

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Some people maintain that civilization can be measured in terms of literacy, specifically the reading of books and it is certainly true that reading plays an important role in our modern, technologically advanced age (Barton, 2000). Results obtained from a number of surveys and research findings on reading have revealed widely divergent perspectives and arguments regarding the importance of reading and reading ability.

Krashen (2004, p. 37) concluded that reading is consistently shown to be more efficient than direct instruction and that reading is a powerful means of developing reading comprehension ability, writing style, vocabulary, grammar, and spelling. Consequently, making reading a regular habit is the only way to be a good reader, develop a good writing style, and build up an adequate working vocabulary, advanced grammatical competence, and the only way we become good spellers.

Approximately 90% of Thai students are incapable of thinking for themselves, preferring instead to imitate their peers and to chat with friends both online and via mobile phone; hence, they ignore reading. They lack the ability to think critically, to retain more information and get a better understanding of it in short-term memory.

The Thai Ministry of Education is aware of the importance of reading. It has been observed that people know some English as a foreign language, but Thai students need to acquire information through reading, both in their own language and English. The result of an interview survey of Thai students revealed that 51.32% agreed that reading is necessary and usually useful in their daily life. In addition, the results regarding reading ability from the Original National Education Test (ONET) showed that students got low points. This showed that students lacked the requisite reading comprehension skills.

There are many reasons why students cannot read: they do not have any motivation with regard to reading. The students usually get used to reading expository text. Cushenbery (1989, pp. 103-104) concluded that the choice of texts and students' attitudes are important causes of reading problems. Another factor is that the teaching methods that are used to motivate the students were not sustainable because the time allocated to reading, texts and teachers were subject to change. This type of environment can hinder the students' reading ability in that it is not only non-conducive to reading atmosphere but also incapable of solving the aforementioned problems.

The students' perception with regard to understanding is another important factor that affects their reading ability. Psychologists say that people learn through three ways: visual preceptors, auditory preceptors and kinesthetic preceptors. Therefore, if the students are able to use those preceptors, they can learn and will develop their reading process.

Another factor is the students' consciousness, which can affect their success, or otherwise, with regard to reading for understanding. Researchers on reading have tried to determine the factors that indicate students lack consciousness, but they are not successful in their endeavors. Consciousness helps the readers to remain calm, be ready to remember, recall the information they read, and comprehend the text.

Speed reading is another problem that students face. Researchers have speculated that many students believe that if they read slowly, they will be better able to answer comprehension questions. In fact, if a reader reads too slowly, it is more difficult to relate the ideas in a passage to one another. Short-term memory does not retain information for long, and it is impossible to relate previous information with new information if the reader reads too slowly. (Smith, 1982)

In addition, the way in which Thai students approach a reading text is yet another problem. Whenever they encounter a new word, they will pause, which inevitably slows down their reading. When they read English, they go back and read the same words or phrases again while they are reading a passage. Consequently, they fail to understand the relationships among the words in the sentences, because a passage contains many new items of vocabulary.

Moreover, one of the most important factors hindering the power of reading is the lack of a positive attitude towards the reading process itself. Positive attitudes toward reading usually develop if reading is perceived to fulfill a tangible need. However, a positive attitude towards reading does not

necessarily lead to an active reading of books. Attitude, which varies with the level of reading ability, background experience, effort, and peer influences, is unique, personal, and highly unpredictable. (Harris & Sipay, 1979, p. 399)

Many researchers have concluded that attitudes about reading are apparently too complex to be altered significantly in a more positive direction by short-term teacher reinforcement. There was some indication that more intensive long-term efforts on the part of the teacher might prove successful. Most Thai students think that reading English is difficult. They do not read in their daily life so they do not have the necessary experience to support their reading. They do not have the requisite power and therefore lack success in their reading endeavors. However, Krashen showed that it was possible to achieve success with free voluntary reading, which can be done well if the reader spends some time on it (Krashen, 2004). Researchers found that students who engage in in-school free reading fare better on reading comprehension tests than those who are taught using traditional modes of instruction.

Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman and Hamphill (1991, cited in Krashen, 2004) showed that when free reading and direct traditional instruction are compared directly, free reading is as good or better, and in long-term studies free reading is a consistent winner.

Free voluntary reading itself promotes the habit of reading. A consistent finding in in-school free reading studies is that children who participate in these programs are more involved in free voluntary reading after the program ends than those in traditional programs (Pilgreen & Krashen, 1993). So the

researchers used this model and provided time for students to read because the researchers agree with Trelease 2801's suggestion that a single positive reading experience can create an interest in reading, in addition to agreeing that children read more if they have time to read.

Based on the above survey and the information gathered, it can be concluded that the students do not have the power with regard to understanding because of a number of causes including the lack of interesting texts, the students' learning styles, a lack of motivation, perceptions for understanding, speed reading, consciousness, family problems, overcrowded classrooms, unqualified teachers, too many new words, and the attitude of students themselves. These are the factors which hinder the students' power in comprehending the reading texts that they encounter.

Statement of the Problem

Reading is an active process and interaction between the reader's knowledge and the text. If the readers know the meaning of vocabulary and understand the meaning of the text they will get success in comprehending the text.

In school, teachers always have a limited number of books to distribute to students, and a limited amount of time for students to read them. The students have no chance to choose the books they are interested in and like. Therefore, they lack of thinking process, language development: including of vocabulary, grammar and reading comprehension.

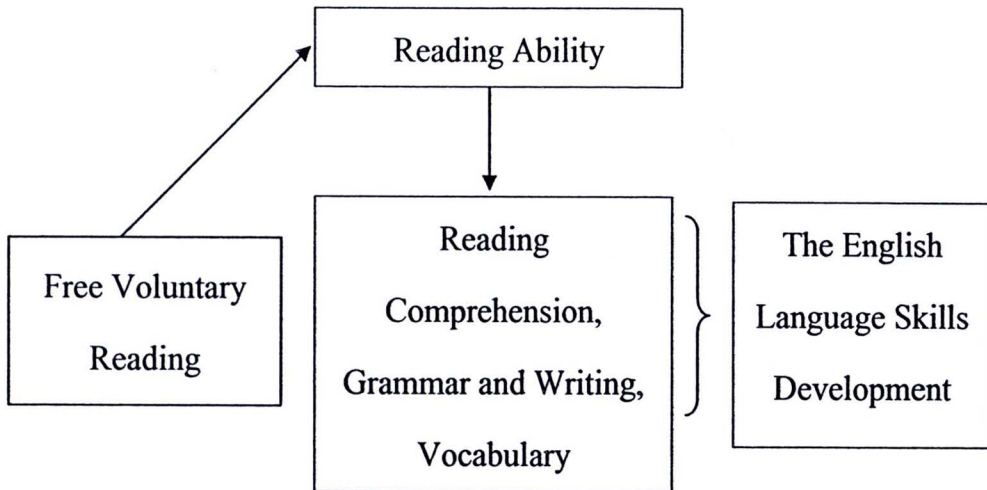
Some researchers found that in-school free voluntary reading and giving more time to read are better or good reading comprehension test than students who are taught by traditional instruction.

Krashen divides in-school free voluntary reading into three kinds: sustained silent reading, self-selected reading, and extensive reading.

In this study, the researcher use both self-selected read extensive reading. The students choose the books they are interested and record the numbers of pages they read progress chart then write a short summary each book focusing on the main idea and the idea they got from reading in the reading report. At the end of each week the students discuss the knowledge they get to each other.

Conceptual Framework

Krashen's reading hypothesis (Krashen, 2004, p. 17) shows that more reading results in better reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary; spelling and grammatical development but the conceptual framework of this study will determine only the effects of in-school free reading and self-reported free reading on reading comprehension, grammar, writing and vocabulary, which improve reading power as seen in the diagram below.



Purposes of the Study

This study attempts to identify the effects of reading ability on the English language development. Specifically it will try to:

1. To identify the characteristics of free voluntary reading enhancing the English language skills development.
2. To verify the effects of free voluntary reading on the reading power of Mattayomsueksa on vocabulary, grammar and writing skills and reading comprehension comparing to normal reading.
3. To investigate how the reading ability contributed to the English language skills development.

Research Questions

This study is guided initially by the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of free voluntary reading enhancing the English language skills development?
2. What are the effects of free voluntary reading on the reading ability of Matthayomsueksa students on vocabulary, grammar and writing skills and reading comparing to normal reading?
3. Does reading ability contribute to the English language skills development?

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study will concentrate on the components of reading ability, the effects of developing language skills on reading comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, and writing ability among students at high school levels, and the effects of free voluntary reading on the above items. This research does not study the students' age, sex and level variables. Within this study, the factors that are considered for studying the reading ability focusing on the effects on free voluntary reading comparing to the development of language skills in a normal classroom.

Definition of Terms

The specialized terms used in this particular study are complex and diverse in meaning; therefore they need to be clearly defined, the terms are listed with their respective definitions

1. Reading ability is the ability to read in terms of reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and writing ability.
2. Free Voluntary Reading (FVR) refers to voluntary reading outside classroom and students choose their own book for recreation and knowledge at the students' pace and their own time.
3. Language skills development refers to the process by which develop the comprehensive skills, vocabulary grammatical use and writing ability.
4. A quasi experiment is a study which uses nonrandomized groups and assign group by systematic methodology.
5. A control group is a group of Matthayomsueksa 5 students who read in classroom selected for reading in normal teaching.
6. An experimental group is a group of Matthayomsueksa 5 students who volunteer outside the classroom.
7. Books refer to the one hundred standard books which have suitable vocabularies approximately 4,300-4,500 English words by the time they graduate from upper secondary school. (English Curriculum (1973, pp. 31-32)
8. The application form refers to the form used to check the students' interesting to reading, the name of the books, the authors and their signatures.

9. Reading Report is an instrument designed by the researcher to conclude the topic of the story, the name of the writer, vocabulary the main idea of the books and the idea the students get from reading.

Benefits of the Study

Wichit Srisa-an (1998, pp. 1-7) stated that limiting the learning and teaching of to English to within the classroom is not enough the learners themselves should also find materials and techniques that are suitable for language learning outside the classroom. For many students, the development of English reading skills is a priority, so they resort to free voluntary reading. Therefore, it is interesting to know the effects of free voluntary reading on the English language development.

This study attempts to determine the effects of free voluntary reading. It will be of practical use for those people who are involved in the acquisition of reading skills.

Summary

There are many problems concerning the development of reading ability because the students themselves lack the requisite reading skills, including an adequate knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and a lack of comprehension skills. Free voluntary reading is a tool that is capable of

solving their problems. Consequently, it should be one of the major goals of language education to encourage free voluntary reading programs.