

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This present study aims to investigate the effects of pre-reading questions and previewing on EFL Taiwanese senior high school students' reading comprehension of American short stories. Based on the results in Chapter Four, this chapter concludes the results of the research findings. Then, the pedagogical implications for EFL reading instruction at senior high schools are discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research are provided for those who are interested in this subject as well as for those who intend to carry out follow-up studies in the future.

#### **Summary of the Findings**

Background knowledge is an essential element on as well as a major contributor to reading comprehension (Grabe, 1991). In order to find out more useful ways to help improve Taiwanese senior high school students' reading comprehension, this present study explored whether offering pre-reading questions and previewing before reading aided in increasing learners' reading comprehension. Based on the analyses and discussions of the results in Chapter Four, the findings of this study are summarized as follows.

First, the result of written recall on the reading performance of the Pre-reading-question Group (PQ) was better than that of the Control Group (CG). Pre-reading questions seemed to warm up the subjects for the upcoming story and prepared the subjects readiness for reading the assigned text. As the participants

read the pre-reading questions in advance, they had a general idea of what they were about to read. For this reason, the pre-reading questions were helpful and useful to the subjects in this present study. This confirms the findings in other studies (Grellet, 1981; Heilman, Blair, & Rupley, 1990; Pan, 2003; Reutzel, 1985).

Second, there was significant difference between the Previewing Group (PV) and the Control Group (CG) in the results of the written recall. In other words, subjects receiving previewing prior to a story significantly outperformed those without any pre-reading activities. The finding indicated that Taiwanese senior high school students benefited from previewing. Since previewing revealed the major events happening in a story, it did greatly help the readers to get a main idea of the plot of the story and thus improves reading performance. This finding corresponded to other previous research about the positive effect of previewing (Chen & Graves, 1995; Graves & Cooke, 1980; Graves, Cooke, & LaBerge, 1983; Graves & Palmer, 1981; Huang, 2003; Neuman, 1988).

Third, the effects of previewing were greater than that of pre-reading questions on Taiwanese senior high school students' reading comprehension of American short stories. The outcome pointed out that previewing yielded better results on Taiwanese senior high school students' understanding of short stories than pre-reading questions. One possible reason was that, unlike previewing, pre-reading questions only offered general ideas of the upcoming text. If readers were not able to relate the ideas embedded in the questions to the main idea of the about-to-read text, they would have trouble foreseeing the incoming content and would be unable to predict the plot in the text. On the other hand, previewing directly showed readers the main parts of the plot in the text so the readers did not have to predict the plot, except for the climax, nor did they have to connect the ideas in the previewing to the content of the about-to-read stories. Consequently, though both pre-reading questions and

previewing aided in constructing background knowledge before reading a passage, the effect on overall reading comprehension was considerably different between them.

This seems to be why subjects offered previewing got higher scores than those provided with pre-reading questions and the result came to significant differences.

Fourth, according to the subjects' responses to Item 2 in the questionnaire for all of the three groups, more than half of them expressed that they enjoyed reading the three short stories. An interesting tendency could be drawn out from the results of Item 2 in the questionnaire. In all the three stories, the subjects in PV got higher mean scores than the other two groups ( $PV > PQ > CG$ ). To put it another way, the participants in PV enjoyed reading the three short stories more than those in the other groups did. A possible reason might be due to the employment of previewing in PV. Since the results of recall proved that previewing facilitated reading comprehension most, the subjects who received previewing prior to reading understood the plot of the stories most. For this reason, they enjoyed reading the three stories more.

As for the responses to Item 3 to Item 6 from subjects in PQ and PV, the subjects moderately enjoyed reading the pre-reading questions and previewing before reading the three stories. In addition, they tended to believe that pre-reading questions and previewing helped increase the overall reading comprehension and also helped them to anticipate the content of the upcoming stories. Therefore, the subjects in PQ and PV moderately agreed that they would be better off if there are pre-reading questions and previewing respectively in front of a reading text.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Based on the findings of the study and the subjects' opinions drawn out from the questionnaires, there are several pedagogical implications and suggestions for the employment of pre-reading activities in senior high schools in Taiwan.

First, EFL teachers in Taiwan should take the role that background knowledge plays in reading comprehension into consideration. According to Carrell & Eisterhold (1983), teachers' responsibility was to reduce reading difficulty and enhance comprehension by offering relevant information, while relevant information before reading might have directed learners to the most essential information in the passage, and thus improved overall comprehension (Stahl, Jacobson, Davis, & Davis, 1989). Hence, before the instruction of reading texts, teachers have to check if the students have enough conceptual schemata of the reading texts and then try to design pre-reading activities to help build up the students' background knowledge or activate their prior knowledge. Since the purposes of employing pre-reading activities are not only to increase readers' reading comprehension but also to activate their schemata, by the aids of well-developed pre-reading activities at the pre-reading stage, the students' background knowledge could be constructed and their interests in the about-to-read texts might be aroused.

Second, teachers should respond to students' need. In this study, students' questionnaires clearly indicated that pre-reading activities were helpful to reading comprehension. To help students benefit from the pre-reading activities, it is reading teachers' duty to help build students' background knowledge needed for the reading texts and to show students how to activate their existing knowledge in the reading process as well. A quote from Stevens (1982) best described the role reading teachers play—"a teacher of reading might thus be viewed as a teacher of relevant information as well as a teacher of reading skills" (p. 328). For this reason, EFL teachers in Taiwan should place much emphasis upon pre-reading activities, make good use of them, put them into practice, and lead learners to do the pre-reading activities and make discussion on them.

Third, based on the subjects' responses to the questionnaire, the subjects

expressed that they enjoyed reading the three American short stories. According to Chen (2003), Taiwanese learners should be able to read as well as to be encouraged to read so that language proficiency might be enhanced. On one hand, to encourage Taiwanese learners to read, short stories are highly recommended; on the other hand, since written materials have been the major source in language teaching and learning in Taiwan, the written texts should be designed as friendly as possible. That is to say, the written material should be read easily and makes reading enjoyable. One way to make written material pleasant and easily read is to add pre-reading activities prior to reading texts because pre-reading activities help to warm readers up to the upcoming reading texts and to decrease their uncertainty about the texts, and thus improve their reading comprehension. In this study, the group with previewing before a short story yielded much better grades than the other two groups, the group with pre-reading questions and the group without any pre-reading activities. However, while pre-reading questions are often used as pre-reading activities in English textbooks for senior high school students in Taiwan, previewing has hardly been employed as a pre-reading guide in English textbooks used in Taiwan. Consequently, based on the results in this present study, previewing is highly recommended as a form of pre-reading activities before a short story.

Fourth, based on the participants' answers to the questionnaire, they favored pre-reading questions as well as previewing as pre-reading guides. As Carrell (1988c) suggested, various types of pre-reading activities should be employed in turn because it might be limited to use only one type of pre-reading activity. For example, if the learners are beginners or low achievers, teachers can make use of previewing as a pre-reading aid because previewing directly tells them what happened in a story so that the learners can have a clear picture of the story and do not have to guess too much of the plot. After the learners improve their language competence, teachers

can use other ways of pre-reading activities, such as pre-reading questions, to help the students activate their prior knowledge and to practice connecting their existing knowledge to the pre-reading questions and further make a guess of the content of an upcoming story.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Although some studies have been carried out on the effects of previewing on reading comprehension, few have been conducted to EFL learners. More research is called for to explore and uncover the reading process and the outcome of previewing on EFL students. Though this present study is conducted as thoroughly as possible, there are some limitations. Therefore, future studies are needed to further investigate the effects of previewing on reading comprehension. Some suggestions are provided for those who are interested in this topic as future research.

First of all, there are only 124 senior high school students involving in this study. Owing to the small amount of sample students, the findings extracted from this present study might not stand for and account for the performance of reading comprehension of all the other EFL senior high school students in Taiwan. Nor could the findings be adequately generalized to other senior high school students in Taiwan. For a more precise and thorough study, larger groups of subjects are recommended for further relevant studies.

Second, all of the subjects joining in this study come from a rural senior high school in Pingtung County in southern Taiwan. Due to the limited group of learners at only one school, the research findings might not be generalized to other learners with different ages and in different areas in Taiwan. As a result, other students with different ages or grades and from urban schools are suggested to be recruited in future studies to see if the positive effects of previewing can be generalized.

Third, further investigation may consider dividing the subjects into three proficiency groups—high, medium, and low, to examine whether the pre-reading questions and previewing facilitate all levels of students on reading comprehension or they are beneficial to only those with certain level of proficiency.

Fourth, the reading selections used in this study are limited to American short stories; other genres of reading passages, like expository texts, are suggested to be employed in future studies.

Last but not least, other kinds of test methods are worth examining. In this present study, only one type of comprehension measures is used, that is, the written recall. Other sorts of assessment, for example, multiple-choice question, fill-in, short-answer questions, and open-ended questions, could be made use of to have a more thorough understanding of the true effects of previewing and pre-reading questions on reading comprehension.