

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

English has become necessary since it is a global language; especially in developing countries where there is a strong need to learn the more economically powerful language in order to survive socially (McNamara 52). Moreover, English is an essential tool of learning. In higher education, English is vital as a source of knowledge. For example, there are a lot of fundamental and advanced sources of knowledge published in English textbooks which are varying, rich and influential on the development of educators and learners. In the world of literature and education, English provides influential knowledge. Concepts and experiences of scholars are widespread through English, which contributes to a great pool of knowledge available for all readers and learners who seek knowledge. English is also the most commonly used language in science. 95% of articles in the Science Citation Index are written in English, even though only half of them come from native English speakers. Today, research journals, books, magazines, and newspapers written in English are available in many countries around the world and they are simply accessed via online connections. Therefore, to increase English reading abilities, it is essential for university students to search for information from various English language sources

To increase academic English abilities for students who want to further their education abroad, some specific courses are designed to help students attain a score of 6.5 or higher in the IELTS[®] and a score of 80 or higher in the TOEFL[®], which is approximately 66.66%, for those who intend to further their education in the UK and USA, respectively. Generally English for academic purposes is used to train scholars to increase their English proficiency by blending vocabulary, grammar and the four

skills; reading, writing, speaking and listening, with the specific study needs of the students. In addition, study skills are instructed either directly or indirectly. For example, a teacher may focus on training college students to recognize the main idea and major support and exposing the students to the English texts using text-based learning. Similarly, vocabulary chosen for study should be based on academic texts to develop their reading proficiency.

However, to achieve proficient reading is not easy. According to British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP par.1), proficient reading is equally dependent on two critical skills: the ability to understand the language in which the text is written, and the ability to recognize and process printed text. Proficient reading depends on the ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly. If word recognition is difficult, students will use too much of their processing capacity to read individual words, which interferes with their ability to comprehend what is read. There is a question to be raised: what is the most essential element in proficient reading? According to DeCarrico (290), vocabulary is central to language acquisition and vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to improving comprehension. That means strengthening vocabulary can lead to high achievement in language learning and that increasing vocabulary ultimately increases reading ability.

According to Rahimi and Sahragard (5), there are two dimensions of problems of vocabulary learning: the learners' limited number of vocabulary and the learners' ability to use vocabulary correctly. Learners' limited amount of vocabulary, which is possibly due to the lack of exposure to the foreign language, can be a barrier to successful vocabulary learning. According to DeCarrico (290), the base of two thousand words, now seems to be the most commonly cited goal for second language learners. Likewise, Meara agrees that language learners should be taught at least two thousand words in high intermediate to advanced levels with a large number of vocabulary learnt when students first start to acquire the language. A learner with limited vocabulary is likely to encounter a large number of unfamiliar words and as a result, important meaning in a written text could be missed by words that a learner does not know (233). Some researchers further suggest that a base of two thousand

words would be inadequate for certain groups of students and learners with a specific goal. Students pursuing higher education need to know approximately one thousand words in addition to the base of two thousand words for their academic purpose, as they need to know technical jargon and specific vocabulary for their specific purpose (Coxhead 213-14). The other problem revolving vocabulary learning is how to use vocabulary correctly. Many ESL learners sometimes have difficulties using the right word in the right context in order to convey the meaning accurately. Furthermore, confusion with word meaning could lead to misunderstanding of a text.

To overcome the obstacles of vocabulary learning so as to increase reading ability, Incidental Vocabulary Learning could be applied. Rott believes that incidental learning has a stronger effect on vocabulary knowledge, and that only at least two exposures to an unknown word could result in a receptive as well as in productive word gain (594). Craik and Tulving conducted studies on memory involving Incidental Vocabulary Learning. In their experiments, subjects were asked to perform a task without being told in advance that they would be tested later to recall the previous information. The satisfactory result suggests that L2 acquisition is more effective in unintentional settings and language learners need to be exposed to the target language (294). In addition, it is widely believed that incidental learning links the role of involvement, attention, and depth of processing in vocabulary learning (Martinez-Fernandez 211). Hulstijn and Laufer proposed the Involvement Load Hypothesis which suggests that the amount of involvement that learners are engaged in will affect the retention of targeted vocabulary. The Involvement Load consists of both motivational (need), and cognitive (search and evaluation) components (4). After Hulstijn and Laufer's introduction of the Involvement Load Hypothesis, many researchers claim that a higher degree of Involvement Load promotes better Incidental Vocabulary Learning. This means exposing learners to a diverse array of vocabulary through reading texts could incidentally increase their reading ability.

Students will increase their academic reading ability when exposed to a large amount of vocabulary while reading texts. According to Coxhead (qtd. in Hunt and Beglar 4), 2,000 high frequency word families with root, prefix and suffix

forms, as represented by the headwords in West's *General Service List*, make up approximately 90% of non-academic texts and approximately 75-80% of average academic textbooks. The 570 general academic word families, presented in *Academic Word List*, make up approximately 10% of the active words in academic texts and the percentage of a specialized text that contains technical vocabulary varies depending on the field. This implies that there is a relatively small amount of high frequency, general academic and technical vocabulary and it can be acquired incidentally through academic text exposure.

In language learning, it is agreed that students will acquire the target language more successfully by unintentional means of rather than intentional approaches. Accordingly, having read a number of texts written in academic English, students acquire active vocabulary unintentionally. Working on a number of reading assignments, students need to look up the meaning of new words from a dictionary and infer the word meaning in context by themselves inside and outside class. This creates opportunities for incidental learning which will enable vocabulary acquisition and improve reading ability at the same time. Moreover, it is exposing learners to the target language which is learner-based language because the vocabulary being acquired is dependent on the learner's own learning ability and needs. From the practical perspective, Incidental Vocabulary Learning provides prospective readers with in-depth understanding of how pedagogical interventions can be implemented, through reading assignments inside and outside a classroom setting, to increase their vocabulary size which, in turn, increases their reading ability. Therefore, there is a possibility that Incidental Vocabulary Learning would enhance students' vocabulary skills and sequentially increase their academic reading ability.

To increase students' academic reading abilities, some college students seek help from private tutorial schools, which arrange specific courses to meet the customers' demand. Ace! The Academy for EducationUSA is an English tutoring school, which serves college students who aim to increase their English proficiency to attain their academic achievement. It offers academic English courses to help the students obtain a high score of TOEFL[®] required for progressing in higher education abroad. A number of students who come to the school have a limited amount of

academic vocabulary as they are insufficiently exposed to academic English. As a result, they do not develop their English skills effectively enough to attain a score of 80 or greater on the TOEFL[®], required for higher education abroad. Considering students learning difficulties, the researcher needs to develop the academic training course to help the students attain the required achievement. Involvement Load Hypothesis, which is a form of Incidental Vocabulary Learning, will be applied to help the students expand their vocabulary bank so that they will consequently increase their reading ability. Involvement Load Hypothesis seems to be an appropriate instruction to help effectively increase the academic reading ability of the group of students who aim to obtain a high TOEFL[®] score for their higher education abroad. It focuses on applying *need*, *search*, and *evaluation* in the learning process. Therefore, this study will focus on investigating whether Incidental Vocabulary Learning will increase the academic reading ability of the college students. In addition, it will discuss why Incidental Vocabulary Learning increases their academic reading ability and what students' attitudes are regarding Incidental Vocabulary Learning.

1.2 Purposes of the Study

The research aims:

1. to investigating whether and why Incidental Vocabulary Learning will increase the academic reading ability of the college students
2. to find out the attitudes of the students on the Incidental Vocabulary Learning environment.

1.3 Methodology and Scope of the Study

This study is of quantitative research. The target group will be a class of thirty college students from Chiang Mai University enrolling in the course of reading for academic purpose at The Ace! The Academy for EducationUSA. The instruction instruments are (1) the lesson plans based on Involvement Load Hypothesis and

Incidental Vocabulary Learning and (2) the instruction materials based on Involvement Load Hypothesis and Incidental Vocabulary Learning which focuses on study skills in reading academic English. The instruction will take 20 hours according to the administrative requirement of the school; each learning session being 20 hours for a course. The data collecting instruments are the pre-test and post-test. To analyze the results of the study, the mean and the standard deviation of the pre-test and post-test will be used. To measure the increase of the academic reading ability, the mean of the post-test is set at the satisfactory value of 66.66%, according to the TOEFL[®] requirement. In addition, the questionnaires will be used to study their attitude toward the Incidental Vocabulary Learning, and the mean and standard deviation will be used for the data analysis.

1.4 Educational Benefits

The results of this study could:

1. help the college students gain strength in their vocabulary
2. increase their academic reading ability
3. help a teacher design effective reading tasks
4. encourage the use of Incidental Vocabulary Learning through a cooperative learning environment