

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The major findings of the present study are summarized in the first section, followed by some pedagogical implications in the second section. Finally, the limitations of the present study and suggestions for future research are also presented.

Summary

The present study analyzed the reading question types of the English reading comprehension tests of the BCT and presented a formal reading instruction of the reading skills and strategies in class. The teaching plans of the formal reading instruction, including three major phases, had been implemented between the control and the experimental groups for fourteen weeks. The participants' performances in both of the BCT held in May and July of 2006 were analyzed by computing descriptive statistics, t-test and ANOVA. The major findings are summarized below.

1. The question types of the reading comprehension tests in the BCT and their frequency distribution

According to Mo (1987) and those from the BCT committee (2005), there are generally six question types for the English reading comprehension tests in the BCT. In the reading pretest, the researcher also recognized these six question types as 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). However, in the English reading comprehension tests in the BCT of 2006, there were

only five reading question types and the question type drawing correct conclusions was not identified.

Moreover, the frequency of the question types displayed unbalanced distribution not only in the reading pretest but also in the BCT reading tests of 2006. Among these reading question types, the type DI was in the largest proportion and nearly half of the reading questions were categorized into this question type. On the contrary, there were few reading questions which were referred to as the question type MI and II. In both of the BCT reading comprehension tests of 2006, there was even no reading question which could be recognized as the question type CC. The frequency distribution of individual reading question types showed that the English reading comprehension tests of the BCT focused a lot on finding the detailed information rather than on the other question types that may help develop some of the important and essential reading skills and strategies for junior high school students.

To be more specific, for the question types included as the literal and the critical reading skills, the BCT reading comprehension tests also centered mostly on the literal skills. The critical skills that are related to what Farr et al. (1990) mentioned, deeper comprehension were not emphasized in the reading pretest and both of the BCT reading tests in 2006.

In a word, there are six reading question types in the BCT reading comprehension tests and the reading question types are recognized mostly as the literal reading skills such as finding the detailed information (DI), determining the meaning out of the context (MC) and finding the targets of the reference (TR). But, the question types for the critical skills such as identifying the main idea (MI), drawing implications and inferences (II) and drawing correct conclusions (CC) are not equally emphasized.

2. The participants' performances in the reading pretest

For individual question types, the participants performed better on the question types which belong to the literal reading skills such as finding the targets of the reference (TR) and finding the detailed information (DI). According to Johnson (2004), the literal skills are usually the easier skills to learn because they depend on simple awareness and understanding of the ideas that are stated. They merely require attention to the ideas the author has stated. On the contrary, the question types related to the literal reading skills may require not only the surface meanings but also the deeper processing and comprehension of these meanings. The participants did not perform well on the question types of the critical reading skills such as identifying the main idea (MI), drawing correct conclusions (CC) and they performed the worst on the question of drawing implications and inferences (II), only about fifty percent of these questions could be answered correctly in the pretest.

Moreover, statistical results also displayed that the participants' performances in the experimental and the control groups presented no significant difference. T-test was processed to analyze the participants' overall performances in the pretest, while one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare their performances of individual question types. For the question types related to the literal and the critical reading skills, there is also no significant difference between the experimental and the control groups. Therefore, the participants' performances in both groups seemed similar before the formal reading instruction.

3. The participants' performances in the BCT of 2006

First of all, the participants' overall performances showed inconsistent results between the two BCT reading comprehension tests in May and in July of 2006. The t-test treatment revealed a significant difference between the control and the

experimental groups for the first BCT of 2006. This suggests that after the formal reading instruction, the participants who learned the reading skills and strategies in the experimental group performed better than those who practiced the same reading passages one after another in the control group, which may imply that the reading instruction is significant and effective in improving students' overall reading comprehension performances in the first BCT of 2006.

However, no significant difference was found for the participants' performances in the second BCT of 2006. How come the reading instruction is effective in the first BCT but not significant in the second? According to Mo (1987) and Brown (1994), the reading skills and strategies need to be practiced and reinforced to help learners acquire and internalize them. But the participants graduated from the researcher's school in June, and the second BCT was held in July, almost one and a half month later. After they graduated, the researcher could not actually guide their practice for the second BCT of 2006 and the effectiveness of the formal reading instruction may reduce. So, the results of the first BCT of 2006 may be more reliable than the second one. Generally speaking, the results of the participants' overall performances in the first BCT of 2006 are significant and the formal reading instruction seems effective for the experimental group.

On the other hand, for the participants' performances of individual question types, the participants in the experimental group performed well in both the question types related to the literal and the critical reading skills and better than those of the control group. The performances on the question types of the critical skills improved in the experimental group but not in the control group. Moreover, one-way ANOVA was processed to analyze the significance and effectiveness of individual question types between the experimental and the control groups in the first and second BCT of 2006. Again, the results showed inconsistency between the first and the second

BCT of 2006. In the first BCT of 2006, the results of the participants' performances for individual question types and those for the literal and the critical reading skills are significantly different between the experimental and the control groups. Only the instruction for the question type finding detailed information (DI) is not significant in the first BCT of 2006. This may imply that the instruction of the literal skill for finding the detailed information was not effective and most of the participants could recognize the correct answers even though they do not receive the formal instruction of the skill and related strategies if they are given enough time to finish their reading comprehension questions. In general, the formal reading instruction of the reading skills and strategies in the experimental group is effective on the participants' performances of individual question types in the first BCT of 2006.

Moreover, the results of the participants' performances in the second BCT of 2006 did not seem to present as much significance as the first one. The results for the question types related to the literal skills are not significant but the question type drawing implications and inferences (II) is still significant in the second BCT. This may also imply that the instruction of the critical skills is more effective than that of the literal ones. The instruction of the critical skills remains significant because even if the effectiveness of the formal reading instruction decreases in the second of BCT, the participants in the experimental group could still figure out the answers with their reading skills and strategies but those in the control group could not come out with correct answers as easily as the literal ones.

To conclude with the finding presented above, the results of the present study display that first, there are totally six individual question types for the reading comprehension tests in the BCT, and the frequency of the reading questions also presents an unbalanced distribution not only in the pretest but also in both of the BCT in 2006. Second, the results of the participants' performances in the pretest

suggest that they performed better on the question types related to the literal reading skills than the critical ones and there is no significant difference between the experimental and the control groups before the formal reading instruction. Third, the results of the participants' performances in the first BCT of 2006 show that the formal reading instruction is effective not only for their over performances but also for individual question types. At last, the results from the second BCT of 2006 reveal that the effectiveness of the formal reading instruction with reading skills and strategies may decrease because of time and practicing factors. Besides, the results in the second BCT of 2006 also suggest that the instruction of the critical reading skills may be more effective than that of the literal ones.

Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings of the present study, some implications could be drawn for EFL teachers, material designers and even the BCT committee in Taiwan.

First, results of the present study demonstrate that the English reading question types of the BCT present unbalanced design and distribution. The question type finding the detailed information (DI) and the literal reading skilled are over emphasized. The question types related to the critical reading skills are often neglected and a negative backwash may cause English teachers and their students to pay little attention to the training and developing of more critical and advanced reading skills. The critical reading skills are important factors to improve students' overall reading ability, but if the reading comprehension tests of the BCT focus mostly on the literal reading skills, it may lead the reading instruction and learning in an unbalanced way that teachers and students may only prepare for the question types related to the literal skills. Therefore, the BCT committee may have to think of a better way to the design of a more balanced reading comprehension test that

emphasizes both the literal and the critical reading skills. Teachers and their students may be affected and aware of the importance of the critical reading skills to the development of the overall reading ability.

Besides, EFL teachers often confront the dilemma that they are willing to incorporate the reading instruction into their classes but they lack a more systematic and clear-cut teaching material of reading. The present research has presented that the formal reading instruction with the reading skills and strategies may be effective in the first BCT of 2006. The teaching plan demonstrated in the formal reading instruction may provide teachers with the guidelines to the instruction of the reading skills and strategies. Six different reading skills are arranged with their brief introduction, question forms, related reading strategies, examples from the BCT and after-class assignments in this teaching plan. Teachers may design their own reading materials in a more systematic way and arrange the reading passages in accordance with different reading question types and reading skills. They may also combine the teaching plan with their own reading materials and choose what they aim to teach their students. Before the coming of the BCT, they may take this teaching plan to enhance their students' reading skills and ability.

Moreover, the instruction of the reading skills and strategies may be beneficial for EFL students as well. The formal reading instruction does not aim to help students to identify the correct answers without referring back to the reading texts but to help them get the gist out of the texts they are not familiar with by identifying the main idea, finding the detailed information, determining the meaning out of the context, finding the targets of the reference, drawing implications and inferences, and drawing correct conclusions. Students often say that though they have learned a lot of vocabulary and even understand the surface meanings of every sentence, they sometimes become puzzled to decide on the most suitable answer and feel frustrated

when choosing the wrong answer. Therefore, the instruction of the reading skills and strategies may be a better solution for them to get the most of the reading texts and answer the reading questions correctly. Students may have intensive practice of one reading question type after another and the skills and strategies as well. 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 most important of all, and to enhance their ability of reading comprehension.

At last, concerning material and textbook development, the researcher has observed that the present English textbooks for junior high school students show no or little information about the reading skills and strategies. The present study may be able to provide their designers with better ideas of how to incorporate reading skills and strategies into the design of the tasks and activities in the textbooks. In Taiwan, textbooks have been playing a greater role in shaping the curriculum than teachers (Chao, 2005). Once the reading skills and strategies are introduced in the textbooks, teachers may be willing to incorporate them into their reading classes and students may have more chances of practicing these skills and strategies and therefore, enhance their awareness and internalization of the reading skills and strategies.

Limitations of the Present Study and Suggestions for Future Research

There are several limitations of the present study.

First, the present study only looked into sixty ninth graders' performances in the BCT to analyze the effectiveness of the reading skills and strategies. They are in the same school in Taipei and the number of the participants is small. Therefore, the generalizations of the results may not apply to subjects in other junior high schools in Taiwan or to subjects with a different educational background. It is suggested that a larger sample from different schools or in different parts of Taiwan should be

investigated in order to obtain a clearer picture of the effect of the reading skill instruction on Taiwanese junior high school students' reading comprehension tests in the BCT.

Second, the reading passages and the reading comprehension questions in the pretest are not enough for the analysis of the reading question types and their frequency distribution. Because the BCT was first implemented in 2001, the examples of the reading comprehension tests were limited. The present research excluded the reading comprehension test in the BCT of 2005 because many of the participants may have practiced the questions before they took the BCT in 2006. However, after a few more years, future studies may have more examples to analyze. Moreover, the reading question types related to the critical reading skills are recognized much less than those related to the literal skills in both of the BCT in 2006. Due to the limited number of these questions, the results the present study displayed that the instruction of the critical reading skills may be more effective than that of the literal ones may become less reliable. Therefore, the researcher may encourage the test designers to include more reading questions related to the critical reading skills and further studies in this area are suggested to investigate the effectiveness of the literal and the critical reading skills.

Third, the reading passages in the BCT are really too short (about 100 to 150 words) to train the reading skills. Because the researcher may need longer statement and description to explain and instruct some critical reading skills such as drawing implications and inferences and drawing correct conclusions.

Fourth, the factors that may affect students' performances in the BCT may go beyond the instruction of the reading skills and strategies. For example, other factors such as the type of the test, learners' former learning experience, their personality, the teacher-student relationship, the time after they graduate, and so on, may affect

their performances in the reading comprehension tests of the BCT. Instead of the multiple choice questions, the participants may perform quite differently in short answer questions. Therefore, it is also suggested that in addition to the reading skills and strategies, other factors also need further investigation in future studies.

Fifth, the present study lacked the analysis of the item difficulty, which is important in comparing the results of two different tests. Then, the progress the participants have made can be the effectiveness of the instruction or simply because of some easier reading questions. To avoid this problem, further studies are suggested to include the analysis of the item difficulty for the reading questions involved.

Finally, in the present study, there was no questionnaire for the participants to reflect what they had learned, how they felt about the instruction of the reading skills and strategies, and what their difficulties were after the formal reading instruction. Designing a questionnaire about these issues could also provide precious data that may inspire further research in this area.