



DIFFICULTIES AND SOLUTIONS ON LEARNING READING SKILL OF THE SECOND YEAR NON ENGLISH MAJORED STUDENTS AT UTEHY

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Abstract:

Reading skill has played a very important part in learning a foreign language. However, most students seem to face many difficulties in this skill. This study was conducted to find out difficulties and solutions on learning reading skill for non English majored students at Hung Yen University of Technology and Education (UTEHY). To achieve the aims of the study, qualitative methodology was chosen and two methods of data collection including reflective journal and survey were employed. The participants of the study comprised 40 second year students who were chosen randomly at UTEHY. Basing on the data collected, many students have low interest and motivation in reading English text, besides, the difficulties in reading of the students come from the lack of vocabulary and grammar, lack of techniques for reading, poor working memory, low motivation, these lead to the problems of learning reading skill. However, some solutions for the problems were also found out in the result.

Keywords: Reading skill, Difficulty, Technique, Solution, Motivation.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays English has become an international language because it is widely used in many parts of the world. One of the important skills is reading because it will enrich our vocabulary, grammar, other skills such as writing and listening and even speaking. Moreover, it can widen our knowledge about the world. However, most non-major English students don't have good results in reading skill. They are likely to be lack of knowledge, vocabulary, grammar, and the techniques of reading. Some teachers complain that most students are not able to understand what they read. Students hate to read, they only read required textbook in order to be able to set for the achievement routine exams. For most of the learners, reading is an extremely difficult task that requires integrated skill, which also does not get easier with the passage of time and the accumulation of experience. Like many students in the schools of Vietnam, students at UTEHY are faced with these common problems. For the second-year non major English students, although they have been learning English for at least several years, they still have difficulties in understanding a text or a passage in English, since they have the same problems in reading skill. In fact, there are a variety of reasons for these difficulties, and finding appropriate solutions to learn reading skill effectively for students at UTEHY requires a long serious research. This led me the choice of the study "difficulties and solutions in learning reading skill of the second - year non major English students at

UTEHY" with the hope of finding the solutions for learning reading skill more effectively in reading lesson.

II. LITURATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definition of reading

The term "Reading" is widely used in practice. However, reading is differently defined due to the areas of defining in term of activities or goals. That is the reason why no definition of reading can possibly include all points of views and features. Moreover, each one's definition only reflects what reading means to that person.

One of the simplest definitions of reading suggested by Williams (1984, p.2) is that "it is a process whereby one looks at and understands what has been written". However, according to him, the readers is not passive but active in that he "is able to arrive at understanding without looking at every letter and word, and generally reads in groups of words, not word by word, far less letter by letter".

Actually, reading is a mental process which is not easily described. In the most general term proposed by Harmer (16, p.153) considers reading as a mechanical process that "eyes receive the message and the brain then has to work out the significance of the message". He not only focuses on two actions that dominated by the eyes and the brain but also the speed of the process "a reading text moves at a speed of the readers", which means that the reader who decides how fast he wants to read the text.

Although those reading definitions are of different attitudes to reading they seem to have some features in common. It is because they all concentrate on the nature of reading. To make this point clearly, Urquhart & Weir (29, p.22) define reading as follows: "Reading is the process of receiving and interpreting information encoded in language form via the medium of print". Reading plays such an important part in the success of second language learning and it is necessary to understand what reading is, however, it's difficult to explain it briefly and correctly.

In a general term, reading is defined as "Reading is an active, fluent process which involves the reader and reading materials in building meaning, meaning does not reside on the printed page, nor is it only in the reader" Anderson (8, p. 1) this definition of reading has been generally shared by other researches.

Deriving from those opinions, reading is considered a process in which a reader looks at and understands what has been written out.

2.2. Definition of reading comprehension

In teaching reading, it is necessary to understand the nature of reading comprehension. What the teacher understands about it will have a great influence on what he or she teaches in the class. He would know what to teach and how to make his/her reading lesson effectively. In fact, methodologists have been providing different definitions of reading comprehension.

If reading is understood generally as above, reading comprehension should be defined more specifically. According to Richard & Thomas (1987, p.9) "Reading comprehension is best described as "an understanding between the author and the reader". The further point out that "reading comprehension is a mental process that in the final analysis, only the reader fully understands". Comprehension is what stimulates readers to remember their experience.

Also concerning the reading comprehension, Grellet (20, p.3) argued that: "Reading comprehension or understanding a written text means extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible". The author means that reading comprehension is an activity which aims at decoding the meaning of word combination in the text in the most efficient way.

From these opinions, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is a process of understanding what is conveyed in the text. It does not mean that the reader needs to understand every single word in the text but actively work on the text

and extract the required information efficiently.

2.3. Factors affecting reading comprehension

2.3.1. Poor working memory

Working memory is a function of the brain, which keeps information in the mind for a short time, typically for a few seconds, in order to use that information for thinking. Working memory has been defined as the system which actively holds information in the mind to do verbal and nonverbal tasks such as reasoning and comprehension, and to make it available for further information processing. Language comprehension places heavy demands on working memory resources. Whether reading or listening, representation of words and sentences must be held in memory while other aspects of the text or discourse are processed and background knowledge is activated and integrated (see e.g. Kintsch & Rawson, this volume). Support for the relationship between comprehension and working memory comes from a number of sources, including observations that college students selected on the basis of low working memory span achieve lower comprehension scores than their "high span" peers, and perform less well on various components of comprehension such as pronoun resolution (Daneman & Carpenter, 1980, 1983).

2.3.2. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is commonly defined as "all the words known and used by a particular person". Knowing a word, however, is not as simple as simply being able to recognize or use it. There are several aspects of word knowledge which are used to measure word knowledge. Vocabulary is the body of words that make up a language, and the importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension cannot be overstated. The importance of vocabulary can extend to spelling instruction. When concepts cannot be clearly expressed, it is easy for readers to click away and seek another source.

2.3.3. Self motivation

The definition of motivation is to give reason, incentive enthusiasm, or interest that causes a specific action or certain behavior. Motivation is present in very life function. Simple acts such as eating are motivated by hunger. Education is motivated by desire for knowledge. Motivation can be anything from reward to coercion. Most motivation theorists assume that motivation is involved in the performance of all learned responses; that is a learn behavior will not occur unless it energized. As a result, motivation affects the extent of active, personal involvement in second

language learning. Therefore, motivation is one of the main determining factors in success in foreign or second language learning.

2.3.4. Background knowledge

As the background or content knowledge about subject or theme, prior knowledge is an important aspect to successful reading. In second language research, there is evidence that having this prior knowledge plays a significant role in comprehension (Brantmeier, 2005; Hammadou, 1991, 2000; Jonson, 1982; Lee, 1986; Nassaji, 2003; Paulido, 2004, 2007). For example, Johnson (1982) finds that a lack of cultural familiarity in English students has a greater impact on reading comprehension of a passage on Halloween than the pre-teaching of vocabulary. Readers who do not have background knowledge about the topic of the text or the text type will be more difficulty in comprehending the text (Lenz, 2005, p.1). It means that the students' background knowledge can influence their reading comprehension.

2.3.5. Students' reading strategies

Strategy is conceived as a deliberate goal-directed action (Pereira-Laird & Deane, 1997), which can be either conscious or unconscious or automatic. More precisely, reading strategies have been defined as specific, deliberate, goal-directed mental processes or behaviors, which control and modify the reader's efforts to decode a text, understand words and construct the meaning of a text (Garner, 1987; Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Reading strategies are of interest not only for what they reveal about the way readers manage their interaction with the text, but also for how the use of strategies is related to effective reading comprehension. It is common to students who fail to employ reading strategies tend to experience difficulty inferring conceptual meaning, relating to what they have read, self-monitoring their learning and understanding, and evaluating texts for clarity and consistency (Duffy et al, 1987; Long & Long, 1987; Underwood, 1997)

2.3.6. Reading materials

Reading materials are one of the most important factors determining students' motivation. According to Broughton (1984: 102), "The choice of an appropriate text is very important in building up students' reading competence". Also, students are more likely to be motivated to read more by reading materials that are interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 57).

Actually, texts play an important role in teaching and learning reading they are a means to introduce new lexical, phonetic as well as grammatical items of the target language. They are also a means to help students to enrich background knowledge.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results from reflective journal and survey reveal that second - year non English majored students at UTEHY have some difficulties in learning reading skill, which include:

3.1. Limited vocabulary, structures and grammar

From the data analysis, it is clear that students' limitation of vocabulary and grammatical structures, their lack of appropriate reading strategies and their background knowledge are students' main difficulties which influence their motivation for reading as well as their understanding. When learning the reading skill, the second-year Economics' students have many difficulties. They often come up with unfamiliar words and phrases, which are obstacles to their understanding of the ideas of the text.

3.2. Lack of reading strategies

The students do not have appropriate reading strategies. When they read the texts, most of them need to know every word in order to understand the reading texts. They base so heavily on the teacher with unknown words.

3.3. Low motivation

Most of English learners complain that they feel bored with the reading lesson. One reason is the fact that reading is the most difficult and boring of the four practical skills. Students often lose interest in the reading texts and are reluctantly participate in reading lesson.

3.4. Not enough knowledge with requirement

Most students agree that they are lack of knowledge so when teachers give exercises, they cannot complete them. Because they do not learn well in Secondary school and High school so they can not deal with long and difficult texts

3.5. Poor memory

All students agree that they have poor memory so it is difficult to remember words. Students with poor memory can have difficulty reading. They often find it difficult to pay attention, listen to, and remember information. They may need more time to process information.

There are many methods to help students

improve reading skill such as building up reading strategies, doing homework and preparing new lesson, reading materials that is at your level or just a little difficult, group learning, self - motivation and increasing memories through memories games. Most teachers and students agree that these methods are useful and effective to help students improve reading skill.

IV. SUGGESTIONS

4.1. Guide students useful reading strategies

Knowing and being able to use reading strategies is very important for all reading to do reading tasks effectively. Thus, it is essential that the teacher show students how they can adjust their reading behavior to deal with a variety of situations, types of input, and reading purposes. They help students develop a set of reading strategies and match appropriate strategies to each reading situation. Strategies that can help students read more quickly and effectively include

Previewing: reviewing titles, section headings, and photo captions to get a sense of the structure and content of a reading selection

Predicting: using knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about content and vocabulary and check comprehension; using knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure; using knowledge about the author to make predictions about writing style, vocabulary, and content

Skimming and scanning: using a quick survey of the text to get the main idea, identify text structure, confirm or question predictions

Guessing from context: using prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to the meanings of unknown words, instead of stopping to look them up

Paraphrasing: stopping at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas in the text

4.2. Activating students' background knowledge

Background knowledge is a crucial component of reading comprehension. The amount of prior knowledge a reader has can be a very strong determinant of how much he or she will be able to understand of the text he or she is reading. Readers who had a well-developed knowledge base are more likely to have a strong ability to recall relevant information. Background knowledge helps students to interpret reading materials in an individual way. Thus, it is important that teachers should teach students how to use their own background knowledge as a strategy for comprehending text.

4.3. Motivating students by using reading games and role-plays

Pre-reading activities can be the good ways to lead the students into the reading tasks. Similarly, post-reading activities will be effective to help students have a summary of the reading text. Students general get engaged and motivated if they have chances to participate in games and role-plays in both pre-reading and post-reading activities. The teacher can use cooperative games in which the participants work toward a common objective or competitive games in which the participants compete against each other to be winners. Some interesting read-and-do games can be: games with flashcard or picture cards, matching games, stepping-stones, rhymes and songs, reconstructing the story, treasure hunt, scrambled lines. At the post-reading stage, the teacher should try to create other situations for role-plays and dialogues; change the context of that tedious role-play in the textbook to another one. The teacher may have students change the tone of their voices and dress differently, reinventing the character, while role-playing.

4.4. Setting up pair and group-work

It cannot be denied that pair work and group-work are very important. With large classes, students will not have many chances to talk to the teachers. Hence, having opportunities to work in pairs and in group means that students have more time to talk in English to their peers and/or to teachers while the teachers will move around the class to check and to participate with their students in these activities. Pair work and group-work activities not only give students far more chances to speak in the target language but also encourage them to be more involved and to concentrate on the task assigned. When working in pairs or in groups, students will be more self-confident to take part in learning activities without being afraid of making mistakes or being judged by teachers. More importantly, students have psychological space and opportunity to be who they are.

4.5. Assigning and checking students' fulfillment of homework

It is clear that when students are consistently given a reason to learn within the time available, they will begin to form a habit of study. The teacher may prepare a variety of reading exercises with different forms and levels of difficulty such as matching (pictures to words, parts of words to other words, words to words), filling in cross words, grids or diagrams, multiple choice or translation, etc. These exercises may be given to students after

each lesson. They may be checked as a warm-up activity in about 10 minutes. By doing this, can the teachers review and recycle the words their students have learnt so that the students can remember them better. In short, the diversification of task types plays a key role in arousing students' interest in learning vocabulary. Also, assigning and checking the fulfillment of homework can help to give feedback to their students' mistakes.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The results gained from the research show the

difficulties of learning reading skill that the second year non English majored students often face such as limited vocabulary, structures and grammar, lack of reading strategies, low motivation, not enough knowledge with requirement and poor memory. It also gave some suggestions for teachers and students to improve teaching and learning reading skill.

In conclusion, the findings of the study will make a significant contribution to improve the current situation in teaching and learning reading skill at UTEHY.

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KHÓ KHĂN VÀ GIẢI PHÁP TRONG VIỆC HỌC KỸ NĂNG ĐỌC CỦA SINH VIÊN KHÔNG CHUYÊN NGỮ NĂM THỨ HAI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC SƯ PHẠM KỸ THUẬT HƯNG YÊN

Tóm tắt:

Kỹ năng đọc đóng vai trò quan trọng trong việc học ngoại ngữ. Tuy nhiên, hầu hết sinh viên thường gặp nhiều khó khăn trong khi học kỹ năng này. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện với mục đích tìm ra những khó khăn và từ đó đề xuất giải pháp giúp sinh viên năm thứ hai không chuyên ngữ, trường Đại học Sư phạm Kỹ Thuật Hưng Yên học tốt kỹ năng đọc. Để đạt được mục tiêu nghiên cứu, tác giả đã sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính và các phương pháp thu thập dữ liệu: nhật ký học tập và khảo sát. Đối tượng nghiên cứu bao gồm 40 sinh viên không chuyên ngữ năm thứ hai được chọn ngẫu nhiên tại trường Đại học Sư phạm Kỹ Thuật Hưng Yên. Theo dữ liệu thu thập được, nhiều sinh viên không có hứng thú và động lực đọc các bài khóa bằng tiếng Anh vì họ gặp nhiều khó khăn như thiếu vốn từ vựng, ngữ pháp, thiếu thủ thuật đọc hiểu, trí nhớ kém. Nghiên cứu cũng đề xuất được một số giải pháp nhằm khắc phục khó khăn và giúp sinh viên học tốt kỹ năng đọc hiểu hơn.

Từ khóa: Kỹ năng đọc hiểu, Khó khăn, Thủ thuật, Giải pháp, Động lực học tập.