I. RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is common that foreign languages, especially English, are used as a medium of communication for various purposes. In international relations, foreign languages play crucial roles which enable different people to understand each other. In many countries where international languages such as English, French, Arabic, Spanish or Chinese are not spoken, learning those languages have become academic affairs. In academic sphere, English in particular and other foreign language are not only a disciplinary subject at different educational levels, but a lingua franca as well to achieve academic goals since literature and teaching materials are written in this language. For non-English speakers, speaking and using English requires individuals to learn it at formal or non-formal education settings. Therefore, sometimes foreign language acquisition becomes a very hard struggle for some or many people.

A particular phenomenon related to foreign language acquisition can be seen at tertiary education level in Indonesia in particular. Studying international or foreign languages constitutes a choice for students to develop their academic, linguistic and intellectual capacity, and to pursue socio-cultural, economic or professional goals. Furthermore, they are studied and analyzed in many respects. In other words, people learn those languages, learn about them, and learn through them. According to US International Education Program Service (2008), graduates with competence in foreign language face exciting employment opportunities given increased demand for such competence in the global market.

As a developing country, Indonesia adopts an education system which encourages people to learn and study foreign languages in order to communicate with other peoples and understand their cultures. Many other developing countries develop similar policies in their education system. Thailand is one of those countries that apply an education system which includes foreign language learning into its curriculum. Indonesian and Thai people do not speak international languages used in international communities or bodies such as United Nations. Exposure to the international languages in both countries only belongs to those who study them or who have chances to communicate with people from different nationalities. English is a dominant international language spoken in various areas in both countries. One of interesting phenomena to which many people pay attention is using English to develop study skills, and this phenomenon can be found in learning processes among graduate students who do not major in English or any other foreign languages. They have to develop their study skills by acquiring English in particular as they read literature and instructional materials in English. Frankly speaking, most of textbooks intended for graduate students in Indonesia and Thailand are written in English. It is the reason why some students, if not all, at graduate education level deal with an extra burden in completing their study.

Indonesia University of Education located in Bandung Indonesia and Mahasarakham University in Thailand share a similar circumstance where graduate students who do not major in English or other foreign languages are required to master foreign language skills due to the above mentioned reason. At Indonesia University of Education for instance, graduate students have to achieve at least 450 TOEFL score as the evidence of their English language acquisition. They have to present an English language proficiency certificate to Graduate School at the end of first semester. When they are able to show this evidence, they are allowed to submit their thesis for final examination. This requirement proves that English is not only a foreign language but also an academic language. However, how they make use of it to facilitate their study is still a question because they in fact speak Indonesian as instructional medium. Up to now, not much effort has been made to document this dilemmatic situation. It is why this research is worth considering and conducting.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the problem identified and described above, the research will be guided by the following questions:

1. What is Indonesian and Thai graduate students of education studies competence in English or other foreign languages?

2. How the graduate students make use of English or other foreign languages to develop their study skills?

3. How they use English or other foreign language for academic purposes?

III. RESEARCH PURPOSES

The research is aimed at

1. identifying Indonesian and Thai graduate students' competence in foreign language, English or other foreign languages;

2. identifying difficulties they face in mastering English or other foreign languages for academic purposes;

3. describing their study skills by documenting their foreign language learning strategies; and

4. documenting ways they use their competence in English or other foreign languages to facilitate their learning processes.

IV. RESEARCH BENEFITS

The research is expected to provide data and information about (1) foreign language proficiency among Indonesian and Thai graduate students who do not major in English or other foreign languages; (2) how the students develop study skills by making use of English or other foreign languages; (3) how they use English or other foreign languages for academic purposes; and (4) possible strategies or policies which can be developed by Indonesia University of Education and Mahasarakham University or other universities which offer graduate programs both in Indonesia and Thailand to help the students improve their foreign language competence. In addition, it is expected to encourage other researchers to conduct further joint research at international level on the foreign language skills or other fields of study.

V. THEORETICAL REVIEW

1. Foreign Language Learning Theories and Models

To fully understand how a foreign language is acquired and learned, it is necessary to take into some theoretical perspectives. Literature describes a number of foreign language learning theories and models. Freeman & Freeman (1996), Willis & Willis (1996), Brown (2000), and Scovel (2001) proposed those theories and models in different ways. Based on their work, there are three general classifications which cover foreign language learning theories and models: innatist, cognitive, and constructivist. However, it is necessary to emphasize that in general a theory results in a model. Therefore, theories and models share the same names. The table below shows three categories of foreign language learniing theories and models.

Innatist	Cognitive	Constructivist
- Subconscious acquisition superior to "learning" and "monitoring"	- Controlled/automatic processing	- Interaction hypothesis
- Comprehensible input (i + 1)	- Focal/peripheral attention	- Intake through social interaction
- Low affective filter	- Restructuring	- Output hypothesis
- Natural order of	- Implicit vs explicit	- Authenticity
	- Unanalyzed vs analyzed knowledge	- Task-based instruction (Long)

Acquisition	- Form-focused instruction	
- "Zero option" for	(McLaughlin/Bialystok)	
grammar instruction		
(Krashen)		

a. Innatist Model

Stephen Krashen is one of experts who has written various articles on foreign language acquisition and proposed five hypotheses: (1) The Acquisition- Learning Hypothesis, (2) The Monitor Hypothesis, (3) The Natural Order Hypothesis, (4) The Input Hypothesis, and (5) The Affective Filter Hypothesis.

In his first hypothesis, Krashen (1997) states that adult learners of a foreign language adopt two ways of mastering a target language: acquisition and learning. Foreign language fluency, according to him, is achieved through an acquisition process, rather than learning process. Acquisition is more dominant than learning, and both processes are separate. The second hypothesis suggests that learning involves the process of monitoring (correction), and learners are aware of this process. The third hypothesis states individuals master language rules naturally (unpredicted). The fourth hypothesis contends that foreign language learning processes occur when learners understand language inputs slightly higher than their language competence. The final hypothesis mentions that language acquisition will occur in an environment where learners have low anxiety or affective filter.

Considering those five hypotheses, we can conclude that language input is a crucial source for foreign language learning. However, learner competence and learner involvement in interactional processes of acquisition and learning are not taken into account.

b. Cognitive Model

Among other experts, there are two writers who have made significant contributions to the development of cognitive model: Barry McLaughlin and Ellen Bialystok. McLaughlin (1987, 1990) proposed Attention-Processing Model, which puts emphasis on the control and automatic information processing mechanism. Control process involves limited and temporary capacity and competence, while automatic mechanism includes wider and more complex processes.

Meanwhile, Bialystok (1990) put forward Explicit and Implicit Model. Explicit knowledge is a fact of an individual's linguistic knowledge and competence to present the fact in certain ways, while implicit knowledge is information automatically and spontaneously used in language communication. In this model, cognitive ability is the key to successful foreign language learning.

c. Constructivist Model

Figure behind this model is mainly Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, who presented Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory. ZPD is a potential distance between learner's independent learning and more capable adult' assistance in learning processes (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1996). In terma of foreign language learning, Michael Long adalah is a constructivist who has presented ideas of how foreign language is acquired or learned in social context. In Long's perspective (1996), interation and language input are two major factors in foreign language acquisition process.

With the emphasis on social interaction, we can conclude that classroom is not only a place to develop language skills, but also a setting for learners to interact with each other and make interaction a language acquisition facilitator.

2. Practical implications for foreign language learning

Considering the above mentioned theories, there are a few practical implications teachers and learners should take into account in their language learning processes. Those implications are:

a. Teacher and learner should consider various variables which lead to foreign language learning complexity.

b. Language instruction should focus on acquisition process or at least balance acquition and learning processes.

c. Foreign language learning is also foreign culture learning.

d. Learning is a process of dialog and interaction.

f. Personal, cognitive, and social components when combined will be very important sources of successfull foreign language learning processes.

3. Study Skills

In many ways, study skills are similar to learning strategies. A skill or strategy is closely related to metacognitive, cognitive, and socioaffective aspects (Nunan, 1999). At higher level of education, study skills cover the following skills: (1) understanding syntax, (2) recognizing and interpreting cohesive devices, (3) interpreting discourse markers, (4) recognizing functional value, (5) recognizing the presuppositions underlying the text, (6) recognizing implications and making inferences, (7) recognizing rhetorical structure, and (8) prediction (Nuttall, 1996). Based on this conception, it can be concluded that study skills and reading skills are interchangeable. For the purpose of this study, study skills will be connected with reading skills or reading strategies.

However, study skills are not only concerned with written language, but spoken language as well. In the context of higher level learning in particular, there is one thing to consider that oral process, speakers or readers should be in interaction. In writing process, writers do not need to directly interact with their readers. It is therefore necessary to re-emphasize that "in many ways there is a close relationship between speech and writing because both are a crucial part of language competence and support each other (Winch, et.al. 2001)". The table below presents differences between spoken and written language.

Speech	Writing
1. Takes place in a context, which often makes references clear (e.g. 'that thing over there')	1. Creates its own context and therefore has to be fully explicitly.
2. Speaker and listener(s) in contact. Interact and exchange roles.	2. Reader not present and no interaction possible.
3. Usually person addressed is specific.	3. Reader not necessary known to writer.
4. Immediate feedback given and expected (a) verbal: questions, comments.., murmurs, grunts (b) non-verbal: facial expressions	4. No immediate feedback possible. Writer may try to anticipate reader's reactions and incorporate them into text.
5. Speech is transitory. Intended to be understood immediately. If not, listener expected to react.	5. Writing is permanent. Can be reread as often as necessary and at own speed.
6. Sentences often incomplete and	6. Sentences expected to be carefully

sometimes ungrammatical. Hesitations and pauses common and usually some redundancy and repetition.	constructed, and linked and organized to form a text.
Range of devices (stress, intonation, pitch, speed) to help convey meaning. Facial expression, body movements and gestures also used for this purpose.	Devices to help convey meaning are punctuation, capitals and underlining (for emphasis). Sentence boundaries clearly indicated.

(Byrne, 1988; p. 3)

In the final analysis, it can be convinced that when students are able to manage and manipulate those skills for their academic purposes, they will result in high quality learning outcomes. The following sections describe foreign language skills which are frequently used in developing study skills and in improving learning outcomes.

4. Reading Ability

As mentioned above, study skills are closely related to reading activities. In many respects, the use of foreign language by graduate students involves reading activities since the students are frequently exposed to literature written in foreign languages, especially English.

a. Reading defined

The word "reading" has a broad meaning and is very meaningful to human kind. Reading is an everyday activity done in daily life. In practice, it is not only the matter of its acquisition but also of its usefulness for various purposes. It is of interest to us that although not every single human activity involves reading, people read everywhere and anytime. Borrowing Paulo Freire's (1987) phrase "reading the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987), we can say that reading is a human activity and a crucial part of human life. Throughout history, people read various texts, natural and printed. Natural texts are those available in their that leads to shared understanding of their environmental phenomena and symbols. With symbol recognition and beyond, the texts involve in a wide range of discourses and interactions that convey meanings. Their ability to read their world enables them to survive and develop their potential in the midst of their social community. Interpretation, understanding, and comprehension produced by this world reading ability will in turn contribute to their abilities to interact with and adapt to their environment. In an abstract connotation, we often hear that people wish to read someone's mind as if they are able to identify what someone is thinking about. However, this type of

reading ability does not require people to develop their language competences. Although it results in understanding and comprehension, it is not real reading. Real reading is an interaction between reader and print, and it is the process with which we are very familiar. Reading the world as presented by Freire (1987) is only understood in denotative meaning, but his phrase as a whole also contains a wide philosophical conception about "real" reading and how reading ability should be approached.

When issues of reading are addressed, some questions frequently arise about how reading process occurs, what kind of process it is, and how and why people read. Generally speaking, reading is a multidimensional process. This multidimensional nature of reading has encouraged many scholars from different disciplines (e.g. Haberlandt, 1997) to examine reading process from different angles and in different ways. Based on different theories or approaches, various definitions have also been proposed to expand our understanding of what are involved in reading process. Even some authors have formulated their definitions on empirical basis (see Weaver, 1988, 1994) or on dictionary basis (Bernhardt, 1991; Urquhart and Weir, 1998). It is not surprising that abundant literature provides seemingly unlimited information about the reading process.

In most cases, however, it seems that reading is a contact between eyes and

texts. In other words, reading is a visual or sensory process. In this process, a reader should acquire visual capability to react to the graphic symbols. When reading graphic symbols, two processes occur: mechanical and mental. According to Dechant (1970, p. 18), "the mechanical process brings the stimuli to the brain, while mental process interpret the stimuli after they get to the brain". Stanovich (1991) suggested that when a reader has recognized graphic symbols, s/he begins to recognize words. Stanovich also argued that this word recognition is the basic foundation for reading process and closely related to word identification. The notion of word recognition does not emphasize the importance of words as fundamental basis for understanding a passage. However, centrality of word recognition in acquiring reading ability is to reinforce that reading is ultimately aimed at attaining comprehension (Stanovich, 1991). Furthermore, as visual word identification is connected with word meanings, a mental reconstruction of the whole textual meaning is produced. This reconstruction occurs continually as a reader progresses (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1996). Considering the notion of visuality raises a question relating to blind readers, can we say that a blind person reads a text in Braille alphabet is a reading activity. Although this question is beyond the context of this discussion, an claim proposed by Downing and Leong (1982) who suggested that meaning making in or through a system of arbitrary symbols (as in Braille) is not dependent only on visual ability. Blind people are unable to get meaning from visual codes, but they can understand and comprehend the print from a "tactual code" (p. 147). Eye

movements are not enough for individuals to comprehend print. They have to develop a perceptual process. Dechant (1970) suggests that reading also involves perception which is supported by a conceptual and thinking process which regarded as "the interpretation of everything that we sense" (p. 26). It is the perception that gives meaning to the symbols.

As a process, reading involves thinking, evaluating, judging, imagining, reasoning, and problem solving (Zintz, 1978). In relation to reading activity among mature readers, Zintz (1978) views reading as a four-step process: "perceiving words in print, understanding their meaning in context, reacting to the idea presented by the writer, and integrating new learning into one's accumulated experience" (pp. 8 – 9).

In a seemingly simple definition, Weaver (1994) viewed reading as a process of word identification and meaning construction. She suggested that in reading process there are three important cue systems within the language of a text a reader should be able to identify while reading: (1) syntactic cues, that is, grammatical cues like word order, function words, and word endings; (2) semantic cues, that is, meaning cues from each sentence and from the evolving whole, as one progress through the entire text; and (3) grapho/phonemic cues, that is, letter/sound cues: the correspondences between letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes), and larger letter/sound patterns (p. 5). In a similar way, Goodman (1986) also described three language systems which interact during reading: the graphophonic system (sound and letter patterns), syntactic system (sentence patterns), and the semantic system (meanings). Previously, Zintz (1978) defined reading as follows:

> Reading is decoding written words so that they can be produced orally.
> Reading is understanding the language of the author of a printed passage.
> Reading is the ability to anticipate meaning in lines of print so that the reader is not concerned with the mechanical details but with grasping ideas from groups of words that convey meaning (pp. 6 – 7).

In general, reading is viewed as a process of communication between reader and print as a process of meaning making. For example, McKenna and Robinson (1993) defined reading as "the construction in the mind of meaning encoded in print" (p. 21). In a broader sense, they regarded reading as an interaction between the reader's prior knowledge of the reading contents and the reading purposes which in turn influence what he/she has learned for the reading. Based on these different definitions and viewpoints, it can be assumed that reading embraces several crucial characteristics: meaning construction, prior knowledge, and reading purposes. These characteristics interplay during reading process, and the absence of one factor may induce breakdown in the reading process.

A further argument held by Smith (1985) should also be considered. Smith believed that "not everything we say we read is print" (p. 102). There are a lot of things we can read in daily life, memory note, telegrams etc., which involve written language. The existing definitions of reading do not and can not cover various types of texts and circumstances of reading. Smith (1985) suggests that the conception of reading has developed into abstract or metaphorical connotation and there are certainly things in common among different situations of reading. He further explained that reading is about how to answer our questions about information we want to find while reading, being able to identify letters and words, and to comprehend the text.

Based on their particular philosophical or ideological views, authors present different notions and emphasis when they explore the nature of reading process. In describing the principles for reading and writing in whole language, for instance, Goodman (1986) contended that "readers construct meaning during reading and use their prior learning and experience to make sense of the text. They predict, select, confirm, and self-correct as they seek to make sense of print" (p. 38). Similar to Goodman's perspective is idea proposed by Blair (2001) who puts emphasis on the importance of background knowledge to the reading process by suggesting that "reading is a process of constructing and responding to meanings and understandings based on the individual's prior knowledge and background experiences" (p. 98).

However, reading will not be meaningful when a reader has no purposes when dealing with the print. So, reading should be purposeful, which raises a further question why people read? As mentioned above, people do a reading activity for a wide range of purposes. Page and Pinnell (1979) argued that purpose of reading can be understood by referring to the idea of problem solving and that problems facing the individuals can be a powerful context to identify problems while using written language. They classify the human problems into following categories: (1) communication over space, (2) communication over time, (3) dealing with complexity, (4) representing and understanding life experiences, (5) seeking pleasure and enjoyment, (6) enjoying leisure time; and (7) playing roles in culture (p. 11). Further, they contend that these activities involve written language production and interpretation, and reading occurs in both processes.

In a much broader sense, Ruddell & Ruddell (1996, p. 59) view reading comprehension as

"purposeful reading guided by internally and externally motivated objectives and expected use, an activation of background knowledge content including lexical, syntactic and story structure schemata, an activation of background knowledge processing strategies for effective meaning construction, a mobilization of attitudes and values related to the text content and expected use of the constructed meaning, an activation of monitoring strategies to check the meaning

construction as directed by the objective, and an interactive use of these processes to construct meaning".

When reading is purposeful and a reader sets reading purposes, it can be assumed that comprehension will be an easy process. Finally, whatever purposes and techniques people have in mind during reading, the important thing is that they get meaning from print or bring the meaning into the print and comprehend the meaning. The following sections will discuss meaning and how to get it and how comprehension process takes place.

b. Meaning

What does meaning really mean? It is not easy to answer the question. Meaning is 'vague and intangible' (Smith, 1985, p. 115). A broad perspective should be applied to better understand the meaning(s) of meaning. In reading process, meaning is always linked to symbols embodied in words, sentences, or paragraphs. Meaning varies in different contexts. A word or sentence is not meaningful without context. Contexts can be lexical, grammatical, semantic, situational, or pragmatic. Weaver (1994) added schematic context which refers to a structured body of knowledge or experience in a person's mind. Furthermore, Weaver (1994) further argued that a meaning will be meaningful when it interrelates with other meanings. Connotative, denotative, metaphorical are among the various meanings frequently found in language use. However, where a reader can find a meaning is an important question both reading researchers and educators should ask. According to Gee (1992), meaning, like other constructs such as thinking, memory, knowledge or belief, is not the name of "mental entity" (p.1). The meaning of word is generally viewed by linguists, psychologists, and philosophers as "what allows us to identify something as falling under the denotation of that word" (Gee, 1992, p. 1). Gee further opposed the traditional theory which argued that meaning is something in our head. He assumed that if meaning is about what we have in our head, the words should mean exactly the same thing when we say them. By supporting semantic mediational theories as ideological theories which withhold values of experiences, things or human beings, and which marginalize the physical appearance of the things, Gee (1992) argued that meaning is created and found in social practices rather than in the head, and these social practices are an important part of Discourses, which refer to the composition of "people, of things, and of characteristic ways of talking, acting, interacting, thinking, believing, and valuing, and sometimes characteristic ways of writing, reading, and/or

interpreting" (p. 20). Gee concluded that "if meaning determines the truth conditions, then meaning can't be fully explained simply by reference to the states of people's heads". In other words, he suggests that "since their utterances are made true or false under different conditions, they cannot mean the same thing, despite the fact that their heads are the same in all requisite regards" (p. 3). A similar idea has been presented by Weaver (1994) who contends that meaning does lie in the text, but it arises during the transaction between reader and text in a given situational context. It seems that Gee and Weaver's ideas could be probably interpreted in similar ways since they put emphasis on social context. In conclusion, meaning and its construction are social in nature, but "social" can and should also mean textual and contextual.

Meaning is not always clear and not always obscure, but it is always central to the readers. Authors agree with the centrality of meaning in reading process since meaning leads to the comprehension. According to Winch et.al (2001, 7), "meaning is at the core of reading and the goal of reading is meaning itself." Goodman (1986) also expressed a similar idea that understanding the meaning is always the goal of readers. However, regarding how to get meaning when someone reads, authors present different positions. For example, Winch et.al (2001) contended that readers extract meaning from the print by manipulating their knowledge of the world, themes, grammatical structures, and visual features and symbols. It is likely to argue that what the word "world" means in this statement is what Gee (1992) called "simplified world" to describe the internal structure of a thing. It is also possible to falsify that the "world" is human habitat with its all socio-cultural artifacts. Previously Dechant (1970) presented a broad perspective of how different factors influence each other in the process of meaning construction. He maintained that meaning itself is determined by experience, culture, the emotional state of the reader, and the reader's ability to reconstruct his experiences, and meaning is achieved only when the reader has developed the ability to discover the key words, and to connect words and sentences with each other. Culture and emotion are two key points in Dechant's idea. It is understandable that culture is an important factor which provides context to the meaning. (p. 8).

Another notion was proposed by Downing and Leong (1982) who considered the importance of affective, cognitive, and linguistic determinants. They postulated that to get or construct meaning, the readers should be able to "(1) decode written symbols to sound, (2) have recourse to the lexicon or mental dictionary to extract meaning for the printed from semantic memory and (3) incorporate this meaning into their language acquisition process" (p. 3). It is almost certain that meaning making does not solely occur in reader's mind nor in the words or texts, but it is produced and facilitated by

interaction between cognitive process and textual and contextual messages which combines with personal and socio-cultural forces. This interaction will be likely to lead to the comprehension process.

In many respects, a reader who possesses good comprehension does not only understand meaning and context, but also has the following characteristics:

1) reader knows that reading is a complex, intellectual endeavor, requiring the reader to draw on a range of active meaning-making skills;

2) reader deploys previous knowledge of other texts to enable the effective reading and further meaning-making of the text being read;

3) reader is aware that texts are constructed for particular purposes, for identifiable audiences and within recognizable text types or genres;

4) reader can predict that ways that texts work, and can use reading to confirm or readjust those predictions, depending on how typically the text unfolds;

5) reader is critically active before becoming involved in the substantial body of any text;

6) reader is increasingly able to activate a repertoire of critical questions in engagements with new and unfamiliar texts;

7) reader knows how to interact appropriately with a variety of text types/genres for particular purposes;

8) reader is aware that one way of demonstration progression in reading can be through raising more complex questions about the same text;

9) reader is aware that learning to read is a life-long continuous process;

10) reader is aware that all readers do not necessarily read and make meanings in the same ways as one another.

11) reader will be able to explain why a text has been rejected, unfinished, or how it has been unable to satisfy the tasks to which it is put;

12) reader improves when encouraged and taught to monitor and reflect on own reading ability and progress (Dean, 2000: 63-64).

c. Reading Comprehension

Sometimes the word "comprehension" precedes the word "reading" and sometimes it does not. It is an intricate issue among the reading professionals, but it seems that they have chosen to avoid the argument about this issue. According to Smith (1985), this issue is about language, not about the nature of reading. In this chapter, phrase 'reading comprehension' is employed because the research focuses on reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is a process in which the reader engages in an exchange of ideas with an author via text. Such an exchange always has a purpose and always takes place within a specific context or a setting (Burnes, 1985, p. 45).

Comprehension involves a wide range of abilities a reader should possess to be a good reader. Dechant (1970, p. 401) lists 21 abilities to achieve a comprehension, and some of the them are:

1. associate experiences and meaning with the graphic symbol.
2. react to the sensory images suggested by words.
3. interpret verbal connotations and denotations.
4. understand words in context and to select the meaning that fits the context.
5. give meaning to units of increasing size: the phrase, clause, sentence, paragraph, and whole selection.

Like reading process itself, reading comprehension is also a complex process because many factors can be assumed to be responsible for the complicity of the process. According to Otto, Peters and Peters (1977), there are at least five crucial factors which contribute to the comprehension process: conceptual attainment, language ability, cognitive strategies, interest, and comprehension skills related to specific instructional outcomes (p. 238).   Meanwhile, Burnes (1985) classifies factors affecting the comprehension into three categories: reader-related factors, author-related factors, and text-related factors (p. 46). Reader variables comprise reader's level of general intelligence, world knowledge, reading purposes, reader's perceptions of reading. Author variables are knowledge, background, purpose, and author's assumptions about the reader and they are similar reader's variables and can be identified in the print. Finally, text-related factors include text readability and language cohesion. Those variable interact and interplay with each other to produce comprehension.

As we are well aware, the ultimate goal of reading act is comprehension. Different readers have different purposes of reading, but they generally aim at understanding and comprehending what they read. In this case, it is intuitive to expect that the ways they read will differ. In a narrow sense, what is called comprehension is to understand what is read. In a broader sense, it is "the linguistic process of reconstructing the intended message of a text by translating its lexical and grammatical information into

meaning units that can be integrated with the reader's knowledge and cognitive structures (Harris, et.al., 1981). Individuals undergo various events to achieve comprehension, and comprehension itself is a lengthy process. In this case, Ruddell and Ruddell (1994, p. 92) postulate that "oral language development, early writing experiences, encounters with environmental and other prints, and myriad social interaction serve as the foundation for reading comprehension". In other words, these are conditions which are conducive to the comprehension process.

What really means by comprehension process is a crucial question individuals may ask when reasoning about meaning and understanding. Many authors have proposed ideas such as to list things that happen during the comprehension process. Ruddell & Ruddell (1996: p. 59) vividly describes the comprehension process as follows:

- purposeful reading guided by internally and externally motivated objectives and expected use;
- activation of background knowledge content including lexical, syntactic, and story structure schemata;
- activation of background knowledge processing strategies for effective meaning construction;
- mobilization of attitudes and values related to the text content and expected use of the constructed meaning;
- activation of monitoring strategies to check the meaning construction as directed by the objective;
- interactive use of these processes to construct meaning.

So, reading comprehension is not a autonomous and automatic process, but a multifaceted one which involves various variables. The comprehension process, then, involves organizing, building, and reorganizing information by forming schemata and incorporating new information into them: it is driven by individuals' desire to make sense of experience (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1994, p. 93). As a multifaceted process, comprehension also involves sub-processes that create a complex network. In other words, comprehension comprise various skills readers should acquire to become good comprehenders. In this case, there are five skills employed to achieve comprehension: (1) recalling word meanings, (2) finding answers to questions answered explicitly or in paraphrase, (3) drawing inferences from the content, (4) recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude, tone, and mood, and (5) following the structure of a passage (Otto, Peters, and Peters, 1977, p. 239). In addition to skills, comprehension involves different types of knowledge. Blachowicz and Ogle (2001) argue that comprehension is skillful and strategic, and that a good comprehender possesses three types of knowledge: declarative, procedural, and conditional. Declarative knowledge refers to relations between sounds, letters or symbols, and text. Procedural knowledge has to do with ability to choose and use appropriate reading strategies to achieve

comprehension. Meanwhile, conditional knowledge is about when those strategies should be applied. In cognitive psychology, declarative knowledge includes information about physical, social, and linguistic situations, semantic memory, and word meanings, while procedural knowledge encompasses motor and cognitive skills that can not be expressed easily (Haberland, 1997). Other abilities can also be included into the process of achieving comprehension. One important ability is "associating experiences and meaning with printed symbols" (Dechant, 1970). Other abilities should be acquired to make comprehension possible, and among others are (1) understand words in context and select the meaning that fits the context, (2) identify and understand the main ideas, (3) recognize literary and semantic elements, ideas or purposes of the writer, and so forth (Dechant, 1970).

Comprehension is the heart of all reading and has to do with approximating and reacting to the ideas an author has represented in print (Hillerich, 1983, p. 125).

Sometimes term "comprehension" is accompanied by term "interpretation" (see Urquhart and Weir, 1998; Downing and Leong, 1982). And those terms can be regarded as product and process. The product of reading is resulted in with the successful completion of the reading act or when readers comprehend what they read. The process explains how to get to the product. We emphasize the process aspect because it is flexible and adaptable, with manifold resources (Downing and Leong, 1982). Comprehension and interpretation could be different, but this section will not look at differences among both concepts.

Based on those theoretical conceptions of reading comprehension, reading professionals have managed to approach this process in different ways to observe and identify what happens when the comprehension process takes place. The importance of prior knowledge has been mentioned by many scholars as the most prominent factor which determines success or failure of reading comprehension. Text content, text structure, and language used in the text are among other factors which contribute to an individual's comprehension. Due to a great number of variables involved in producing comprehension, there have been some basic changes in the notion of reading comprehension. Authors have made efforts to provide a whole picture of how reading comprehension proceeds. Comprehension process is full of clues and contexts which are inseparable from each other. Moreover, comprehension consists of layers or levels individual readers should pass through.

d. Levels of Comprehension

Individual readers can achieve the highest level of comprehension in a short period of time since comprehension is much resemble reasoning process which require individuals to pass through different

levels in accordance with their developmental stages. Reading comprehension takes place at different levels of difficulty according to the nature of the material and the purposes for which the reading is intended (Zintz, 1978, p. 268). Classifying reading comprehension into different levels or categories is important in terms of assessment and measurement. It is equally important to the assessment of reading ability in general because individuals possess different levels of ability to act on and react to the texts they read. In this context, some measuring instruments have been designed and developed to enables teachers and researchers to assess reading comprehension ability of an individual or a group of individuals, and some of them have been commercially published. In academic settings, performance assessment, portfolio, anecdotal record, running record, retelling, cloze procedure are commonly and widely used instruments. A variety of reading comprehension measuring instruments was based on the fact that reading comprehension is not a rigid and static process, it changes all the time in accordance to an individual's academic, intellectual and emotional maturity. That is why assessment practices changed. This change or shift can be seen among others in the followings:

(1) an orientation to assessment practices that is relativistic and inter-subjective in nature, jointly negotiated, and context-specific;
(2) an orientation to assessment that is connected with relevance, meaningfulness of the assessment activity (Tierney et.al., 1995, p. 479).

Because reading comprehension is a reading ability which can be measured at different levels, researchers and practitioners have presented and described reading comprehension at different levels of difficulty. According to Hillerich (1983, p. 125), reading comprehension can be categorized into different levels: literal, inferential, and critical. Literal comprehension has to do with understanding or with answering questions about what an author said. Inferential comprehension refers to understanding what an author meant by what was said. Critical reading has to do with evaluating or making judgments about what an author said and meant.

Zintz (1978) classified reading comprehension skills into two levels: literal and interpretive. Literal comprehension is viewed as a basic skills required to understand vocabulary, direction, details, paragraph or text structures, and the like, while interpretive comprehension "includes learning to anticipate meanings, drawing inferences, drawing generalizations, and selecting and evaluating messages in print" (Zintz, 1978, p. 269). Zintz (1978) also admits that a critical reading ability is required to apply these skills by involving judgmental, evaluative, and selective skills during reading. However**,**

Burnes (1985, p. 53) recognizes that the best known description of traditional levels of comprehension is probably the taxonomy of reading comprehension developed by Barrett in 1976:

1. Literal: Literal comprehension requires the recognition or recall of ideas, information and happenings that are explicitly stated in the materials read.
2. Inference: Inferential comprehension is demonstrated by students when they use a synthesis of the literal content of a selection, their personal knowledge, intuition and imagination as a basis for conjectures or hypotheses.
3. Evaluation: Evaluation is demonstrated by students when they make judgments about the content of a reading selection by comparing it with external criteria, for example, information provided by the teacher on the subject, authorities on the subject or by accredited written source on the subject; or with internal criteria, for example, the reader's experiences, knowledge, or values related to the subject under consideration.
4. Appreciation: Appreciation has to do with students' awareness of the literary techniques, forms, styles, and the structures employed authors to stimulate emotional responses in their readers.

Of course, there are still other significant variables which encourage different people to assess reading comprehension ability differently. The following section will address the issue on prior knowledge and schema, two important variables which many authors believe to great contributors to the comprehension.

e. Reading Strategies

In addition to the above described factors which determine the reading process, reading strategy is a variable which enables a reader to understand, analyze, and interpret passages. In this case, Vermont Institutes (http://vermontinstitutes.org/vsri/strategies.html) states that "reading strategies enable readers to operate cognitively and monitor their comprehension so they can determine when and why text is unclear, and choose the strategy or strategies that will help them construct meaning." Furthermore, Vermont Institutes has developed nine reading strategies which help readers become effective and active readers: (1) imaging, using a variety of senses, (2) make connections, (3) analysis text structure, (4) recognize words and understand sentences, (5) explore inferences, (6) ask questions, (7) determine important ideas and themes, (8) evaluate, summarize, and synthesize, and (9) reread and adjust approaches to the text. Of course, readers should choose one or more appropriate reading strategies, and their choice depends on various factors.

5. Writing Ability

Writing is another crucial element of learning processes at different education levels. Like reading, writing is a complex process and can be seen from different perspective. It is commonly understood that through writing, individuals can express their ideas, thoughts, or feelings. They can put forward whatever they have in their mind. Winch, Johnston, Holliday, and Ljungdahl (2001, p. 160) argued that

> a major advantage of writing is that it is a wonderful clarifier of thinking. A writer takes the myriad ideas in the mind, orders them, and puts the relevant ones down on paper. In this way it objectifies thought so that we can pursue it, modify it, enrich it – in general, revise continually so that they become the best thoughts we are capable of.

Winch et. al (2001) also suggested that "writing can be a rapid process if the imagination is crowed with ideas or if the task is found to be easy" (189). Thus, writing is basically a medium of presenting or communicating and clarifying our thoughts and ideas. Furthermore, Campbell, Green, and Rivalland (2003) suggested that writing is "a learned, socio-cultural behavior, a product of our cultural practices" (p. 136). In relation to the school context, Campbell, et.al. (2003) suggested that when students are involved in writing activities, they deal with a "culturally-based phenomenon" (p. 137). Hence, writing is closely related to socio-cultural aspects or is learned and developed in the socio-cultural context..

Writing can also be seen as a multilevel process (Hannon, 2000). Hannon argued that different levels of writing process and their orders are produced by the experts' reflection on their own writing process and their analysis of various texts written by other writers. In this case, it is likely to postulate that a writer can formulate different levels of writing on the basis of their own writing experiences. Based on his reflection, for example, Hannon concluded that the writing process consists of five levels or stages: (1) pre-composing, (2) drafting, (3) revising, (4) editing, and sharing (p. 98).

In many ways, there is a close relationship between speech and writing because they are a crucial part of language competence and support each other (Winch, et.al. 2001). "Written language is organized differently from spoken language, and the world as seen in writing is different from the world as heard in speech" (p. 151). A comparison between speech and writing can help us understand some of the difficulties we experience when we write. Like the reading process, writing also involves a variety of factors that influence its smooth flow. According to Byrne (1988), there are three factors that cause writing difficult: psychological, linguistic, and cognitive. Specifically, Winch, et. al. (2001) suggested that

feelings and emotions are crucial factors to the writing process because they act as driving forces during the writing process.

In general, graduate students deal with academic writing tasks to prove their writing skills in various forms of academic work. They write paper or research paper to meet academic requirements set by their lecturers. Therefore, their writing activities are mainly academic in nature. This research will slightly focus on academic writing activities carried out by the graduate students of education studies in Indonesia and Thailand as their academic tasks mainly require them to read and completed in their national language.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Method

In line with its purposes, the research will adopt a descriptive method to describe current state of Indonesian and Thai graduate students' foreign language proficiency and study skills.

2. Instruments

To collect data on graduate students' foreign language proficiency and study skills, questionnaire and interview will be conducted. Questionnaire will contain questions regarding students' proficiency in one or more foreign languages, foreign language learning experiences, frequency of foreign language use, the acquisition of foreign language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and learning strategies in relation to the use of foreign language. Meanwhile, interview will focus on study burden in relation to learning materials written in foreign language, attempts made to handle foreign language difficulties (if any), development of foreign language skills, the contributions of foreign language skills to the selection of appropriate study skills, and acceleration of academic task completion.

3. Samples

Research samples will be randomly selected from graduate students of education studies who have completed the third semester of their study period at Indonesia University of Education and Mahasarakham University Thailand. Graduate students of education studies are masters' or doctoral students who are not majoring in English or other foreign language studies. A manageable size of samples will be set to make this research workable and attain accountable validity. Participation or involvement of other students from other universities both in Indonesia and Thailand will be confirmed.

VII. RESEARCHERS

This research involves two researchers:

1. Riswanda Setiadi, Ph.D., a lecturer at Indonesia University of Education, who is interested in foreign

   language and literacy education and teaches French to undergraduate and graduate students.

2. Araya Piyakun, Ph.D., a lecturer at Mahasarakham University Thailand, who has conducted a research

   on English language acquisition by Thai students and has an interest in language education in general.

VIII. TIME LINE

Preparatory stage, data collection and analysis, and reporting are among major activities which will be accomplished by the researchers. Research schedule is presented in the table below.

No	Activity	Month (2009)							
		May	June	July	Augst	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
1.	Research proposal review	√							
2.	Research instrument construction		√						
3.	Research instrument tryout		√						
4.	Instrument revision		√						
5.	Data collection			√	√				
6.	Data processing and analysis					√	√		
7.	Seminar on the research findings							√	
8.	Submission of research report								√

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CURRICULUM VITAE

1. Full name   : Riswanda Setiadi, Ph.D.

2. Date of birth   : October 13, 1965

3. Education   : -   Doctor of Philosophy in Education Studies
   Monash University, Australia 2006
   - Master of Arts in Elementary School Literacy Education
   University of Iowa, United States of America, 1996
   - Undergraduate Degree in French Language Education
   IKIP Bandung 1989

4. Trainings
   a. USAID Module Development Training, Bandung 2006
   b. Academic Writing Training, Jakarta 2001
   c. Multimedia training, Singapore 2000
   d. Action research training, Bandung 1999
   e. Student assistance and guidance training, 1999
   f. College textbook writing training, Bandung 1998
   g. Translation training, Bali 1993

5. Address   Home   : Jl. Sariwangi Indah Baru No. 4 Kompleks Sariwangi Indah
   Sariwangi - Kabupaten Bandung Barat (KBB)

               Office   : Sekolah Pascasarjana Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)
   Jl. Dr. Setiabudi 229 Bandung 40154 West Java

   Telephone   Home   : 62-22-82025868 Mobile: 081322561470
               Office   : 62-22-2001454
               E-mail   : riswadasetiadi@yahoo.com

6. Language and Degree of
   Proficiency   : English - very good (spoken and written)
   French - very good (spoken and written)

7. Employment record   : -   Lecturer, Indonesia University of Education (UPI)
   1991 – the present
   - Secretary, Center for Research on Education and
   Socio-cultural Transformation (CRES) 2000 – the present
   - Deputy Manager, International Education Office UPI
   2001
   - Sessional Teaching Staff, Monash University Australia
   2002 – 2005
   - Sessional Teacher, Mornington Secondary College,
   Victoria, Australia 2005
   - Technical Assistant to UPI Rector, 2006 – 2008
   - Head of Graduate Studies in French Language Education

UPI, 2008 – the present

8. Presentation : 1). Empowering and Improving the Quality of Teacher and
Teaching, International Seminar, Jakarta 2009
2). Effective Teaching Model, IPDN Bandung December 2008

3). Current Issues in Indonesia's Early Childhood Education,
UNESCO, Kuala Lumpur November 2008
4). Teacher Certification: Lesson Learned from New
Experience, International Seminar, Bandung October 2008
5). Teacher Efficacy and Student Learning Outcomes, 20th
World Congress, International Reading Association,
Manila, Philippines, June 2005
6). Directed Reading -Thinking Activity (DR-TA) as a promising
model for Indonesia, Monash University October 2003
7). Beginning Reading and Writing, International Seminar on
Teaching Indonesian to Foreign Learners, Bandung 1998

9. Publication : 1). Basic Reading in French, 2008
2). Basic Writing in French, 2007
3). Entrepreneurship, BASEM Publication, 2007
4). Association process in language learning, FOCUS 2007
4). Teachers' Beliefs in Their Efficacy, Educationist 2006
5). Language Education Research (on the process)

10. Research : 1). Teacher Self-Efficacy and Its Relationships to Students'
Literacy Learning Outcomes, 2006
2). Effectiveness of Reading Workshop, 2000
3). Application of Directed Reading and Thinking Activity, 1999
4). Proficiency of English and French in Connection, 1998
5). Competence-Based Teacher Education, 1996

I, the undersigned, certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief, this Curriculum Vitae correctly describes myself, my qualifications, and my experiences. Other information may be missing due to lack of documentation. I understand that any willful misstatement herein may lead to my disqualification or dismissal, if engaged.

Bandung, March 23, 2009

Riswanda Setiadi, Ph.D.