

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This study aimed to explore senior high school English teachers' beliefs about reading instruction and to investigate the relationship between their beliefs and practices. It contained two phases and was conducted through a questionnaire, open-ended interviews, and classroom observations. In Phase I, a questionnaire (see Appendix A) was used to characterize seventeen senior high school English teachers' beliefs about reading instruction. The results of the questionnaire would indicate whether the teachers possessed particular theoretical beliefs. In Phase II, participants with distinct theoretical orientations were interviewed (see Appendix B for interview questions) to elicit their beliefs about reading instruction and thus to verify the results of the questionnaire. Their responses to the interview questions were transcribed and coded for later analysis. Their classrooms were also observed in the class hours for finishing teaching a lesson/unit. Their instructional practices were audiotaped and a checklist (see Appendix C) was used to determine how the teachers actually conducted their reading instruction. Then the results of Phase II were analyzed to determine to which orientation the participants belonged and whether their instructional practices were consistent with their theoretical beliefs elicited in Phase I. In the following, the researcher deals with the pilot study and the major study.

Pilot Study

Ten copies of the questionnaire were distributed to English teachers in a senior high school in Taoyuan County. The questionnaire was composed of two parts: (a) the participants' background information, and (b) the participants' beliefs about reading

instruction. Regarding the first part, four teachers indicated that they could not recall the exact courses they had taken in colleges or graduate schools and thus failed to answer the fifth question. As to the second part, three teachers were uncertain about whether they should answer the questions according to their beliefs about reading instruction or their actual classroom practices. Their opinions were very valuable to the major study, in which the participants would be told to feel free to leave out the fifth question in the first part if they could not recall what courses they had taken before and to answer the second part on the basis of their beliefs rather than their practices.

Major Study

The major study included the participants, instruments, and procedures.

Participants

In Phase I, seventeen senior high school English teachers participating in this study were invited to complete a questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire identified the teachers' theoretical orientations as text-based, reader-based, and interactive. Only the teachers with particular theoretical orientations were selected to be the participants in Phase II. Based on the results, none of the teachers was text-based. Hence, two teachers identified respectively as reader-based and interactive in their beliefs about reading instruction were selected as the participants. The participants were named Teacher A and Teacher B to ensure their privacy. They were interviewed and their classes were observed. Permission to make classroom observations with a tape recorder was sought from them, and field notes were taken as well. The participants' background information was shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Background Information about the Participants

Teacher	A	B
Orientation	Reader-based	Interactive
Gender	Female	Female
Age	About 40	About 35
Academic degree	Master	Master
Major	Education	Pedagogy
Teaching experience	14 years	7 years
English teaching hours	11-15 hours	16-20 hours
Student numbers in English class	over 40	over 40
Attendance at symposiums	never	once
Enjoying English reading	Yes	Yes

The participants shared some similarities. First, both of them were female. Second, both had master's degree. Third, the student number in their English classes was over 40. Last, they both enjoyed English reading.

There were also differences between the participants. Teacher A, categorized as reader-based, majored in education and received her master's degree in the U.S. She has been teaching English in senior high school for 14 years. Her weekly English teaching hours were less than 15 hours, and she had never attended any symposium on English reading instruction in the past three years. On the other hand, Teacher B, characterized as interactive, majored in pedagogy and got her master's degree in England. She has been teaching English in senior high school for 7 years. Her weekly

English teaching hours were 16-20 hours, longer than those of Teacher A. She had attended one symposium on English reading instruction in the past three years.

Instruments

The instruments in this study included a questionnaire, open-ended interviews, and classroom observations. In Phase I, the questionnaire was employed to describe the participants' background information and to explore their beliefs about reading instruction. In Phase II, open-ended interviews were conducted with two participants to verify their beliefs about reading instruction and to help them explain their classroom practices. Classroom observations were conducted throughout the class hours for finishing teaching a lesson/unit. A classroom observation checklist and field notes were applied to provide indispensable information to verify the participants' beliefs about reading instruction.

The questionnaire. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) was composed of two parts: (a) the participants' background information and (b) the participants' beliefs about reading instruction. The first part of the questionnaire was employed to explore the participants' gender, age, educational background, English teaching experiences, weekly English teaching hours, average student numbers in English class, attendance at symposiums regarding English reading instruction, and personal attitude toward English reading. The second part, modified from Wu's (2002) master thesis, consisted of twenty-one statements concerning teachers' beliefs about reading instruction, which were placed in random order. The statements were grounded on three categories of beliefs identified from the literature: the text-based approach (No. 1, 5, 9, 12, 15, 17, and 21), the reader-based approach (No. 2, 4, 7, 10, 13, 18, and 20), and

the interactive approach (No. 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, and 19). These theoretical models were adopted from Kinzer's (1988a) categorization.

The statements reflected the three approaches. The text-based approach emphasizes the language in the reading, that is, vocabulary, grammar, and sentence patterns. Statements like *"I will first teach vocabulary, then derivatives, and finally the text (No. 5)"* and *"The explanation of grammar and sentence patterns is necessary for students to comprehend the text (No. 12)"* illustrated the text-based approach. The reader-based approach, on the other hand, focuses on the reader's background knowledge and reading skills, such as skimming, scanning, and guessing. Statements like *"Students can comprehend the text by applying such reading skills as skimming, scanning, and guessing (No. 10)"* and *"To help students comprehend the text, it is necessary to activate their background knowledge (No. 20)"* reflected the reader-based approach. The interactive approach, however, does not put emphasis on any particular aspect of language or reading skills. Instead, it strongly suggests the interaction between information obtained by means of text-based decoding and information provided by means of analysis, both of which depend on certain kinds of prior knowledge and certain kinds of information-processing skills. Statements like *"Besides vocabulary and grammar, reading skills need to be taught, too (No. 8)"* and *"I will encourage students to comprehend a new paragraph on the basis of textual clues and background knowledge (No. 19)"* exemplified the interactive approach.

The statements were divided into three categories with each containing seven statements. The statements used a Likert-type scale and next to the statements was a grid consisting of four columns: "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", and "strongly

disagree.” Each column had a particular value, that is, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The participants were asked to tick the appropriate box to indicate how far they agreed or disagreed with each statement. It was decided that a high score on the scale would imply a favorable attitude. Hence, favorable statements would be scored 4 for “strongly agree” down to 1 for “strongly disagree.” The total score of the seven statements in one category would be calculated and compared with scores of statements in the other two categories.

Open-ended interviews. Interviewing provides an avenue to eliciting participants’ thoughts and reviewing their experience as well. The interviews of this study were conducted prior to and after classroom observations to meet these needs. In conducting an interview, an interview guide is used to provide the researchers with related topics to ask and to explore. It also helps the interviewers to determine the best way to use the limited time available in an interview. In this study, an interview guide was employed in Phase II to draw forth the participants’ beliefs about reading instruction and to avail them to review their classroom practices. The participants’ responses to the interviews were audiotaped.

The participants were interviewed before classroom observations by means of nine interview questions (see Appendix B) designed to categorize the participants’ beliefs about reading instruction and to unveil the factors that influenced classroom instructional practices. The first eight questions were intended to find out the participants’ beliefs about efficient reading instruction, reading skills that students need to learn, factors benefiting reading comprehension, factors hindering reading comprehension, factors enhancing reading instruction, factors impeding reading

instruction, sections in a lesson/unit that must be instructed, and sections in a lesson/unit that can be skipped. The last question was about the arrangement of the textbooks in use and was used to investigate how the participants applied the textbooks to reading instruction. The participants' responses to these questions would show how efficient reading instruction should be conducted, what reading skills should be instructed, what factors may enhance or impede students' reading comprehension, what sections in every lesson/unit they considered to be important or unimportant, and what factors may benefit or hinder teachers' reading instruction. Their responses would show their preferences for certain approaches and in turn verify the results of the questionnaire.

The participants were also requested to recall and comment on certain events that had occurred in their classrooms. Such interviews, referred to as retrospective interviews, were conducted to help the participants review their classroom events. The interviews were conducted in Chinese to help the participants to feel comfortable and free to express themselves. The audiotaped interviews were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible for later analysis.

Classroom observations. Classroom observations not only help researchers study the process of education as it develops in the classroom but also provide more detailed and precise evidence than any other source. In this study, classroom observations were administered in Phase II to verify the information obtained through the questionnaire and the interviews. The researcher entered the classroom before class, set a tape recorder in the back of the classroom, and sat at the corner to reduce the participants' vigilance. The tape recorder was used to keep track of the classroom events. The

researcher took field notes for later interviews with the participants. The observations took three and nine class hours respectively. The class hours differed as the participants had their own schedules and instructed reading passages in different ways.

A checklist (see Appendix C) adapted from Lloyd's (1995; 1996) categories of reading comprehension instruction and Kinzer's (1988a) categorization of reading models (i.e., text-based, reader-based, and interactive) was employed to identify the participants' reading instruction. The reading instruction in each class was generally divided into pre-reading activities, while-reading activities, and post-reading activities. The checklist was used to identify the participants' classroom activities and calculate the duration of each activity. The participants' classroom practices were then identified as text-based, reader-based, or interactive according to the majority of the activities they conducted.

Pre-reading activities included twelve items. They were listed as follows:

1. Instructing vocabulary, idioms, and phrases.
2. Instructing derivatives, collocations, synonyms, and antonyms.
3. Explaining grammar and sentence patterns.
4. Having students do drills in sentence patterns.
5. Providing students with realia, props, pictures, films, etc.
6. Other activities.
7. Having students discuss topics related to the text.
8. Having students share their personal experiences.
9. Providing students with background information.

10. Eliciting what students have learned.
11. Having students practice reading skills.
12. Other activities.

For text-based teachers, pre-reading activities (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6) may include instruction of vocabulary, idioms, phrases, derivatives, collocations, synonyms, antonyms, grammar, sentence patterns, and so forth. For reader-based teachers, pre-reading activities (Items 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) are intended to activate students' background knowledge and to encourage students to apply reading skills. For interactive teachers, pre-reading activities may include Items 1 to 12. The researcher noted that they do not elaborate on every single word, sentence pattern, or grammatical rule. Instead, they make explicit only the vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammar that may cause comprehension difficulty.

While-reading activities contained eleven items. They were listed as follows:

13. Elaborating on vocabulary, idioms, and phrases.
14. Elaborating on grammar and sentence patterns.
15. Introducing the organization of the text.
16. Translating and paraphrasing the text.
17. Having students do the comprehension check.
18. Other activities.
19. Having students practice reading skills.
20. Activating students' background knowledge.
21. Providing students with cultural background related to the text.
22. Having students get the meaning from the context.

23. Other activities.

In conducting while-reading activities, text-based teachers tend to elaborate on vocabulary and grammar, introduce the organization of the text, translate the text, and the like. The activities may include Items 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. Reader-based teachers, on the other hand, encourage students to practice reading skills and to get the meaning from the context. Reader-based activities may include Items 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23. Interactive teachers may conduct text-based and reader-based activities as listed in Items 13 to 23.

Post-reading activities included nine items. They were listed as follows:

24. Having students do the exercises in the workbook.
25. Having students do drills in sentence patterns and translations.
26. Giving students quizzes on vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammar.
27. Other activities.
28. Having students review what they have learned.
29. Having students express how they feel about the text.
30. Having students paraphrase/rewrite the text.
31. Having students do further studies related to the text.
32. Other activities.

For text-based teachers, post-reading activities (Items 24, 25, 26, and 27) are meant to have students do the exercises in the workbook, do the drills in sentence patterns and translations, and take quizzes on vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammar. Reader-based teachers are likely to have students review what they have learned, express how they feel about the text, and do further studies related to the text.

They may do such activities as Items 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32. Interactive teachers may perform activities included in Items 24 to 32. They would also have students integrate reading and writing abilities.

Field notes were taken during classroom observations to keep track of specific activities that needed to be clarified later in the interview. For example, the reader-based participant spent most of the class conducting text-based activities, such as translating Chinese sentences into English and explaining sentence patterns. Field notes served as a source of interview questions, which helped to make clear the reasons that the participants performed certain activities inconsistent with their beliefs.

Procedures

The study was composed of two phases, and the procedures of the study were described as follows. In Phase I, seventeen senior high school English teachers were invited to complete a questionnaire. If a teacher agreed with a statement, then he/she got a score of three. Since each orientation had seven statements, a total of twenty-one or more than twenty-one would indicate that the teacher had a dominant orientation. As there were three categories, each teacher had three kinds of score, representing different orientations. A score of twenty-one or higher indicated that a teacher possessed one theoretical belief. Two kinds of score of twenty-one or higher showed that a teacher had dual orientations. Three kinds of score of twenty-one or higher suggested that a teacher possessed multiple orientations. However, if the three scores were less than twenty-one, then a teacher possessed no significant orientation. It would be interesting to discuss why some teachers possessed more than one

orientation, while some possessed no significant orientation. However, this issue was not the main concern of this study and was not taken care of. The seventeen teachers' average score of each statement was calculated to see if some statements were more favorable. Their total scores in each group of statements were added up to determine their orientations (see Appendix D). Based on the results of the questionnaire, two out of the seventeen teachers were selected to be the participants in Phase II, as they were respectively identified as reader-based and interactive in their beliefs about reading instruction.

In Phase II, the two participants were interviewed prior to classroom observations to elicit their beliefs about reading instruction. Their responses to the nine questions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcription of their responses was analyzed to determine their belief categories, which might consolidate or contradict the results of the questionnaire. Then, each participant was observed in the class hours for finishing teaching a lesson/unit. More often than not, one lesson/unit took about six class hours to finish. However, since the participants had different lesson plans, it took three and nine class hours respectively to finish teaching a lesson/unit. Generally speaking, senior high school students have five to seven English class hours per week. Hence, it took about two weeks to conduct the classroom observations. The participants' practices were audiotaped, and then transcribed as soon as possible. The transcription was coded by two raters using a classroom observation checklist to determine the participants' theoretical orientations. The raters, who got their master's degrees in English pedagogy and were experienced in teaching, were provided with clear instructions of defining the three theoretical

orientations. They categorized each class hour as text-based, reader-based, or interactive on the basis of the majority of the classroom activities. Disagreements over the coding of particular classroom activities were resolved through discussion. Field notes were taken as a source of the interview conducted after classroom observations. The interviews after classroom observations were recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

