

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

It has been widely accepted that the development of language involves the four components of language skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking. In acquiring their first language, young children first deal with the language in the oral form: listening and speaking, and as they grow up, they learn the language in the written form: reading and writing, which are often regarded as a means of recording the oral form as well as the representation of the oral form (Broughton et al. 1980, 172).

In second language learning, during which a learner has usually had his first language established, the development of the second language does not necessarily start with the oral and then the written form. In fact, the skills are likely to be learned simultaneously. These skills cannot totally stand apart from one other. Since the relationships among these skills are very close, the mastery of one skill is likely to cause progress in the other skills. However, it is also possible that when the training is emphasised on one skill rather than the others, there will be unfamiliarity with some aspects particular to the skills not so often trained. When such is the case, there will be a gap between one skill and the other skills.

In order to examine a learner's ability in each of the skills, assessment on each language skill is conducted. Assessment is an important tool in monitoring the development of one's skills in the course of their study. Brown and Abeywickrama state that "[c]ourses of study in every discipline are marked by

these periodic milestones of progress that have become conditional methods of measurements” (2010, 1). By having the pupils take a test from time to time, both the teachers and the learners can monitor their progress and get invaluable information about their study. They can celebrate their improvement as well as obtain some revealing insight into the areas that still require attention. This principle also applies in the study of second language. Learning another language after a mother tongue is established is a long-term process and information about the pupil’s language ability often proves very useful in making further decisions regarding the pupil’s course of study.

One way of assessing language skills is through proficiency tests. A proficiency test is a test which is intended to measure a learner’s overall ability in a language. It includes testing one’s language ability in all the four areas: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Although a learner may not score equally in these four areas, there certainly is some correlation among these skills because these skills do not exist in isolation.

The four language skills are commonly classified into the receptive and the productive skills. Reading and listening are receptive skills, while writing and speaking are productive skills. Despite some unique aspects of each skill, Buck (2006, 31) suggests that there is a considerable overlap between listening ability and reading ability. Furthermore, since the goal of reading and listening is comprehension, and some of the processing elements required in reading are similar to those in listening, it is hypothesised that there is a correlation between these two receptive skills. The receptive skills are also hypothesised to affect the productive skills because in order to express oneself in speech or in writing in a

much greater variety of contexts, the learner has to be equipped with the command of language which allows him to do so (Broughton et al. 1980, 35).

The researcher thinks it worthwhile to examine the relationships among these skills by analysing the proficiency test results of intermediate learners of English.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Reading and listening skills are both classified as receptive skills. Although in reading, one deals with graphs; while in listening, with sounds, both skills are concerned with the processing of incoming information, which involves one's background knowledge. Such background knowledge is often referred to as *schemata* (Cohen 1994, 213), which are classified into three types:

- 1) Content schemata, which involve systems of factual knowledge, values and cultural conventions,
- 2) Language schemata, which involve the linguistic features of a text such as sentence structure, grammatical features, spelling and punctuation, or tone and intonation, vocabulary and cohesive devices.
- 3) Textual schemata, which concern the rhetorical structure of different modes of texts.

Considering that this processing of incoming information with the schemata is involved both in reading and in listening, the researcher has decided to conduct a research project to find out whether achievement in one's reading ability can be an indicator of one's achievement in listening ability and vice versa.

The researcher also seeks to find out how each of the receptive skills can be an indicator of a learner's productive skills, especially writing.

In excluding Speaking from this research, the researcher is not by any means suggesting that Speaking is less important than the other three skills. On the contrary, she believes that Speaking, due to its interactive nature, has to be treated with greater sensitivity. In assessing speaking, the assessment developers, the examinees, the interlocutors, the raters, and the score users have all to be put into considerations (Luoma 2004, 4).

### **1.3. Scope of the Study**

The research is limited to examining the correlations between three of the language skills i.e. Reading, Listening, and Writing of intermediate learners English in a foreign language setting. The study compares the results of 104 students who are progressing towards the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Languages: Learning, Teaching and Assessment.

### **1.4. Purposes of the Study**

The study is conducted to find out if there is a positive correlation among one's reading skills, listening skills and writing skills when the learners are at intermediate level. It uses the results of a proficiency test which covers reading, listening and writing. This study also seeks to see if there is a stronger correlation between the receptive skills than the correlation between the receptive and the

productive skills. Besides, it is also meant to find out if the correlation between reading and writing is stronger than that between listening and writing.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

In conducting the study, the researcher formulates the following research questions:

- 1) How do the participants score in reading, listening and writing in the proficiency test?
- 2) What information can be derived from the participants' test results regarding their CEFR levels of language?
- 3) Is there a correlation between the reading test results and the listening test results?
- 4) Is there a correlation between the reading test results and the writing test results?
- 5) Is there a correlation between the listening test results and the writing test results?
- 6) Is the correlation between reading and writing stronger than the correlation between listening and writing?

### **1.6. Significance of the Study**

Both teachers and learners of English can benefit from this study. Teachers of EFL can use this study to get a general picture on how a learner's reading, listening, and writing abilities are correlated to one another. This notion will help them predict the outcome of one skill by using information gathered on the other

skills. They can adjust their instructions and select their teaching methods as well as their materials accordingly.

This study can also benefit learners of English as they are monitoring their progress in the course of their study. The results of this study on the correlations between the language skills can provide general information to the learners on what skills are inter-related, so that they can expect improvement in one skill to affect the other. This knowledge will encourage them to continuously develop their language skills because they know what they can expect to achieve during their journey towards proficiency in the language they are learning.

### **1.7. Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One gives an introduction, which covers Background of the Study, Statement of the Problem, Scope of the Study, Purposes of the Study, Research Questions, Significance of the Study and Organisation of the Thesis.

Chapter Two summarises the theoretical considerations and the literature review related to Reading, Listening and Writing in second language learning, as well as the relationships between these skills. In this chapter, the readers can also find some previous studies, the research model and the research hypotheses of the study.

Chapter Three presents the research method, which includes the research design, research details and procedures, method of data collection, the details of the research instruments, techniques of data analysis and the statistical hypotheses.

Chapter Four discusses the result findings, including the analyses of the data, the results of the hypothesis testings, the limitations of the study and the discussions and interpretation of the results.

The last chapter, Chapter Five, concludes the study, presents the implications of the study and suggests some recommendations for further research. The thesis ends with a list of references, appendices, and a short biography of the researcher.

