

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Chapter Two comprises four sections: first, a review of the theory of reading, the types of reading, and the benefits of extensive and intensive reading; second, a discussion about the major components of cloze test in the English Examination for Technological and Vocational Education Joint College Entrance Examination, and students' problems with cloze test; third, an overview of previous studies on reading activities. Fourth, the presentation of the research questions of this study.

2.1 Reading

2.1.1 Theory of Reading: Schema Theory, Top-down and Bottom-up Processing

Reading is a complicated psycholinguistic process which involves “the core components of phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and motivation” (Berry, Brinck, Greenberg, Joseph & Rodrigo, 2006, p.81). When one reads, one's background knowledge would interact with the written text in the meantime, and thus the reader could comprehend the text. That is to say, the text does not carry any meaning itself; it serves as a stimulus to help readers construct the meaning based on their previous knowledge. The previous knowledge, or the background knowledge, is termed schema (Adams & Collins, 1979; Bartlette, 1932; Rumelhart, 1980). It is each reader's schema that interacts with the text and endorses the meaning of the text. The schema theory could be summarized by Clark and Silberstein (1977):

Research has shown that reading is only incidentally visual.... That is, readers understand what they read because they are able to take the stimulus beyond its graphic representation and assign it membership to an appropriate group of concepts already stored in their memories....(pp.136-137)

As indicated above, the information a reader retrieved from the text is closely connected to his prior experience, so the same text may engender different meanings to different readers.

The schema structure comprises two major schemata: content schemata and formal schemata. Content schemata means a person's knowledge about people, the world, culture, and the universe (Brown, 2001), and formal schemata means a person's knowledge about discourse structure of the language (Brown, 2001). Through the interaction between the two schemata and the text, the meaning of the text would then be constructed. Since the schema structure plays a vital role in one's comprehending the text, the way it deals with the inputs could be identified through two information processing: top-down processing and bottom-up processing.

When the information flows into the brain, two data-processing would be activated: top-down processing and bottom-up processing. Top-down processing occurs "when the (schema) system makes a general prediction based on higher level, general schemata and then searches the input for information to fit into these partially satisfied, higher order schemata"(Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p.554). Top-down processing is also called conceptually driven processing because readers process the information from the general to the specific. For example, when one reads, the reader would first try to predict the main ideas of the text, and then find details in the text to support or revise his prediction.

In contrast to top-down processing, bottom-up processing indicates that the incoming information matches the bottom-level schemata, and when these lower-level

schemata converge, a higher-level schemata would be activated (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). It is also called data-driven processing because the reader relies on specific linguistic elements, such as words, phrases, etc., instead of general ideas, in order to comprehend the text; that is, the meaning of the text is constructed based on the specific information.

Although top-down and bottom-up processing is different in its way of information processing, they are not an either-or proposition. When one reads, he “continually shifts from one focus to another, now adopting a top-down approach to predict probable meaning, then moving to the bottom-up approach to check whether that is really what the writer says” (Nuttall, 1996, p.17). The idea of this interactive-compensatory model can be illustrated in figure 2.1 (Stanovich, 1980).

Figure 2.1: Interactive-compensatory Model

Top-Down Processing

(background knowledge/ schemata)
 (preview; inference making)
 (skimming: for general information)
 (scanning: for specific information)



(text/discourse)
 (syntax)
 (semantics)
 (morphology)
 (phonology)
 (linguistic knowledge)

Bottom-Up Processing

Therefore, when one reads, both top-down and bottom-up information processing would

be activated and shifted constantly so as to help the reader construct the meaning of the text.

2.1.2 Types of Reading

Among the ways to learn English, reading is widely adopted and practiced by school teachers to improve students' English ability because reading provides students with enough inputs. Students could enhance their vocabulary acquisition when encountering low frequency words in the text constantly (Schmidt, 1996).

Generally speaking, reading activity can be categorized into two types: extensive reading and intensive reading. Extensive and intensive reading are different in their essence and benefits, but both gain favorers in the English pedagogy.

2.1.2.1 Extensive Reading

Extensive reading, by its literal meaning, is reading in large quantities, though how extensive the reading is has not reached a common ground (Robb & Susser, 1990). The purpose of extensive reading is not for test-taking; it aims to involve students into the pleasure of reading and help students create a positive attitude toward reading. Thus, there are no tests following the reading activity, and students are encouraged not to use the dictionary when they read along.

The characteristics of extensive reading are as follows (Carrell & Carson, 1997; Ding & Qian, 2004; Jacobs, Rajan & Renandya, 1999; Loucky, 1996; Robb & Susser, 1990; Schmidt, 1996; Stanley, 2005). First, extensive reading is for general understanding instead of studying linguistic elements. Second, the reading material should be neither too

easy nor too difficult and the number of the reading materials should be sufficient. Third, students choose their reading material according to their interests, and they could change the book anytime in the reading process. Bamford & Day (1998) furthered illustrated the principles for teaching extensive reading. For instance, learners should read as much as possible, and reading is individual and silent. Most importantly, teachers orient and guide their students, and serve as a role model of a reader. All in all, extensive reading promises readers a stress-free reading environment where they could develop their reading autonomy and their positive attitudes toward reading.

More and more language teachers adopt extensive reading activity in the classroom because of its numerous benefits supported by researchers. For example, students have access to a lot of reading materials in the target language (Loucky, 1996; Robb & Susser, 1990). Extensive reading can help students improve their vocabulary, their reading comprehension and writing (Antepara, 2003; Bamford & Day, 1998; Bell, 1998; Berry, Brinck, Greenberg, Joseph & Rodrigo, 2006; Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Hayashi, 1999; Janopulos, 1986; Krashen, 1993; Krashen, 2001; Kuo & Yang, 2002; Lai, 1993a; Lai, 1993b; Lee, 2006; Lee & Hsu, 2007; Liu, 2007; Loucky, 1996; Shang & Lin, 2007; Tsang, 1996; White, 2005). Extensive reading is also beneficial to one's spelling (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Bamford & Day, 1998; Krashen, 2001), conjunctions (Chou, 2002), grammar (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989; Krashen, 2001), reading speed (Bell, 1998; Bell, 2001; Ding & Qian, 2004; Kao, 2004; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Sheu, 2003), and overall proficiency (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Green & Oxford, 1995).

Not only does extensive reading enhance one's linguistic competence, but it also helps develop readers' positive attitudes toward reading (Asraf & Ahmad, 2003; Ching,

2002; Dickinson, 1995; Grundy, 2004; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Leung, 2002; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Nash & Yuan, 1992; Robb & Susser, 1989; Sheu, 2003; Yin, 2004), and promote their motivation for reading (Kao, 2004; Mori, 2002; Powell, 2005; Robb & Susser, 1990; Shang & Lin, 2007).

Extensive reading did enjoy a great number of merits; yet, some difficulties do not go unnoticed in the practice of extensive reading activity. For example, the resource and management of the reading materials, and the time constraint of the reading activity is a primary concern (Grabe, 1995; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Shih, 2005). Besides, some students feel that extensive reading activity is not a real learning but an extra assignment, and they show unwillingness to the reading activity (Shih, 2005; White, 2005). All these add up to the difficulty of the implementation of extensive reading activity. Therefore, the classroom teachers have long adopted another reading activity—intensive reading—to help enhance students' English proficiency.

2.1.2.2. Intensive Reading

Intensive reading activity is commonly practiced by language teachers. Unlike extensive reading whose material is long, the reading material for intensive reading is always short, and students have to study the text carefully. Actually, intensive reading activity 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). For example, students have to learn the new vocabulary and phrases, study the grammar rules and the structure of the context, and after the teacher's instruction, a test of the vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and the

content of the text is followed. Besides, the reading material is usually assigned by the teachers and students could not change the material even if they do not like it.

The purpose of intensive reading is to help students build up their linguistic skills and correct their errors in the language (Krashen, 1993). Through the repetitive drills and memorization of vocabulary and grammatical rules, students could enhance their specific language ability gradually. Light (1970) even suggested that for basic level students, it is better to implement intensive reading first so that their linguistic competence could be built.

Intensive reading is embraced by many language teachers because of its benefits to one's language proficiency. It helps learners comprehend the text and the text organization with detailed instruction; it helps learners monitor effective reading strategies consciously; it helps learners develop basic linguistic skills in the foreign language (Paran, 2003). Moreover, since intensive reading would emphasize specific aspects of the target language, students could gain practical linguistic knowledge in a more clearly focused manner. Another reason for the popularity of the intensive reading activity lies in the fact that the resource for intensive reading is numerous and the effects of intensive reading are astonishing only after a short period of time.

Yet, intensive reading is also criticized for its close study of the context. One of the major shortcomings of intensive reading is that the word-by-word translation would hinder fluency (Bell, 1998; Schmidt, 1996). The translation would prevent readers from improving reading skills because they have to stop when encountering unknown words. Krashen (1993) even stated that the impact of direct instruction is small, that teaching grammar has no influence on language growth of typical secondary students, and that

more drills for poor readers do not work.

Though extensive and intensive readings serve different purposes of the language learning, both are beneficial to one's language proficiency if combined properly. The following table (Loucky, 1996) summarizes the advantages of extensive and intensive reading for language teachers' references.

Table 2.1: Advantages of Extensive & Intensive Reading

Extensive Reading Skills	Intensive Reading Skills
Development of faster reading	Development of specific reading skills
Self-chosen materials; authentic reading	Teacher-assigned texts with drills
Analytical reading	Focused development of vocabulary, grammar, and study skills
Improved motivation for L2 reading	Clearly-focused instruction of grammar
Greater entertainment & enjoyment (lower anxiety & better affective factors)	Positive effects of building up basic language skills in a short time
Wider range reading for pleasure	Understanding author's bias & purpose

2.2 Cloze Test

2.2.1 Major Components of Cloze Test in Technological and Vocational Education

Joint College Entrance Examination (EEFTC) English Examination

The term “cloze” was created by Wilson Taylor in 1953 to refer to “a device for approximating the readability level of written materials” (Brown, 1993, p.93). Later, cloze was used as a test of overall ESL proficiency (Brown, 1993). Because cloze test is easy to score (Fotos,1991; Oller & Conrad, 1971) and measures one’s integrative ability (Abraham & Chapelle, 1992; Alderson, 1979; Bensoussan & Ramraz, 1984; Fotos, 1991; Jonz, 1990; Oller & Conrad, 1971), it is a common test in many important English examinations. Take the English Examination for Technological and Vocational Education Joint College Entrance Examination (EEFTC) as an example. The cloze test in EEFTC is assigned 20-40 points in average every year. When compared with other tests in the English Examination in EEFTC, cloze test takes up a higher percentage of the total scores.

Since cloze test is to measure one’s integrative ability, global and local comprehension items are included in a design of cloze test. In Lu’s study (2002), which explored the characteristics of cloze test in the EEFTC English Examination for five consecutive years, she pointed out that the global comprehension test items in the cloze test were usually about understanding meanings between sentences or paragraphs, and making inferences or drawing conclusions, while the local comprehension test items were about knowledge of grammar, tense, parts of speech, understanding of vocabulary or phrase, and understanding meanings within a sentence. With global and local comprehension test items, cloze test in EEFTC usually takes up 20-40 points, which holds

a high proportion in the EEFTC English Examination. In classroom English teaching, preparing students for cloze test taking skills is regarded important by many vocational high school English teachers.

2.2.2 Students' Problems with Cloze Test

Cloze test is one of the most difficult tests for vocational high school students (Lu, 2002). Unlike other tests in EEFTC English Examination, such as vocabulary, phrases and conversation where students could score high by memorizing words with high frequency or some common expressions, cloze test examines one's integrative language abilities. To get high scores in cloze test means that one can deal with the local and global comprehension items in cloze test.

The traditional way to enhance students' cloze test performance is by cloze test practice. For intermediate or high-level language achievers, practice might really make perfect; yet, for low achievers, who already had difficulty with basic linguistic skills, the practice only serves as guessing games because of students' unfamiliarity with the content, and the complicated structure of the sentence. As the EEFTC English Examination becomes more and more integrative, to score high in cloze test would mean to help students develop their integrative language ability (Lu, 2002). Since reading activities can enhance one's general English proficiency as claimed by previous studies, could we assume that low achievers would improve cloze test performance through reading activities?

2.3 Previous Studies on Reading Activity

Much research has explored and demonstrated the advantages of extensive reading: extensive reading benefits students' vocabulary and grammar ability (Kao, 2006; Liu, 2007); it enhances students' reading comprehension and reading speed (Kao, 2004; Kao, 2006; Liu, 2007; Shih, 2005); it promotes students' attitudes toward reading (Chen, 2005; Lin, 2004; Shih, 2005; Yin, 2004). However, there are also a few studies indicating that extensive reading does not have positive effects on one's reading comprehension (Lai, 1993b). Some studies compare the effects of extensive and intensive reading on students, showing that extensive reading yields a more positive effect than intensive reading in terms of one's language competence (Bell, 2001; Smith, 2007).

Many researchers focus on intermediate level students. Among the few who target the less proficient students as participants of their study are Mason and Krashen (1997), Sheu (2003), and Lee and Hsu (2007). The result of these three studies indicated the positive effect of reading activities on less proficient students.

In Mason and Krashen's study, which was intended to investigate the effects of extensive reading on reluctant students of EFL, 30 Japanese university students who had to retake the English course participated in the extensive reading activity. These 30 students in the experimental group came from the second, third, and fourth grade of university, and the students in the control group were in their second year. They had 90-minute English lesson per week and were instructed by the same teacher.

The extensive reading activity was conducted in the second semester. Students in the makeup class had to read 50 books in class and as homework for the whole semester, and they had to write a summary of each book in Japanese. Though most students failed to

read 50 books by the end of the semester, the average number of books read was 30.

After the post-test, the result showed that the gains made by the experimental group was significantly greater than those by the control group, and students held a positive attitude toward the reading activity.

Sheu's study (2003) aimed to explore the effects of extensive reading with EFL learners at beginning level. The participants in this study were beginner learners of English, aged 13-14 years old at a junior high school. They had four English classes per week and were instructed by the same English teacher.

Forty-five minutes were distributed to the implementation of the reading activity per week. Two experimental groups read graded readers and books for native English-speaking children respectively, and they had to complete a reading record once they finished the reading. The post-test indicated that the experimental groups were better in the language proficiency test, reading speed test, and attitudes toward the reading activity.

A more recent study (Lee & Hsu, 2007) chose vocational college students as participants. They were in the third year of a five-year junior college, and they had 150-minute English lessons per week. The experimental group received usual classroom teaching with 50 minutes spent on extra reading activity, while the control group received the traditional instruction. Students were required to read at least one book per week and had to write a reading log and a summary after they finished reading each book. The result of the post-test showed that the experimental group did better on cloze test, and on vocabulary test.

These three studies showed positive effects of extensive reading on the performance

of cloze test. The reason for this result might be that the experimental group had additional language inputs, as in Sheu's and Lee & Hsu's study. If the control group also received extra language inputs besides the usual classroom teaching, would the study yield the same result? What about the feasibility of intensive and extensive reading for English low achievers in vocational high schools? And what are the different effects of intensive and extensive reading on low achievers' cloze test performance?

The study was intended to examine the effects of traditional, intensive and extensive reading instruction on low achievers' performance in cloze test. It will compare and discuss the different effects of traditional, intensive and extensive reading instruction on participants' performance in the grammar section, vocabulary and phrases section, transitions section, and the overall scores if these three reading instructions yield positive effects. Finally, it will explore the difficulties in the implementation of reading activities and students' reactions to reading activities.

It is hoped that the results of the study could be a reference for language teachers to help low achievers with their cloze test performance, and the students could rebuild their confidence in English through the reading activity, enjoy the process of English learning, and develop a lifelong reading habit.

2.4 Research Questions

This study is intended to explore the following questions:

1. Which is the most effective instruction in terms of grammar, vocabulary & phrases, transitions, and the overall performance, traditional reading instruction, intensive reading instruction, or extensive reading instruction?
2. What are students' attitudes toward the reading instruction?