READING–WRITING CONNECTIONS: THEORY AND PRACTICE

读写一体化教学模式：理论与实践

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读写一体化的研究由来已久，但是，针对何种一体化形式能够提高英语学习者的阅读水平进行的研究却为数不多。本研究是阅读能力的习得研究，目的是考察阅读并写概要、阅读并写日志、阅读并口头讨论等三种学习任务对中国高校学生英语阅读能力的影响。

本研究表明读写一体化能有效提高学生的阅读理解能力，该发现对中国的英语教学有一定的启发意义。

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Lin Zhou

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to provide a general background of the present study. It starts with the importance of reading in English as a second or foreign language (L2) for university students. After that, a statement of the problem, the purposes of the study, the research questions, the significance of the study, and the definitions of key terms, are presented. The chapter concludes with an outline of the dissertation.

1.1 Background of the Study

In the age of globalization, reading in second or foreign language settings continues to have an increasingly important role. The acquisition of reading skills in an L2 is a priority for millions of learners around the world. As Eskey (2005) has pointed out, many EFL students rarely need to speak the language in their day-to-day lives but may need to read it in order to "access the wealth of information" (p. 563), recorded exclusively in English. In fact, the ability to read the written language at a reasonable rate and with good comprehension has been recognized to be as important as oral skills, if not more important (Eskey, 1988).

In a world that demands competency with printed texts, the ability to read in an L2 is one of the most important skills

required of people in international settings (Grabe, 2002). In an L2 setting, reading may function as a major source of comprehensible input and thus be a means to the end of acquiring the language. At the same time, reading is an end itself, as the skill that many serious learners most need to employ. The importance of academic reading has been well recognized by many researchers. Levine, Ferenz, and Reves (2000) stated that the ability to read academic texts is considered one of the most important skills that university students of ESL or EFL need to acquire. Indeed, reading comprehension skill has come to be the "essence of reading" (Durkin, 1993), essential not only to academic learning in all subject areas but also to professional success and, indeed, to lifelong learning (Pritchard, Romeo, & Muller, 1999).

However, due to the complexity inherent in the reading process, reading is also one of the most difficult language skills to develop to a high level of proficiency (Grabe, 2002). Many students have difficulty understanding what they read, in particular, when it comes to academic texts (Snow, 2002). As Dreyer and Nel (2003) pointed out, many students enter higher education underprepared for the reading demands that are placed upon them.

In China, English is studied as a foreign language (EFL) and, therefore, not used as the everyday means of communication by most people. Many Chinese EFL students rarely speak English in their daily lives. However, in order to get access to the newest information, they may need to read materials recorded in English. In other words, to be able to read in English is of particular importance to Chinese university students.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Once EFL students reach upper-level courses, it is often assumed that they are fully proficient speakers, readers, and writers of the foreign language. However, the fact is that very few students meet this assumed standard of proficiency in upper-level courses, and many students are unable to understand the assigned texts (Redmann, 2005). Blame is sometimes placed on lower-level teachers for their failure to teach the necessary grammar and vocabulary, or on students for their failure to devote sufficient time and efforts to reading. As a matter of fact, what the EFL students often lack is experience with the target language. Therefore, rather than assuming students are proficient in English, upper-grade teachers may devise various tasks to help the students get more experience in the target language and thus become proficient readers. Furthermore, Roe, Smith, and Burns (2005) pointed out tasks for reading become increasingly complex as students advance through grades. Thus, continual attention must be given to the reading tasks assigned to the EFL upper-level students.

According to Alderson (2000), L2 reading could be somewhat slower and less successful than L1 reading because of the levels of readers' proficiency, types of text, text difficulty, and task demands. Research on L2 reading has considered various variables involved in the reading process, and most of this kind of research has consisted of participants from the beginning and intermediate levels of language instruction (e.g. Brantmeier, 2003; Carrell, 1988a; Hudson, 1982; Johnson, 1981; Young & Oxford, 1997; Schueller, 2004). However, little empirical research (e.g. Brantmeier, 2001; Young, 2003) has been done to investigate readers at the advanced levels of language instruction, and it is at this stage of acquisition that

more L2 reading research is needed. As researchers attempt to learn more about advanced L2 readers, it has been noticed that students' gender (Brantmeier, 2003; Pae, 2003; Young and Oxford, 1997) and text type (Alderson, 2000; Brantmerer 2005; Grabe, 1988; Olson, 2003; Perfetti, 1997) should be explored.

Meanwhile, the relationship between reading and writing has long been recognized, and it is agreed that reading and writing cannot be separated (Castellani, 2001). Reading writing interaction has received considerable attention from theorists, researchers and practitioners (Baker & Boonkit, 2004; Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Salthouse, 1996; Shannhan, 1988; Tierney & Pearson, 1983). Findings of research in L2 reading and writing echo each other to a large degree. Many researchers point out that successful L2 readers and writers use similar strategies. For example, successful readers and writers do not use strategies hierarchically or linearly, but interactively in reading and recursively in writing (Carrell, 1983a; Zamel, 1992). In contrast, according to Leki (1997), less successful readers and writers seem to do the same thing. They access the text on the page rather than the meaning potential of that text, the forms of the letters and words rather than the overarching connections between them.

However, up to now, language skills are still mostly taught as discrete skills, which is a dilemma in L2 reading instruction (Lee, 2008). Additionally, discussions of reading-writing connections focus mainly on writing proficiency (e.g. Kennedy, 1994; Ruiz-Funes, 2001; Tsang, 1996), regarding reading as a springboard to writing tasks and writing improvement. Many researchers assume reading abilities of the students as unproblematic. Nevertheless, it is far from being true with many EFL learners. Low comprehenders have difficulty using writing to make sense of their reading, and this is a serious problem because tasks that require students to write about texts are ubiquitous at all

levels of schooling and assessment. Also, research on reading comprehension and research on writing make little mention of validated interventions for helping learners to develop abilities for writing about text. Therefore, Grabe (2004) suggested that it is essential to give consideration to reading as well as writing in reading-writing research.

Based on the EFL students' problems in reading comprehension on the one hand, and the strong connections between reading and writing on the other hand, one way to improve the students' reading comprehension might be to introduce writing into the reading classroom. This present study was motivated by concerns over difficulties that learners appeared to encounter in EFL reading. It examined the impact of three reading tasks - reading with summary writing, reading with journal writing, and reading with oral discussion - on EFL learners' reading comprehension. It differs from earlier studies of reading-writing relationship, which mainly focused on writing proficiency.

1.3 Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this quasi-experimental study were five-fold:

1. To investigate the effects of the three reading tasks on Chinese EFL students' reading comprehension;
2. To investigate the effects of text type on Chinese EFL students' reading comprehension;
3. To investigate the effects of gender on Chinese EFL students' reading comprehension;
4. To investigate the interactions among the three independent variables, namely, reading task, text type, and gender of students; and
5. To examine the students' attitudes towards the three reading tasks.

1.4 Research Questions

The seven research questions below guided the present study.

1. Do the three reading tasks facilitate Chinese EFL students' reading comprehension development?
2. Do the students in the groups of reading-writing connections show greater reading comprehension than those in the group of reading with no writing?
3. Are there any significant effects of text type on Chinese EFL students' reading comprehension?
4. Are there any significant effects of gender on Chinese EFL students' reading comprehension?
5. Are there any significant interactions among the three independent variables?
6. What are Chinese EFL students' attitudes towards the three reading tasks?
7. Which reading tasks are most effective?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Even though there have been many research studies on the roles of summarizing, they have seldom been examined in comparison with journal writing for their effectiveness in supporting reading. This study aimed to fill in the gap and examine the effects of the three tasks - reading with summary writing, reading with journal writing, and reading with oral discussion - on L2 reading comprehension. The primary significance of this study is that it may add new information to L2 research on reading comprehension because no empirical studies have been conducted on the effects of these three reading tasks. Also, the one-term (18 weeks) duration of the study were long enough time period to give validity to findings about the students' reading comprehension skill.

Second, besides adding information to L2 research on reading comprehension, this quasi-experimental study may improve global insight into the reading-writing relationship by involving two kinds of source-based writing, namely, summary writing and journal writing. Shanahan (1988) noted that combining reading and writing instructionally is complex, and he argued for the need to design experiments that show how to do that most productively.

Third, the research findings could be of great help in identifying the relationship between students' reading comprehension and reading task, text type, and students' gender. Thus, the research findings can serve as a database for further study about L2 reading comprehension, particularly about the effects of the reading tasks and their interactions with text type and students' gender.

Finally, pedagogically speaking, the findings of this study may have implications for students learning English as a foreign language. Students can improve reading comprehension by applying the effective reading tasks developed from this study.

1.6 Definitions of Terms

The following terms are frequently used in the present study.

Reading Tasks

Reading tasks refer to the activities or work plan that is part of the reading curriculum and teaching. In order to do the reading tasks, learners must employ reading skills and have a clear outcome. They must employ cognitive process to comprehend, manipulate, produce and interact with the text being read. In the case of the current study, reading tasks refer to reading with summary writing, reading with journal writing, and reading with oral discussion.

Reading with Summary Writing

Reading with summary writing is one type of reading task in this study. After the students have finished reading a text, they are required to write a summary. They have to identify the main idea, delete irrelevant information, generalize redundant information, and then reorganize their ideas. In summary writing, only the gist of a text is required.

Reading with Journal Writing

Reading with journal writing is another type of reading task in this study. Students are required to write a journal in English after they have finished reading a text. Journal writing is a way for students to document their learning and collect information which is related to their reading. It is basically a free form and students have the freedom to express their own understanding, their questions and concerns, to reflect on their learning processing, or to write about other reading-related themes and concerns.

Reading with Oral Discussion

Reading with oral discussion is the third type of reading task in this study. After reading a text, the students are not required to write, but orally discuss the comprehension questions.

Students' Written Feedback

Students' written feedback in this research context refers to the report written by the students after they have finished their respective tasks. In their written feedback, the students mainly discuss their attitudes towards and perceptions of the tasks they have completed.

Text Types

Text types in the context of this study refer to the narrative and expository texts. A narrative text is written to express either a true or fictional story. They may take the form of a travel story, autobiography, fairy tale, etc. A narrative text may con-

tain the following elements: characters, setting, plot, and theme (Spafford, Pesce, & Grooser, 1998). An expository text is written to present factual information or ideas. This type of text is referred to as content area texts, which includes social studies, mathematics or science (Spafford *et al.*, 1998). An expository text may have the following structures: cause-effect, comparison-contrast, description, problem-solution and sequence (Harris & Hodges, 1995).

1.7 Outline of the Book

This book is organized into six chapters. Chapter One provides an overview of the study, including background of the study, statement of the problem, the purposes and research questions, the significance of the study, and definitions of key terms.

To answer the research questions, the researcher has reviewed the related theories and previous research studies in the field. Chapter Two includes an exclusive literature review on L2 reading, reading-writing connections, and writing from sources.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the methodological design of the study, including the description of the participants, the variables, the data collection instruments, and data analysis methods, as well as the rationale behind the selection of data collection procedures. Also, it reports the results of the pilot study and describes the main study.

Chapter Four presents the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data elicited through the pretest and posttest, the students' written feedback, the questionnaires, and the interviews with the students.

Chapter Five discusses the findings of the present study.

Chapter Six summarizes the main findings of the present study in response to the research questions, establishing the

pedagogical implications of such results and their limitations. Some suggestions for further research in the field are outlined at the end of this chapter.

1.8 Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has given a description of the background of the study. The statement of the problem, the research purposes and questions, the significance of the study, and the terms frequently used in the study were briefly discussed. An outline of this study was given in the final part of the chapter.

In the next chapter, a review of the theories and research on L2 reading, L2 writing, and reading-writing connections will be presented.