

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The present research focuses on the analysis of the reading comprehension tests in the BCT and the instruction of the reading skills and strategies in class for junior high school students. In this chapter, the theory of reading, which may serve as the background studies for the present study, is discussed first. Then the validity and the categorization of the reading skills and strategies for the formal reading instruction are reviewed. At last, the literature is also reviewed on the reading comprehension tests in the BCT. Besides, three research questions of the present study are proposed at the end of this chapter.

The Theory of Reading

The review of the reading theory may include two important elements, the reading process and the reading components. Three models of the reading process: bottom-up, top-down and interactive are discussed first, and then follow by the reading components including language, background knowledge and literary. Schema theory, which is related to background knowledge, is also introduced in this section.

The Reading Process

Weir and Urquhart (1998) considered reading as a cognitive activity which largely takes place in the mind while the physical manifestations of the activity such as eye movements are comparatively superficial. As a cognitive activity, reading has been a major interest of cognitive psychologists. They are interested in reading construct and test hypothetical models of the reading process as it is thought to take place in the mind. Following are some of these models familiar to many teachers of

reading: the bottom-up model, the top-down model and the interactive model.

The bottom-up model

The bottom-up model is to “decode meaning from the printed page, recognize linguistic signals, and use linguistic data processing mechanisms to impose some sort of order on these signals” (Brown ,1994, p. 284). Weir and Urquhart (1998) also mentioned that bottom-up analyses begin with the text, or bits of the text. For example, in Gough’s (1972) model, the reader begins with letters, which are recognized by a SCANNER. The information gained is passed to a DECODER, which converts the string of letters into a string of systematic phonemes. This string is then passed to a LIBRARIAN, where with the help of the LEXICON, it is recognized as a word. The reader then fixated on the next word, and proceeds in the same way until all the words in a sentence have been processed. Reading is, therefore, considered as a process of exact identification of letters, words, and ultimately sentences. In a text, the smallest units of language are identified first, and these are chained together to form the next highest unit; these units in turn are then chained together to form the next highest unit and so on (Wang, 1998). Therefore, this model is data-driven and it is so-called bottom-up processing.

As Rayner and Pollatsek (1989) pointed out, in Gough’s model, a word should take longer to recognize than a single letter. But in fact experiments have shown that this is not the case, words can be recognized more quickly than individual letters. It appears that at the word-recognition stage, letters are processed in parallel. Moreover, readers have been shown to use syntactic information to deal with ambiguous words. Kolars (1969) also mentioned higher level information is being used in word recognition, which may conflict with the direction of the bottom-up model. Thus, the bottom-up model was criticized because its view of reading comprehension is in a

rigid, word-by-word fashion (Wang, 1998). The criticisms also came from several psycholinguists such as Coady (1979), Lynch and Hudson (1991), and Goodman (1970). They argued that reading involves more than word perceptions. Lynch and Hudson (1991), for instance, pointed out that this model slows the readers down in a way that they cannot comprehend larger language units. Therefore, a model that emphasized a process from higher-level comprehension came in.

The top-down model

The bottom-up model starts with the smallest text unit, and one might expect the top-down model should begin with the largest unit, the whole text. But, as Weir and Urquhart (1998) mentioned it is impossible to see how a reader can begin by dealing with the text as a whole, then proceed to smaller units of the text, paragraphs and then sentences, words and letters. The term 'top-down' is not used to offer an absolute opposite to 'bottom-up' but refer to approaches in which the expectations of the reader play a crucial and even dominant role in the processing of the text.

Goodman (1970) then offered a top-down model of the reading process. He held that readers process from higher-level conceptual encoding to lower-level perceptual information, which operates in the opposite direction from bottom-up processing (Wang, 1998). Goodman (1970) described reading as “a psycholinguistic guessing game, involving an interaction between thought and language” (p. 498), and he also viewed the construction of meaning of a text is “a cyclical process of sampling, predicting, testing, and confirming”. Goodman thought of reading as a process of hypothesis verification and the readers use selected data from the text to confirm their guess. Weir and Urquhart (1998, p. 42) further discussed Goodman’s view of the reading process ‘was developed as a reaction to the bottom-up model, not against theorists like Gough, but against a pedagogical tradition, which stressed a strict

bottom-up approach to the teaching of reading.’ In Goodman’s study, he found the subjects sampled the text, employing text redundancy to reduce the amount of data needed and using their language knowledge, either syntactic or semantics, to guide their guesses. Therefore, his view of the reading process is often classified into the top-down process, in which the readers’ expectations are brought to the text, and that is reader-driven. Unlike the bottom-up model, the reading process is seen to be cyclical instead of being sequential, and the readers move from their own hypothesis to the text and back to the hypothesis again.

Goodman contributed a lot in the theory of reading process. First, he offered an alternative to reading researchers who may not be satisfied with the letter to letter, word to word bottom-up model. Learning reading may become more exciting. Secondly, Goodman suggested the readers’ hypothesis to the text, which may fit what Chomsky (1965) described that human language users impose existing ‘rules’ or expectations on the data degenerated. Finally, his model meshed well with notions that texts always being incomplete and being completed by the readers by referring to their background knowledge. Goodman also had considerable influence on L2 reading theory. For example, Hosenfeld (1984) claimed that the good reader is a good guesser. However, there was criticism concerning the claim that good readers guess more, and use the context more than poorer readers. Nicholson (1993) found that it was the poor and average readers who may benefit from contexts not the older and better ones. In fact, it is accepted that at least at the level of word recognition and lexical access, some form of bottom-up process is followed.

Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), and Eskey (1988) also challenged the views that reading comprehension involves either bottom-up or top-down processing. They pointed out that the model of the reading comprehension process involves both bottom-up and top-down models, and then proposed that in comprehending a text, the

two models are employed interactively and simultaneously.

The interactive model

The bottom-up model is sequential, and one stage is completed before another is begun. In the interactive model, which was first proposed by Rumelhart (1977), a pattern is synthesized based on information provided simultaneously from several sources. Weir and Urquhart (1998) further described Rumelhart's model. Once a Feature Extraction Device has operated on the Visual Information Store, it passed the data to a Pattern Synthesiser which receives input from Syntactical, Semantic, Lexical and Orthographic Knowledge, all potentially operating at the same time. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) also explained that the bottom-up model ensures the reader's anticipation about the text while top-down processing helps to resolve ambiguities or to select interpretations of the text. Besides, Carrell (1988) believed that efficient readers shift from one process to the other while low-proficiency readers tend to depend on one model of processing.

Stanovich (1980) then suggested the interactive-compensatory model, which refers to the idea that a weakness in one area of knowledge or skill can be compensated for by strength in another area. Alderson and Urquhart (1985) also mentioned that background knowledge might make up for inadequate language skills. This model is very attractive but as Rayner and Pollatsek (1989) pointed out, the main weakness is that it is very good at explaining results but comparatively poor at predicting them in advance. This may be due to the fact that each reader must be viewed as potentially different, with different strengths and weaknesses.

To sum up, the interactive model emphasized that reading involves both the applications of higher mental operation and the lower text processing. Both bottom-up and top-down approaches are important elements to complete the reading tasks. Also,

different tasks may require different models of the processes involved. Entwistle et al. (1979) suggested that either data driven or reader driven may be the preferred styles of particular classes of readers. From the interactive point-of-view, reading comprehension is considered as an interactive processing of the text and the readers' background knowledge, both of which are important elements of the reading components. Therefore, the review of the reading components below may be beneficial to the display of different models for the reading theory.

The Reading Components

The models discussed above tended to describe the actual process of reading, but the models of the reading components aimed to discuss the areas of skills or knowledge involved in the process. According to Weir and Urquhart (1998), there are two componential models, two-component model and three-component model. Besides, the schema theory is also closely related to the reading components.

The two-component model

Fries (1963) and Perfetti (1977) mentioned the componential model with two components is the simple view. Hoover and Tunmer (1993) also pointed out that these two components are word recognition and linguistic comprehension. According to their interpretation, word recognition refers to the ability to recognize an English word in print, to pronounce it, and to give its meaning; on the other hand, linguistic comprehension means the comprehension which is linguistically committed to the text. Hoover and Tunmer (1993) analyzed in their study of the students in the early graders, the correlations between word recognition and linguistic comprehension are low, but become steadily higher as they advance through the school.

The two-component model is very simple and desirable for many reading researchers; however, its simplicity may also bring about criticism. For example, Weir and Urquhart (1998) pointed out that the term ‘word recognition’ doesn’t appear to refer to the ability to decode pseudo words which do not appear in the lexicon but involve accessing the mental lexicon. Carroll (1972) also suggested that linguistic comprehension should not be limited to ‘pure’ or ‘simple’ comprehension of the text but ‘total’ comprehension including processes of inference, deduction and problem solving. In addition, there are obvious difficulties in using this model to describe L2 readers. Hoover and Tunmer can make the reasonable assumption that young L1 learners’ language knowledge can be tapped by an oral comprehension test, but this may not be a safe assumption to make with L2 learners, who may well perform on a reading test than on an equivalent oral test.

To solve this problem, L2 reading researchers may have to pay more attention to what is meant by language and the knowledge the reader brings into the text, and offer another model with three components of the reading process.

The three-component model

Coady (1979) and Bernhardt (1991) both described L2 reading including three variables. Coady (1979) first claimed that reading comprehension involved the interaction of the reader’s “conceptual abilities,” “background knowledge”, and “process strategies” (p. 7). In Coady’s model, Conceptual abilities are equivalent to intellectual capacity. Background knowledge refers to the knowledge of the subject being read, and process strategies mean both a knowledge of the system and the ability to use the knowledge.

On the other hand, Bernhardt’s model includes language, literacy, and world knowledge. Language consists of the ‘seen’ elements of the text, such as word

structure, word meaning, syntax and morphology. Literacy equals operational knowledge, knowing how to approach a text. World knowledge is similar to Coady's background knowledge.

Both of the models focused on background knowledge and strategies, and Coady's model may be further discussed in the part of the schema theory while Bernhardt's model will be emphasized within the section to review the literature of the reading skills and strategies.

Schema theory

Anderson et al. (1977) mentioned that every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well. Coady (1979) and Bernhardt (1991) also considered background knowledge an important component of reading. Brown (1994) further described background knowledge of the subject as the information, knowledge, emotion, experience, and culture the reader brings to the printed word. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) first proposed the schema theory which may categorize different kinds of background knowledge.

Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) discussed that there are two kinds of schemata: content schemata and formal schemata. Content schemata refer to "the background knowledge of the content area of a text" (p. 560). Several studies have proposed that background knowledge of the text content plays a significant role in reading comprehension (Johnson, 1982; Roller, 1990), and the more the readers are familiar with the topic of a text, the better they can comprehend the text. On the other hand, formal schemata are about the background knowledge of the "formal, rhetorical or organizational structures of different types of texts" (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 560). Studies also showed that a reader's familiarity with rhetorical structures of different types of texts helps to facilitate reading comprehension (Cohen et al., 1979;

Geva, 1992; Roller, 1990). In addition to the content and formal schemata, James (1987) presented linguistic schemata which emphasize the importance of knowledge of the language such as grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, content schemata are similar to background knowledge in Coady's model while formal schemata can be referred to as Bernhardt's literacy component and linguistic schemata are under different areas of language in Bernhardt's model.

To sum up, background knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension. But for language learners, understanding the components of reading, which include not only their background knowledge but also some practical reading skills and strategies they can apply when taking reading comprehension tests, may be more important. Therefore, following is the review of the reading skills and strategies that may be beneficial to the formal instruction of these skills and strategies.

The Reading Skills and Strategies

As mentioned above, background knowledge and the reading skills and strategies are important components of reading. In this section, the definition of the reading skills and strategies is stated first, and then the categorization of the reading skills and strategies is presented. The validity of the instruction of the reading skills and strategies is also discussed at the end of this section.

The Definition of the Reading Skills and Strategies

According to some researchers, the definitions of the reading skills and reading strategies seem to present a certain amount of overlapping. For example, Weir and Urquhart (1998) pointed out that a reading skill can be described as a cognitive ability which a person is able to use when interacting with written texts. Olshavsky (1977) and Sarig (1987) both considered reading as a problems-solving process and reading

strategies can be seen as ways and responses to deal with difficulties while reading a text. Nuttall (1996) and Grabe (1991) even referred to skills and strategies as if they were interchangeable. However, Criper and Davies (1988) pointed out that reading skills are text-oriented and strategies are reader-oriented. Brown (1994) then considered the skill-based one as the bottom-up and the strategy-based as the top-down approaches. Weir and Urquhart (1998) also mentioned that strategies represent conscious decisions taken by the reader, and skills are deployed unconsciously.

The present research aims to provide the categorization of different question types and the instruction of related reading skills with practical reading strategies for students to solve their problems in the reading comprehension tests of the BCT.

The Categorization of the Reading Skills and Strategies

Researchers identified and presented different perspectives about reading skills and strategies. For example, Lunzer et al. (1979) suggested eight reading skills, including word meaning, words in context, literal comprehension, drawing inferences from single strings, drawing inferences from multiple strings, interpretation of metaphor, finding salient or main ideas, and forming judgments. Johnson (2004) also proposed six reading skills such as recognizing main idea, identifying supporting details, drawing logical inferences and conclusions, recognizing the author's purpose and tone, identifying the author's overall pattern of organization, determining the meaning of the words from context and word structure. There were still many other researchers who suggested similar categorization (Carver, 1978; Mikulecky, 1990; the Raygors, 1985). Mo (1987) therefore classified the reading skills into the following six categories: (1) identifying the main idea, (2) finding specific details mentioned in the passage, (3) finding implications and drawing inferences and

conclusions from the text, (4) recognizing style and tone, (5) determining the special techniques used by the author, (6) determining the meaning of strange words or phrases as used in the text.

As the researcher aims to analyze the reading comprehension tests in the BCT, the principles for compiling the BCT English reading comprehension tests are essential and indispensable to this research. According to the BCT committee (2005), there are six strategies for its reading comprehension tests: (1) finding the details, (2) identifying the main idea, (3) drawing the conclusions, (4) drawing inferences, (5) finding the reference (6) guessing the meaning. The researcher thus combined the reading skills from Mo (1987) and those from the BCT committee, and brought forward the reading comprehension handouts with six major reading skills which may suit the need of the reading instruction for junior high school students. These skills are identifying the main idea (MI), finding the detailed information (DI), determining the meaning out of the context (MC), finding the targets of the reference (TR), drawing implications and inferences (II), and drawing correct conclusions (CC).

In addition, the reading skills were further classified by different researchers. Hughes (1989) mentioned that the skills such as identifying referents of pronouns and using context to guess meaning of unfamiliar words are regarded as micro-skills while the skills such as skimming text to obtain the gist and scanning text to locate specific information are macro-skills. Weir and Urquhart (1998) also proposed the local skills and the global skills: the former may include locating specific information and deducing meaning of lexical items from context while the latter may be related to establishing discourse topic, main ideas, and propositional inferences. Johnson (2004) then described the literal and the critical reading skills. He mentioned that the literal comprehension skills are to determine what the author has said on the page and emphasize more the surface meaning of the texts, but the critical reading skills may be

involved with the ability of deeper comprehension and require the reader to find out the meaning beyond. Johnson (2004) therefore concluded that the literal reading skills include finding the detailed information (DI), finding the targets of the reference (TR) and determining the meaning out of the context (MC), while the critical reading skills consist of identifying the main idea (MI), drawing implications and inferences (II) and drawing correct conclusions (CC). In the present research, the focus is not only on the effectiveness of individual reading skills but also on the significance of the literal and the critical reading skills for junior high school participants.

On the other hand, the categorization of the reading strategies may be more problematic. Unlike the research to categorize the reading skills that demonstrates a certain degree of similarity, in strategies research, the focus is on the actual strategies used by the readers and the strategies reported may vary a lot. There are two representative examples of strategy research. Olshavsky (1977) did her work with English-speaking readers and categorized the strategies as word related, clause related and story related strategies. Word related strategies include the use of context to define a word, synonym substitution, stated failure to understand a word. Clause related strategies are about re-reading, inferences, addition of information, personal identification, hypothesis, stated failure to understand a clause. Story related strategies may involve the use of information in story to solve a problem.

Sarig (1987), who worked with bilingual Hebrew and English speaking subjects, adopted a 'think-aloud-when-reading' technique to categorize the strategies as technical aid, coherence detecting, and clarification and simplification monitoring. Technical aid strategies are skimming, scanning, and skipping. Coherence detecting strategies include the identification of macroframe, use of content schemata, and identification of key information in text. Clarification and simplification monitoring strategies are related to syntactic simplification, using synonyms and circumlocutions,

mistake correction, ongoing self-evaluation, controlled skipping and repeated reading.

The studies of the reading skills and strategies are closely related to each other. For example, the skill of determining the meaning out the context (MC) may require some of the word related strategies such as the use of context to define a word and synonym substitution, and drawing implications, inferences (II) and correct conclusions (CC) are related to clause related and story related strategies. The skill of identifying the main idea (MI) may involve the technical aid strategies of skimming and skipping while finding the detailed information (DI) needs a lot of scanning strategy, and the skill of finding the targets of the reference (TR) is related to coherence detecting strategies. Therefore, the present research aims to provide the instruction of the reading skills with useful and practical strategies.

The Validity of the Instruction of the Reading Skills and Strategies

Researchers have considered the reading skills and strategies as important components of reading (Bernhardt, 1991, Coady, 1979; Weir & Urquhart, 1998). Brown (1994) also described that for most second language learners who are already literate in a previous language, reading comprehension is primarily a matter of developing appropriate, efficient comprehension strategies. Reading skills and strategies have been a major area of reading research (Dubin et al., 1986; Grabe, 1991; Williams & Moran, 1989). Lunzer et al. (1979) and Vincent (1985) even recommended reading skills as a means of structuring reading syllabus. Therefore, some researchers described reading as underlying skills components for the purpose of teaching and testing (Chapelle et al., 1997; Gillet & Richards, 1979).

However, the validity of the instruction of the reading skills and strategies may be threatened and have a strong impact on the training of test-taking techniques. It was argued that such instruction directs to get the answer rather than to understand the

reading text. Dubin et al. (1986), therefore, suggested that reading skills be addressed and items be designed in a way that these reading skills are evaluated. Nuttal (1996) also encouraged the test designer to define the skills and to write questions which involve such skills. Johnson (2004) even encouraged the instruction of some critical reading skills which may help the readers to achieve deeper comprehension of the text other than its surface meaning. Weir and Urquhart (1998, p. 93) concluded that reading “skills are useful tools for the development of both teaching materials and tests.” Moreover, Brown (1994) emphasized the importance of specific instruction in reading skills, and he mentioned that techniques should be intrinsically motivating and should utilize authentic language and contexts. He also indicated “interactive, integrated-skills approaches to language teaching emphasize the interrelationship of skills. Reading ability will best be developed in association with writing, listening, and speaking activity” (p. 283).

On the other hand, both Olshavsky (1977) and Sarig (1987) viewed reading as a problem-solving process and strategies are ways of getting round difficulties encountered while reading. Pritchard (1990, p. 275) also mentioned that a strategy is “a deliberate action that readers take voluntarily to develop an understanding of what they read.” Cohen (1998) pointed out that the instruction of the reading strategies may be helpful to the development of the readers’ consciousness. Auerbach and Paxton (1997) also described that readers’ awareness of their reading processes and strategies may enhance proficiency. Williams and Burden (1997) pointed out the learners will employ strategies if they have a sense of ownership or choice in the strategies used. Therefore, the instruction of the reading skills and strategies aims to enable students to internalize the skills and strategies they have learned, to solve the problems they encountered, and to enhance their ability of reading comprehension.

To conclude, the reading skills and strategies are important elements for not

only the reading research but also the reading instruction and the reading comprehension tests. Many researchers have proposed a lot of practicable reading skills and strategies (Block, 1992; Carver, 1978; Haverson, Wayne, & Haynes, 1982; Johnson, 2004; Lunzer et al., 1979; Mikulecky, 1990; Mo, 1987; Murphy, 1980; Olshavsky, 1977; Raygors, 1985; Sarig, 1987), but little research has been conducted on their application and instruction in the EFL class, especially in the junior high school level. Some of the researchers focused on the cross-cultural studies of the reading skills and strategies (Block, 1992; Murphy, 1980), while the other researchers emphasized the adult literacy (Haverson, Wayne, & Haynes, 1982). The research on cross-cultural studies may not be generalized and suitable in Taiwan for the culture, teaching environment, and the reading habits may be different. The research on the adult literacy presented different participants from those whom the researcher is interested in, and their learning strategies and language abilities may not be the same. Therefore, there is a need to proceed with this research on the instruction of the reading skills and strategies for junior high school students and their effectiveness on the BCT reading comprehension tests.

The Reading Comprehension Tests

After the literature review on the theory of reading and the reading skills and strategies, the present research may proceed with the review on the reading comprehension tests. First of all, the validity of the reading comprehension tests is discussed, and then comes the research of the reading comprehension tests in the BCT. After the review of the reading theory, the reading skills and strategies, and the reading comprehension tests, three research questions of the present study are proposed.

The Validity of the Reading Comprehension Tests

Henning (1987) described that the central concern in reading comprehension test is its construct validity, which demonstrates that a test measures just the ability which it is supposed to measure. Hughes (1989) also pointed out that reading is “the exercising of receptive skills which does not necessarily, or usually, manifest itself in overt behavior” (p. 116). Heaton (1990) mentioned that a test must aim at providing a true measure of the particular skill that it intends to measure. Therefore, how to develop the reading comprehension tests which can best reflect the test-takers’ reading ability may be the major concern for many reading researchers.

According to Weir and Urquhart (1998), multiple-choice questions have been widely adopted to assess a student’s reading ability in the reading comprehension tests. Lu (2002) also presented that the issue of what multiple-choice questions actually assess and of whether multiple-choice questions are valid reflections and measures of reading ability has become the major issue of the reading comprehension tests (Cummings, 1982; Weir, 1997). Therefore, some researchers have built up strong criticism for the validity of the multiple-choice tests. For example, Traxler (1970) indicated that there are some limitations of standardized reading tests since reading comprehension is a complex thinking process which does not naturally fall into measurable units. The strongest criticism might be for the problem of passage-independent (Teale & Rowley, 1984). Teale and Rowley (1984) suspected what the test would measure if the items could be answered without referring to the reading text. Some researchers have found that examinees, in response to the items of the multiple-choice questions, do not refer back to the reading passage (Cohen, 1998; Fillmore & Kay, 1983; Nevo, 1989). Besides, Fillmore and Kay (1983) discussed the content and construct validity of the reading test and argued that some multiple-choice reading tests do not allow students to demonstrate their reading comprehension

because of the undesirable test questions which might be irrelevant to understand the text, confuse the meaning in the text, or prevent students from using their background knowledge to select the correct answer. Bauman (1982) even, in his analyses of test items and the reading selections, identified the inconsistencies between the meaning of the selection and the suggested correct answer.

Even though the criticisms on the validity of the reading comprehension tests are strong, Farr et al. (1990) proposed that the types of questions that follow a reading selection will determine if the reading selection focuses on only the surface meaning of the text or on other- perhaps deeper – comprehension, and that developing questions focusing on important aspects of test passages enhance the validity of the test. Yu (1995) pointed out that an ideal reading test should provide items that enable readers to demonstrate their reading ability and that a reading test should switch from the single-dimension assessment to the multiple interactive factors assessment. Hughes (1989) also suggested that the reading comprehension tests contain as many questions as possible to test readers' abilities. However, due to the constraint of time and cost, it is not possible to develop an unlimited list of different reading questions. What is more important is to design well the reading comprehension questions that may require most of the readers' skills and abilities, and the balanced distribution of different question types should be emphasized. Therefore, the threatening to the validity of the reading comprehension tests may reduce.

The Reading Comprehension Tests in the BCT

Huang (2004) mentioned that the BCT is a standardized summative test which is designed based on the objectives of Nine-Year Integrative Curriculum. The test should contain significant knowledge and skills to assess junior high school students' basic competence. According to the BCT committee (2005), there are ten

indicators for students' English reading competence. Before graduation, junior high school students will be able to (1) identify the cursive writing of the English alphabets, (2) look up the pronunciations and meanings of the words in the dictionary, (3) read common signs and tables in English, (4) read aloud short passages and stories with an appropriate tone and tempo, (5) understand the main idea of the reading passages in the textbook, (6) understand the content and plot of the dialogues, short passages, letters, stories and plays, (7) identify important elements of the stories, such as the background, characters, events and the ending, (8) guess the meanings or make inferences from the context or demonstration, (9) read simple articles with various styles and different topics, (10) understand and appreciate simple poems and plays.

According to Hughes (1989), the test with good validity should imply the curricular objectives. The English reading comprehension tests in the BCT should therefore go well with these indicators to demonstrate junior high school students' reading competence. However, related reading research in Taiwan has rarely been developed to examine whether the design of the English reading comprehension tests in the BCT meet their indicators or not.

In Taiwan, some researchers have analyzed the English tests of the BCT (Huang, 2004; Lei, 2001; You, 2004). Their focus is either on the backwash effects of the BCT in English class or on the analysis of test items. Still some researchers centered on the analysis of the reading comprehension tests for entering college or technology university (Lu, 2002; Lu, 2003; Wu, 2000). However, little attention was drawn to the analysis of the reading comprehension tests in the BCT, and even less research was found on the effectiveness of the instruction of the reading skills and strategies in the junior high school English class. Therefore, the present research aims to describe the reading comprehension question types in the BCT, to discuss the participants' performances and problems in each question type and to examine how the reading

skills and strategies work for junior high school participants. Following are the research questions:

Research Questions

1. What are the question types and their frequency distribution in the BCT?
2. How do the participants perform in each question type and what are their problems?
3. How do the reading skills and strategies work in class for junior high school participants?

