



## CHAPTER 2

### THE RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the problems encountered by Thai students in reading a foreign language are examined. The literature shows a number of concepts or approaches, as well as several methods and techniques for teaching English reading skills. The discussion focuses on six major areas: students' characteristics with regard to their approach to reading English, the definition of reading, reading skills, reading strategies, reading purposes, English reading instruction and related researches.

#### Students' Characteristics Regarding Reading English

Studying the English language in college is very difficult for many students. They need to improve their reading, writing, listening and speaking skills. As McWhorter (2003, p. 3) states that if students want to be successful, they will have to discover what is expected of them in college; learn how to improve their concentration; analyze how they learn; and, strengthen their comprehension skills. McWhorter (2002, pp. 1-2) also suggests that there are a few tips that will help you become a successful college student, such as confidence, as well as the ability to visualize success and set long-term goals for yourself. In addition, students should plan on spending time reading, actively searching for key ideas as they read. They should think of reading as

a way of unlocking the writer's message and stick with a reading assignment. Students who study in university should develop good study habits. Hancock (2008, p. 1) suggests that college classes are very different from high school classes in that university students have more work and responsibility, without being prodded as much, and need to read a lot to gain more knowledge. Each individual student, however, may have different reading problems. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2004, p. 3) point out that no two students have the same knowledge of a language, nor the same language learning needs. Some students may need to learn more vocabulary, while others may need to develop their ability to write proper sentences in English.

When teachers assign students to read supplementary texts, the latter do two things: first, most Thai students read word-by-word and secondly, look up each word. When they see words they do not understand, they stop reading, find the vocabulary in the context and look up unfamiliar words in the dictionary. Then they write the meanings down over or under the unfamiliar words in the text. They do not try to guess what the unfamiliar words mean. Maneerat Sukchotrat (2005, p. 40) states that when students read texts, they should not stop and look up the meaning of each new words in the dictionary, but should continue reading the text and try to understand it. They should also try to predict the meaning of the text while reading. After reading the text, however, it may be that students are unable to reply to questions on the content or have no idea what they have read. This may be because they do not pay much attention to the text and worry too much about the meaning of the individual words while reading. McGrath (2005, p. 43) adds that the readers should

formulate an overall strategy for defining unfamiliar words, such as understanding how to use external context and internal context (parts of the word-prefixes, roots, suffixes), to help define a word. Also, one should identify other resources for defining unfamiliar words, recognize the difference between the denotation and the connotation of a word, as well as recognizing when words are chosen by the author for a special purpose, recognizing and understanding figurative language and so on. Attitude also plays a role as well; reading is not hard for students to practice if they think that they can do it. Furthermore, as Kohl (1973, pp. 171-173) points out, reading and writing will be acquired naturally if readers can be natural about it and believe it is worth doing.

### **Definition of Reading**

Blake (1989, p. 1) defines reading as understanding messages in written or printed materials. To acquire this understanding, the readers need to discover the writer's ideas, the main message and use reading skills to find out what they want to know.

### ***Reading Skills***

Brown (1975, pp. 7-9) maintains that reading will help the readers know themselves better in three ways, such as being better able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, explore their relationships with others and broaden their concept and clarification of past, present, and future.



Goodman (1967, pp. 126-130) characterizes reading as a psycholinguistic guessing game. Meaning does not come from the printed letters alone, but involves an interaction between thought and language. Rather than reading each individual word, readers select the fewest, most productive cues from the printed page that are necessary to produce apt guesses and confirm them. They make predictions about what will come next, and check these predictions. Smith, Goodman, and Meredith (1970) also suggest that reading is an active process rather than a passive, receptive one.

Grabe (as cited in Hayashi, 1999, p. 115) emphasizes that reading is the relationship between reader and text and that the reader needs to know the language to understand the text.

Harris and Sipay (1975, p. 5) suggest that reading is “the meaningful interpretation of written or printed verbal symbols” and is a kind of communication for exchanging ideas between readers and writers. In other words, reading involves decoding written symbols and reconstructing the world the writer had in mind. However, that is difficult to achieve, and readers always understand both more and less than the writer intended, even in their native language (Somnuk Songsiri, 1999, p. 15)

Leedy (1956, pp. 1-4) also points out that reading is knowing where to look to discover main ideas and supporting details, how to appreciate the organization of thought, and how to interpret and evaluate that thought as it lies open upon the page before us.

McGrath (2005, pp. 2-3) points out that the distinction between skills and strategies is not always clear. A skill is something the readers perform



automatically and a strategy is a technique the readers consciously select to complete a task accurately and efficiently.

Smith (as cited in Malee Nitsaisook, 2003, p. 79) suggests that reading is a process to understand the meaning of the reading material. The reader needs to activate the complex knowledge (regarding which many theories have been devised) and beliefs already existing in his or her brain.

### ***Reading Strategies***

Many researchers have defined reading strategies. For example, Fjeldstad (2006, p. 415) suggests that there are many strategies one can use to be better readers. One of them, previewing, helps us get ready to read actively. The reason is simple: the more you know about a topic, the easier it is to read about that topic. In other words, the more background information you possess, the easier it is to read.

Amara Phu wattanaset and Nitaya Yuangsri (1986, p. 1) define reading strategies as key to understanding all the words that the writer has written. It is a communication between the reader and the writer. The writer's context is just like a code; the reader needs to learn what the code means and decode it from the letters, words and sentences. Also, the reader needs to use their background knowledge to manage all those items cited above so that they will understand the meaning the writer wishes to convey within a chosen context.

Barnett (as cited in Tercanlioglu, 2004) also claims the term 'reading strategy' refers to the fact that, when readers read texts, they have to understand why or for what purpose they are reading that particular item.

Garner (as cited in Wirotanan, 2002) notes simply that reading strategies may be defined as a series of actions readers use while reading in order to construct meaning. Wipasiri Jaengsaengthong (as cited in Sheorey & Mokhtari 2001, p. 3) defines reading strategies in a more complex way as “deliberate, conscious procedures used by readers to enhance text comprehension.” In a similar vein, Paris, Lipson, and Wixson (1983) define reading strategies as deliberate, cognitive steps that learners can take to assist in acquiring, storing and retrieving new information and that can be accessed for a conscious use. In a further variation on this theme, Brantmeier (2002) believes that the reader uses reading strategies as the comprehension process to make sense of what they read, such as skimming, scanning, guessing, recognizing cognates and word families, reading for meaning, predicting, activating general knowledge, making inferences, following references and separating main ideas from supporting ideas.

### ***Reading Purposes***

Before students read different kinds of texts, they first need to know their purpose in reading it in order to be successful in reading. McGrath (2005, p. 8) suggests that adjusting readers’ approach to reading to their purpose can make their reading more effective and efficient. Adams (1974, pp. 8-12) states that before the students read anything, they should know themselves what their purpose for reading is, such as reading for pleasure, reading for practical application, reading for general ideas, reading to critically evaluate, and reading to locate specific information. Leedy (1956, pp. 159-164) also point out that, as

the reader reads a newspaper, for instance, the purposes for reading change almost as rapidly as they move from column to column or from page to page. The overall purpose may be to find out what is happening in local and world affairs, but the specific aim is shaped by the individual reader's purpose. For example, reading the editorial is different from that which impelled them to read the front-page news. Blake (1989, p. 3) adds that deciding on one's purpose is very important for two reasons. First, it helps readers pick the reading skills they should use. Second, it helps readers know when they have obtained the requisite information from their reading. Deciding on their purpose (s) also help them to save time and work.

Reading is an important skill for students because students will gain more knowledge, enjoyment, create concepts, use their imagination, solve problems and apply what they have learned to their real lives. As pointed out by Wipasiri Jaengsaengthong (2008, p. 14), in order to engage various types of texts, readers should know their purpose while they are reading.

Wallace (1992) illustrates the various purposes for reading as follows:

1. Reading for survival-This is reading that may involve a life or death situation. Survival reading serves immediate needs or wishes, one example being the necessity to read a drug label or a traffic sign accurately.

2. Reading for pleasure-This type of reading serves the reader's personal enjoyment, and includes such material as literature, newspapers or texts whose aim is entertainment.

3. Reading for learning-This plays the wider role of extending the reader's general knowledge of the world. However, reading for learning is



usually viewed as exclusive to related education and is seen by most people as taking place in academic contexts.

Grabe and Stoller (2002, p. 148), on the other hand, divide the purposes underlying reading into seven categories, as follows:

1. Reading to locate information-Reading to search involves the ability to read a text to find important information. An example is to read a telephone directory to find key information.

2. Reading to skim quickly-This is a common part of many reading tasks and a useful skill in its own right.

3. Reading to learn from texts-This involves the academic and professional contexts in which a person needs to learn a considerable amount of information in text form.

4. Reading to integrate information-This requires readers to decide what information to integrate and how to integrate that information.

5. Reading to write (or search for information needed for writing)-This requires readers to compose the information they have gleaned in written form after they finish reading.

6. Reading to critique texts-This requires readers to be critical in reading texts.

7. Reading for general comprehension-This requires readers to be skillful in obtaining a general understanding of a given text.

Conley (1995, pp. 8-9) divides the purposes of reading into the following six issues: pleasure or entertainment, instructions, general idea, detailed information, specific information and evaluation

Rachnee Sosothikul (1992, pp. 1-4) also emphasizes that the important thing for the reader is his or her purpose in reading. There are two main purpose, one being entertainment and the other education. Before reading, a reader should first know the purpose. While reading, a reader should figure out the main idea. Readers will be more knowledgeable and successful in reading, and gain more confidence, if they know the purpose of their reading.

### **English Reading Instruction**

Before students read any type of passage, they should read all the instructions to make sure they will understand what the instructions require of them. D'Agostino (1982, p. 3) emphasizes that students must read all the directions carefully. If they skip over the instructions, they may well misunderstand what information they are required to find. They must read each question carefully because careless reading will lead to misinterpretation. Leedy (1956, pp. 205-209) also states that there are a series of steps involved in reading and in following directions. First, readers need to look for the directions. Then, they need to put away any preconceived notions they might have. Next, they should read through the directions rapidly at first, after that, trying to understand the logic of each step. Fifth, they need to visualize the critical points and finally, make a special note of the key words.

Before students read the text, teachers should explain the background or something about the text or discuss the topic. If the text is very difficult for students, teachers should provide a summary or some clues to help them

understand the text. Carrell, Devine, and Eskey (1993, pp. 727-751) makes a number of suggestions for activating students' schemata in order to improve their reading comprehension. She suggests that background material could be provided in the form of lectures, movies, slides, demonstrations, class discussions or predictions about the text, etc.

For students with vocabulary difficulties, Carrell recommends introducing vocabulary before the reading of the text. In addition, Day (1993, p. 56) suggests that it is always easier for students to read about something they are interested in or would like to know more about. Having students summarize related articles from newspapers and magazines encourages them to use many of their developing language skills for real-life tasks and helps them utilize any newly acquired vocabulary.

Carrell, et al. (1993) believed that students should be taught about the organization of English passages, including how to find the main idea and its supporting details, and how sentences and paragraphs are connected and organized. Students should do exercises to outline or summarize the passages, put main concepts in order and draw diagrams, etc. It is also helpful to teach students about the common rhetorical patterns of English, such as classification, problem-solution, cause and effect, etc.

Nuttall (1982, p. 62) points out that most people accept that we can at least identify certain strategies which readers can make conscious use of when reading difficult texts. Probably the best way to acquire these strategies is simply to read and read. The strategies to be covered are diverse. To read efficiently involves both the physical strategies of reading flexibly, and the study strategies



of making the most of all the information the text offers such as using titles, diagrams, indexes and so on.

Silberstein (1994, p. 11) explains that teachers should teach some basic reading techniques, such as skimming, scanning, finding topic sentences in each paragraph, together with supporting details and examples.



### **Related Research**

Apaporn Wijanpreecha (2005) studied the relationship between reading strategies and reading abilities of third-year English majors at Naresuan University. This study investigated the relationship between reading strategies and reading abilities, and studied the types and the number of reading strategies used by 34 English majors, studying in their third year in the Faculty of Education at Naresuan University. The instruments for this study were two reading tests that were designed in the different styles of writing and original sources, and the reading strategy questionnaire that consisted of 27 reading strategy questions, based on 5 main types of reading strategies (Memory, Cognitive, Metacognitive, Compensation and Affective Strategies). 34 students completed two reading tests for one hour and reading strategy questions for 15 minutes. The results of this study indicated the five most frequently used reading strategies of 34 students were as follows: applying images, using context, encouraging oneself, analyzing expressions, and self-evaluating respectively. A statistically significant relationship was found between reading strategies and reading abilities at a level of 0.01.

Kijja Kamhang and Kriengsak Syananondh (2006) conducted a research study entitled “Reading Strategies Used by High and Low Achievement Students”. This study compared the reading strategies used by 62 fourth-year English majors at the Faculty of Humanities, Naresuan University. The 62 participants were required to complete 30 questions on the Survey of Reading Strategies Survey (SURS) that were adapted from Mokhtari and Reichard (as cited in Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002) which measured reading strategies in three categories (global reading strategies, problem-solving strategies and support strategies). The results were that the high achievement students had higher levels in terms of using reading strategies and Global reading strategies (GLOB) than that of the low achievement students. However, both the high and low achiever were at the same level in terms of using Problem Solving strategies (PROB) and Support strategies (SUP). Moreover, the high achievers used different sub-strategies than their low-level counterparts. Some of those sub-strategies that students utilized were deciding what to read closely and what to ignore, stopping from time to time and thinking about what is being read, using context clues, checking understanding when coming across new information, asking oneself questions, trying out the answers against the reading materials, and checking to see if guesses regarding the text were right or wrong.

Somnuk Songsiri (1999) studied the English reading skills of Mathayomsuksa 6 (Grade 12) students in a large, government secondary school in a suburb of Bangkok and investigated their attitude or point of view pertaining to reading material in English. The main purpose of the study was to determine what English reading skills the students possessed, and to evaluate what students

had gained from their experience, both inside and outside the context of a formal education. The secondary purpose was to explore the students' attitude towards English reading, especially, their interest, motivation and opportunity with regard to reading material in English. Not every student could have the same skills in reading English. This case study will help teachers to find an appropriate way of teaching English reading skills. The subjects of this study consisted of twelve students, selected by asking for volunteers. The subjects were selected from six classes, two students (a boy and a girl) from each class. The instruments used were in the form of a pre-test, reading passages and guided questions for individual interviews. Criterion reference and qualitative data were used for data analysis. The findings of the study revealed that there were students that had both general and specific skills in terms of English reading at a 'below-satisfactory' level and therefore, should be encouraged to do extra reading. The other finding was that students had a positive attitude towards reading English. They were highly motivated and were interested in learning to read English.

### **Summary**

This chapter discussed the various theories regarding students' approaches to reading English, detailed various definitions of what constitutes reading, English reading instruction and related research studies.