CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

As a preparation for the formal study, a pilot study was carried out by the researcher with two objectives in mind. The first objective was to investigate the feasibility of balanced reading program instructions for EFL beginners. The second objective was to determine which of the rich variety of balanced reading instructions appropriated for EFL beginners in the researcher’s classroom. The formal study; essentially followed the design of the preliminary pilot study, not only expanding the scope but also further exploring the effects on letter knowledge, phonological awareness and reading attitude. Based on the above objectives, the research questions are presented as follows:

1. How will the balanced reading instruction program affect students’ letter knowledge and phonological awareness in learning English?

2. How will the balanced reading instruction program affect students’ reading attitude in learning English?

A detailed description of the methodology adopted in the present study was illustrated in this chapter.
3.2 Pilot Study

The research setting involved the researcher’s first grade classroom of fifteen children at the private English Cram School in Taipei City, Taiwan (please see appendix 1). The school is located in the middle part of Da-an district which is an important educational, commercial, residential and cultural district of Taipei City. The researcher’s class met daily from 4.30 to 6.00 p.m. (90 minutes) a sharp contrast to public schools, which typically has 35-40 students per class and attended in the morning to afternoon session. Most of the students are from the same public school, which is located nearby this English cram school. They come to learn English as their foreign language after their whole day class in elementary school. The researcher taught spelling, language arts, reading, phonics and day to day English.

The class is comprised of students with various background (please see table 1). They came from different family background and possess a diverse learning behavior. While, some of them already have slight Basic English language knowledge and most of the others didn’t have any background of English language learning.

All the above theories and research and also backgrounds have had rich implications to the researcher in designing the current research. In the beginning of the research, researcher managed the classroom with a reading corner and decorated the classroom with some posters which supported students reading opportunity, implemented various strategies, activities and instructions in balanced reading instruction. During the research, beside classroom observation, field notes, interviews, surveys, learning
experience questionnaires, this also included the English alphabetic writing tests. All of those tools were used to help the researcher find out the students learning process.

Based on Cunningham and Hall (1998), the four blocks: A balanced framework for literacy in primary classrooms and also some other researchers such as Kelly(1997) and California Department of Education (1996) concluded Balanced Reading Instruction framework as below Guided Reading, Self-Selected Reading, Writing and Working with Words:

![Figure 3 The four blocks by Cunningham and Hall (1998)](image)

In the process of this study the researcher applied the above framework in order to enhance the students reading by combining and correlated the essential items in balanced reading instruction.

The participants were comprised of students with various backgrounds. They came from different family background with diverse learning behavior. Some of them already had slight basic foundation of English language knowledge, while most of the others didn’t have any background. In the first week of February, 2008, a pretest consisting of Phonemic Awareness (PA) items and an attitude questionnaire were given
to the participants to understand the starting level of their PA skills and their learning attitudes (please see appendix 5).

The cram school has an inventory of more than 800 English reading books of various genres and difficulty levels. The participants received a general textbooks teaching instruction which were set by the school director. The researcher tried to design different strategies for the participants during the pilot study which included the BRI components such as shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading (please see appendix 6). The participants then engaged in a 20 minutes independent reading of self-selected materials, while the researcher documents their progress. Reading notes were also written with the purpose of keeping track of the students reading session. The reading notes contained the information of the title of the book, pages of the book, and student’s satisfaction in reading. The participants were also interview informally during and after the pilot study regarding their reflection on the independent reading accomplished. The interview questions included their interaction with the environment, peers, or with the books that they read.

A group interview with the students was accomplished after the duration of the program, in order to gather the students’ perceptions toward the whole process. However, some problems and difficulties were encountered during the implementation of the program, such as:

- the range of underachiever’s limited English proficiency;
- difficulty in book selection;
- interference from the surroundings;
During the pilot study, the participants chose books of their interests, but yet are beyond their ability. As a result, actual reading does not seem to take place. Among the participants, four of the participants had better proficiency in reading English children books. However, participants mentioned that they couldn’t understand the entire book’s content. To ensure that the participants select the appropriate reading material that will cater to their ability. Suitable books were provided and properly coded. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to employ a monitoring system regarding the students’ book reading completion time, which simultaneously assessed their reading development.

Other information revealed from the reading notes were the students’ reasons behind the selection of specific books. Underachievers chose books according to the perceived difficulty levels. Personal preferences and whether the books provided First Language (L1) support were also noted. In addition, students were also inclined to select easy books, books with attractive illustrations, and bilingual books. These results are then used as a basis for books selection in the formal study that followed.

The third problem encountered during the pilot study can be investigated that the participants were passively initiate to read independently. They will read if the teacher insisted to read. Thus, the researcher set up a reading corner for the participants to have a cozy reading environment. Books bins were provided with selected books, posters, and flashcards. This effort was used to motivate and attract the participants’ into the enjoyment of reading.
The final problem encountered in the pilot study was the inconsistency of student attendance rate, which partly influenced the participants reading ability and learning attitude. In summary, the problems encountered during the pilot study, helped lay down the foundations for the following formal study, which were deemed crucial to the success of the BRI action research being conducted.

The pilot study was a trial for designing a balanced reading program that really works for the EFL beginners to help their reading skills and might changed their learning attitude. The researcher used different methods of teaching during this period of time. Interviews used to gain some background regarding their learning attitudes, which were later used in the discussion of the results. The Pilot study was also used to determine the appropriate instructional, to explore the steps of materials presentation, and also test the administration of the instruments, and analysis of the data gathered. This pilot study thus served as a guide for the present formal study.

3.2.1 Participants

Fifteen participants were divided into three levels of reading proficiency. Twelve (ages 6 to 8) of the participants came from the same elementary school, and two (age 5) came from the same kindergarten. While, the remaining student (age 5) came from another kindergarten. The participants were ten boys and five girls. They were coded as SB1, SB2, SG3, SB4, SB5, SB6, SG7, SB8, SG9, SG10, SB11, SB12, SB13, SG14, and SB15 (SB is Student Boy, while SG is Student Girl).
Participants were kindergarten students, first grade students, and second grade students in the elementary school. Their English proficiencies were categorized at low or basic level. SB1, SB2, SG3, and SB4 have prior basic knowledge of English as they can spell and read some short vocabulary words. The researcher categorized these four participants as better level reader in the first grade class. SB6 and SB11 have family supported English knowledge so they also knew basic English letters and alphabets sounds, even though they possess little skills in listening and speaking, they still need to improve their reading and writing skills, while, the rest of the participants were classified as beginners. In addition, the elementary school were the participants are enrolled, are considered to be of good quality. (See Table. 1)
Table 1.
Description of Students’ Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>English learning background</th>
<th>Cram school experience</th>
<th>Parent’s education background</th>
<th>English learning supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SB1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Non</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Master</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>31/2 years</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>31/2 years</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Non</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Non</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Non</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Non</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB14</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following are individual descriptions of the student participants:

SB1 is one of the older students in this first grade class, he came only two days a week for Spelling and Day to day English plus more reading and speaking class on Wednesday. He was good in spelling and already had basic knowledge of Phonics when he was in Kindergarten. He needs to improve his reading and speaking skills.
SB2 is a bright and high cheerful boy, who always tries to get teacher’s attention by answering and extremely high in expressing himself in class. He has very strong vocabulary bank and initiatively practice the lesson at home. His parents are teachers and they fully support him in all his subjects. He needs to improve and build up skills in speaking and reading comprehension. He should also learn how to work in team.

SG3 is a smart and active girl. She is a quick learner and has strong basic knowledge in phonics. She is a good reader, however she still need improvement in her reading comprehension, she didn’t really understand the context of reading and her grammar understanding was not so stable yet.

SB4 is a clever and smart boy, he was sent by his parents to improve his speaking skills and reading ability. He has good English speaking but he needs to rearrange and strengthen his grammar in order to build correct sentences. He doesn’t really like to speak in English because he thought English is a foreign language and as a Chinese he shouldn’t keep speaking in English.

SB5 is a calm and passive speaker in class. He was transferred to the current cram school because his parents working area had changed. He rarely speaks out loud, but he is a critical thinker. When he was on his first week in the English cram school, he refused to speak and talk. For him English is one of the academic studies, which he has to learn and accomplish the assignments, therefore, he doesn’t show any progress at the beginning of
SB6 and SB11 have almost the same background, wherein their parents care so much about their English speaking progress. (爸爸叫我要多講英文，因為英語對我們未來會有幫助，出國玩的時候會用到的。Interview notes: February 10, 2008). They came to study when they were 5 years old. Compared to their kindergarten school classroom activities, which was conducted in Chinese, they were complaining about the Writing; their current English cram school was not exactly the same. They felt too hard to write in English and show anxious and boredom during textbooks instruction, which are considered too difficult to them. (寫英文字，好累 喔! 我比較喜歡上自然發音的課。Interview notes: February 10, 2008).

SG7 is a polite and shy girl. She showed her effort in learning even though she did not quite understand the instructions well. (我聽不懂也一定要繼續學，因爲爸爸希望我英語有進步。Interview notes: February 12, 2008). Her classmates SG9 and SG10 were glad that they could be together in the English cram school. The students were happy that they could learn together. (我們可以同班學習真好！我可以跟她座在一起嗎？Interview notes: February 12, 2008).

SB8 is an energetic and active boy; he loves to help others during class time, but he is very slow in writing and possesses many problems with his learning focus. He felt
English is difficult. He felt that his English ability is poor, and he couldn’t understand words or sentences. He can’t read out loud. He assumed that his English ability is the worst, as he often loses his attention and concentration. He is unconfident of himself. (学英文很难，我的英文能力很烂，考试很烂。上课老师用英文听不懂。Interview notes: February 14, 2008).

SB12, SB13 and SB15 had similar background knowledge and think that learning English is difficult. They could not follow their teacher’s instruction in English. They could read the words only when repeated by their teacher. They thought they are very poor in every lesson. Lack concentrations and didn’t listen during class time. Their minds were always wandering. (不喜欢英文，因为英文很难。上课的时候，听不懂老师用英文讲，上(英文)课有时候很烦，老师一直讲，英文听不懂，很烦。老师写在黑板的字，句子有些看得懂，有些看不懂。自己的英文能力不好。困难在看不懂也更不会阅读英文。我是这里面三个最不好的。上课的时候，有时候有听，有时候没听。有听的时候听不懂，没听的时候发呆。Interview notes: February 14, 2008).

**Interview notes** (parents): November 18, 2008

One of the reasons why I put my daughter to the elementary school is because we were both working until late evening, and nobody will take care of her. So we decided to find a school who offers full day classes with variety of study and good quality of education.
Most of their parents decided to put their children in cram schools with several objectives as such:

- to improve their children’s English ability;
- to finish and review their children’s elementary school homework including English;
- to take care of their children before they got off from work.

**Interview notes** (grade two teachers): February 18, 2008

“I don’t know how to deal with this student, he was sleeping while I taught and when I asked why he could be like that he told me that he need to finish all his homework until midnight and he didn’t take a nap during their school recess time. He also has problem with his spelling, he doesn’t know how to spell well until now. He really poor behind performance in English.”

**3.2.2 Phonemic Awareness test**

To determine the participants’ background knowledge and ability in English learning, the researcher conducted phonemic awareness test during the pilot study. And the results showed as in table 1. (Showed as Table below)
Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>PA pretest score</th>
<th>PA posttest score</th>
<th>PA Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SB1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>+21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>+18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>+12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG10</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG13</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB14</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SB15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The PA test was adopted version of Blevins’ phonemic awareness assessment (1998, p.31). The arrangement of five subtasks corresponded to the complexity of five levels of PA proposed by Adams (1990). They were: rhyme detection, oddity tasks, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and phonemic manipulation (please see appendix 4). The first two rhyme detection and oddity tasks were auditory and written subtests administered collectively whereas the remaining three on phoneme blending, segmentation and manipulation were auditory and oral subtests which required the subjects to respond orally and individually. Each subtest contained ten items. There were two principles for selecting words for the PA test. First, only monosyllabic words
consisted of two or three phonemes were chosen. Second, half of the stimulus words appeared in phonics and spelling and also reading teaching materials (please see appendix 2).

The pilot study lasted for more than two months, during this time the researcher keep tracks of the students’ reading improvement, while taking notes and reflecting on the students’ reactions. These observations were then discussed with her colleagues and cram school director. Then on, curriculum development was done, which is later implemented. At the end, the researcher collects the data and proceeds with the analysis and description of the results.

Table 2 shows the result wherein the first five students (SB1 to SB5) have a high pre-test PA scores, this are probably caused by their prior knowledge of PA during their kindergarten time. However, the remaining 10 students showed little improvement in their PA scores. Since the sample size was too small in the pilot study, the researcher decided to design a balanced reading program for those weaker readers in the formal study.

3.2.3 Teaching materials setting:

During the pilot study, one of the findings revealed that book selections affect the learners’ language development and attitudes toward reading. Similarly, the pilot study also revealed that the participants were surprised and shows lack of confidence, during
book selection. Therefore, efforts were made to solve this problem, which was to provide the participants with a choice of different level books into the books bin at the reading corner.

Book selection is critical as not all books are equally effective with ELLs (Smallwood, 1991; Tabors, 1997), especially with weak readers who find it hard to locate an appropriate book to read. In BRI program, skills taught are perfected through stories (Blair-Larsen & Williams, 1999). The researcher selects books and looks through books based on rich visual and pictorial support to provide students’ prediction into the meaning content; more attractive and appropriate with their level study, mostly with lots of repetition; at last the books may stimulate children’s curiosity.

The books’ length should not be too long as to allow them to finish in a short time and experience success frequently (see Figure. 4)
Several books were selected during the research process, such as the Children’s Literature, which is beneficial not only for English native speakers but also for ESL/EFL children in acquiring English effectively (Allen, 1989). Picture books and story books are the favorite books for children not only in the classroom but also at home. They are particularly recommended for teaching young learners in the EFL context because they provide clear illustrations along with reading texts (Smallwood, 1998).
Most of children learned language from repetition. Chants can be a fun way for students to acquire new vocabulary and use this language in proper syntax. Even the youngest learners will enjoy the repetition and rhythm of these language activities. On track reading books were also helped the early reading students to experience the pattern of each rhymes and the students will also learn new words in it.

EFL beginners in the context of Taiwan cram school have problem in acquiring the English reading, some of bilingual books are potential in helping low-level, reluctant readers to pick up their first book because reluctant readers can always turn back on the native language version on the opposite or the back page when a comprehension problem arises (Renandya, 2007). The early reading success in books approached motivation to read more. However, the researcher should pay more attention as soon as the learners have built up enough confidence in reading so they should move on to monolingual English children literature (Renandya, 2007).

In order to find way to improve the students Phonics ability, the researcher prepared several package of books which were used for the participants in their independent reading time. The researcher also designed worksheets and test papers as supplementary materials. The materials selected based on the following criteria( Ellis & Brewster, 1991). First, books contain rich visual and picture support to provide predictive cues for the content meaning of the unfamiliar words; second, should be appropriate with the reader’s level and age of reading usually repetition or chant suitable for them, the last
criteria is the story must be interested and connected closely to readers’ life experiences or background culture.

3.3 Formal Study

After going through more than two months pilot study, the researcher discovered several problems through observations, PA test, interviews. The following problems were:

1. The weaker readers showed extremely poor ability in letter knowledge, phonological awareness in English reading.

2. The middle and weaker readers showed lack of confident and low motivated during reading class.

In order to solve and assist the students’ problems, the researcher as also a practitioner in the present study decided to continue designing and encounter BRI program into the next semester study.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

In order to gather information and produce evidence to show the effectiveness of balanced reading instruction affected their letter knowledge, phonological awareness and reading attitude in English, data was collected from several sources to allow triangulation. The quantitative data included the Abecedarian reading assessment test, running records of reading behavior from individual reading, work samples from student reading response journals. The qualitative data included excerpts from teacher’s journal,
anecdotal of reading activities, and the voices of students, parents and colleagues, as expressed in recordings, conversations, observations, pre and post-test of reading attitude questionnaire, surveys and interviews.

3.4.1 Observation

Field observations of 16 weeks classroom activities carried out one time a week over months of the first school term in the 2008 academic year. The observations conducted during the BRI sessions at the English classroom were in the form of participant-observation, in which the researcher was available for providing any assistance if needed. The observations focused on weaker reader’s letter knowledge, phonological awareness, and also their reading attitude or responses to the texts. How they interact with the physical environment, the books, the rewarding, and their reading partners are also part in the observations. These sessions were partly video-taped; the research site atmosphere and incidents were jotted down in the researcher’s field notes. Afterward the contents of the field notes were transcribed word by word and analyzed.

The researcher has to come into the research site with a broad focus of inquiry. Then, through the ongoing process of observing and participating in the setting, recording what was seen and heard, and analyzing the data, the researcher were able to identify the salient aspects of the setting (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).
3.4.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted to understand the experience of the participants and the meanings they make of their experiences (Richard, 2003). Interviews are particularly important when one is interested in gaining participants’ perspectives, the language and meanings constructed by individuals. Five students were selected to be interviewed during this study. The selection was based on the participants’ performances during the present study. The colleagues were also selected as the interviewees to encounter problems among other students.

3.4.3 Researcher’s Journals

In this study, qualitative research was the major method of the project; therefore reflexive journals (field notes, interview notes, observation notes) were kept as the study moved on. The journal is a source of valuable reflection for the researcher. The researcher’s journal (please see appendix 10) in this study served several purposes: first, it evidenced the crucial reflection about the researcher’s biases throughout the study. Second, it proposed an opportunity to reflect on what was occurring in the study and to keep a record of decisions and issues that were particularly important in tracing the evolution of a continual study. Third, the journal extended an account of the researcher's evolution in terms of methodology, methods choices, and development as a researcher (Torres & Mogolda, 2002).
3.4.4 Document Reviews

Moreover, the participants reading record kept implemented during the program also provide valuable information. At the beginning of the home reading log, the researcher provided a guideline for keeping the book (please see appendix 9). The information to be recorded on the subsequent page included the book titles, number of pages, word counts of the book they have read. In addition, the participant evaluated the book individually and provided short reflection on reading that particular book. The form of the reflection could be their feeling of reading it, a short summary, the most impressive part of the book, or the words they have learned from that book.

In a BRI program, readers can self-selected the books and abandon when they feel that they couldn’t or did not want to move on. In the present study, the participants were also allowed to do so. To understand why they felt that they were not willing to stick with their book selection, they would keep the record of the decision of abandonment. Keeping track of what has been read and their feeling toward such an endeavor helped the participants realize if they were actually making a difference or simply maintaining the status quo. By combining methods of data collection, the credibility of the findings was also increased.
3.4.5 Running Records

The running record showed in appendix represent the book that one of the students read. Running record can tell us a great deal more than just the match between child and text, however. They are invaluable tool for helping teachers observe exactly which types of miscues children are making, and how children are attempting to make use of the interactive cue systems (for example, graphic, syntactic, semantic, visual) in word identification (Clay, 1994). It helped teacher analyze student’s specific reading behaviors such as monitor their own miscues, self corrected and cross–checked. Running record revealed the students’ independent as a reader. (Appendix 9)

3.4.6 The Pre-test and the Post-test Reading Attitude Questionnaires

Before the formal study started, the researcher gave out a pre test questionnaire for the parents to fill in regarding their children’s attitude toward learning English (see appendix 11). Regarding to the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted and re-designed the questionnaires from “The Reading Questionnaire” originally conducted by Hsieh(2001) and Fu(2008).
3.5.6.1 The Pre-test of Reading Attitude Questionnaires

The Questionnaires divided into 3 sections; (a) is describing the students’ personal background and parent’s educational background, (b) is examining experiences of reading English children books, (c) is investigate attitudes toward reading.

Part A of the questionnaire content fourteen questions with yes and no answers of experience of reading English children’s books. Regarding to their personal experience through reading by asking have they ever read or listened to an English story on TV, VCD or books? When they read English children books, did they just look at the pictures or words? How their parents care about their reading improvement by providing books for them, read stories for them and how their classmates play roles as motivators to read more English children books, even how the teachers would help such telling stories in English during class time to encourage their reading of English children’s books.

Part B of the questionnaire content twenty questions with always, sometimes, seldom and never questions.

Question 1 was asked the student’s feeling when he/she read English children books. (當我閱讀英文童書時，我覺得輕鬆快樂的。)

Question 2 was to determine how he/she likes the English children books. (我喜歡看英文童書。)

Question 3 was to check how they react if they got English children books as their gift. (當我收到的禮物是一本英文童書時，我會覺得很高興。)
Question 4 asked how they responses if they were provided with reading environment by taking them to library or bookstore. (我喜歡到圖書館或班級圖書區翻閱新的英文童書來看，我樂在其中。)

Question 5 was to convinced did they feel pressure when they read English children books. (我喜歡到圖書館或班級圖書區翻閱新的英文童書來看，我樂在其中。)

Question 6 asked how they spend their holiday by reading English children books. (當我收到的禮物是一本英文童書時，我會覺得很興。)

Question 7 compared the interest of reading English children books with English textbooks. (我覺得在課堂上閱讀英文童書比上課本有趣。)

Question 8 determines how English children books attracted and get their interest. (我覺得看英文童書是一件很有趣的事，會吸引我去做。)

Question 9 checked on how easy the English children books for he/she. (閱讀英文童書對我而言是一件容易的事。)

Question 10 convinced the students English ability improvement by reading English children books. (我覺得閱讀英文童書能讓我英文能力進步。)

Question 11 to enquire the students obtains more knowledge by reading English children books. (我覺得閱讀英文童書可以獲得更多知識。)

Question 12 to enquire the students can learn more vocabulary through reading English children books. (我覺得閱讀英文童書可以學到更多的單字。)
Question 13 to acquire the students can learn more sentence pattern after reading English children books. (我覺得閱讀英文童書可以學到更多的句型。)

Question 14 asked their interest was billed by classmate recommendation of English children books. (同學向我推薦一本英文童書時，我會去閱讀。)

Question 15 to tested did they feel pressed while reading English children books. (不需要父母或老師的催促，我會自己閱讀英文童書。)

Question 16 convinced how they spend their break time by reading English children books. (我會利用學校的下課時間閱讀英文童書。)

Question 17 determines whether they read books spontaneously. (我從不主動閱讀英文童書。)

Question 18 to ask their parents providing books in their children learning environment. (我希望父母親買英文童書給我閱讀。)

Question 19 to ask their parents willingness to read English children book to their children. (我希望父母親能陪我閱讀英文童書。)

Question 20 to enquire the school effort in order to buy more English children books for the students. (我希望學校能購買英文童書給我們閱讀。)

3.5.6.2 The Post-test of Reading Attitude Questionnaires

The post-test of reading attitude questionnaire (see appendix 13) contained;(a) students’ background information, including genders, name of the school,(b) the same as in pre-test to examine students’ reading attitudes toward English children literatures,(c)
open-ended questions which revised from “The Questionnaire on student responses to the BLCRP” by Huang(2003) to investigate students’ responses to the BRI. It included what their favorite stories were, how the teacher’s methods facilitate their reading comprehension, how the phonics instruction helps them, what kinds of language skills they make progress, what kinds of difficulties they feel, how much they like the story telling classes. Questions are as following:

1. Please rank the six English stories that teacher told from most favorite to the least favorite!
2. What kind of teacher’s methods for story telling can help me comprehend the story?
3. How does the phonics instruction help you?
4. After story classes, I think I improve in?
5. During the process of storytelling classes, I feel difficult most in?
6. Do you like the storytelling classes?

The above questions were asked by the researcher individually to the fifteen participants during the study process.

3.5.6.3 Interview Questions

To elicit more in-depth responses of students’ attitude toward English children literatures and to BRI, the semi-structured interviews were conducted. The items on the questionnaires include their reading feeling, reading belief, reading behavior, expectation of parents or teachers’ supports and responses to the BRI, were used as the interview
guide. Four students were chosen and interviewed. Inclusive of two with high reading proficiency, one with intermediate reading proficiency and one with low reading proficiency. It took about ten to fifteen minutes interview time individually; the process of the interview was recorded and will be transcribed as data support and further interpret the results based on the instruments.

3.4.7 Coding the Data

Before processing all the data collections, the researcher set up signs to conceal the participants’ identities. The participants were coded with their initials (SB1 for Student Boy-1 and Student Girl-1). Their significant others were coded based on their relations to the participants; such as, the elementary English teacher (ET), their parents (PSG7, PSB2, and PSB4). The different sources of data were also coded, such as field note (FN), interview (I), researcher’s journal (RJ), and running record (RR). These codes were used gradually in the data. The first code would stand for the source of data, the second code would stand for the participant, and the third code would be the serial number of the data file.
3.4.8 Prepare the data for analysis

After the data were collected, the researcher would transcribe them in three weeks. The first page of each data file would indicate the basic information about the data file. For example, at the beginning of an interview transcript, the researcher would state the names of the interviewer and the interviewee, the date and time the interview was conducted, the place where the interview took place, the time consumed for that interview, and a summary of the interview content and a brief description of the atmosphere.

3.4.9 Analysis Process

When data were collected and throughout coding then analyze the data. The data in the present study were organized and analyzed by using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore analysis process consisted of 3 steps. At the first step involved the researcher’s reading and re-reading the data to discover units of meaning and assigning a code to each unit.

The second step was to categorize all the units of meaning. The researcher has to sort and placed some units of meaning into temporary categories based on the look/feel-alike criteria. Then a summary was written for each category, and each unit was reselecting to determine whether it compound category rule or if it should be categorized in elsewhere. If a unit of meaning could not be classified under any category, a new category was formed. Affiliate if certain categories contained insufficient data, the researcher returned to the field to collect more data. After all the units of meaning were
categorized and coded, the researcher reviewed those categories for any overlap and ambiguity and refined the categories if necessary. In the process of categorizing data, the researcher also had to fixed with negative and discrepant aspects; rules for conclusion and categorization were revised to account for all the cases.

During the process of study and investigating, some categories were intervened, some deleted, some were mixed or joined with a more general category, and some new ones were added. The data collection and data analysis continued until “the theoretical saturation point” was reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1990); that was when all the categories and relationships between categories were well supported.

At the end, the researcher tried to integrate all the data and observed the relationships and major point among categories. These points formed the results of the study. The research report was then written up to present the results.

The study lasted for more than five months, during this time of instruction the researcher kept open conversations, reflections, and shared critically thinking with other colleagues. Classes are also observed by the English director, which were then on developed into the curriculum and intervention. At the end of the five months, the researcher then gathered the data and generalization were made. Figure 6 shows the specific research time line with corresponding years and months.
3.5 Research Process

Two days a week (on Wednesdays) for more than four months from March to August, 2008, fifteen EFL beginners started with the pre-test and engaged the exact program of BRI from April – July then they had the post-test. With exclusion of preparation week for resumption of the semester, monthly test each month, program was held with a total of 24 sessions.

3.5.1 Teaching methods and process

This study was conducted to improve students’ reading ability and increase their attitude toward learning English because the researcher found students’ reading ability was so poor in the previous pilot study and most students were also not showing interested and enhance in reading English Children Literature, including textbooks, storybooks, easy reading books, etc. After reviewing related literatures, the researcher considers that BRI with the aids of English children literatures might be helpful to improve students reading ability and their reading attitude toward English children literatures. Therefore, the researcher designed an EFL balanced reading instruction program for the students. It is also designed the research instruments, including an English Word recognition test, the Abecedarian Reading Assessment and a reading attitude questionnaire, to investigate the effects of BRI to the first grade students.
The instruction time was one hour and thirty minute class period each and the instruction duration lasted for twenty four weeks. During this twenty four weeks instruction, the researcher video recorded and recorded students’ performances in the teaching journals, logs. The students also studied the normal regular instruction of the textbooks in this study.

The instruction included teaching new words, sight words, dialogues, and phonics rules in the textbooks. For students in the study, they reviewed and did more exercises or practices that they were taught in the textbooks in the normal regular English class. In addition, the post-test reading attitude questionnaire was designed to get a deep insight of student’s attitudes toward English children books and several questions for students in the present study were designed to elicit their responses toward the EFL balanced reading instruction. During the implementing process the researcher conducted and re-designs the new intervention in two cycles. Finally, the collected data were gathered and analyzed qualitatively by the process of cycle in the action research implementing- intervention-implementing. The steps of the whole study procedure illustrated (see Figure. 5):
The impact of Letter Knowledge, Phonological awareness and reading attitude on EFL beginners in a Taiwan cram school

Pilot Study + Pre-test PA + Pre-test Reading Attitude Questionnaire

Design EFL Balanced Reading Instruction

**Cycle I**
- Shared Reading
- Self-Selected Reading
- Word-Study activities
- Story telling

**Cycle II**
- Guided Reading
- Self Selected Reading
- Phonics and Phonemic Awareness Skills
- Sight Vocabulary
- More better strategies

**Cycle III**
- Shared & Guided Reading
- Partner reading
- Add more reading materials
- Special reading program

- Post-test word recognition and phonemic awareness test
- Post-test Reading Attitude Questionnaire
- The Abecedarian Reading Assessment
- Observation, Running Records, Other Measurements
- Interviews
- Research journal
- Document reviews
- Running records

*Figure. 5* Research steps in methodology
3.5.2 Action Research Cycle One

The researcher began by grouping the class according to their needs and abilities. In order to ensure that they were engaging in lots of reading at their independent level, as well as receiving the necessary teaching at their instructional level. The researcher used the pilot study’s pre and post-test, Self made assessments data from previous study done in February, and the anecdotal data from the individual reading group, to determine reading levels and learning needs (please Table 3).

Table 3. Research Timeframe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material design (pilot study)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilot Study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis and material design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action research cycles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis and conclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Action research cycle I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle I</th>
<th>Strategies and Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April 2008</td>
<td>Weekly whole group shared reading using various, rhymes, songs and chants activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 times a week small group reading activities, using selected leveled books.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Daily word study activities, including spelling, phonics and working with words, using spectrum phonics, spelling and reading book.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Twice a week story telling activities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weekly whole group shared reading using various, rhymes, songs and chants activity:

During the process in Cycle I (see Table.4), the researcher taught the participants’ rhymes, songs and chants activity in whole group shared reading strategies such as Eentsy Weency Spider, One, two, buckle my shoes, two little black birds adopted from Wee Sing collections. The lesson plans could be seen in Appendix 24.

Three times a week small group reading activities, using selected leveled books

The researcher’s classroom library consisted of a variety of trade books, as well as her private collection books. The practitioner organized these books into leveled bins according to the method described in the book, Guided Reading by Fountas and Pinnell (2001). The organization ensured that the children would be able to select appropriate books for independent reading, rather than books which were too hard or too easy for them (Figure 5). It had been noticed during the quiet reading time, many of the weaker
readers were choosing books which were too easy for them and also too difficult, and were simply pretending to read them.

The researcher set up a classroom routine whereby students were expected to choose books from the appropriate level, read them independently, and then write about them in a piece of paper, which later on collected as their own journal. This procedure required a lot of modeling and teaching. For the beginning the researcher started with two little components, the title of the book and the author. Eventually, some of the students were asking to write the publisher name and they also counted the pages. The researcher kept motivating by asking them to find their favorite page in the book. Draw and find out the characters in the book. They really enjoy the moments when everyone was busy to draw, color and also find out words to describe the characters.

Apparently this strategy didn’t lead to the improvement of the weaker readers. The pretest which the researcher use was based on the Abecedarian assessment, which demonstrated that “What exactly happen to these kids? How will they learn better and what can I do as a practitioner to get these kids reading and writing better? What does the exact and effective way to teach them?” (Field notes: February, 2008)

Daily word study activities, including spelling, phonics and working with words, using textbooks.

According to the curriculum and syllabus which the school English director had arranged that every Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. The students have to
practice spelling three new vocabulary words each day. As a regular English class, the researcher has to teach from the textbooks as the major syllabus.

Twice a week storytelling activities

The researcher also implemented storytelling activity which lesson plan could be seen in Appendix 23. The storybooks such as; Brown bear, brown bear what do you see? (Martin & Carle, 2007), The Turnip (Harriet Ziefert, 1996), The Farm (Rod Campbell, 1998), Puss in Boots (Marie Cook, 1998), Little Red Riding Hood (McIlvain, 1996) were presented during the BRI program.

Reflection and Actions during the cycle one:

1. Limited books of appropriated level for Shared Reading, and also limited time to really selected books required in other library. The cram school textbooks were too difficult for them. And they were not suitable for weaker or middle level readers to read as their independent reading books.

Solving problem:
Researcher has to find more books out of school, public library or university library and also suggested the director to buy for school library.

2. The classroom setting has to be changed and innovated differently in the study.

Solving problem:
The researcher tried to design the classroom to be a cozy and supported room for reading group.
3. The students attendance duration were varies (8 of the students come from Monday – Friday, 3 of the students come every Tuesday and Thursday, 3 of the students come every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and 1 of the students come two days in a week, Monday and Wednesday).

Solving problem:

This varies attendance influenced the participants indirectly affected this study, students who come only two days or three days a week will have no opportunities to have a whole study of the present program. Those who come everyday from Monday to Friday will have rich knowledge and experiences which automatically build their confident and motivation in reading English and learning English. So researcher or practitioner need to devoted extra times to mark up and catch up the missing part. In this case, the researcher made individual progressing during the program study.

3.5.3 Action Research Cycle Two

Because this struggling group of readers had very limited sight vocabulary and weak phonics skills, the researcher knew that they needed to work more on these areas. And they also had to develop a repertoire of good reading strategies and more fluent readers. So she had to come up with some strategies to motivate them to engage in reading.

The researcher was working alone for all these objectives because every teacher has their own responsibility and work to accomplish. Spend more time for those remedial
students by accompany them in reviewing and catching up after class finish. Every teacher has their own works and for foreign teachers, they will just leave the school after class finish. The parents in a cram school won’t engage too much either, during the time where their kids are in the cram school. Thus, the researcher couldn’t find any parents who are willing to volunteers and help those learning disability, low esteem students, and remedial readers. Parents were informed every week through communication books regarding about program activities in the school (see Table. 5).

Table 5 Action research cycle II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle II</th>
<th>Strategies and Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>Same as Cycle I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increased sight vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better phonemic awareness and phonics skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More time on task and practice actually reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better use of good reading strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher started to set schedule for reading conferences with one or two of the weaker readers. The researcher tried to implement one of the balanced reading strategies. The teaching was guided by many strategies described in the books Fifty Strategies for teaching English Language Learners by Adrienne Herrel and Michael Jordan. At the end of each session, wrote personal notes to the children to reinforce what they had done well and to remind them to work better next.

Reflections and Actions during cycle two:

1. Limited time to prepare richer sight words practice materials to support the sight word vocabulary activities.

Solving problem:

Researcher bought some teaching materials to support the present study.
Researcher felt unsatisfied with her personal understanding and knowledge in teaching phonics skills and reading skills.

Solving problem:

Researcher kept enriching herself to study and learn from other instructors about teaching English especially in Phonics and EFL beginners. She dedicated her time to attend teacher training and workshops held by some institutions in Taiwan. (Oxford University Press, Cambridge Examination of Young Learner, and Pearson Press) see Table. 6

3.5.4 Action Research Cycle Three

Table.6 Action research cycle III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle II</th>
<th>Strategies and Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June to July 2008</td>
<td>1. Partner reading/ peers reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. More words study instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. More non-fiction reading material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Every week communication book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Special Reading program with another teacher for the Summer Program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partner Reading/ Peers reading

The students were paired with their partners to do repeated readings of familiar material. Sometimes I let them choose their own partners and sometimes I paired a stronger reader with a weaker reader.

More words study instruction.

We (me and the kids) made words card with cut-up letters, and little pocket alphabets books. I knew the several of the weaker students needed additional teaching to improve their phonemic awareness and understanding of how words work.
More non-fiction reading material.

I started searching for more non-fiction reading material that would appeal to the interests of the reluctant readers. I felt that they would be more motivated to read about real things, like sports and animals. I designed a game or activities where they can express themselves as the baseball players (Yankees, New York Team, Taiwan R.O.C Mr. Jian – Ming, Wang). When I showed them a picture of the real tiger or dinosaur. I also gave them papers to explore and draw their own imagination pictures (please see appendix). I found out most of them love drawing and talented in drawing.

More instruction in reading strategies.

I sent home information to teach parents about ways to help at home (please see appendix). This excerpt from my journal demonstrates my thinking. “I have to give parents the knowledge and references to prompt the children appropriately.” (Shirly, Journal, June, 2008)

Every week communication book

The communication book report were helped me to understand and know more about the kids performance and response at home. Some parents will willingly reply my comments, but there’re also some of them didn’t give any feedback at all (please see appendix

Special Reading program

This program was conducted with another teacher for the Summer Program. Annie Chen who was also one of the teacher in our cram school lead a group of young children in a summer reading program where they used books from Oxford University Press Publishing.
In May, after four weeks of assistance for the lower reading group, the researcher re-evaluated their skills by using the Self Assessment Test which was held in the beginning. The Abecedarian Test. The researcher was impressed, as from this quote demonstrates.

They’re improved slightly sight words and word recognition. They also had built their reading attitude and behavior much better than the first time they were in class.” (Field notes: May, 2008)

Although they were improved in sight vocabulary, but the researcher felt that they were still reading below what she considered to be acceptable in Grade Two for the next semester. They didn’t speak much English orally during and out of class time. She determined to modify the plan to ensure more time on task, more motivation to do reading activities and more reading instruction for the whole class.

The researcher believed that by including these activities in the program, it would encourage more time on task with the weaker group of readers. She had to change the environment to include more intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The researcher wanted to create an atmosphere in which the children either had to read, or wanted to read. Motivators included small group and individual reading activities where the teacher could demand attention to the reading task, written feedback during reading group, the use of non-fiction reading materials, take home books and the use of incentives, where students receive rewards for engaging in reading activities.

The researcher was somewhat concerned about the use of rewards because in her belief the children’s motivation of reading and their behavior toward reading is not just because they were promised to get a reward. But it should be a natural desire to love
reading as part of their reward. The rewards system was just for short term, but we may consider changing the recess time as their reward. In addition, the researcher preferred to use food and books or stickers as prizes.

3.6 Teacher as an Action Researcher

Action research has been used in many areas, where an understanding of complex social situations has been sought in order to improve the quality of life. Kurt Lewin; often cited as the originator of action research, used the methodology in his work with people affected by post-war social problems (McKernan, 1991). Action research approaches to educational research were adopted in the late 60s and early 70s by the teacher-researcher movement in the secondary education sector. Its combination of action and research had contributed to the attraction to researchers, teachers, and the academic community alike (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

Action research into our own teaching practice is an important source of learning for the teachers. Here, we can describe the nature of action research, and describe its use in the on-going development and evaluation of a new teaching modules. It is the goal of an action research to approach teaching, and to improve the teaching and learning practices. This also sought to bring the practicing classroom teacher into the research process as the most effective person to identify problems and to find solutions. The scope of action research as a method is impressive. It can be used in almost any setting where a problem involving people, tasks and procedures cries out for solution (Cohen et al., 2007).
All of the above mentioned researches adopt a methodical, iterative approach embracing problem identification, action planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection. The insights gained from the initial cycle feed into planning of the second cycle, for which the action plan is modified and the research process repeated (please see Figure 6).

Kolb (1984) extended this model to offer a conception of the action research cycle as a learning process, whereby people learn and create knowledge by critically reflecting upon their own actions and experiences, forming abstract concepts, and testing the implications of these concepts in new situations. Practitioners can create their own knowledge and understanding of a situation and act upon it, thereby improving practice and advancing knowledge in the field.

![Figure 6](image)

**Figure 6** The action research process (Kolb, 1984)

Action research has a number of further distinctive features, as described by Zuber-Skerritt (1982). For her, action research is critical collaborative enquiry by reflective practitioner who makes results by self evaluate participative problem-solving and continuing professional development. According to this view, action research is
critical in the sense that practitioners not only look for ways to improve their practice within the various constraints of the situation in which they are working, but are also critical change agents of those constraints, and of themselves. It is reflective in that participants analyze and develop concepts and theories about their experiences.

Action researchers are accountable in that they aim to make their learning process and its results public, both to each other and to other interested practitioners, using accessible terminology. Their practice is self-evaluated in that the reflective and analytical insights of the researcher-practitioners themselves form the basis of the developmental process. Action research is participative in that those involved contribute equally to the inquiry, and collaborative in that the researcher is not an expert doing research from an external perspective, but a partner working with and for those affected by the problem and the way in which it is tackled.

3.6.1 Triangulation

Triangulation is labeled as the “between methods “type, and represents the most popular use of triangulation. For example, the effectiveness of a leader may be studied by interviewing the leader, observing her/his behavior, and evaluating performance records (Jick, 1979)

Triangulation increases the probability that credible findings and interpretations will be produced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, the technique of triangulation was adopted by using different data sources (with the first grade students as the key informants, the researcher, and students significant others, including their English teacher,
peers, and parents) and different data collection methods (observations, in-depth interviews, running records, researchers’ journals, reading record books, test results, etc.). Furthermore, the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The research site was also video-taped and detailed description was provided. In the meantime, the researcher took field notes to supplement the recordings. Thus, credibility was also accomplished by confirming the field notes with what had been recorded on video and audio-tapes.