letters before this)</td>
<td>- Pronounced and spelled correctly after the teacher</td>
<td>- Practiced on their own</td>
<td>- Had to think before reading words with two syllables or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 3)</td>
<td>- Writing in the air helped them write faster</td>
<td>- Took more time thinking of some letters such as /n/, /h/</td>
<td>- Read and wrote short words such as cake, king</td>
<td>Read sentences slowly and jerkily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Reviewed sometimes</td>
<td>- Spelt some words slowly but tried to pronounce and make out words</td>
<td>- Could not put sentences in order well</td>
<td>- Could not read along sentences very well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Asked teacher sometimes</td>
<td>- Always asked the teacher when unsure and always helped one another</td>
<td>- Wrote sentences</td>
<td>but could find words that they could remembered and guessed their meanings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Always helped one another</td>
<td>- Could not pronounce some ending sounds such as mouth, tooth</td>
<td>- Enjoyed reading words with pictures and could give meanings of words that they could pronounce</td>
<td>- Enjoyed activities not requiring much writing such as filling in missing words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Always needed help from classmates</td>
<td>- Could read only words that they could remember with the letters they knew such as dad, sun, dog, cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Could read only short words</td>
<td>- Confused with p, b, d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Could not read diphthong words such as read, meat, mouse</td>
<td>- Pronounced /v/ as /w/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Could give meaning of picture cards</td>
<td>- Copied each letter one by one for long words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Copied each letter one by one for long words such as birthday, volleyball</td>
<td>- Never reviewed at all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Tried harder when making out words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>- Remembered more letters than before but still confused with some letters with similar sounds such as /f/ and /v/, /b/ and /d/</td>
<td>- Not interested in doing activities requiring them to think such as putting word cards in the correct order</td>
<td>- Always needed help from classmates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N = 2)</td>
<td>- Needed help from classmates</td>
<td>- Enjoyed activities not requiring much writing such as filling in missing words</td>
<td>- Could read only short words</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Not confident in pronouncing and writing the letters</td>
<td>- Pronounced words correctly after the teacher</td>
<td>- Could not read diphthong words such as read, meat, mouse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Could give meaning of picture cards</td>
<td>- Confused with p, b, d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Copied each letter one by one for long words such as birthday, volleyball</td>
<td>- Pronounced /v/ as /w/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Never reviewed at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows that each student had improvement, especially students in the moderately cooperative group who tried to learn and practice during the review of letters and their sounds at the beginning of the course. The students in the highly cooperative group
practiced less than the moderately cooperative group and the average cooperative group because they could already remember all the letters. The students used their observation skills very well i.e. they were attentive and tried to practice spelling, reading and writing words by themselves and usually asked the teacher immediately for help when they were not sure. They also enjoyed doing challenging activities such as putting word cards in the order that they heard, matching words with pictures and pronounced words when looking at pictures. The students in the moderately cooperative group tried to learn and practice right from the very beginning; they could not yet remember nor write all the letters. When learning at the stage of phonemic awareness, they tried very hard to learn how to spell and make out words. They also helped motivate their classmates to learn, and were enthusiastic in teaching their classmates who were in the average cooperative group. The students in the average cooperative group had to always ask their classmates to help teach them or show them before they could do it. They were not very interested in doing activities that required them to think or to write. However, the students in the highly cooperative and those in the moderately cooperative groups were still confused with diphthong words and could pronounce them slowly such as road, meat, mouse, juice and hide. They could read more simple sentences that were not very long such as “A girl runs in the sun.” and “A man buys a book.” They could read slowly and mispronounced longer sentences such as “A cat is sleeping on a boat.” and “Two boys are washing a car in winter”.

**Discussion**

The results of the study showed a significant improvement in pronunciation, spelling and reading comprehension. The results were the effects of using systemic phonics in the teaching that was set aside from their normal classroom which corresponds with a recommendation made by Rose (2006 in Bald, 2007) saying that the phonics method has to be used systematically and specifically as a basic method and a main method in teaching reading and spelling. Reading activities help increase knowledge of vocabulary and sentence structures leading to writing and making students able to better understand what they read with more confidence. The success in doing activities is in line with a study by Ehri et al (2001) who found that using phonics in teaching can improve L1 students’ ability in reading. The results of this study was also in agreement with research carried out in EFL context such as that of Fatina Sumalee (2011) who studied the use of phonics in teaching reading and vocabulary writing to Pratom Suksa 5 students. She used phonics in the normal classroom together with teaching the content required by the Ministry of Education. The results of the
study revealed that using phonics in teaching could help develop students’ pronunciation and retaining the words they learned; however, she suggested that it could not yet develop their spelling ability and it also made the teaching and learning in the normal classroom slow. Thus, it was recommended that phonics should be used to teach reading outside the normal contact hours and should be used for remedial classes in order to make it more effective.

The results of this study found that students’ ability in spelling words was the skill that the students could increase their score the most. This is confirmed by a study by Ball & Blachman (1991) where the results of using two types of activities were revealed: oral blending, and oral segmentation which are explicit phonemic awareness instructions play an important role in vocabulary retention for students of English as a foreign language or English as a second language in that it can improve learners’ ability in reading and writing as well as their achievement in reading and spelling, too. Some examples of what students said in the interviews are as follows:

“Practicing pronunciation and spelling as well as putting letter cards in the correct order enable me to know how to spell them. I look at each word and think how letters come in the right order. When I’m able to spell a word, I know how to read it”.

Mana (a moderately cooperative student)

“I like putting letters cards in order to make out words and I spell the word in my head and read it out loud for the teacher to hear. When I pronounce words correctly, I want to read more words. When I pronounce words correctly, and remember the sounds of the letters, I can write them correctly”.

Pat (a highly cooperative student)

This also the same as what Areena Paduka (2011) found in her study on the effects of using phonics in teaching word reading in a remedial English class of Muttayom Suksa 1 students. She found that the students could segment sounds of letters and could improve their ability in reading words, and with more fluency as well as more vocabulary retention. The students also scored more in reading at the word level, sentence level and at reading new words.

However, their score for the retention test decreased when compared with their score for the post-test and the decrease was statically significant, which might be because of time limitation. Moreover, using phonics in teaching, students should be given more continuous
and regular practice in order to make it effective. Foes & Sloan (1999) recommended that to teach students whose reading ability is below average to read, phonics should be used together with reading everyday both at school and at home. Gunning et al. (2000) used a systemic direct method to teach students for 25-30 minutes every day for two years and found that students in the experimental group scored significantly higher than those in the control group when the teacher taught them to read systematically and clearly and provided opportunities to students to read many types of books and helped students translate so as to help them understand what they read.

In this study, the last factor that helped students to learn better was the help they received from the teacher and classmates in doing activities. Students with more ability in learning helped those whose learning ability was lower. Moreover, when students were not certain or wanted a clear answer, they could ask for help from the teacher. This is confirmed by Vygotsky’s social constructivism theory (Vygotsky, 1978 in De Bot et al., 2005) that with a little help from people around him/her, he/she can learn new things better.

“I practiced pronunciation and read after the teacher first and then I tried to do it repeatedly by myself. But I cannot write words and sentences very well. I have to look at a friend’s work or ask the teacher first, then I can write it”.

Tana (a moderately student)

“I cannot make out words very well and I cannot remember some letters or cannot remember them correctly. I must have a friend read it to me first and I say it after him. I practice by myself very little and only practice some short words. When I write, I have to look at a friend’s writing first. I cannot write correctly and if it is a long word, I have to copy from the blackboard that the teacher has written.”

Da (an average student)

Recommendations for using phonics to teach English

1. Decide on the length of the course and teach phonics for 30 minutes every day continuously. For students whose achievement in the English language is low, a longer period of time is recommended for laying foundation of phonics and more phonemic awareness should be taught in order to enable students to make out words from mixing sounds and to be able to analyze the sounds of the words.

2. Use systematic phonics to teach remedial classes. Because using phonics to teach reading effectively should be taught systematically from the basic level to a higher level
gradually. Phonics should be used in remedial classes because it is not in line with the content designated in the core basic education curriculum B.E. 2551, and the normal contact hours are limited.

3. Phonics should be used with other approaches such as whole language approach to teach words that cannot be read using phonics approaches such as octopus, mother, and tomato, where the sounds of the letter “o” are different: /ɒktəpəs/, /ˈmʌðə(r)/, /ˈtəmətəʊ/.

**Recommendation for further research**

1. More studies should be conducted on using phonics to teach reading words with clusters or words with two or more syllables. This study did not cover them due to time limitations.

2. Studies should be conducted with more subjects. This study could not be done with more subjects because there were a very limited number of students in the school that the researcher taught and therefore the subjects were selected using purposive sampling in order to solve problems in reading and writing, and to make the teaching and learning activities more diverse.

3. To encourage children to read, the teacher should survey students’ need and provide reading materials to practice at home by using phonics to be a fundamental method.
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