

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Rationale of the Study

Reading plays an important role in language learning. Students acquire information and ideas that enable them to speak and write mainly through reading. Therefore, reading is likely to be the best indicator and predictor of achievement in school subjects (Walberg, 1996). Anderson (cited in McPherson, 2003) believes that reading is an essential skill for English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) students to master. With strengthened reading skills, ESL/EFL readers will make greater progress and attain greater development in all academic areas.

In China, most learning in classroom situations requires a heavy reliance on reading comprehension for input. One reason is traditional teaching methods. Teachers emphasize reading and writing rather than speaking or listening. Another reason is the widespread use of textbooks based on the written words. Finally, the high teacher-student ratio per classroom makes focusing on written words more practical than oral communication. For most students reading is the most important resource for language input. Problems with reading can possibly cause learning problems.

Therefore, reading skills are very important for the students (Maguire, 1997-1998).

From the researcher's personal experience, many students thought that good or successful readers should know all the words in a text in order to understand it.

However, there were also many students who complained that they still could not understand the text even when they knew every word in it. This raises the question of what is a good reader. Singhal (2000) claims that good readers are purposeful, thoughtful and reflective about the reading process. Good readers can also monitor and evaluate their understanding of texts and use of strategies when they read.

Mi-jeong Song's research (1998) found that EFL college students' overall reading comprehension ability was significantly improved after strategy training. The result of this research indicated that the low reading proficiency group benefited most from the reading strategy training.

Singhal (2000) claims that reading strategy instruction improves reader's comprehension of texts, especially challenging texts. She concludes that strategy instruction is beneficial for readers. Reading comprehension can be improved if the learners are taught how to monitor the process of comprehension.

Durham (1999) suggests that strategies are purpose-determined. That is, the reader knows not only what strategies to use, but also how, when and why to use them. The type of strategies the students use will vary according to the task. It is necessary to let students know that different reading tasks require different reading strategies. It is also necessary for the teacher to know what reading strategies are required for different reading tasks in the coursebooks so that the teacher can help

students be aware of both reading strategies and choosing strategies appropriate to the task.

Reading coursebooks are potentially good resources to teach reading strategies. Hutchinson and Torres (1994) emphasize the relationship between textbooks and teaching and learning. They consider teaching as a partnership between the teacher and materials. Textbooks are the most convenient means of providing the structure that the teaching-learning system requires. Textbooks provide input into classroom lessons in the form of texts, activities, explanations, and so on. A good textbook can provide a kind of structured guidance and make it possible to bring changes into the classroom. For teachers, the textbook is a facilitator: it saves time, gives direction to lessons, guides discussion, facilitates giving of homework, and makes teaching easier. For learners, textbooks are a framework or guide that helps them to organize their learning both inside and outside the classroom. If the teacher has little control over the selection of textbooks, it helps to be aware of the strong points and limitations of the textbooks so that the teacher can exploit the textbooks effectively and supplement them if necessary (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).

Textbooks may play an important educational role in the teaching of reading strategies. From the researcher's personal experience, some teachers do not know much about reading skills and strategies and do not know how to teach them. If no reading skills and strategies are taught in the coursebook, it could be difficult for the teacher to use the coursebook to teach reading strategies in the class. On the other

hand, if reading skills and strategies are taught in the coursebook, along with explanations, examples and activities, they will be a resource for teachers and classroom instruction. There are many reading coursebooks in the Chinese teaching material market. The teachers have the problem of selecting the appropriate coursebooks for teaching reading skills and strategies.

The aim of the present study is to evaluate coursebooks by identifying what reading skills and strategies are taught in five college level EFL (English as Foreign language) coursebooks through using a checklist and see how these reading strategies are taught. This allows a comparison of the teaching of reading strategies taught in these coursebooks. The five EFL coursebooks analyzed in this study include three Chinese locally-produced EFL coursebooks which were published in recent years (1997-2003), and two international EFL reading coursebooks, which were also published recently (2001-2003).

#### Purposes of the Study

The purposes of the present study were to:

1. analyze what reading skills and strategies are taught in the selected reading coursebooks.
2. analyze how reading skills and strategies are taught in the selected reading coursebooks.
3. compare the teaching of reading skills and strategies in the selected

coursebooks.

### Significance of the Study

Since reading skills and strategies training are beneficial for readers, and reading coursebooks are good resources for teaching reading skills and strategies, it is worth knowing what and how reading skills and strategies are taught in reading coursebooks, because it helps the teacher develop a better understanding of teaching reading skills and strategies. The reading skills and strategies taught in the coursebooks provide syllabuses, guidelines, explanations, activities and support for teachers, especially the teachers who do not have enough background knowledge of teaching reading skills and strategies. Thus the first significance of the present study is that the analysis and evaluation of reading materials enabled the teachers to develop the expertise needed for dealing with practical and fundamental issues in the classroom setting, and also saved learners from what Allwright (1981) terms the deficiencies of teachers.

The second significance of the present study is that it offered criteria for selecting reading materials. The present study evaluated how the reading skills and strategies were taught in the selected coursebooks. The comparison between the selected coursebooks revealed what were the better ways of teaching reading skills and strategies. Now in China, there are many reading coursebooks in the market. Teachers have the problem of selecting the appropriate coursebook for their courses

and for their students. The result of the present study could help teachers select appropriate coursebooks for teaching reading skills and strategies.

The third significance of this study is for reading coursebook design and adaptation. In order to design effective reading materials, it is necessary to know what reading skills and strategies are and the effective ways of teaching reading skills and strategies. There are no perfect teaching materials. Knowing what reading skills are and how reading skills can be effectively taught, the teacher can supplement or expand the teaching materials which do not have sufficient teaching of reading skills.

#### Definition of Terms

It is necessary to discuss the definition of reading skills and reading strategies because there is considerable terminological inconsistency in the literature and teaching material for the terms 'skill' and 'strategy'. Williams and Moran (1989, p.223) give two examples: 'inferring' is a skill for some researchers, but a strategy for another. One writer regards skimming and scanning as strategies, while others regard them as skills. Nuttall (1996) suggests the terms are synonymous, and they are used interchangeably by Davies and Whitney, Taylor *et al.*, and Maingay (cited in Williams & Moran 1989). Williams and Moran (1989) give the definitions for these two terms, "In principle, one may distinguish the terms by defining a skill as an acquired ability, which has been automatized and operates largely subconsciously,

whereas a strategy is a conscious procedure carried out in order to solve a problem.(p.223)”

In the present study, the checklist used to analyze coursebooks included both reading skills and strategies. Although these two terms are different in principle, in practice, it is difficult to really differentiate them. For some reading strategies, such as skimming and scanning, when the reader just learns how to use them, they use them consciously (as a conscious strategy), but after they acquire them, they will become automatized and be used subconsciously (as a skill) in the reading process. Therefore, the present study refers to both reading skills and reading strategies.

### Organization of the Study

In this chapter, the rationale of the study was related to the significance of teaching reading skills and strategies and the important role of material. Purposes of the study, significance of the study and definition of terms were described. Chapter Two explains theoretical background of the study and reviews research about reading skills and strategies, the significance and methods of teaching reading skills and strategies. Chapter Three presents the introduction of the selected coursebooks, the development of the analytical framework, and the analysis of data. Chapter Four reports the organization of selected coursebooks and the results of the analysis. Chapter Five concludes the findings and the limitations of the study, suggests implications for teaching and learning, and recommends future studies.