

Effects of Phrase-cued Text on Taiwanese EFL Children's Retell Fluency

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Abstract

This study examines effects of phrase-cued text on EFL children's retell fluency (RTF). The participants included 12 classes of fifth and sixth graders (six classes for each grade) with a total of 258 students from a public elementary school in central Taiwan. Among them, 128 participants were considered higher proficiency students and 130 were lower proficiency students based on results of the General English Proficiency Test Kids (GEPT Kids) adopted to assess their reading ability for two purposes: to ensure the homogeneity of reading proficiency among six classes in each grade and to divide them into two proficiency levels. Six classes of each grade were randomly divided into two groups: Phrase-cued Group (PCG) and Control Group (CG). The former was given a phrase-cued text, while the latter was given a conventional text. A 198-word text, *Spring is coming*, chosen from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS 6th edition) developed by Good and Kaminski (2007) was used to assess participants' retell fluency. Results showed that PCG significantly surpassed CG in RTF scores. When reading proficiency was taken into account, further analysis indicated PCG with higher English proficiency significantly outperformed its counterpart (i.e., CG with higher English proficiency) and PCG with lower English proficiency also remarkably surpassed its counterpart (i.e., CG with lower English proficiency). Additionally, PCG with lower English proficiency performed similarly to CG with higher English proficiency. These results suggested phrase-cued text significantly improved both higher and lower proficiency groups' RTF performances, especially for the lower one. Based on findings of this study, phrase-cued text is suggested as effective teaching material to facilitate EFL children's retell fluency.

Keywords : phrase-cued text, reading proficiency, reading comprehension, retell fluency

註記短語與斷句文本對臺灣國小學童 英語重述能力的影響

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摘 要

本研究探討註記短語與斷句文本對 EFL 學童重述能力 (RTF) 的影響。研究對象為 258 位中臺灣一所國小的五、六年級學生。其中，高閱讀能力的學生有 128 位，低閱讀能力的學生則有 130 位。學生的閱讀能力以語言訓練測驗中心所發展的小學英檢進行測驗，以便測量他們的英語閱讀能力在每個年級的六個班級中是否為同質性。完成閱讀學習背景問卷和閱讀能力測驗後，研究人員將五、六年級共十二個班級的學生平均隨機分成兩組：短語提示組 (PCG) 和對照組 (CG)。其中，實驗組閱讀有註記短語與斷句的文本，而對照組則閱讀無註記短語與斷句的文本。重述能力測驗所使用的文本為截錄自早期基礎讀寫能力動態指標〈DIBELS 第六版〉總字數 198 字的文章〈*Spring is coming*〉。結果顯示，短語提示組 (PCG) 在重述能力 (RTF) 評分上顯著超過了對照組 (CG)。當使用閱讀能力和閱讀有無註記短語與斷句文本的兩個因素將學生分成四組時，事後比較結果顯示高程度者在閱讀註記短語與斷句文本後的重述能力表現比高程度者閱讀無註記短語與斷句文本的表現顯著的好；並且，低程度者在閱讀註記短語與斷句文本後的重述能力表現比低程度者閱讀無註記短語與斷句文本的表現顯著的好。此研究結果顯示註記短語與斷句文本能提升高、低程度學生的重述能力表現。其中，低程度者在閱讀註記短語與斷句文本後的重述能力表現和高程度者使用無註記短語與斷句文本的表現並無顯著差異。此研究結果顯示，閱讀註記短語與斷句文本能有效提升學生的重述能力或閱讀理解能力，尤其是對低程度的學生特別有效。最後，根據本研究的發現，建議英語教師們可以有效使用註記短語與斷句文本作為教材，以提升以英語為外語學習者的重述能力或閱讀理解能力。

關鍵詞：註記短語與斷句文本、閱讀能力、重述能力、閱讀理解

1. Introduction

Reading plays an important role in early literacy development. Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) indicated that the early successful reading acquisition is a fundamental factor for learners' later reading comprehension and other cognitive reading abilities. The simple view of reading (SVR) categorized reading abilities into two components: decoding and comprehension (Hoover & Gough, 1990). Based on Samuels (2006), "reading fluency is the ability to decode and comprehend text at the same time" (p.6); thus, reading fluency is considered the bridge between decoding and comprehension.

Reading comprehension defined by RAND Reading Study Group (2002) is the ability to extract and construct meaning with written language via a complex cognitive process, and then, to understand or comprehend the written words.

For primary school students, Good and Kaminski (2002) suggested that both oral reading fluency and retell fluency (the ability to retell what one has read in one minute after reading a passage) could be used to check their reading comprehension. In addition, some educators utilized DIBELS Retell Fluency assessment as a tool to measure participants' reading comprehension (Bellinger & Diperna, 2011; Paleologos & Brabham, 2011; Roehrig, Petscher, Nettles, Hudson, & Torgesen, 2008). The rationale of the assessment is to make participants practice reading with meaning. Thus, retell fluency (RTF) could be considered an indicator of reading comprehension.

Some studies have noted that oral language skills of reading comprehension are critical elements for reading (Gough, Hoover, & Peterson, 1996; Koriati, Greenberg, & Kreiner, 2002; Pikulski & Chard, 2005). According to Morgan (1996), prosodic patterns, the feature of oral language skills, were concerned with one's syntactic awareness of phrases, clauses, and sentences. Koriati, et al. (2002) pinpointed prosodic phrasing could help readers' ability to group meaningful words into appropriate phrases, thus being able to understand the semantic meanings. That is, phrase reading ability might be a mediator to affect reading comprehension. Such inference is supported by many studies which indicated that phrase reading ability was significantly related to reading comprehension (Dowhower, 1991; Henk, 1986; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008; Le & Nguyen, 2014; Morrow & Asbury, 2003; Schreiber, 1991; Smith, 1978; Stahl & Kuhn, 2002, 2004, 2005; Walley & Hansen, 2006).

For example, Smith (1978) suggested readers could utilize chunking words to make meaningful units in order to enhance reading comprehension. Zutell and Rasinski (1991) proposed that the reading strategy of grouping chunking words into meaningful phrases and units could efficiently facilitate reading to accomplish a critical element of oral reading fluency, automaticity. That is, readers could read by grouping or chunking words into meaningful phrases and units efficiently, rather than read word by word laboriously.

More recently, there has been a shift in attention from focusing on the outcome of reading to an emphasis on determining the strategies that readers use in several reading contexts. Many reading researchers found phrase reading ability was associated with reading comprehension (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel, 2010; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010; LeVasseur, Macaruso, Palumbo, & Shankweiler, 2006; LeVasseur, Macaruso, & Shankweiler, 2008; Mokhtari & Thompson, 2006; Nomvete, 2014; Young & Bowers, 1995). The most remarkable finding is that phrase reading ability may be increasingly able to enhance learners' reading comprehension further as learners get older (Gough, Hoover, & Peterson, 1996; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008). While there is a relationship between phrase reading ability and reading comprehension, most of the previous studies were conducted in L1 contexts. Few empirical studies were conducted in the EFL context to test this assumption. Thus, this study attempted to investigate effects of phrase-cued text on EFL children's retell fluency (RTF), an indicator of reading comprehension. Following are three correlated research questions.

1. Does phrase-cued text affect Taiwanese EFL children's RTF performances?
2. Does learners' reading proficiency affect their RTF performances?

3. Is there any interaction between phrase-cued text and learners' reading proficiency on Taiwanese EFL children's RTF performances?

2. Literature review

2.1 Reading ability

The simple view of reading (SVR) classifies reading abilities into the ability to decode words and the ability to comprehend what the words mean (Hoover & Gough, 1990). In addition, Gough, Hoover, and Peterson (1996) pointed out that "if reading, decoding, and comprehension are considered as skills that range from zero to one, then reading must be the product of decoding and comprehension" (p. 3). Similarly, if a learner did not have decoding ability and comprehension ability, he or she might not have reading ability.

Based on Gough et al. (1996), to understand what is being read, oral language skills of comprehension consist of being able to know the meanings of words, to utilize prior knowledge to infer the texts, and to parse sentences into phrases using syntactic elements. Moreover, the elements of constructing meaning from the text includes making inferences, responding critically, and requiring attention (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). That is, readers might get the component of reading fluency as they chunk words with little attention, then, achieve reading comprehension effortlessly.

Furthermore, there are five essential component skills for reading development, including alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, oral reading fluency, and comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000). Reading fluency serves as the bridge between decoding and reading comprehension (Chall, 1996; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Schwanenflugel, Hamilton, Kuhn, Wisenbaker, & Stahl, 2004). Researchers proposed a theoretical perspective with reference to automaticity and prosodic patterns which can be applied to explore the relationship between fluency and reading comprehension as well (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010). Thus, if readers could read a text with automaticity and prosodic patterns, it might facilitate them to construct the meaning, and then, to enhance their ability of fluency and reading comprehension.

2.2 Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension was defined as "the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002, p. xiii). Several reading cognitive subcomponents, such as reading rate, decoding skills, and vocabulary are related to one's ability to understand or comprehend the written words (RAND Reading Study Group, 2002). In contrast, if readers had weak reading cognitive subcomponents, their reading comprehension might be obstructed (Hock, Pullen, Lane, & Torgesen, 2009).

According to the simple view of reading (Hoover & Gough, 1990), the cognitive subcomponents of reading comprehension can be classified into two reading skills, the decoding skills and the language skills. To illustrate, the decoding skills are required to read the words of the reading texts (e.g. reading rate, automaticity); accordingly, oral language skills are required to know the meaning of the reading texts (e.g. phrase ability, syntactic awareness). The relationship among the decoding skills, the oral language skills and reading comprehension might vary. The decoding ability was only significantly correlated with reading comprehension in the learners' grades one to six; moreover, the oral language skills were significantly correlated with reading comprehension as learners' age increased (Gough et al., 1996). In other words, if readers who acquired strong decoding skills well in primary school could achieve good performance in relation to oral language skills, their reading comprehension might improve as well as their overall learning growth.

2.3 DIBELS retell fluency

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) contains subtests of Oral Reading Fluency and Retell Fluency. The subtests of Oral Reading Fluency and Retell Fluency are standardized individual assessments. Each student reads a passage aloud for one minute. The

number of correct words per minute is regarded as ORF. Right after reading the passage, the student needs to retell what he or she has read in one minute. The way of counting Retell Fluency score is the same as ORF measurement. That is, both ORF and RTF are considered time efficient measurements. The number of correct words per minute is regarded as the score of RTF. Moreover, RTF scores stand for the level of reading comprehension.

The guidelines offered by DIBEL 6th edition (Good & Kaminski, 2002, p. 35-37) are addressed as follows:

- (1) Only actual words are counted. (They uhh are going to the library.)
- (2) Count contractions as one word. (They're going to the library.)
- (3) Minor repetitions, redundancies, irrelevancies, and inaccuracies are counted. (They're going to the library. The library is downtown. I like the library.)
- (4) Rote repetitions of words or phrases are not counted. (They're going to the library. They're going to the library.)
- (5) Stories or irrelevancies that are off track are not counted.
- (6) Songs or recitations are not included.

There are two advantages for RTF measurement. Firstly, RTF is a time-efficient measurement. Secondly, RTF is a suitable tool to measure children's reading comprehension. For the above reasons, RTF is utilized to assess participants' reading comprehension in this study.

2.4 Effects of phrase reading ability on reading comprehension

Koriat et al. (2002) stated that prosodic phrasing can help with readers' ability to chunk meaningful words into appropriate phrases, then, to understand the semantic meaning. In other words, phrase reading ability may be a mediator to affect reading comprehension. Later, numerous studies found a significant relationship between phrase reading ability and reading comprehension (Benjamin & Schwanenflugel, 2010; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008; Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, & Meisinger, 2010; LeVasseur, Macaruso, Palumbo, & Shankweiler, 2006; LeVasseur, Macaruso, & Shankweiler, 2008; Mokhtari & Thompson, 2006; Nichols, Rupley & Rasinski, 2009; Nomvete, 2014; Walley & Hansen, 2006). For example, Klauda and Guthrie (2008) worked with 278 fifth graders from three schools located in a small city in a mid-Atlantic state and found that phrase reading ability was associated with reading comprehension. Therefore, instructors can emphasize the importance of phrase reading ability in learners' primary school phase.

Nomvete (2014) explored effects of phrase-reading ability, syntactic awareness, and reading rate on adolescents' reading comprehension. The results showed: (1) phrase-reading ability, syntactic awareness, passage reading rate, and reading comprehension had a significantly positive correlation, and (2) phrase-reading ability served as a mediator between reading rate and comprehension, and between syntactic awareness and reading comprehension.

Results of above studies (Klauda & Guthrie, 2008; Nomvete, 2014) supported Walley and Hansen's (2006) finding that phrase reading ability predicted unique variance in L1 reading comprehension as well as. Moreover, Nichols, et al. (2009) pinpointed that "phrase reading ability is an excellent strategy for promoting students' ability to read in syntactically appropriate and meaningful idea units or phrases, in order to understand what they read, and to increase automaticity in word recognition and enhanced comprehension" (p. 7). This statement is compatible with Kuhn and Stahl's (2003) claim that it is a certainty to retain readers' comprehension with the competence of chunking words into phrases and meaningful units.

While there is a relationship between phrase reading ability and reading comprehension, little empirical evidence has been found to support the assumption for children in primary school in an EFL context. Therefore, this study would have elementary-aged EFL students as its participants and focus on their phrase reading ability and reading comprehension.

2.5 Effects of phrase-cued text on reading comprehension

Many studies (Anglin & Miller, 1968; Koriat et al., 2002; Le & Nguyen, 2014; Manson &

Kendall, 1979; Rasinski, 1990, 1994; Weiss, 1983) indicated that “chunked” reading material or separation of sentences into meaningful related phrases could improve some readers’ reading comprehension. For instance, Anglin and Miller (1968) conducted a study to examine whether prose passages presented in the phrase structure of the sentences could enhance Harvard students’ recall of words from the texts. Two paragraphs A and B were presented either by phrase-cued text or by conventional text. The results showed that college students had a greater recall of the words from the phrase-cued texts than the conventional texts.

Manson and Kendall (1979) carried out a study to examine whether reading a phrase-cued text could improve fourth graders’ reading performance in the L1 context. The results showed that reading a phrase-cued text could improve children’s reading performance, especially, those with low reading ability.

Weiss (1983) conducted a study to investigate whether phrase-cued text could make primary school’s social studies textbooks more readable in the L1 setting. 648 fourth and seventh graders were administered into three reading formats: a pausal phrase format, a syntactic phrase format, and a standard prose format. The results indicated that participants reading with a syntactic phrase format scored more highly on reading comprehension than the other two groups.

Rasinski (1990) reviewed studies over the past four decades regarding the effects of phrase boundaries on reading comprehension. He found that reading boundaries could facilitate learners’ reading performance, particularly for younger learners and less fluent readers. He pointed out that “chunking” written texts into meaningful phrase units is beneficial for proficient reading and he regarded this “chunking” written texts as phrase-cued texts. In the present study, the reading passage which contains chunking phrases adopts the guideline of producing phrase-cued texts proposed by Rasinski (1990, 1994).

Le and Nguyen (2014) investigated the effects of phrase-reading strategy instruction on Vietnam EFL senior high school students’ oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. The results showed that the experimental group receiving phrase-reading strategy instruction outperformed the control group in terms of oral reading fluency and reading comprehension, indicating that phrase-reading strategy improved EFL students’ oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. Moreover, by using the correlation analysis, the researchers also found that oral reading fluency and reading comprehension were significantly correlated. The findings of this EFL study were in line with those of previous L1 studies which found that the reading strategy of grouping or chunking words into meaningful phrases or units could boost reading comprehension (Dowhower, 1991; Zutell & Rasinski, 1991; Klauda & Guthrie, 2008).

While considerable attention has been paid in the past to research issue related to impacts of phrase reading ability or phrase-cued text on reading comprehension, literature regarding EFL children tends to be limited. This study thus aimed to investigate effects of phrase reading ability on EFL children’s reading comprehension.

2.6 Effects of reading proficiency on reading comprehension or retell fluency

Alderson (1984) conducted a study and reported that both L1 reading ability and L2 reading proficiency affected L2 reading comprehension, and L2 reading proficiency had a stronger influence on L2 reading comprehension of the low level. That is, lack of L2 reading proficiency might not improve L2 reading comprehension. Additionally, some studies have shown that vocabulary makes more of a contribution to L2 reading proficiency than grammar does (Bossers, 1992; Brisbois, 1995; Taillefer, 1996). However, knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structure, two important linguistic components, seem to be important for L2 reading proficiency. A number of reading researchers indicated that vocabulary and grammatical structure are related to reading comprehension (Anderson & Freebody, 1981; Berman, 1984; Barnett, 1986; Flores d’Arcais, 1990; Nation & Coady, 1988).

In terms of readers’ reading proficiency level, following studies had reading proficiency as an independent variable while investigating the relationship between phrase reading ability and reading

comprehension. O'Shea and Sindelar (1983) examined the efficacy of segmenting written discourse into meaningful phrases to enhance comprehension scores on a maze task in L1 context. The participants were 83 first- to third-grade students randomly selected from elementary schools in Pennsylvania. They were divided into low or high level readers based on their scores of reading speed and accuracy. The children were asked to complete two maze tasks at the third-grade reading level: one segmented and one standard typographic passage. The results indicated that segmenting sentences into meaningful units improved reading comprehension of both high and low level readers. Regression analysis showed that the effect of segmented text was especially pronounced for low readers.

Casteel (1990) conducted a study to investigate whether text with chunking phrases would significantly enhance eighth graders' reading comprehension in Louisiana. Fifty participants were divided into two reading ability groups: high and low reading ability. The results showed that the low reading ability readers' comprehension scores were significantly affected by phrase-cued text. Although the high reading ability readers' comprehension scores showed no significant gain, there is a positive relationship between phrase reading ability and comprehension.

The aforementioned two studies were conducted in L1 setting, and the next study reviewed was conducted in an EFL setting. Yamashita and Ichikawa (2010) carried out a study to investigate the relationships between chunking, English reading fluency and comprehension in an EFL context. The study involved 48 Japanese EFL participants from both intermediate and advanced levels. A self-paced reading was used to explore the effects of phrase-cued text on reading rate and comprehension in English reading by four text modes: the Whole Text, the Single Word, the Meaningful Chunk, and the Fragmented Word Groups. The results showed that the advanced learners read English texts faster than the intermediate learners with any four text modes. The results also showed that the difficulty of chunking a text negatively affected comprehension for the intermediate learners, while the advanced learners were able to overcome chunking difficulty. Thus, it was suggested that the relationship between chunking and reading needs to be considered based on the text difficulty and different aspects of reading.

As observed from the related research, phrase-cued text remarkably improved the learners' reading comprehension, particularly for low reading proficiency learners. Therefore, this study also regarded English reading proficiency as an independent variable on learners' RTF performances.

3. Methodology

3.1 Pilot study and its results

In order to find the reading text with an appropriate level and readability, and to investigate whether the phrase-cued text following the guidelines of phrase-cued texts offered by Rasinski (1990, 1994) would improve EFL young learners' reading comprehension, a pilot study was conducted. The research question was proposed in order to realize whether phrase-cued text would enhance Taiwanese EFL fifth graders' reading ability in terms of retell fluency. The pilot study focused on the research question: Between the phrase-cued text and the conventional text (See Appendixes B & C), which type of reading text is more effective in improving Taiwanese EFL fifth graders' retell fluency?

The participants in the pilot study were 44 fifth graders from an elementary school in central Taiwan. They were recruited from two intact classes, and were taught by the same English teacher. The students' scores on English achievement test in 2016 were collected; moreover, the learners' language background questionnaires (See Appendix A-1 & Appendix A-2) were completed by these students. After that, they were asked to complete the reading section of the proficiency test (the General English Proficiency Test Kids, GEPT Kids). Results from the achievement test and the learners' background questionnaire indicated that there was no significant difference between two groups in terms of students' reading proficiency. The pilot study lasted 2 weeks in duration. After two classes had completed the reading section of the proficiency test (GEPT Kids) in the first week,

the results of the independent samples *t* test indicated that there was no significant difference between two classes in terms of their reading proficiency as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of independent samples *t* test for scores on GEPT Kids Reading Proficiency Test for two classes

Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Experimental group	20	42.10	12.72	1.69	.098
Control group	24	36.67	8.48		

Note: Experimental group = phrase-cued text; Control group = conventional text
Maximal score = 60, $p = .098$

Next, the researcher randomly selected one class as the experimental group and the other as the control group. In the second week, the participants received the experiment and the researcher assessed each participant's RTF performance. The text, *Spring Is Coming*, was chosen from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS 6th edition) developed by Good and Kaminski (2007), and it was a 169-word story (Readability: Grade level 0.9; Reading ease 100). The experimental group received a phrase-cued text, whereas the control group was given a conventional text. Both texts contained the same content except the phrase-cued text containing within-sentence phrase-breaks (/) and sentence boundaries (//) following the guideline of phrase-cued texts proposed by Rasinski et al. (2011). After that, the researcher recorded what the participants read and retold orally and calculated students' RTF scores.

Table 2. Results of independent samples *t* test for RTF scores of two classes

Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Experimental group	20	11.20	5.11	-2.80	*.008
Control group	24	7.08	4.62		

Note: Experimental group = phrase-cued text; Control group = conventional text
Maximal score = 22, $p = .008$

The RTF mean score for the experimental group ($M = 11.2$, $SD = 5.11$) was significantly higher than that for the control group ($M = 7.08$, $SD = 4.62$) as shown in Table 2. The results of the independent samples *t* test revealed that there was a significant difference between two classes in RTF mean score.

3.2 Participants

The participants consisted of 258 fifth and sixth graders from twelve intact classes recruited from a public elementary school in central Taiwan. Each grade contained six classes, with 127 fifth graders and 131 sixth graders. They had received English instruction two periods (80 minutes) per week since the third grade. Their ages ranged from ten to twelve years old. Before the experiment, both graders completed learners' language background questionnaires and took the reading section of the GEPT Kids class by class, to assess their reading ability and to ensure the homogeneity of reading proficiency among six classes in each grade. As shown in Table 3, results of one-way ANOVA indicated that there was no significant difference among six classes of the fifth grade in terms of their reading proficiency, $F(5, 121) = 1.542$, $p = .182$. Similarly, there was no significant difference among the six classes of the sixth grade, $F(5, 125) = 1.529$, $p = .186$. Therefore, all classes of each grade were respectively found to be homogeneous in their reading proficiency.

Table 3. ANOVA results for Scores on GEPT Kids Reading Proficiency Test for fifth and sixth grades with six classes for each

5 th Grade						6 th Grade					
Class	n	Mean	SD	F	p	Class	n	Mean	SD	F	p
A	24	36.67	8.48	1.542	.182	A	24	43.83	9.19	1.529	.186
B	22	43.09	11.11			B	23	50.43	7.13		
C	20	42.10	12.72			C	20	45.10	10.25		
D	18	41.33	10.67			D	20	45.50	10.52		
E	18	45.11	9.31			E	22	44.64	9.63		
F	25	42.00	10.88			F	22	44.36	9.43		
Total	127	41.54	10.70			Total	131	45.66	9.47		

Note: Maximal score = 60, $p > .05$

Furthermore, six classes of the fifth grade were randomly assigned to two groups: (1) the experimental group (Classes: 5C, 5E, 5F) receiving the phrase-cued text with chunked phrases and (2) the control group (Classes: 5A, 5B, 5D) receiving the conventional text. Likewise, six classes of the sixth grade were randomly assigned to the experimental group (Classes: 6B, 6D, 6E) and the control group (Classes: 6A, 6C, 6F). The score range of reading proficiency in each grade was from 18 to 60. The mean score of 12 classes was 43.64 and was used to divide the participants into high- and low-proficiency groups.

3.3 Instruments

The instruments used in this study include (1) a questionnaire of language background, (2) a standardized English proficiency test, and (3) an RTF test. The questionnaire of language background was first developed in English (Appendix A-1) by the researchers and later translated into traditional Chinese (Appendix A-2) because all participants' native language is Chinese. It was used to collect data regarding participants' English learning information, which assisted the researchers to verify whether participants' English learning background was similar or not and to ensure that they had not taken the standardized reading proficiency test (GEPT Kids) yet.

The standardized English proficiency test in this study refers to the reading section of *General English Proficiency Test Kids* (GEPT Kids) launched by the Language Training and Testing Center (LTTTC) in 2015. It was utilized to assess participants' reading proficiency. The reading test was composed of three parts, including twenty yes-no questions, five blank-filling questions, and five multiple-choice questions. The total number of questions on the reading proficiency test was 30 and the maximum score for the test was 60. It took thirty minutes for the participants to complete.

The RTF test adopted in this study is a 198-word text, *Spring Is Coming* (see Appendix B & C). It was chosen from the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS 6th edition) developed by Good and Kaminski (2007). The Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level is 0.9. The Flesch Reading Ease Readability Score is 100.0. According to the Flesch Reading Ease Reading Formula, scores between 90.0 and 100.0 are considered easily understandable by average 5th graders in United State. Besides, Vocabulary Quotient (VQ) was used to estimate the actual size of English vocabulary of the text. The VQ results showed in Table 4 indicated that 18.75% of the words in the passage were included in the 3rd grade word list, 23.21% in the 4th grade word list, 30.36% in the 5th grade word list, and 23.21% in the 6th grade word list. Based on the readability and vocabulary quotient analysis of the text, *Spring Is Coming* is considered appropriate to assess participants' RTF. The difficulty level of this passage is also adequate to appraise the participants' RTF in this current study.

Table 4. Word List of Vocabulary Quotient for the Passage, *Spring Is Coming*

Test Passage	Vocabulary Quotient	Readability	
		Grade Level	Reading Ease
<i>Spring Is Coming</i> (198 words)	18.75% (Grade 3)	0.9	100
	23.21% (Grade 4)		
	30.36% (Grade 5)		
	23.21% (Grade 6)		
	4.47% (others)		

Two types of text were used to assess the participants' RTF: a phrase-cued version and a conventional version (see Appendix B&C). The former followed the guideline of producing phrase-cued texts offered by Rasinski (1990, 1994). Half of the participants saw the text marked with the sentence boundaries of the passage with double slashes (//) and each of phrase breaks with a single slash mark (/). The rest of the participants were given the conventional text (see Appendix C)

Each participant was individually required to read the text from the beginning within one minute and was instructed to skip the words he or she did not know how to pronounce. In addition, no correction of mispronunciation was given while each participant was reading the text aloud. After one minute of reading the text aloud, each participant was individually asked to recall and retell what they had read within another one minute. Each participant's text reading and text retelling were recorded individually. The researchers calculated the correct words recalled or retold by each participant. Based on the guidelines of RTF assessment provided in the DIBELS (6th edition), the RTF score was the total number of correct words retold by a participant.

3.4 Research design and procedures

The experiment was conducted during a 4-week period in a school setting from March to April as shown in Table 5. It took each class 2 weeks to complete the following three instruments: a questionnaire of language background, a reading proficiency test, and the DIBELS RTF test. The sixth-grade data were collected in March and the fifth-grade data were collected in April. In the first week, participants were given the questionnaire. Then, they were given the reading section of the GEPT Kids to examine their English reading proficiency and to ensure the homogeneity among the six classes of each grade. The proficiency test was administered in a large-class setting. After administering the reading proficiency test, the third researcher randomly divided the six classes of each grade into two groups: the experimental group and the control group. The participants in the experimental group were given a phrase-cued text which had within-sentence phrase-breaks (/) and sentence boundaries (//), and yet, the others in the control group were given a conventional text which had no phrase marking on the text. In the second week, the RTF test was individually administered to each participant. The third researcher recorded what each participant read and retold orally to evaluate his/her RTF score. This test took 2 minutes for each of the participants. Table 5 below specifies the procedure of the experiment in detail.

Table 5. Schedule of Experiment

Month	Grade	Weeks	Administrating Instruments	Time
March	6 th graders	1	Questionnaire of Language Background	5 min
April	5th graders		Reading Section of General English Proficiency Test Kids (GEPT Kids)	30 min
		Six classes were randomly assigned to two groups: experimental group and control group, three classes for each.		
		2	The Test Passage for reading aloud	1 min
			The Test Passage for RTF	1 min

3.5 Data analysis

Two-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate if two independent variables (phrase-cued text and reading proficiency) respectively had significant effects on the dependent variable (i.e., EFL children's RTF scores) and if there was significant interaction between two independent variables on the dependent variable.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Does phrase-cued text affect Taiwanese EFL children's RTF performances?

Table 6 reports results of two-way ANOVA conducted to explore effects of text type (phrase-cued vs. conventional) and reading proficiency (high vs. low) on the participants' RTF scores and to examine the interaction between these two variables (text type and reading proficiency). Results of text type variable in Table 6 were significant ($F = 41.27$, $p = .000$), indicating the phrase-cued group significantly outperformed the conventional group in RTF mean score. These results suggest that phrase-cued text had significant effects on participants' RTF performances. This finding accords with those of previous studies reporting phrase-cued text had significant effects on learners' reading comprehension (Anglin & Miller, 1968; Kuhn & Stahl, 2003; Le & Nguyen, 2014; Manson & Kendall, 1979; O'Shea & Sindelar, 1983; Rasinski, 1990, 1994; Weiss, 1983). For example, Le and Nguyen (2014) found that students in their experimental group presented with phrase-reading instruction significantly outperformed the control group oral reading fluency and reading comprehension. Kuhn and Stahl (2003) stated that chunking words into phrases and meaningful units enhanced learners' reading comprehension. O'Shea and Sindelar (1983) reported that segmenting sentences into meaningful units aided reading comprehension of both high- and low-performance readers.

Table 6. Results of two-way ANOVA for RTF scores in terms of text type and reading proficiency

Text Type	Phrase-cued (n =128)		Conventional (n =130)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	13.27	6.12	8.7	4.42		
Reading Proficiency	High (n =128)		Low (n =130)		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	14.09	5.92	7.9	3.63		
Text-type x Reading Proficiency		<i>DF</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
		1	103.28	103.28	5.04	*.026

Note: Maximum RTF score = 115; * $p < .05$

4.2 Does learners' reading proficiency affect their RTF performances?

Results of reading proficiency variable in Table 6 were significant ($F = 95.93$, $p = .000$), showing high proficiency group significantly surpassed low proficiency group in RTF mean score. Such results suggest that reading proficiency had remarkable effects on participants' RTF

performances too. This finding is in line with those of previous studies reporting reading proficiency had marked effects on reading comprehension (Alderson, 1984; Casteel, 1990; O'Shea & Sindelar, 1983; Yamashita & Ichikawa, 2010).

4. 3 Is there any interaction between phrase-cued text and learners' reading proficiency on Taiwanese EFL children's RTF performances?

Results of two-way ANOVA in Table 6 shows there was a significant interaction between two variables of text type and reading proficiency ($F = 5.04, p = .026$). Since the interaction between two independent variables was significant, the Scheffé post hoc comparisons were further conducted to assess the pairwise differences among four groups' RTF scores. Table 7 reports results of Scheffé post hoc comparisons of RTF scores among four groups. Results in Table 7 showed that the HP with PCT group obtained the highest RTF mean score and significantly outnumbered any other group in RTF mean score. LP with PCT group also significantly performed better than LP with CT. However, HP with CT group did not significantly surpassed LP with PCT group in RTF mean score ($p = .18$) although it significantly exceeded LP with CT group ($p = .03$). Such results suggested that phrase-cued text had significant effects on RTF performance for both high and low proficiency participants, especially for low proficiency ones. This finding is compatible with those of previous studies which indicated that a phrase-cued text improved learners' reading performance, especially for those with low reading proficiency (Casteel, 1990; Le & Nguyen, 2014; Manson & Kendall, 1979; O'Shea & Sindelar, 1983; Rasinski, 1990). For instance, O'Shea and Sindelar (1983) found that segmenting sentences into meaningful units aided reading comprehension of both high- and low-performance readers. Rasinski (1990) claimed reading boundaries could facilitate learners' reading performance, particularly for younger learners and less fluent readers. However, the finding of this study partially differs from that of Casteel's (1990) study, which reported phrase-cued text had significant effects on reading comprehension only for low reading ability learners rather than for high reading ability readers.

Table 7. Results of Scheffé Post Hoc comparisons of RTF scores among four groups

Groups		<i>M.D.</i>	<i>P</i>
HP with PCT	LP with PCT	6.88	.00*
	HP with CT	4.95	.00*
	LP with CT	9.27	.00*
LP with PCT	HP with CT	-1.93	.18
	LP with CT	2.39	.03*
HP with CT	LP with CT	4.31	.00*

Note: HP = high reading proficiency; LP = low reading proficiency; PCT = phrase-cued text; CT = conventional text; * $p < .05$

The researchers of this study would like to elaborate more on effects of phrase-cued text on the LP with PHT group. The non-significant results of post hoc comparison between LP with PHT and HP with CT in Table 7 suggested that the performance of LP with PCT group did not significantly differ from HP with CT in terms of their RTF. This further suggested that phrase-cued text boosted RTF performance of the LP with PCT group to the level similar to that of the HP with CT group. Based on the results of the current study, the ranking of four groups' RTF scores is HP with PCT > HP with CT = LP with PCT > LP with CT. According to these results, phrase-cued text is strongly recommended an effective reading material for improving EFL children's RTF and reading comprehension, especially for low EFL learners.

5. Conclusion, limitations and suggestions

This study investigated effects of phrase-cued text and reading proficiency on 258 Taiwanese EFL children's RTF performances, an indicator of reading comprehension. Results of two-way

ANOVA indicated: (1) the phrase-cued group significantly outnumbered the conventional group in RTF mean score, suggesting phrase-cued text significantly enhanced participants' RTF performances; (2) high-proficiency group significantly surpassed low-proficiency group in RTF mean score, suggesting participants' reading proficiency significantly affected their RTF performances, and (3) when overall low proficiency group obtained significantly lower mean score on RTF than overall high proficiency group, low proficiency group with phrase-cued text performed not only significantly better than low proficiency group with conventional text in RTF but similarly well as high proficiency group with conventional text, which suggested phrase-cued text had significantly positive effects on RTF performances, especially for low-proficiency EFL children. Based on the aforementioned findings of this study, phrase-cued texts are strongly recommended as effective teaching material to enhance EFL children's RTF, especially for low reading proficiency EFL children.

However, there are two limitations for this study. Firstly, the participants of the current study were recruited from one public elementary school in central Taiwan. Results of the present study might not be suitable to be generalized to EFL children in other areas of Taiwan. Therefore, for future studies, the participants should be more representative by recruiting them from different schools and from different geographical areas of Taiwan. Secondly, it is likely that RTF might not accurately convey a student's comprehension. In order to retell a passage, a student has to recall information, organize it in a meaningful way, and possibly draw conclusions about the relationships among the ideas (Klingner, 2004). Thus, to retell a passage might be a task that is more dependent upon the student's productive language abilities than their reading comprehension. Moreover, it might be difficult for researchers to distinguish among difficulties at the level of input, retrieval, expression, or some combination of them (Johnston, 1981; Spooner et al., 2004). Furthermore, socioeconomic status and cultural-linguistic differences might also play a role in students' performance on comprehension tasks that require oral language processing (Snyder, Caccamise, & Wise, 2005).

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Appendices

Appendix A-1

Questionnaire of Learners' Language Background (English Version)

Class: _____ Name: _____

Please read each item, then, check and fill in the blanks according to your experience. If you have any question, please raise your hands.

1. How long have you studied English?
 - ☐ less than one year ☐ one to two years ☐ two to three years
 - ☐ three to four years ☐ four to five years ☐ more than five years

2. Do you take lessons after school? If you do, how long have you taken lessons after school?
 - ☐ No.
 - ☐ Yes, I have taken lesson after school for _____ month/year.

3. Have you ever lived in any English-speaking countries before? If you have, how long have you lived there?
 - ☐ No.
 - ☐ Yes, I have lived in English-speaking country for _____ month/year.

4. Have you ever taken General English Proficiency Test Kids exam before? If you have, when did you take the exam?
 - ☐ No.
 - ☐ Yes, I have taken this exam _____ time(s) in _____ grade.

5. Have you ever taken Cambridge English Language Assessment (YLE) exam before? If you have, when did you take the exam?
 - ☐ No.
 - ☐ Yes, I have taken this exam _____ time(s) in _____ grade.

6. Have you ever taken Style (JET) exam before? If you have, when did you take the exam?
 - ☐ No.
 - ☐ Yes, I have taken this exam _____ time(s) in _____ grade.

Appendix A-2

Questionnaire of Learners' Language Background (Chinese Version)

語言學習背景問卷

班級：_____ 姓名：_____

請閱讀每一題的內容後，根據自己的經驗，勾選項目並完成補充說明。作答上有任何問題，請舉手發問。

1. 你已經學習英文多久？

- ☐ 1 年以下 ☐ 1~2 年 ☐ 2~3 年
☐ 3~4 年 ☐ 4~5 年 ☐ 5 年以上

2. 你是否課後補習？

- ☐ 沒有。
☐ 有，我已經課後補習_____月/年。

3. 你是否住過以英文為母語的國家？

- ☐ 沒有。
☐ 有，我曾經住在以英文為母語的國家_____月/年。

4. 你是否有考過小學英檢（GEPT Kids）的經驗？

- ☐ 沒有。
☐ 有，我在_____年級，考過_____次。

5. 你是否有考過劍橋兒童英語（YLE）的經驗？

- ☐ 沒有。
☐ 有，我在_____年級，考過_____次。

6. 你是否有考過全國兒童暨青少年英語分級檢定（STYLE/JET）的經驗？

- ☐ 沒有。
☐ 有，我在_____年級，考過_____次。

Appendix B

Phrase-cued Text Version of DIBELS Passage for Measuring ORF and RTF

Spring Is Coming

It has been so cold/ this winter.// The wind blew/ and blew.// It rained/ and rained.// The sky has been gray/ and dark.// I had to wear gloves/ and a hat/ to school/ every day.//

At first/ winter was fun.// Now/ I'm tired/ of the cold.// It has been too cold/ and wet/ to play outside.// At school,/ we sit/ in the library/ and read/ during rest time.// After school/ I just stay/ in the house/ and play.//

But/ today was nice.// The sun was shining brightly/ even though it was still cold.// The wind didn't blow.// My friends and I/ played kick ball/ at rest time.// We had to take off our jackets/ because we were warm.// We even got hot/ and thirsty.//

On the way home/ from school/ I saw a purple flower/ on our street.// It was blooming/ in the grass.// I told my mother /about it.// She wanted me/ to show it/ to her.// She bent down/ and touched it.//

"Come/ smell this,"/ she said.// It smelled like perfume/ and sun/ all mixed together.// "Spring must be coming,"/ she said.// "Because it's one/ of the first flowers/ of spring."// I can't wait for spring.//

Appendix C

Conventional Version of DIBELS Passage for Measuring ORF and RTF

Spring Is Coming

It has been so cold this winter. The wind blew and blew. It rained and rained. The sky has been gray and dark. I had to wear gloves and a hat to school every day.

At first winter was fun. Now I'm tired of the cold. It has been too cold and wet to play outside. At school, we sit in the library and read during rest time. After school I just stay in the house and play.

But today was nice. The sun was shining brightly even though it was still cold. The wind didn't blow. My friends and I played kick ball at rest time. We had to take off our jackets because we were warm. We even got hot and thirsty.

On the way home from school I saw a purple flower on our street. It was blooming in the grass. I told my mother about it. She wanted me to show it to her. She bent down and touched it.

"Come smell this," she said. It smelled like perfume and sun all mixed together. "Spring must be coming," she said. "Because it's one of the first flowers of spring." I can't wait for spring..