Taiwanese University Freshmen's Difficulties with Reading in English

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This article examines, by means of student essays, the difficulties Taiwanese university freshmen had in their English reading. The concept of receptivity to the target language and culture is used throughout. A wider framework than merely what happens in the university classroom is examined. The first section deals with the students' previous learning of English reading in secondary schools and its effect on their present learning. The second section examines the students' attitudes towards the English-speaking culture vis a vis their own Taiwanese culture, and to the English language. These are seen as important determinants of their present difficulties. The third section examines their present difficulties via their attitudes to the methods of teaching used in the university. It is concluded that reading in a foreign language involves much more than what happens in the classroom, and that further studies casting such a wide net should be made.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the difficulties Taiwanese university freshmen had with their reading in English from two points of view: the contrast between Taiwanese culture and English-speaking culture, and the contrast between the earlier teaching and learning of reading which the students had experienced in school and the kinds of teaching and learning which they were exposed to in university. Bernhardt (1991: 6) writes: '.... The processing of text can only be viewed within a unique cultural context. There are basically no generic or generalized readers or reading behaviours.' This article examines a particular context within a university in Taiwan, and the histories of reading in English and attitudes to it expressed by a group of Taiwanese freshmen.

The questions raised and discussed in this article are those which have frequently been discussed in the literature recently: to what extent is reading ability a function of knowledge of the world (which is always learnt within a particular culture)? To what extent is reading ability in a second language affected by the attitude of the reader towards the target culture; and to what extent is difficulty in reading a function of teaching methods? However poorly rated a certain teaching method may be by researchers, students may have grown accustomed to this method; conversely, a method highly rated by researchers may, because of its novelty, actually impair their reading ability.

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The fact that each culture gives its members different 'schemata' which 'incorporate generalized knowledge about objects or events' (Steffensen and Joag-Dev, 1984: 53) has long been recognized within the literature on second language learning. As an example:

> ..... adult Americans possess well-developed schemata relating to the wedding ceremony. Given a message about a wedding, an American reader would anticipate references to, and specific information about, an engagement ring, a stag party, the wedding cake etc. (1984: 53)

Indian readers in the Steffensen and Joag-Dev article produced radically different interpretations of a passage about a wedding, leading these authors to conclude:

> .....reading comprehension is a function of cultural background knowledge. If readers possess the schemata assumed by the writer, they understand what is stated and effortlessly make the inferences intended. If they do not, they distort the meaning as they attempt to incorporate even explicitly stated propositions to their own preexisting knowledge structures. (1984:65)

The situation is, however, more complicated than this: within a particular culture, specialists will have well-developed schemata in their own area of specialization, but lack such schemata in other areas. Nuttall (1996: 6) writes of a scientific text:

> Text B is difficult to someone who, like me, knows nothing about science. It would not help me if I looked up the words in a dictionary, because I should not understand the definitions.

So baldly stated, schema theory needs qualification: particularly in the present world, where cultures are interpenetrating, and where, indeed, preservation of their own individual cultures is a preoccupation of many countries (e.g. the attempts of the French Academy to 'save' the French language from anglicization). Each country will have different historical, political and cultural relations with particular other cultures, and attitudes arising from these.

Criticisms have been made of schema theory on the grounds that schemas are not useful in research, are static, synonymous with background knowledge, never described in detail – e.g. we do not know how those who advocate schema theory see schemas as being acquired – and too loose a concept altogether (see Urquhart and Weir, 1998: 70-1). In this article, the both more inclusive and more particular term 'background knowledge' will be used.

Knowledge is almost never neutral: that is, there is always some affective or attitudinal aspect of almost all knowledge or background knowledge. Intercultural attitudes are now, given mutual cultural interpenetration, as vital as intercultural knowledge.

Attitudes have long been recognized as a key factor in foreign language learning. Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Schumann (1978)) distinguished between instrumental and integrative motivation for learning. Lambert (1963: 114) describes these two types of motivation thus:

> The orientation is 'instrumental' in form if the purposes of language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement, such as getting ahead in one's occupation, and is 'integrative' if the student is oriented to learn more about the other cultural community as if he desired to become a potential member of the group.

However, as Stern points out (1983: 378) 'the relationships between social context and attitudes are often more complex .....The social status of the second language in relation to the first, ethnolinguistic group relations, economic or political factors, are likely to influence motivation to learn a second language.' For example, 'The instrumental motives for learning the target language may be accompanied by a negative motivational orientation in the form of 'fear of assimilation' (Stern 1983: 378) Each individual's attitude to the target culture will be a complex reflection of attitudes he/she has towards the languages (and their relative prestige) within his/her own culture and towards the 'foreign' culture. Just as low-caste Hindus in southern India often convert to Buddhism to escape the caste system, learning a foreign and prestigious language may, for example, be an attempt to circumvent the low prestige afforded one's own language in one's own culture (of which more later). Each individual motivation is complex.

As one approach to intercultural attitudes, Allwright and Bailey use the concept of 'receptivity' towards the target culture, which they define as 'a state of mind, whether permanent or temporary, that is open to the experience of becoming a speaker of another language, someone else's language' (1991: 157) They divide this (1991: 157-167) into:

Receptivity to:

the target language;
the people and culture;
the idea of being associated with other non-native speakers in the target language;
the teacher as person;
fellow learners;
the teacher's way of teaching;
the course content;
being a successful language learner;
communicating with others

All of these together make up the individual student's view of the task of learning a foreign language. As this article will deal largely with the effect students' attitudes

to Anglo-American culture has on their learning to read in English, the Allwright and Bailey scheme seems a useful framework within which to work.

The Taiwanese learners' difficulties are seen along two axes: that of past to present (their past learning and teaching - in school and in the home -versus their present learning and teaching in the university); and inside their culture versus outside their culture. The stress is not so much on bringing an abstract theoretical framework as on seeing how the students themselves see their context of learning, through recording their attitudes. The emphasis on examining the students' attitudes, as free as possible from any conceptual preconceptions, reflects the view expressed by Littlewood (1984: 1):

> In language teaching, our methods and techniques have often failed to produce effective learning, however sound they may have appeared in theory. To discover why, we must study the learner.

BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The students whose essays form the basis of this study were freshmen English majors at National Chung Cheng University, Chiayi, Taiwan, in the years 1994-5. All spoke Mandarin Chinese, although several spoke a different language at home (Taiwanese or Hakka). They had studied English since the age of twelve. They had had no native-speaking English teachers. Class size in the schools had been, on average, sixty. They had spent six hours a week in school studying English. Classes in state schools, which all but one had attended, had usually been sex-segregated and streamed for ability. To enter university, students had to pass a national university entrance exam (the Joint College Entrance Exam) at the age of eighteen.

There were twenty freshmen in the class, eight males and twelve females. The class met for three fifty-minute periods a week. During the year they read essays on varied subjects from the books listed below. It will be noted that all these books fall within a particular category – that of 'literary essays' - which can be said to be their area of specialization.

The Norton Reader (shorter eighth edition).
Themes for College Writers by J. Brereton and J. Dobija
Patterns of Exposition by J. Decker.
Short Takes by E. Pensfield.

Examination of the students' essays is divided into three parts, all of which illustrate the past learning-present learning, and 'inside' (Taiwanese culture) - 'outside' (English-speaking culture) axes. These parts are:

1 The students' attitudes to English-speaking culture in relation to Taiwanese culture.

2 The students' past learning of English and the teaching of English they received in school (particularly in reading in English), and their attitudes to it.

3 The students' attitudes towards the teaching and learning of reading in English in the present, at the university.

Students' English is not corrected except where it may be otherwise incomprehensible. It is, perhaps, a slight disadvantage that the essays were written in English: the students might have shied away from the expression of complex ideas which they could have expressed in another language.

1 Essays dealing with past experience in learning to read English

Higa (1965: 168-9) writes:

> ..... There is no such thing as difficulty in the absolute. It is chiefly the learner's past and present learning experience that makes any learning material easy or difficult..

For this reason, to understand the students' difficulties in reading in English at the university, we must look back at the ways they learned and were taught in schools, and their attitudes to their past learning experience.

Students reported that when they started to learn English, they had great enthusiasm for it. This was caused by their high estimation of English-speaking culture. For example:

> *When I was a child I thought that a person who could speak English was really great. So I was very interested in learning English when I started it.*

However, this initial enthusiasm had been lost for various reasons, all related to methods of instruction. These were:

A Difficult lessons, (*'The lessons became hard to read and there were many lessons to learn by heart'*);
B Reading lessons which were used as a preparation for exams (*'Gradually the learning for exams made me tired and bored'.)*;
C Lack of progress;
D Too much homework;
E Uninspiring teachers;
F Too much new vocabulary (*'All students need confidence. Students will give up when seeing a lot of new vocabulary');*
G English readings being explained in Chinese (*'Because the teachers would explain the meaning in Chinese, we didn't care much about the meaning in English')*;
H Dull textbooks.

These points need amplifying with a closer look at the methods that had been used to teach reading in English in schools. None of the students had had native-speakers of English. Because of restrictions, until recently, on travelling abroad, few of their teachers had much ability in speaking or listening to English. (A student wrote of his teachers: *'Since the English teachers are not foreigners (English is not their native language), some of them are sometimes afraid of speaking with foreigners').* Teachers therefore concentrated on those areas where they had expertise – reading and writing. As for Taiwanese school students, Jordan (1969: 73) writes of their 'extreme reticence ..... to expose themselves to ridicule by speaking badly' and notes that 'such words as a student may utter are normally unintelligible to a native speaker of English.'

Taiwanese education, heavily reliant on Confucian teachings, stressed learning by heart, and the goal of secondary school education was to pass the JCEE which led to entrance to a university. Jordan (1969: 69) writes of education in Taiwan 'until very recent times'.

> ..... the acquisition of literacy was inseparable from the study of ancient literature. Indeed, the mark of an educated man was his ability to write out or recite a vast corpus of ancient learnings by heart.

Mendel (1970: 48) supports this view of Taiwanese education:

> The teaching methods in Formosa are heavily formalistic, with rote memory, standardized lectures, and regurgitational exams.

Reading is therefore geared to the JCEE and was seen chiefly as a means to learn vocabulary which would help the students in that exam. This is not peculiar to Taiwan: the use of reading as a means to learn something extrinsic (e.g. not learning only to read) is common all over the world. Urquhart and Weir write (1998: 195): 'Many teachers see one of their key roles in the reading classroom as expanding vocabulary knowledge and developing learners' ability to continue to increase their vocabulary'. What is peculiar to Taiwan, and perhaps to several other east Asian countries, however, is the intensity and stress of the long hours of learning that are expected of students in preparation for the JCEE. Mendel writes: (1970: 48) 'The cramming required to pass entrance exams to junior high schools before 1969, and to higher schools today, evidently takes a heavy toll on the health of students, according to surveys of student weight and eyesight.'

The students' reaction to this use of reading for other purposes, from their present standpoint in the university, was negative:

> *If students in high school learn reading for the purpose of passing the JCEE they will forget the information after the JCEE.*

> *We were trained to read very fast in order to get high grades. Sometimes I feel that I am a machine of testing.*
>
> *Reading, in secondary school, was a tool for us students to learn new vocabulary and some important sentence patterns.*
>
> *Vocabulary in reading was long and difficult to use. The main reason was that we learnt it for test's sake.*
>
> *After studying English for three years, I could not speak well. I only learned how to take an exam.*

Three descriptions of what actually happened in their English lessons at school are given below. All reinforce the picture of a reading class in which reading was used as a means to an end, and the students were given little chance to develop their own strategies of reading (only on the third extract is there a tantalizing hint at some teaching of reading strategies.):

1 *I think the biggest difference of the way of teaching between the secondary school and the university is what language teachers use when teaching. In the secondary school there was always new vocabulary listed after the reading. Before starting the reading, teachers would teach us new vocabulary first. They would read the new vocabulary and the examples and then translate them into Chinese. ..... The teachers always emphasized the part of grammar and writing, but not the part of reading and speaking. It meant the teachers cared not how poor the students' pronunciation or the ability of expressing the idea.*

2 *There are many differences between the ways I was taught reading in the secondary school and university. In the secondary school the teacher always asked us to read aloud one story and explained each of the paragraphs to us. After that, our teacher asked us to read a short summary of the story. ..... Secondly, in the secondary school our teachers just taught us whatever the schedules of the textbook.*

3 *First of all they asked us to memorize new vocabulary in the articles and to underline all the words which we didn't know. Second, teachers will analyze grammar and the structure of the sentences for us. Thirdly, teachers will tell us how to find the key words in articles, asking us to guess the meaning of the articles.*

I will now examine students' reactions to their school English lessons against Allwright and Bailey's receptivity scheme:

Receptivity to being a successful language learner.

Self- assessments as learners of English in secondary school are uniformly negative:

I still remember that when I started to learn English I felt nervous. Then I found that it is really interesting, although I am poor at it. Because I am very lazy it is hard for me to have to study English often..

Always I felt less enthusiastic about learning English. Why? Because I thought I could not learn English as good as others.

I am poor at English. Because I am very lazy it is hard for me to have to study English often.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) found a high correlation between self-esteem and language learning, although, as they point out, it is difficult to see which is cause and which is effect. The fact that these relatively successful language learners (they have, after all, passed the JCEE to study English at university) all give negative self-assessments as language learners points to the fact that this may be a cultural convention.

Receptivity to the teacher as person and to the methods the teacher uses.

On the whole these are negative, and mention again the stultifying effect of being tied to an exam-oriented course:

At first I liked English as a language. The reason is that my English teacher made the class live. He taught us how to read, speak and listen, and told us some jokes in class. Therefore we liked and looked forward to his English class. Before I graduated from Junior High School, my class changed the teacher. Her way of teaching was boring. Hence I disliked the class and my grades were lowered.

Only one student speaks favourably of the teaching methods used in school reading lessons. His answer seems to reflect his feeling of uncertainty caused by the lack of 'scaffolding' given in university reading lessons (see the conclusion for a fuller discussion of this):.

Although the teachers would push us, we actually learn something, because the teachers would explain the vocabulary, the sentence structure and the grammar. Now in the university, unlike in secondary schools, we have to depend on ourselves.

Receptivity to the teaching materials used:

The reactions are uniformly negative:

In the secondary school, English books were textbooks, including grammar, phrases and composition books. They were not useful. Some foreigners teased us that what we have learned was classroom English, which we seldom heard or spoke in daily life.

I don't remember the content of those textbooks. I only remember that they were boring.

If I was an English teacher, I would suggest the authority to change the textbooks. I am of the opinion that textbooks should be both interesting and educate.

In view of these attitudes to learning in the classroom, it is not surprising that learning from other sources, outside the classroom, is highly rated. These include:

A Listening to popular western music; reading English books and teaching magazines out of class

For example, of the journal 'Studio Classroom' one student writes that it was '*more engrossing and more related to life'* compared to the textbooks used in the classroom; the radio programme 'Let's talk in English' was contrasted by a student with the dullness of classroom materials ('*very interesting, in contrast to the classroom textbooks, which were very boring*'); another student writes:

Since I entered Senior high School, I gradually lost interest in English. But then I read some magazines and liked English again.

B Contact with native English-speakers

I remember when I was in senior high school, a foreign missionary came to my home to preach. I am glad to be a friend with him. During that period I got much information about their culture, customs and religion that my classes don't give.

C Support from the family ('*My parents also encouraged me to study English. They think that English is important.*') Parental support may be connected with the prestige a speaker of English has in his/her local community. Jordan (1969: 73) notes 'The motivation behind student enthusiasm for it (English) (or more exactly enthusiasm of their parents or friends) seems to derive from its potential use in the local prestige hierarchy.' See the section on cultural attitudes below.

D Other Taiwanese teachers out of class. These teachers and the materials they used are again contrasted favourably with the teaching and materials used in class:

In order to learn more, I had to study out of class. I found that the teachers were more friendly than those in school and they used more engrossing books, such as Studio Classroom, which contained different contents and more related to life.

Receptivity to fellow learners

The subject of students' attitudes to their fellow learners in language classrooms, and the effect on learners of their fellow learners, has been examined in several diary studies, written, however, by experienced teachers (Bailey (1983) and Schumann (1980), for example). In the diary studies reviewed by Bailey (1983)

feelings of competitiveness with fellow learners, and anxiety about being outshone by them, figure prominently. This note of fellow learners being competitors and anxiety-provoking is almost entirely absent from the Taiwanese students' essays. There is only one essay in which fellow learners are seen as anxiety-provoking:

> *Always I felt less enthusiastic about learning English. Why? Because I thought I could not learn English as well as others.*

Receptivity to the people and culture will be examined in the next section.

If the quotation from Higa given earlier is true, then difficulties students have at university may be traced back to the kinds of lessons they had at school, and the attitudes to learning to read in English which they absorbed there.. Reading had been used as a means to an end; it was tied to exams; and the only spark of interest in English came from what was learnt outside the classroom.

2 Essays comparing attitudes to English-speaking culture and Taiwanese culture

Stern (1983: 277) notes:

> Shifts in the emphasis on French, English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian or Dutch as second languages throughout the world have mirrored the ups and downs of political power and prestige.

In spite of the use of Mandarin Chinese in schools throughout Taiwan, Taiwan is not a linguistically homogeneous country. Even within a single family, different languages are frequently used among different generations or family members (for example, Japanese may be spoken among grandparents, Mandarin Chinese between parents, and Taiwanese among members of the younger generation.) The prestige of English depends partly on the political circumstance that America has been a powerful friend of Taiwan for the last fifty years. Ching (in Treat, 1996: 172) writes:

> After the defeat by the communists ..... the Nationalist government became one of the largest beneficiaries of U.S. aid. It is estimated that Taiwan received $5.6 billion in massive economic and military aid from Washington. American influence on postwar Taiwan was pervasive.

Jordan (1969: 73) notes:

> English has enormous prestige in the popular mind ....The highest praise is showered upon someone who can gasp out half a dozen words of 'American.'

Mandarin Chinese also has high prestige as the language of China, whose values many Taiwanese feel they uphold since the takeover of mainland China by the communists. Jordan notes (1969: 74): 'Mandarin ..... was presented as the distilled essence of Chinese linguistic development..... The prestige of Mandarin among Chinese languages is ..... an ancient one.'

A third contender for linguistic prestige is Japanese, which many members of the present grandparents' generation see as the language of education, and which is becoming popular again among the young, as memories of the Japanese occupation fade away. Japanese manga, films and pop songs are popular among the young. Ching writes (in Treat, 1996: 180):

> ....in 1985, sales of publications in Japanese exceeded those in English ..... Videotapes of Japanese T.V. programs accounted for 31% of Taiwan's entire video rental business.

Thus, as Mintz (1981: 435) writes: 'It would be useful to look at Taiwan as the dependency of successive world powers: in this case, of Japan, China, and the United States.'

The first question the students were asked was: 'What do you think of English-speaking culture? Compare it with Taiwanese culture.'

The assumption made, with Schumann (1978: 138), is that

> .....if both groups positively value each other, those favourable views will be communicated to the learner and will enhance his acquisition of the target language.....
>
> if both communities hold negative stereotypes about each other .... Then social distance will prevail and acquisition of the target language will be inhibited.

Taiwanese Chinese culture is described by these students in the following terms: family affection is strong, people are kind, selfish, not obedient, hard-working, materialistic, lacking in spiritual life; Chinese people are good-mannered; Chinese culture is more 'noble and enchanting' than English-speaking culture, there is little public spirit, it is traditional; it is busy, lacking in public security and environmental protection and Chinese people are hard-working; Chinese people hint and are indirect, they are conservative and shyer than English people; Taiwanese culture is warmer than English culture; the family is strong in Taiwan, Taiwanese people are louder in restaurants and do not wait in an orderly queue; Taiwanese people are conservative, lack a sense of humour and hide their feelings; there is more authority in Chinese families, more diversity of religion, and environmental protection is bad – e.g. garbage on the streets and traffic; Taiwanese culture is more complicated than English culture.

English-speaking culture is seen in these terms: it has strict laws and government, people are not as kind as the Taiwanese, and leisure is emphasized; it has fast foods, democracy, leisure, new educational methods and technology, and challenges Taiwanese cultural institutions such as the family with its freedom and is thus a challenge to Taiwan; English-speaking people are relaxed in talking, and English culture influences TV programmes, movies and music; it is law-abiding but lacking in kindness, efficient and leisurely; it is leisure-oriented and diligent, advanced and convenient, and superior to Taiwanese. English-speaking people show their

feelings in public, are simple and direct in the expression of feelings and are confident; in English-speaking culture families are not important, children are freer, people are not noisy in restaurants, they form queues and are good-mannered, and they keep the laws; it is more open and has more humour; it is enthusiastic and direct, the relations between parents and children are very different from those in Taiwan, people show their emotions, the children are freer; families are more harmonious; English-speaking culture has only one religion and is superior; people show their feelings more and the way of life is simple..

From this summary the following contrasts between Taiwanese and English-speaking culture appear:

English-speaking culture	Taiwanese culture
public-spirited law abiding	lacking in public spirit, but stronger on private (particularly family) affection
orderly	disorderly
simple	complicated
direct	indirect
open	closed
leisurely	hard-working
'modern'	traditional

When it comes to the evaluation of these characteristics, attitudes vary widely. Two students see English-speaking culture as *'superior'*, while one notes that *'Taiwanese people should learn other country culture's merit, and correct our flaws'* and that *'any culture has its quality and right to exist.'* Further negative points about Taiwanese culture are: one student notes that westerners have more spiritual life; one that Taiwanese are less efficient; one thinks that Taiwanese should learn humour from the west; and one sees western children as happier than Taiwanese, concluding '*We should choose the good part of theirs to learn.*'

Others note negative points of western culture compared to Taiwanese: *'There are a few bad influences: the confusion of society is caused by democracy;' 'The sign of increasing divorce rate in western society is bad;'* one sees western culture as a threat to Taiwanese - '*It is a challenge to the moral of Chinese culture. As a matter of fact it's not suitable,*' while another thinks that western culture could be selectively useful for Taiwanese: *'No culture is absolutely right or wrong. We should have open minds to learn the good culture of other countries.'*

In one area, that of the way people speak to each other, western culture is seen as 'disorderly' versus the Taiwanese 'orderly':

> *In America, the youth have their own language. When they meet they greet each other with a lot of body language. When we visit to someone, even if it is our relatives, proper language is good manners.*
> *Americans use simple words in talking and do not care.*
> *For them, they can speak out naturally and without awkwardness. The Taiwanese always hint their mood, whether sorrow or excitement.*
> *They would tell their family members how much they like them, love them. Taiwanese do not do that, we just conceal our feeling.*
> *What is different from our culture is that they have body language. They embrace and make faces to express their feelings, but Chinese is more passive and embarrassed to convey their feelings directly.*

Public display of feeling, direct expression of feeling through speech or gesture, seems to be associated with disorderliness.

It will be seen from the above that many of these students are both receptive towards English-speaking culture and critical of their own culture: this may have to do with their age – they may envision English-speaking culture as some kind of 'liberation' from what they see as a 'traditional' culture (several of them remarked that they saw western children as 'freer' and less oppressed by the authority of their parents).

The second question was: 'What do you like and dislike about the English language?'

Allwright and Bailey (1991: 158) give examples of receptivity or its opposite towards a language:

> Whether you find the language you are supposed to be learning attractive or ugly to listen to, for example. Along the same lines, some people may find the target language elegantly systematic, while others are put off by what they see as only complicated rules.

Values are attached to the language of any community. Many communities believe that their language is in some way superior, although there are exceptions to this (e.g. as noted by Hudson (1980: 200) there are communities who see their dialect as in some way inferior – e.g., New Yorkers and Glaswegians). Stern writes (1983: 237):

> Different languages ..... are often associated with deep-rooted emotional responses in which thoughts, feelings, stereotypes and prejudices about people, social, ethnic and religious groupings, and political identities, are strongly associated with different languages or varieties of a language.

Gates (1981: 241, 253) gives an example of linguistic prejudices and stereotypes within Taiwan:

> Taiwanese and mainlanders typically agree ..... that the mainlanders have a cultural advantage in being more directly derived from the Han homeland (which is bigger and more important than Taiwan) and that the Taiwanese language is hopelessly scatological, impossible to reduce to writing, and perhaps ..... not a real language with form and order at all.

Among the students in the present study, reasons for liking the English language were:

1 English is useful and the language of business. E.g. *'It is the language of trade and commerce.' 'The Taiwanese public uses the practical English speaking, especially the businessmen. They speak in commercial English when they trade.'*

2 To be a part of the international community one needs English, which is spoken in many countries. E.g. *'English is equipment to communicate with many countries.' 'English is a very important international language. Two people who come from different countries can speak English.'*

3 English is easy compared with Chinese. E.g. *'English is a logical language. Common conversation in English is simple' 'I like English as a language because it is easy to write. Chinese is difficult to write and too complex.'*

4 On the integrative level, there was appreciation (all by female students) of English –language films, songs and poetry:

I was interested in seeing foreign movies .....I like to listen to English songs. I like to listen to English songs. I love English because it can show a lot of feeling by simple words. I also love English from reading the poetry.

Reasons for disliking the English language were:

1 The grammar is difficult.
The only one problem is its grammar. It is difficult for such an old learner
Most important of all, I always make mistakes in grammar.

2 The vocabulary is difficult.
I don't like learning English vocabulary, so my English vocabulary is small
There are too many meanings in one word.. When I read an article I don't know which meaning I should pick up.

3 Difficulty of listening to spoken English, particularly when it is spoken fast.
And my listening ability is bad, if foreigners speak too fast or use too hard words.
If others speak too fast, I will be confused and misunderstand what they said.

Difficulty of listening is associated with pace by several students. This has been noted by other writers on language learning – see Dudley-Evans and Johns (1981:33), for example: 'The single phonological feature which seems to correlate most strongly with comprehension is – not surprisingly – tempo.'

4 Problems connected with speaking, particularly a fear of making mistakes:

I am afraid to have a conversation with others.
Maybe I dislike its pronouncement because I can't speak it well.

One student relates this poor speaking ability to the materials used in schools:

> *When I went abroad I found it was not much use speaking the kind of English I found in the school textbooks, because these sentences just appear in textbooks but not in daily conversation.*

Allwright and Bailey (1991: 173) note:

> ..... learners report that one of their major worries is that when forced to use the language they are learning they constantly feel that they are representing themselves badly, showing only some of their real personality, only some of their real intelligence.

In the case of these Taiwanese students, this may be partly a cultural factor. Sato (1990: 116-117) notes:

> Along the cultural dimension, ... Asians tend to abide by a stricter interpretation of the teacher-student relationship in the context of classroom interaction. ..... An analysis of participation patterns in two university classes has shown speaking opportunities to be differentially distributed between Asians and non-Asians. The former group has been characterized as taking less speaking turns on their own initiative.

This conclusion is supported by the Taiwanese students' statements, some of which were quoted earlier, noting that English speakers tended to be more *'relaxed'* when talking, that English-speaking people *'always speak more confidently than the Taiwanese,'* and that Taiwanese are *'shyer'* Note also the comment by Jordan quoted earlier about Taiwanese students' 'extreme reticence.'

These negative comments on English seem to reflect not a permanent attitude – English is rated more positively than Chinese on several fronts – but a reflection of the frustrations they are having in learning English at that time.

The third question was 'What will your future learning of English be?'

It was hoped to discover from this question more about the 'integrative' versus 'instrumental' attitudes to English. This question also allows a look at the students' long-term aims (if they have thought about this) in learning to read in English.

Reading was in fact rated as the most important skill in their future use of English by only two students. Listening, speaking and writing were all rated most important by more students. Students stressed what had been emphasized in their English learning: thus many saw expanding their vocabulary (which is what reading had often been used for at school) as the most important aspect of their future learning of English.. For example:

> *I want to enlarge my vocabulary. I think I should memorize some words every day and look up their meanings in the dictionary.*
> *I will read more English magazines and books to improve my vocabulary.*

Just as they had stressed that listening to the radio out of class was one of the best methods to learn English in their schooldays, many mentioned listening to the radio more as one of their future aims in learning English:

> *I will force myself to listen to Studio Classroom on the radio.*
> *I would like to train myself to listen to the radio English-teaching program Studio Classroom every day.*

Five students wanted to be teachers of English in the future. Five mentioned the usefulness of knowing English for visiting other countries. For example:

> *I want to earn enough money to go abroad to visit other countries and practise speaking English.*

If possible I want to study abroad. I can touch some social customs and daily habits of English countries more closely.

Several wrote that they wanted to work in some way using the study of literature. For example:

> *Since this Foreign language Department puts more emphasis on literature and I myself am interested in literature, I would like to be an interpreter in future or maybe translate English books into Chinese.*

The kind of reading students had done in school and university was very much 'the study of literature'. This kind of reading would definitely be an asset for those who wanted to be teachers of English, or to study literature, or to translate English books into Chinese. For those who wanted to visit other countries, or to use English for business, as noted in an earlier section, it is questionable to what extent this study of literature would be of use in their future activities.

3 Essays dealing with students' present learning of English in the University

What we are particularly looking at here are the contrasts between the teaching in the university and teaching methods used at school, and students' reactions to the new methods of teaching reading.

How useful do you think the following methods used in your lessons in the university, are in learning to read in English?

1. Reading aloud

This, it will be remembered, was used frequently in the students' reading lessons at school. It is, indeed, a very widely used method in classrooms everywhere, although often frowned on by theorists. Nuttall, for example, writes (1996: 201-2)

> My instinct here is simply to repeat 'Don't'. ..... Nothing is easier for the teacher or drearier for the students, and few commonly used activities have less value. ..... reading aloud is much slower than silent reading, so frequent exposure deters students from improving their silent reading speeds.

As this had been such a basic method in their reading lessons at school it is not surprising that many students see it as useful. Examples are:

> *I think that reading aloud in class must be very helpful to students because the teacher can correct our pronunciation at the right time. However, generally Chinese students are shy.*
> *Reading aloud in class will help us to improve our pronunciation of reading.*
> *To read aloud in class is a good way to understand what the passage says. Otherwise I can't understand what the passage says.*
> *Yes, I think reading aloud is necessary because the teachers can correct our mistakes right away. Reading aloud can train students to show his (her) pronunciation.*

Notice the connection students make between reading and pronunciation – i.e. reading is still seen by them as a means to an end – in this case, good pronunciation - as it had been in school. The emphasis in schools on reciting Chinese classics aloud was noted earlier, and this attitude, that literature is written to be read aloud, seems to have carried over into their learning of English reading.

However, several students are critical of reading aloud, seeing the concentration on pronunciation as interfering with understanding of meaning. For example.

> *I think its effects are small. I'll read articles fluently in class but I can't understand the meaning of passages easily at the same time.*
> *I feel that reading aloud is not very useful in understanding contents. As far as I am concerned I would just notice words' pronunciations and neglect meanings. After reading aloud I just get a smattering of knowledge about understanding the whole content.*

2. Discussing a text in class

This is not a method the students had used in school. Of interest is the stress students place on learning from their fellow students. While in school the reading lessons had been geared to exams, and therefore a single 'correct' answer to a question,

given by the teacher, had been the rule. In the university reading lessons, emphasis was on diversity of response.

Urquhart and Weir (1998:147) note that while in testing

> A consensus as to what constituted an agreed standard performance in a particular context had to be agreed in advance by the testers ..... teaching, on the other hand, since reliability of measurement is not as important, can take differing products, interpretations into account.

Pearson and Fielding (1991: 826) write that there is a

> ... very real possibility of multiple interpretations of the same text - a possibility that becomes increasingly likely when students read full-length, unedited pieces of fiction ....There is some belief that teachers' questions, even when one single answer is not designated as the 'correct' one, could serve to reveal and sanction the teacher's theory of what the story is about and thus could constrain children's thinking as much as expand it ....

Discussing a reading is, then, a novelty for the students. Several of them are positive about being able to hear different interpretations of a reading:

> *Discussing a reading in class is useful because we can get clearer concepts of the whole article. More importantly, in discussing we can acquire some other ideas from our classmates.*
> *Naturally we should discuss a reading in class. We should listen to everyone's opinion to improve our understanding of the reading. We may change our point of view and comprehension.*
> *If they discuss a reading in class students can communicate with other students about what they think of the article. When collecting many aspects of viewpoints, students can learn a lot from another side.*
> *Discussing a reading in class is useful. After reading an article, everyone must be confused by some parts of it or have a certain misunderstanding of statements. He or she can alter his reading and thinking ways.*

3. Reading on your own for pleasure

'Reading on your own' can refer to silent reading in or out of class. Pearson and Fielding (1991: 843-4) mention 'practices that require little more of the teacher than setting up the opportunities for students simply to read connected texts.' They note that 'volume of reading has been associated with various measures of reading achievement.' (1991: 843-4). 'School sustained silent reading (SSR) programs have been associated with better attitudes toward reading and more library use. (1991: 844)

School silent reading was not mentioned by any student as having occurred in their school reading classes. However, out of class reading on their own had been mentioned by many as useful (see section 1).

> *Reading on our own is good for us. The reason is that we can choose some articles that we like more. We will memorize some vocabulary spontaneously, because that is what we like. What's more important, we have less pressure, so we can study more efficiently.*
>
> *We can choose materials we like to read out of class. Due to pleasure, we can read the materials we like.*
>
> *If we only read the articles we like we will lose much knowledge. The teacher always will give us many kinds of knowledge.*
>
> *Reading on your own for pleasure is one of the best ways to improve reading ability. However, students are busy and lazy. We won't find good articles to read. I don't know which articles I can choose. Therefore I like to take suggestions from the professors.*

While the majority of students view reading on one's own positively, several feel that 'the teacher knows best' and that if left to their own devices, students will not be able to choose suitable reading material or profit from it. For a discussion of this transitional position of the students, between school and university, see the conclusion.

4. Analysing the grammar of a passage in English

Grammar had been heavily stressed in school reading lessons. A student wrote: *'In Taiwan, our education put much emphasis on grammar, even though some of it is not useful in English-speaking countries.'* Reading lessons had, as noted earlier, been used as a means to an end – the end being the learning of grammar or vocabulary, not learning how to read in a foreign language.

Urquhart and Weir (1998: 255) write that they 'do not believe it (the relationship between the teaching of grammar in the classroom and the teaching of reading) has ever been systematically investigated.' Alderson (1993: 218) found that 'a (vaguely defined) generalized grammatical ability is an important component in reading in a foreign language.' Urquhart and Weir (1998: 269) note that 'grammatical competence will be involved in different degrees in different kinds of reading.' In scanning, for example, no grammatical processing may take place, while careful local reading might be heavily dependent on grammatical processing.

The students' answers here bring out the contrast between the teaching in reading lessons in secondary schools, in which grammar played an important part, and the lack of explicit grammar instruction in university reading lessons. All ranges of attitudes to this difference are evident: from those who feel that the lack of grammar teaching in university is detrimental, to those who feel that any student who has been through the school system must already know enough English grammar; from those who feel that grammar is useful in understanding the meaning of a passage to those who feel that it is irrelevant.

In secondary school our English teachers usually analyze the grammar to help us read articles. I think it is very helpful. However, at present our university teachers think that the grammar we should learn has already been learned before, so they don't analyze the grammar for us in class. I think that students in Taiwan hate grammar. Therefore, if teachers analyse grammar in class, they'll be bothered.

It can help us to analyze the meaning of an article, otherwise it will take us much time to do that.

If teachers analyze the grammar of a reading passage, it will help us make less mistakes in writing.

I approve that the professors can analyze the sentence structure, because besides vocabulary grammar is our biggest problem in reading. We students often don't get the meaning of a passage just because we don't know the grammar.

As for analyzing the grammar of a reading passage, I think any student who has graduated from senior high schools has already possessed the ability. Every classmate in our department should have abilities to analyze the grammar.

Analyzing the grammar of readings just makes us know the structure of sentences, but does not aid us in readings' inner and true meanings.

5. Writing summaries of reading passages

Pearson and Fielding (1991: 833) write:

> The early research about summarizing stands in stark contrast to more recent work. Prior to 1980, it is difficult, if not impossible, to locate studies finding a comparative advantage for summarization over simple rereading on measures of either comprehension or recall.....The more recent work in summarization is consistently positive, variously demonstrating improved comprehension ....

These authors note that summarizing is a means to help students see the structure of a text and therefore to isolate the main ideas (1991: 827).

Summarizing was earlier noted as a method used in school reading lessons. All students' comments about summaries except one were positive. The one against the use of summaries mentions the ubiquitous factor in the students' comments on comprehension: time.

Writing summaries of reading passages is no doubt useful for us, because it helps to link the meanings of the paragraphs. Besides, it helps us to guess what will happen in the next paragraph.
This is a good idea. Besides, after writing summaries, we had better time to express our own opinion about those articles.
Writing summaries could make sure whether we have really understood a passage or not. Moreover, summaries can train our writing skill.

I think that writing summaries of passages is not actually a necessary way. Students need more time to completely understand the articles. If we don't totally know what the article is saying, summaries will be useless.

See the conclusion for comments on the students' attitudes to their university reading teaching, as shown in these replies.

What I have learnt in reading this year

In most of these essays we see the students' transitional position – between the kind of learning they did in secondary school, where the teacher was the arbiter of method and choice, and their new lives in the university, where they are expected to exercise greater autonomy and to think about methods of learning for themselves: *'Our professors only lead us to some of our textbooks ..... If we need to know thoroughly, we must use our mind to think and research more'*. There is some unease about this: *'In spite of the fact that I don't know the importance of the summary, I guess that it may be useful because every teacher attaches importance to summaries;'* but also some feeling that the new method is better: *'I understand that explaining a new word in English is better than Chinese because it is more vivid and I can know the original meaning of a word.'*

Significant also is the stress on vocabulary - many students mention that reading has improved their vocabulary (as we saw earlier, in secondary school reading was used as a tool for learning vocabulary) and single out vocabulary as the main problem, as it was in their descriptions of their future learning of English. This supports Nation and Coady's conclusion (1988: 97):

> In measures of the readability of a text, vocabulary difficulty has consistently been found to be the most significant predictor of overall readability ..... That is, sentences are more readable if they contain words that are of high frequency in occurrence and shorter rather than longer.

Specifically, contrasts between school and university teaching noted here are:

1 Words were explained in Chinese in school, but are explained in English at university. This is seen as a positive fact.

2 Professors in the university do not explain the grammar and meaning of an article as they did at school. There is some doubt as to whether this is an improvement.

3 Students are not 'ordered' to memorize words as they were in school. Again there is some doubt as to whether this is an improvement.

After passing the first year of college life I understand that explaining a new word in English is better than Chinese because it is more vivid and I can know the original meaning of a word. Although I still use a Chinese-English dictionary now, I expect to

reach my ideal level as soon as possible. Then I can start to use an English-English dictionary. In addition, practising writing summaries is necessary for reading. In spite of the fact that I don't know the importance of the summary, I guess that it may be useful because every teacher attaches importance to summaries. However, I have always had a strong feeling that my English is so poor. Almost every classmate has the same feeling as I.

At first I could not adapt myself to reading the reading articles because they include so many new words. However, the more neglectful I am, the more burden I own. Because I must still pass mid-term exam and end of term exam. Although some articles are difficult to understand I check up words first. Then I analyse important sentences. How to analyse these complicated sentences? Must I memorise much vocabulary? In the past I often feel my vocabulary is nice. However, I doubt it now.

From these readings I have learnt a lot. I have learnt how to read quickly, what are the important points in a reading, and how to write the summary. Besides, I have also learnt a large vocabulary from reading. In these works, the authors use a lot of strange but graceful and beautiful words that I have learnt. With respect to reading aloud I have made a few advances. Before studying at college, every time when teachers asked me to read the contents of textbooks aloud at class, I would feel extremely nervous so as to read slowly and pronounce slurredly. Now I figure I do better. I read more fluently, though with some faults sometimes, and am not so tense. I, on the whole, am not satisfied with what I did. For instance, I still fail to read an article with comprehending it at the same time.

This year, I think I have learnt a lot of things in reading. First I know many vocabulary and used it in writing compositions. Our professors only lead us to some of our textbooks. They just explained the meaning to us. If we need to know thoroughly, we must use our mind to think and research more.

CONCLUSION

Urquhart and Weir (1998:171) describe a 'typical' reading lesson a few years ago:

> With a lot of justification, it was held that a typical reading lesson consisted of the teacher, with little or no discussion or any other kind of prior preparation, presenting the students with a text, which the students then read. After this stage, the teacher asked questions and the students answered. Feedback was limited to the students being told that their answers were right or wrong.

They describe this kind of lesson as 'testing, but not teaching.' In the present state of research on the teaching of reading, it is certainly not justified to condemn such a lesson outright. Too little is known of how people actually learn reading comprehension. As Bernhardt (1991: 171) writes: '.....research has not yet firmly established how to teach comprehension, (or for that matter whether it is teachable)'. For further questioning of the role of explicit comprehension instruction see Pearson and Fielding (1991 842).

Reading has had a higher or lower place in the hierarchy of language learning depending on what method is currently fashionable. Those schools of thought which have seen speech as primary have assigned reading a low place in the hierarchy. The emphasis in most western reading research at present is on 'careful reading' and 'comprehension' (however defined), and developing strategies for reading.. However, as Aebersold and Field (19 : 31) point out: 'The emphasis on developing a variety of reading strategies seems to be a particularly North American and British cultural trait.' The variety of understandings in different cultures of the word 'comprehension' also needs to be emphasized: Aebersold and Field (1991:31) write:

> In some cultures comprehension means the ability to explain the grammar and structure of a page of text; in others it means the ability to summarize the thesis and argument of a whole book in a few sentences. These cultural beliefs and attitudes about reading are transmitted by teachers in the early years of the education process and stay with students for a long time

In Taiwan, however, as in some other east Asian cultures, reading has always been valued as the mark of an educated man, and this in a Confucian society where the 'educated man' is valued more than in the west at present. This, coupled with the fact mentioned earlier, that until recently few Taiwanese had the chance to travel abroad and thus improve their speaking skills, gives a higher importance to the learning of reading than in the west. Western views of reading comprehension, which tend to the 'dominant' pole (i.e. the reader reading his/her own meanings into the text), contrast with the attitude to reading in many non-western countries, which tends to the 'submissive' pole – in which the reader submits to trying to understand the author's meaning in a text, a meaning which is single and not to be questioned. This attitude to the written word tends to occur in countries where written texts are either seen as marks of civilization (as in still relatively Confucian Taiwan) or as religious revelations (as in the Islamic world). In both cases the reading aloud of texts learnt by rote is a highly valued skill. Thus we have the paradox that while it is acknowledged by many in Taiwan that speech is Taiwanese English teachers' weakest skill, much emphasis is given in reading lessons to reading aloud, and reading is seen as one means of improving one's pronunciation of English.

At the university, the Taiwanese students are confronted with a very different view of reading from that in school, in which multiple interpretations are accepted. Their attitude to this, as seen in the earlier section on 'Discussing a reading in class,' is on the whole highly positive, and correlates with their high estimation of western, and in particular, Anglo-American culture. Many students criticize the 'teacher as omnipotent authority' attitude they had encountered at school. For example, *'In school, the teachers would lecture us word by word and their statements were authoritative. They asked us to pay attention to details like prepositions, for these, trivial, would appear in the JCEE.'* As mentioned earlier, there may be other factors

here, such as the students' age, and the fact that western culture appears to them as a liberation from the heavy hand of traditional Confucian culture.

Reciting aloud was, of course, not the only goal of school reading lessons. A striking fact about school lessons is that reading was used mainly as a means to a different end – to learn vocabulary, or improve grammar, for example. As pointed out earlier, this is not peculiar to Taiwan, but is a feature of school reading lessons worldwide.

The author feels that some important questions for research into the teaching of reading are raised by this article. These are set out below.

Reading lessons in secondary schools were used almost exclusively as a means to other ends: passing the JCEE, learning vocabulary and grammar, improving pronunciation by reading aloud, even learning to write. Yet Fransson (1984: 88) has argued forcefully that 'extrinsic learning' 'where the reasons for the learning have nothing to do with the content of the reading material' is demotivating (1984: 115):

> A subject motivated by expected test demands to read a text for which he has very limited interest is likely to adopt a surface-learning strategy, while deep-level learning seems to be the normal strategy chosen by a student motivated only by the relevance of the content of the text to his personal needs and interests.

This is entirely supported by the students' comments given above.

As seen in the section on 'My future learning of English', other concerns than learning reading for comprehension alone or to increase reading ability have come into view in university. Students are now starting to ask what use reading in English will be in their future lives and jobs. At the same time as being asked to accept a different role of the teacher in reading lessons, and a view of reading in which multiple interpretations are accepted, they are, as evidenced in the essays on 'My future use of English', considering the whole project of learning to read in English from a wider perspective in their lives.

1 Reading featured as the least important skill in the students' essays about their future use of English. This may reflect the view of reading as a means to other ends (good pronunciation, learning vocabulary, writing) which has been inculcated at school. It may reflect the fact that students found school texts unrelated to life and dull. However, it may reflect a genuine feeling that as teachers or businessmen travelling abroad, reading will, in fact be of minor importance compared to speaking and listening. At university the students study literary essays. Will the ability to comprehend literary essays be of use in other fields, for example, reading business reports? Mikulecky (1990: 25) claims that 'Transfer of literacy abilities is severely limited by differences in format, social support networks, and required background

information as one moves from context to context'. He also contrasts the kinds of reading done in schools and those needed for many jobs (1990: 25): 'to read a troubleshooting manual on the job or gather information to fill in a form'. The students' assessments of their future need for the kind of reading they have been taught in schools and are taught in university may be realistic.

2 Attitudes to the English language, of which reading is only one of the skills, are, as seen above, highly positive. Why? Firstly, all these students except one had chosen to study English at university (that one had wanted to study Japanese, but was forced to study English because, due to his low mark in the JCEE, he could not enter a university where Japanese was studied as a major subject). English is, as seen in the section earlier, their road to a career.. America is often seen through an idealized haze in Taiwan, as the repository of such things as social mobility, democracy and unlimited opportunity. This is reflected in the statement quoted earlier, where one student writes: *'I thought a person who could speak English was really great.'* Also, after the defeat of Japan in 1945, many Taiwanese referred to the country of their liberators as 'the God country.' Thus students' hopes for social mobility via English reflect Lambert's (1963: 114) description:

> ..... some may be anxious to learn another language as a means of being accepted by another cultural group because of dissatisfactions experienced in their own culture.

Many students, as seen earlier, expressed a wish to use English to travel and see the world. Until quite recently, because of restrictions on Japanese material being published in Taiwan, English was also almost the only foreign language that could be easily studied in Taiwan, thus intensifying the Taiwanese view of English as a telescope to the outside world. It is against this background that students' dissatisfaction at being given texts unrelated to life and used as a means only to learn grammar and vocabulary must be seen. A high priority for Taiwan, then, would seem to be to introduce into schools texts that are actually related to contemporary life and do not disappoint the students' high expectations of reading in English.

3 The amount of 'scaffolding' used by the school teachers was much greater than that used by the university teachers. For some students this break seems to have been too sharp, as shown in such comments as

> *Maybe in school we failed to read a lot of good articles, however, we built some basement of reading skills. Now in the university we have to depend on ourselves.*
> *Sometimes I don't follow the step of the professor's expectation.*
> *Every teachers' teaching is so different from the senior high school that students themselves must make spontaneous learning to make progress.*

Pearson and Fielding (1991: 841-2) see this question of the amount of scaffolding given as a vital point in teaching reading:

> Recent thinking suggests that it is not explicit instruction per se, but the nature and content of the interactions that occur between teacher and students during instruction that count. Two features of teacher-student interactions are especially interesting: the degree of student control in discussions, and the teachers' instructional scaffolding - –in other words what teachers say and do to enable children to complete complex mental tasks they could not complete without assistance.

Given that the disjunction in the styles of teaching reading is so sharp between school and university, should a national policy try to connect the teaching of reading in a foreign language in the two institutions?

4 In contrast to the feelings of competitiveness and jealousy expressed in western diary writers' descriptions of their learning of foreign languages, (Bailey (1983: 74-5), for example, writes: 'This fear of public failure seem to have been caused or at least aggravated by comparing myself with other students ....'), this was, as noted earlier, almost entirely absent from the Taiwanese students' accounts: this was evident to the present writer in the university also. All comments except one (quoted earlier) show a high receptivity towards fellow learners. For example:

> *From my fellow learners I can exchange our language experience and correct pronunciation and so on.*
> *I feel that I can learn a lot from my fellow learners.*
> *I have many friends who speak English well and they have travelled to many countries.*
> *They also encouraged me to learn English well.*

It will be remembered also that there was a positive reaction to discussing readings in class, a novel feature of reading classes in the university in contrast to the teacher-centred school reading lessons. Students are open to the view that there can be individual interpretations of readings, and are eager to learn from others' interpretations. This may or may not be a reaction against the approach in school, where a single correct answer for an exam was stressed.

In a study by Burstall et al. (1974), it was found, unexpectedly, that small rural schools in England achieved better in their French lessons than their urban counterparts. One of the explanations given for this was that the classroom situation in these schools was 'more prone to encourage cooperative behaviour and to lack the negative motivational characteristics of the competitive classroom.' (Burstall et al, 1974: 32).

Whatever its origin, this attitude is a highly positive aspect of these Taiwanese students' learning to read in English.

5 One aspect of reading which all students wrote positively about was reading done on their own, out of class. Students who complained that school textbooks were boring and unrelated to life wrote enthusiastically of the books they read out

of class during their schooldays, and the pleasure they derived from this. For example:

> *Every time when I had free time, I would read some English stories. If I had enough money, I would spend much money buying English novels and stories.*

Why should this be so? Obviously, students could choose books they read out of class. The kind of reading they did out of class also contrasted with that in school: they were not questioned on their reading, nor did the books relate to any exam or acquisition of grammar or vocabulary. There is also no time pressure on books read out of class, and this contrasts with the picture students paint of classroom reading, in which lack of time for understanding, was a considerable problem. Urquhart and Weir write (1998: 192): 'One of the most striking differences between L1 and L2 readers of English texts is their speed' In school reading lessons, a single routine seems to have evolved: texts were always read with the same procedure of 'careful reading' (e.g. explain words – read aloud – question on reading). Urquhart and Weir (1998: 103-4) write:

> 'Careful reading' may be the preferred mode among students faced with textbooks ..... but it is not something that the majority of people are likely to engage in for a large part of the time. .... They may switch from careful reading to skimming to search reading to scanning and back to careful reading over a small number of pages.

Positive evaluations of reading alone out of class have been given above in the section on 'Students' past learning of reading in school.' While some writers have claimed that extensive reading is the best way to improve vocabulary, Urquhart and Weir (1998: 195), quoting research which reaches opposite conclusions, decide that 'Extensive reading may not be the panacea for vocabulary acquisition that it is often thought to be. For acquiring vocabulary we may have to rely also on instruction in the intensive mode.' However, as Urquhart and Weir (1998: 8-9) also write: 'Reading ..... is a social activity, related always to particular contexts.' If reading in English carries for these students such a heavy context of unpleasant classroom experiences, it would seem that to maintain their interest in reading in English extensive reading out of class should be encouraged.

This article has used a wide-ranging net to catch the various strands that make up the students' attitudes to, and learning of, reading in this, their first year of university study. Criticism of past methods of teaching and learning, although clearly expressed, is mixed with regret that the 'props' they had in secondary school have been taken away from them, and unease at their new autonomy where they are expected to rely less on the teacher in their reading. This dual feeling is clearly expressed in these extracts:

> *Although the teachers would push us (in secondary school) we actually learnt something because they would explain the vocabulary, the sentence structure and the*

grammar. Secondary school teaching gave us steady foundation, but the way of teaching, testing made us lose the interest in reading
The way I am taught reading at university enables me to train my thinking ability. However, my vocabulary and reading skill are not as advanced as I would want to be because I am not ordered by professors to memorize words.
In secondary school the teachers analyzed the grammar and the structure of the sentences for us. It is really very helpful. In the university the teacher just tells us the meaning of new words and doesn't analyze the grammar or sentence structure. They also think we should study on our own and don't ask us to memorize the new words strictly. However, because of this we don't make much progress

Richards (1976: 78) notes:

> What may be the most desirable model theoretically may turn out to be the least effective in actual use, due to the role of extralinguistic factors.

Extralinguistic factors include, for these students, the fact that such classroom methods as reading aloud, using a reading to analyze grammar or improve vocabulary, and a teacher—centred approach are methods they have grown used to in school and with which they are comfortable.

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