

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The present study intends to investigate how storybook reading influences EFL children's vocabulary learning. This chapter is composed of three parts. The first part presents the background information and motivation of the study. The second part points out the problems that lead to the purpose of the study. The third part states the significance of the study.

#### ***Back Ground and Motivation***

Vocabulary is one of the basic and essential elements of language learning. It is not only crucial for conveying meaning, but also a strong predictor of reading comprehension, academic achievement, and overall intellectual ability (Ewers & Brownson, 1999; Justice, 2002). Interests of seeking how and where children acquire language through incidental contacts with the environment have led to substantial amount of research, for children's literacy can not be built from assistance received in school alone. Being exposed to daily conversations and linguistic materials also contributes to children's linguistic knowledge. Reading stories to children, for instance, is very beneficial for their language development (Snow, 1991; Robbins & Ehri, 1994; Schickedanz, 1999; Collins, 2005).

Unlike skilled readers who are able to acquire novel words incidentally from reading, learners with low literacy capacity have a hard time grasping meaning from reading passages. Young children in particular need special help from adults or teachers while learning vocabulary through reading. That is why adult-children storybook reading activity is prevailing in helping children build vocabulary,

especially for preschoolers or children with limited language skills. The effect of storybook reading on children's vocabulary growth depends on how often a child is read to, and on what type of adult reading style is (Elley, 1989; Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008). In other words, children's vocabulary acquisition is facilitated by multiple exposures of novel words in the storybook and adult's support using questions to initiate children's attention to the text and illustration.

Studies in related areas are seeking effective instructions to accelerate children's vocabulary acquisition during shared storybook reading (Senechal & Cornell, 1993; Whitehurst et al., 1988; Bech & McKeown, 2001; Coyne, Simmons, Kame'enui & Stoolmiller, 2004; Collins, 2005). Among them, read aloud, repeated reading, and questioning styles receive most attention (Whitehurst et al., 1988; Senechal, 1997; Penno, Wilkinson & Moore, 2002). By listening to stories, together with questions emphasizing topics related to the story meaning and target vocabulary, children are exposed to a rich and meaningful linguistic context. Meanwhile, in EFL learning conditions, where young learners have little access to an English environment outside of classroom, the storybook becomes an even more useful vehicle for learning. It builds an authentic context from interesting topics that appeal to children, and allows them to be exposed to vocabulary and sentences that do not normally occur in daily conversations.

Most studies dealing with storybook reading and children's vocabulary learning are conducted either in L1 or ESL contexts. On the other hand, research in EFL environment is mostly related to storybook implication in school or the relationship between storybook reading and student's motivation. There are few studies aiming at finding effective vocabulary teaching techniques in the aspect of adult-children interaction during shared storybook reading. The need of efficient vocabulary

instructions with storybook reading in EFL elementary school encourages the initiation of the present study. The interest of the present study is to examine what influence labeling and questioning of novel words might have on EFL children's vocabulary learning. In labeling condition, novel words are introduced by adult uttering the word and pointing to its illustration. In questioning condition, vocabulary is highlighted by adult posing vocabulary eliciting questions which require children to use new words in answering them. Besides, whether children with dissimilar initial language skills would be influenced divergently by different vocabulary teaching techniques is also the interest of the study.

#### ***Purpose of the Study***

The purpose of the study is to find appropriate vocabulary instructions to cope with storybook reading in EFL elementary school. By implementing labeling and questioning techniques during shared storybook reading, it is hoped that children's vocabulary acquisition would be cultivated through interactions between teachers and students. Moreover, how students with variant English proficiency levels react to different vocabulary teaching techniques is also explored.

#### ***Significance of the Study***

The present study is significant in two aspects. First, the investigation of effective vocabulary instructions provides pedagogical suggestions for teachers in vocabulary teaching. The efficiency of acquiring new words from storybook reading may encourage English teachers in Taiwan to use storybooks as their teaching materials. Secondly and most importantly, the use of storybooks for language learning may increase student's motivation toward English learning, and help them expend

their perspective on life. Learning vocabulary through storybook reading might lead children to a new world of learning experience.