Teaching and learning reading comprehension skills for grade 11 at Hong Quang High School: Difficulties and solutions \ Dạy và học kỹ năng đọc hiểu ở lớp 11 trường THPT Hồng Quang: Khó khăn và giải pháp. M.A Thesis Linguistics: \c Nguyễn Thị Hương

1. **Rationale for the study**

English is considered as an international language over the world. It plays an important role in the strong and rapid development of science and technology, politics, culture, and international relations in Vietnam. However, teaching and learning reading skill at high schools is still far from satisfactory for various reasons. Despite the teachers' effort, the students' motivation for intensive reading is low and the reading lesson is said to be a boring one.

Hong Quang High school, which was founded in 1955, is one of the high schools chosen to pilot the set of textbook. During the piloting period the teachers have confronted a number of difficulties, one of which was identified by Hong et al. (2006:18) as "students' general lack of motivation and opportunities to practice communicating in the target language". The students are accustomed to passive learning, the teachers' capacities are uneven, the size of classes is large and classrooms are equipped poorly. According to Hoang et al, there are five main obstacles in reading: the habit of word-by-word reading; overemphasis on forms rather than meaning; excessive focus on details rather than main ideas; poor vocabulary and limited background knowledge.

The researcher needs to take a serious look at activities of teaching and learning of reading comprehension skill in general and reading activities in particular to help the Hong Quang High School 11th – form students read more effectively.

This is the reason why I chose the topic: "*Teaching and learning reading comprehension skills for grade 11 – Hong Quang High School: Difficulties and solutions*".

2. **Aims of the study**

This study aims at improving the quality of teaching and learning English reading comprehension skills for grade 11 in Hong Quang High School after finding difficulties. To achieve this aim, the study has to find answers to the following questions:

1. What are Hong Quang High School's teachers' and students' attitudes towards the teaching and learning of reading?

2. What difficulties do the teachers and students face when dealing with a reading lesson?

3. What are the reading activities suggested to help 11th - grade students at Hong Quang High School improve their reading comprehension skills?

4. **Significance of the study**

This study has been carried out to search for a better and more effective way to develop students' reading comprehension skills. Its findings hopefully would help the 11th-form students find out the suitable way for improving their reading comprehension skills. Regarding teachers, the study would raise their awareness concerning the topic and provide them with useful pedagogical suggestions in deciding to use the new teaching method to better develop their learners' reading comprehension skills. Finally, with regard to researchers, those who happen to share the same interest in the topic could certainly rely on this research to find reliable and useful information for their related studies in the future.

5. **Scope of the study**

To improve reading comprehension skills for Hong Quang High School 11th – form students, the teachers can make use of various techniques and a number of things should be done. However, in this study, the author only intends to a brief overview of current situation of teaching and learning reading comprehension skills in the 11th – form students of Hong Quang High School to suggest some reading activities that can be applied in teaching and learning reading comprehension skill so as to help the students to become effective readers.

6. **Methods of the study**

To achieve the aims mentioned above, based on the results of two survey questionnaires, one for the students and the other for the teachers were employed to collect the data for the study. These will be discussed in detail in chapter 2, methodology.

7. **Organization of the study**

The study is divided into three parts: part A - Introduction, part B - development and part C conclusion.

Part A - introduction includes the rationale, aims and objectives, significance, scope, method and organization of the study

Part B - development includes three chapters. Chapter 1 (Review of literature) provides the theoretical background of the study. The focus of this chapter is definitions of reading, reading comprehension, classifications of reading, reading in second language teaching and learning. Chapter 2 (Methodology) describes the participants, data collection procedures and data collection instrument. Chapter 3 (Data, data analysis and discussion) offers some major findings, some suggestions for improving students' reading comprehension skills and a sample work for a reading lesson of the 11th-form students.

Part C - conclusion includes conclusions, the limitations and suggestions for further study.

PART B: DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 1: Literature review

This chapter discusses different issues in the theories of reading in a foreign language. Four major features will be presented here: definitions of reading, reading comprehension, kinds of reading, reading in second language teaching and learning.

1.1 Definitions of reading and reading comprehension

1.1.1 Reading

1.1.2 Reading comprehension

1.2 Types of reading

1.2.1 According to manner

1.2.1.1 Reading aloud

1.2.1.2 Silent reading

1.2.2 According to purpose

1.2.2.1 Skimming

1.2.2.2 Scanning

1.2.2.3 Intensive reading

1.2.2.4 Extensive reading

1.3 Teaching and learning reading comprehension skills

1.3.1 The importance of reading in foreign language learning

1.3.2 Factors in teaching and learning reading

1.3.2.1 Teacher's role

1.3.2.2 Students' role

1.3.2.3 The reading texts

1.4 Organization of reading comprehension text

1.4.1 Pre-reading stage

1.4.2 While – reading stage

1.4.3 Post – reading stage

1.5 Summary

The chapter has so far presented the relevant literature, which has helped to form the theoretical and conceptual framework for the study. It has talked about different aspects related

to the reading skills and reading activities. What is more, the importance of teaching reading in the second language classroom and factors in teaching and learning reading have been reviewed. The following chapter will display the methodology of the research under the light of the above - mentioned theories.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In this chapter, participants, data collection procedures, data collection instruments will be presented.

2.1 Participants

The process of data collection involved the participation of both teachers of English and grade 11 students as follows:

2.1.1 Teachers of English

2.1.2 The 11th -form students

2.2 Data collection instruments

Using questionnaire allows the researcher to collect the data needed in quantitative form. Besides, the researcher finds it quite easy to summarize, analyze, and report the collected data because all informants answer the same questions.

2.2.1 The questionnaire for the students

2.2.1.2 The questionnaire for the teachers

2.3 Data collection procedures

The copies of the questionnaire were delivered to 105 students from 2 different classes which were randomly selected among 12 grade 11 classes and 12 teachers of English in Hong Quang High School during their last English classes of the second term. And the researcher herself delivered the copies to participants. Before the participants answered the questions, all of them had been informed in Vietnamese about the purposes of the questionnaire and how to answer all the questions so that they were clear about what and how they would to do. When the students were writing their answers, the researcher was there with them to give any explanation if necessary. About 30 minutes later, the questionnaires were collected by the researcher herself.

Chapter 3: Data, data analysis and discussion

In this part, the collected data will be presented by means of tables and charts. Each table and chart is followed by an analysis of the data and their discussion.

3.1 Data analysis

3.1.1 Questionnaire for the students

3.1.1.1 Students' attitudes toward the importance of learning reading comprehension skill

3.1.1.2 Students' purposes of reading

3.1.1.3 Students' attitude toward class reading activities

3.1.1.4 Students' difficulties when learning reading

3.1.1.5 Students' responses to the techniques used by the teacher

3.1.1.6 Students' ways of reading

3.1.1.7 Students' effort for improving their reading comprehension skill

3.1.2 Questionnaire for the teachers

3.1.2.1 Teachers' attitude toward the importance of teaching reading comprehension skills at school

3.1.2.2 Teachers' attitude toward the importance of developing reading comprehension skills

3.1.2.3 Teachers' using reading techniques in a reading lesson at Hong Quang High School

3.1.2.4 Teachers' difficulties when teaching reading

3.1.2. 5 Teachers' suggested activities

3.1.2.6 Teachers' organizing reading activities

3.1.2.7 Teachers' activities to improve students' reading comprehension skill

3.2 Discussion

This section presents the answers to the research question proposed in the thesis.

3.2.1 The teachers' and students' attitudes toward the role of the teaching and learning of reading

From the above data analysis, most of the teachers and students at Hong Quang High School were aware of the importance of reading, they expressed their positive attitudes to

learning and teaching reading comprehension skills as well as developing reading comprehension skills. All of the students also had clear purpose when reading. Many of them read for different purposes such as pleasure, gaining information and improving knowledge, enriching vocabulary and grammatical structures, improving language skills. The survey results in the questionnaire for the teachers indicate that teachers used different activities and exercises in the reading lesson, but they were not appropriate and effective enough. The teachers, in fact still applied traditional strategies in teaching reading. Most of them focused on presenting new words and grammatical structures rather than instructed their students to use some useful techniques such as skimming and scanning, etc. They did not made use of pairs work and groups work in the process of teaching reading. That is why their reading lessons were not be effective. Students consequently could not develop their reading comprehension skills. This is the reason why the teachers of English should think of more useful techniques that do work in the current situation of teaching to get the best result of a reading lesson.

3.2.2 Difficulties the teachers and students meet when dealing with a reading lesson

The information from the data analysis clearly shows 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. Not only the students but also the teachers faced many problems when dealing with reading lessons. Limitation of vocabulary and grammatical structures is the biggest problem for reading. Some possible explanation considered by the researcher is that the 11 th students had very limited vocabulary, and were too dependent on teachers, peers dictionaries. New words have affected the students' process of reading. Background knowledge is found to be a less challenge than vocabulary. Students found that they did not know anything in some aspects. Therefore, they had many difficulties when reading a strange topic. With many demonstrations that those who possess rich prior knowledge about the topic of a reading often understand the reading better than the others with low prior knowledge. Students' lack of appropriate reading strategies is another problem, the teachers had to face.

3.3 The activities suggested to help the 11th-form students at Hong Quang High School improve their reading comprehension skills

According to the statistics, teaching and learning reading comprehension skills at Hong Quang High School are not very effective and satisfactory. The 11th-form students know something about reading skills, and they apply them in dealing with the reading tasks. However, the number of the students being effective readers is modest while the rest of the students seem to be ineffective ones. Thus it is time the teachers did something to reach their ultimate target: students' reading improvement. A successful reading teacher is the person who can help his

students build up passion for reading, comprehend the reading text well, develop effectively reading habit outside classroom and better other language skills in combination with reading. It is very important to give out some suggested activities to improve reading comprehension skills to students. The activities suggested hereafter hopefully can serve as a tool to enable teachers of reading at Hong Quang High School to become more successful.

3.3.1 Pre – reading stage

This activity gets students to think about the content of the text which is going to be read. The aims of this activity are to introduce and arouse the learners' interest to the topic to motivate them by giving the reason for reading and providing some language preparation for the text. Steven (1988:328) states that: "*pre- reading activities must accomplish both goals: building new background knowledge as well as activating existing background knowledge. A teacher of reading may thus be viewed as a teacher of relevant information as well as a teacher of reading skills.*"

The following activities can be considered to be effective techniques in the pre-reading stage of a reading lesson:

- Brainstorming and graphically organizing information
- Giving pre-reading questions
- Using visual aids such as map, diagrams, figure, photographs etc related to the topic.

3.3.2   While – reading stage

3.3.2.1 Reading for general understanding

To help students to gain general understanding about the text, the teacher teaches students skimming technique. The skimming technique is an important technique in reading comprehension directs students to a global understanding of reading texts.

The teacher instructs the students to read a few important sentences and recognize certain words or expression as clues to ideas of what follows. It is advisable to ask the students to pay attention to the title, the beginning, the end as well as the topic sentence of each paragraph that usually conveys the main ideas of the text. After teaching new vocabulary or introducing the text, etc. the teacher asks his students to read the text silently for the first time to gain the global understanding of the text, identify main ideas before going into the details of the text.

Depending on the text, the teaching and learning condition or the students' language level, students are asked to answer information questions, multiple choice questions or True/ False questions, to look for topic sentences, finding paragraph topics.

3.3.2.2 Reading for specific information

After the students complete some exercises focusing on the main point or general understanding of the text, depending on the kinds of task, the teacher divides class into pairs or small groups of 4-5 students to scan the text again and search for or locate some particular pieces of information in the text. The teacher should remind his students that when they are trying to locate specifically required information, they do not need to read the whole text carefully but pay more attention to the paragraph in which the information they need is likely to be embedded. It is advisable to limit the time of scanning since this can save the time and make the students try their best to develop the scanning skill. Depending on the text, the teaching and learning condition or the students' language level, the students are asked to answer information questions, multiple choice questions or True/ False questions.

3.3.4 Adjusting Teaching Time and efforts

Findings from the survey reveal that teachers at Hong Quang High School have already provided different techniques to help their students read effectively. However, the teachers also need to notice that not enough time and efforts have been spent to help their students deal with new words or phrases, or come – up problems of cultural knowledge. The teachers need to save more time and efforts identifying what difficulties their students are coping with in each stage of reading. For example, if their students find it hard to start discussion about the topic to read, it is essential that the teachers guide them with interesting questions, or theme- based topics. If that is the problem of working out the gist, asking them to have skim read is the task of the teachers and this is certain to facilitate the students. Time and efforts are also necessary for the teachers to tabulate their students' level of proficiency so that appropriate reading exercises can be ended punctually.

In short, using the time and efforts wisely is one technique to help teachers improve their students' reading skills.

3.3.5 Creating Interest and Enhancing Motivation

Ways for creating interest and enhancing motivation for the students at Hong Quang High School will vary significantly according to personal preferences, experiences, background, and subject matter. For 11th - form students of English at Hong Quang High School, it would be helpful to suggest some ways for creating the students' interest and enhancing their motivation before reading.

Group discussion is an activity that can be appropriate for situations in which texts are difficult, sometimes contain unfamiliar concepts or words that may be not exist in the students' minds. Group students in three or four with an efficient reader to create an exciting reading atmosphere since reading alone is conventional and sometimes rather boring and not effective.

3.3.6 Techniques for enriching vocabulary

The 11th-form students often find reading tasks are difficult and boring because of their limitation of vocabulary and grammatical structures. The teachers can encourage the students to have extensive reading habit, use word games, use word list. Firstly, by reading extensive materials, the students can feel the joys of reading in other language. Moreover, it can help the students enrich their vocabulary, strengthen their understanding of language and consolidate their grammar. The students can choose what they want to read and the reading material is easy enough. Secondly, word games should be used more frequently in class especially during consolidation stage, if students are made to take part in word games voluntarily, they will become more active and hard working; thus, their vocabulary acquisition will be improved. Moreover, through such activities, the interaction among students in the classroom can be promoted. Students are brought closer to each other. That makes a better studying environment, a very important factor that helps a lot in bringing good learning results. Finally, using word list is also the effective way to revise vocabulary. In order to help students become familiar with the new way of vocabulary learning, which encourage their autonomy, the teachers should guide them how to make their word lists. Students are asked to write their own record sheets, on which they have to list each word they have selected along with its pronunciation, part of speech, meaning, collocations and related forms.

3.3.7 Techniques for improving students' background knowledge

The teacher asks the students to search for information and read as much as possible about a specific topic of their favorites. Then during a class contact, the teacher would start by sharing with the whole class some information that she had collected before asking her students for further supplementation. Alternatively, teachers should subdivide a theme into several subtopics and assign each of them to different groups in the class. Subsequently, each group of students should read at home to discuss or exchange the information with other groups in the following lesson.

3.2.3.8 *Recommending a Sample Lesson Plan*

A sample lesson plan was enclosed at the end of this thesis in an attempt to be an useful document for reference. It may help teachers, to some extent, have the most suitable lesson plan for their specific students in specific contexts.

PART C: CONLUSION

In this last chapter, recapitulation of the study is provided with a brief description of the study as well as the limitations of the study and some suggestions for further study.

1. Summary of the study

As reading, one of the receptive skills through which students can widen their knowledge of the target language more effectively than the others, it is important for the students to have good techniques in reading to become good readers. In the case of this study, the teachers of reading at Hong Quang High School are supposed to be aware of many factors that affect students' reading comprehension. Among these, there are four main factors that should be taken into consideration for the 10th-form students: Students' lack of background knowledge and world knowledge, students' low motivation, students' limited vocabulary and grammatical structures and their lack of appropriate reading strategies.

This study gives an analysis of the difficulties in reading and the sources of these difficulties as perceived by the 11th form students at Hong Quang High School, specifically, difficulties in vocabulary, reading strategies, and background knowledge and knowledge of the world. The study has also looked into the teachers' perceptions of their students' difficulties in reading acquisition in order to investigate to what extent the teachers understand their students in the process of reading acquisition. The findings of the study indicate that there is a big gap between what the teachers have done to motivate the students and what the students prefer. The majority of students prefer having supplementary reading texts or for extensive reading. They want their teachers to provide them with reading strategies, how to read efficiently. Besides, it reveals that the teachers do not make full use of games and visual aids of which catch the interest of most the students. Coming from the real situation of teaching and learning reading at Hong QuangHigh School, in this study, an effort has been made to present some useful reading techniques which hopefully can be employed to help the 11th form students at Hong Quang High School improve their reading comprehension.

2. Limitations and suggestions for further study

Due to the shortage of time and the lack of practical experience, all the issues of the teaching process cannot be covered as a whole, shortcomings were unavoidable.

Firstly, the researcher only uses survey questionnaires to collect data on views of the teachers and the 11th-form students about reading difficulties and their needs in teaching and learning reading. The number of the students participate in the questionnaires is only from 2 classes (105 students), which may not be sufficient for the researcher to have precise judgments.

Secondly, not all the suggested techniques for teaching and learning reading are experimented properly, so the researcher can't draw a conclusion of the effectiveness. Therefore, the suggestions to improve reading comprehension skills for 11th-form students at Hong Quang High School may be subjective and uncompleted.

Finally, this thesis was carried out within the area of Hong Quang High School so the mentioned teaching methods may not be suitable to apply to other high schools because of learners' differences in language proficiency and other social constraints. Despite such limitations, I strongly believe that my research is successful to some extent. Though this is just a small-scale study on the issue, it really provides some helpful suggestions for the teaching reading comprehension skills to the 11th-form students. However, any further researches that employ supplementary instruments such as experimental research or observations and carry out in a longer period of time on a large scale can help to prove the above results more strongly and persuasively and can also help to avoid the subjective assessments from the researcher of this study.