

Chapter One

Introduction

Chapter One briefly introduces the goal of the present study, its purpose and its significance. Chapter Two deals with the literature review, including the theory of reading, the types of reading, the comparison between extensive and intensive reading, the components of cloze test, and previous studies on the reading activity. Chapter Three is concerned with the methodology of the study, regarding the participants, the instruments, the procedures, and the data analysis. Chapter Four and Five are for result and discussion, and Chapter Six is for the conclusion.

1.1 Goal of the Study

The goal of the study is to explore the effects of traditional, intensive and extensive reading instruction on cloze test performance of low achievers in vocational high schools. Cloze test is a common test in many important English examinations not only because it is easy to score but because it can also examine test-takers' integrative language skills. Cloze test usually contains global and local comprehension items. Global comprehension items refer to those items which require examinees to understand meanings between sentences or paragraphs, to make inferences or to draw conclusions, while local comprehension test items examine their knowledge of grammar, tense, vocabulary or phrase, and understand meanings within a sentence (Lu, 2002). Getting high scores in cloze test means that one has a good command of his overall language skills.

For vocational high school students, cloze test, along with reading comprehension test, is one of the most difficult tests in the English Examination for Technological and Vocational Education Joint College Entrance Examination (EEFTC) (Lu, 2002). With cloze test taking up 20-40 points averagely in the English Examination every year, which is a high proportion compared with other tests, helping vocational high school students improve their cloze test performance seems a top priority both to the school teachers and students themselves.

For intermediate-level students in vocational high schools, constant cloze test exercises might be effective in improving their performance, but for low achievers, who already have problems with basic linguistic ability, more cloze test exercises mean more failures and frustration to them. Is there any other alternative to help low achievers improve their performance in local and global comprehension items of cloze test as well as enhance their overall language proficiency besides the usual classroom teaching?

As suggested by Lu (2002), reading might seem to be a suitable way to improve students' cloze test performance. Indeed, since reading is beneficial to one's overall language ability, using reading activity to enhance one's overall language ability might be workable. Actually, reading can be categorized into two types: extensive reading and intensive reading. Extensive reading is reading in large quantities, though how extensive the reading is depends on the reader's own perception (Robb & Susser, 1990). Intensive reading, on the contrary, is a close study of the linguistic elements, including syntactic, semantic, and lexical ones, in a short passage (Carrell & Carson, 1997; Jacobs, Rajan & Renandya, 1999; Nation, 2001; Paran, 2003; Robb & Susser, 1990).

The benefits of reading, whether extensive or intensive, are explored by many

previous researchers. For example, extensive reading is beneficial to learners' reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary, spelling, conjunctions, grammar, reading speed, and overall proficiency. Intensive reading also enjoys many advantages. It helps learners comprehend the text with detailed instruction and develop basic linguistic skills in the target language. All in all, extensive reading and intensive reading are both inductive to the development of learners' language proficiency.

Although many previous researches have demonstrated the advantages of reading, little has been discussed about the effects of reading activities on cloze test performance. Moreover, previous studies focused their research on intermediate-level students, with few probing into the effects of reading activities on low achievers. Therefore, this study aims to explore the effects of traditional, intensive and extensive reading instruction on low achievers' performance in cloze test, and discuss the feasibility of reading activities for low achievers. It is hoped that the result of the study would provide language teachers with insights in terms of cloze test teaching, and offer low achievers other alternatives to improve their cloze test performance, thus regaining their confidence and enthusiasm for English learning.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of different reading instruction on vocational high school low achievers in the performance of cloze test. Cloze test is a common test in the English Examination for Technological and Vocational Education Joint College Entrance Examination (EEFTC), and it usually takes up 20-40 points of the total English scores every year. Vocational high school students consider cloze test to be

one of the most difficult tests because it examines one's overall language proficiency (Lu, 2002). Unlike the section of vocabulary and phrases in EEFTC English Examination, which students could ace by memorizing high-frequency words and common expressions, cloze test consists of both global and local comprehension test items. For low achievers who already have difficulty with basic linguistic ability, cloze test would seem to be a much more difficult test to get high scores since it requires a more advanced language ability of the test-taker. How to improve low achievers' cloze test performance is a primary concern in the classroom teaching in vocational high schools.

Lu's study (2002), which analyzed the English Examination in EEFTC for five consecutive years, indicated that reading might be an appropriate way to enhance students' cloze test performance in the English Examination in EEFTC. Much research also mentioned that reading is one of the best ways to enhance students' overall language proficiency. Through reading activities, students not only better their language ability, but also change their attitudes toward reading. Yet, the participants in previous studies are mainly intermediate-level students, and the different effects of extensive reading and intensive reading on cloze test performance are not explored. Therefore, this study is intended to find out the effects of traditional, intensive and extensive reading instruction on low achievers' performance in cloze test, and if positive results are revealed, further discussions about the different effects of reading activities on cloze test performance would be carried out.

The results of the study could serve as a reference for language teachers in terms of enhancing low achievers' general language proficiency as well as implementing reading activities in the classroom.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study aims to examine the effects of traditional, intensive and extensive reading instruction on low achievers' performance in cloze test and discuss the feasibility of reading activities in the classroom. The significance of the study is as follows:

First, for language teachers who intend to conduct the extensive or intensive reading activity to low achievers in the classroom, the design of the reading activity in this study could serve as a framework. Language teachers could revise the reading activity and avoid the possible drawbacks in this present study, designing a reading activity suitable for their pupils.

Second, in terms of teaching cloze test, this study provides another option to enhance low achievers' overall language proficiency in constant cloze test practice. From the results of the study, language teachers could know whether traditional, intensive or extensive reading instruction is more effective in improving low achievers' cloze test performance. Moreover, the results of the different effects of the reading instruction on cloze test performance offer language teachers insights in terms of designing a reading activity. For instance, if intensive reading activity is more helpful to low achievers' grammar, vocabulary & phrases, or transitions, language teachers could implement more intensive reading activities on students in order to enhance their basic language ability.

Most importantly, the results of the study could provide perspectives for language teachers in helping enhancing low achievers' motivation toward English learning and forming their reading habits so that low achievers can rebuild their confidence in English and enjoy the process of English learning.