

A study of difficulties in teaching and learning reading comprehension in the course book “New Headway (Pre-Intermediate) to the first year students at college of Broadcasting 1, Phu Ly city, Ha Nam province and some solutions = Tìm hiểu những khó khăn trong việc dạy và học kỹ năng đọc hiểu theo giáo trình NewHeadway (Pre-Intermediate) cho sinh viên. M.A Thesis Linguistics: \ Nguyễn Thị Lan Hương

Part I: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

Although in the course book “New Headway” four skills are taught, reading is more important than other three skills because students have to take the examinations which are grammar and reading based. However, the students’ reading proficiency is not satisfactory. That is because teachers and students have difficulties in receiving especially reading skill though this course book has used for some terms. If those difficulties are not found out and no solutions to overcome are given, it is certain that reading class cannot be successful. Despite the above mention reason, no study on this matter has been carried out. It has encouraged the author to do the research.

2. Aims and significance of the study

The study is aimed at:

1. investigating the areas of difficulties that students and teachers are coping with in their daily of teaching and learning reading comprehension in the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate) for the first year students.
2. offering some solutions to overcome difficulties encountered.

The study is carried out in terms of both theory and practice with a hope to be of some help to the improvement of reading comprehension teaching and learning efficiency for the first year students in the college of Broadcasting 1

3. Research questions

In order to achieve the above aims, the study concentrated answering the research questions:

- What are difficulties experienced by teachers who are teaching and first year students who are learning reading comprehension in the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate) in the college of Broadcasting 1 ?
- What are feasible solutions to overcome those difficulties?

4. Scope of the study

This study limits itself to the investigation of

- a sample of the first year students
- Teachers of English
- Reading comprehension in the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate)

5. Methods of the study

In order to get the most exact information for the study, two methods of research (qualitative and quantitative) were employed with the following instruments:

- survey questionnaires to students
- classroom observation
- informal interview with teachers of English
- journal keeping

Part II: DEVELOPMENT

Chapter I: Theoretical background

1.1. Definition of Terminology

1.1.1. What is reading?

1.1.2. What is Reading Comprehension?

1.2. Stages in teaching reading skill

1.2.1 Pre-reading stage

1.2.2 While-reading stage

1.2.3 Post-reading stage

1.3. Reading approaches and skills

1.3.1. Intensive reading

1.3.2. Extensive reading

1.3.2.1. Skimming

1.3.2.2. Scanning**1.3.3. Factors connected with reading success****1.3.3.1. Physical condition****1.3.3.2. Speed of reading****1.3.3.3. Oral reading****1.3.3.4. Vocabulary****1.3.3.5. Reading comprehension****1.3.3.6. Ability to use references****1.3.3.7. Pattern of reading****1.4. Difficulties of the second language reading comprehension process****1.4.1. Reading skill problem****1.4.2. Language problems****1.4.3. Cultural background knowledge****1.4.4. Learner-centeredness in foreign education****Chapter II: An introduction of the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate) and the current situation of teaching and learning this course book****2.1 General description of the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate)****2.1.1 Objectives**

In the college of Broadcasting 1, students learn English with the intention of using it as a means to complete their future job requirements. They use English to communicate so the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate) has been chosen to be the official course book for the first year students before they continue learning ESP.

The book was written by Liz and John Soars. At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- enrich their vocabulary
- enrich their general knowledge
- using skills to communicate successfully
- have basic knowledge to continue their study of ESP
- get a certificate to get a job

2.1.2 Topics, Terminologies and grammatical structures

The book covers 12 topics (in 12 units) about general knowledge (see **Appendix 3**). Each unit has different length depending on the complexity of the subject matter. In each unit, concrete objectives are revealed to the title of the unit.

For example, the objectives of Unit 1, the title is “getting to know you” and the reading text is “A blind date”. After reading, students:

- have some knowledge about star signs
- can take a blind date
- have vocabulary about personality and describing adjectives

2.1.3 Characteristics of reading texts and reading exercises

The organization of information in reading texts of this course book shares common characteristics of other reading texts, has its own characteristics: the information is grouped into themes.

The exercises in the reading comprehension are divided into some types:

- gap- fill
- multiple choice
- matching
- True-False
- short answer
- complete sentence

2.2. Current situation of teaching the course book

2.2.1. Length of the course and time allocation for reading skill

English for communicating is introduced to the first year students in the college of Broadcasting 1. They study the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate). The total time for the course book is 60 periods (= 4 credits) .The course book covers 12 units. And they learn the book during all the term and each period lasts 45 minutes.

Each unit lasts 4-6 periods depending on the length and difficulty of its content. And reading is one of four parts in each unit so the time for this skill in each lesson is one fourth. So to apply all stages in reading lesson is not easy.

2.2.2. Teaching staff and teaching methods

The English teaching staff at the college of Broadcasting 1 consists of 4 official teachers at the age from 25 to 35. All the teachers have university diploma

from different universities in Vietnam. At present, 2 out of 4 teachers have done MA courses in Hanoi University of foreign studies and one of them is doing an MA course in University of Language and International studies.

2.2.3. Teaching facilities

Teaching facilities are considered significant and may affect the teaching process positively or negatively. In general, the teaching facilities in the college of Broadcasting 1 are poorly equipped. There is no laboratory and there is one library but it mainly provides a few books of English. Neither, overhead projector nor projector is equipped in classrooms except in Informatics class or Engineering class. The equipment in classroom is very simple and traditional. A board, chalk, cassette player and textbook are main teaching equipments in every class.

2.3. Current situation of learning the course book

2.3.1. Students' background

Most of learners of the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate) are full time students at the first year, aging from 18-19. They come from different parts of the country with different level of English. Every year our college has about 500 first year students. Some students are good at English, some have never learnt English before and most of them have learnt English as a subject in high school but they are not keen on it. Students are divided into classes from 40 to 60 students. Although they have different levels of English, they all learn the course book "New Headway "(Pre-Intermediate) in the first year.

2.3.2. Students' learning condition

The students' condition of learning is not good enough. A few students have dictionaries to learn English. Moreover, most of students live far from family so the places to live and learn are badly-equipped. They mainly get the knowledge from the textbook without referent books meanwhile the library of the school is poor. Because of this it affects their study and result at the final exam.

2.3.3. Students' attitude to learning English

When students were in high school they mainly learnt English for passing the final exam in each term or at the end of the school year. So they did not care how to get knowledge and how to communicate by English. They found English unnecessary and their ability in general was very limited.

But now English is taught in 3 terms with different levels and it is an important subject for them at school as well as in the future job so they are well aware of their purpose of learning, they become hard working and patient.

Chapter III: The Study

3.1. The context of the study

The college of Broadcasting 1 has been established for over 50 years. Its duty is to provide different form of training with different departments. Now there are some main departments such as: Accounting, Journalism, Information Technology and Engineering and Telecommunication.

English is a compulsory subject in the curriculum of teaching and learning in the college of Broadcasting 1. This subject is graded into 2 major stages. The first stage is aimed at providing students with basic general knowledge of English. And the two next stages are the time for students to study English for their professional field (in the 2nd year).

In order to achieve the aims of the thesis and answer the above research questions, the subjects of the study include: a group of four teachers of English. All of them are female. They have at least three year experience in teaching English.

Also, 300 first year students in 10 classes from all departments in the school were surveyed. 70% of them are female and 30% are male.

The students are chosen randomly among the students in each class.

3.3. Data collection methods

In order to get the most exact information for the study, two methods of research (qualitative and quantitative) were employed with the following instruments:

- survey questionnaires to students
- classroom observation
- informal interview with teachers of English
- journal keeping

3.4. Data collection procedure

As being described in the previous part, various instruments were designed. Journal keeping was the first instrumental for this study. I have been teaching general English for 5 years and have kept the journal on my own since then with the purpose of recording

difficulties during my teaching process in order to find out the solutions to overcome these problems.

Then while studying MA course, I had an idea of carrying out a study on reading comprehension with the course book "New Headway". And the journal has been no longer used to record my own difficulties but also difficulties of my colleagues.

Six interview questions for teachers and 15 questions for students were designed to collect more information supporting what I have been recorded in my journal from teachers of English and the first year students.

3.5. Data analysis and discussion

In this part, the result collected from different instruments will be presented in separated parts in order to answer the research questions raised in the previous part. The first part is the result of survey questionnaire to students and the next one is the result of other instruments to teachers.

3.5.1. Discussion of the result collected by means of the questionnaire

In this part, the data collected from survey questionnaire will be presented in the tables according to the purposes of the study. Sometimes the results of the questionnaire are compared with the results of other instruments in order to make the answers to the questionnaire clearer.

3.5.1.1. Students' opinion on the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate)

3.5.1.2. Difficulties revealed by the students

3.5.1.3. Students' sources of difficulties and their desire from the teachers

3.5.2. Discussion of the result collected by means of the interview, classroom, observation and journal keeping

The result presented below will be grouped in terms of different purposes of the study.

3.5.2.1. Teacher's opinion on the course "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate)

3.5.2.2. Teacher's difficulties in teaching reading English in the course book "New Headway" (Pre-Intermediate)

Summary

Through the findings from survey questionnaire to students, interview to English teacher, journal keeping and classroom observation, the difficulties of the students

and the teachers have been revealed frankly. The analysis of the data and the interpretation of the information collected have been presented carefully including some discussion on the issue. The students' difficulties in learning English include:

- The lack of vocabulary and terminologies
- The lack of appropriate reading method (predicting ability, independent reading habit).
- Lack of understanding the purposes of reading

The difficulties of the students are partly due to themselves and partly due to their teachers. Hence, what are the teachers' problems in teaching?

The teachers of English for the first year students, on one hand, share the same problems with other English teachers, and on the other hand, cope with characterized problems of the teachers of English. The major difficulties of the English teacher include:

- The lack of general knowledge
- The lack of various teaching techniques (teaching method repeats in every reading class).
- The lack of reference materials (for both teachers and students).
- The lack of teaching aids (over - head projector, projector).

3.5.3. Possible solutions

Basing on several difficulties of English teachers and students analyzed in the previous part, basing on the opinions about the solutions of English teachers in the college of Broadcasting 1 (answers of questions 5, 6 in the interview) and on the author's study on theory of English teaching and learning, some suggestions to overcome these difficulties will be offered below. The suggestions include: training students to become efficient readers; encouraging students to have extensive reading habit, making students fully aware of their purpose of reading, improving teacher's knowledge, improving teachers' classroom techniques, equipping teaching facilities, and adapting materials.

3.5.3.1. Training students to become efficient readers

The student will never achieve their goals in learning reading if they are not efficient readers. In addition, the greatest difficulties in learning English of the students reflected in the study are the lack of vocabulary and terminologies, the

lack of appropriate reading method to understand the details of the reading text (predicting ability and independent reading habit). In order to help students overcome these difficulties, it is, therefore, an important responsibility of the teacher to help students to become efficient readers.

3.5.3.2. Encouraging students to have extensive reading habit.

The results of the study have shown that most of students were in lack of necessary vocabulary related to the topic of each texts and their limited general knowledge might hinder their reading comprehension. Familiarizing the students with extensive reading is a way that can help them increase the vocabulary, enrich their understanding of language and consolidate their grammar. In addition, teachers should give students reading materials that are suitable for their levels in order to make them to have extensive reading habit

3.5.3.3. Making students fully aware of their purpose of reading

Helping students to identify the purpose of the reading text right before they start to do the tasks is a useful aid in their reading process because when students have their purposes in mind, they know how to pay attention to the right direction. Looking quickly at title, heading can give students the clues for the reading purposes. Students' reading can be more effective if they know what they are looking for from the reading texts.

The teachers must be sure that their student are provided with reading purposes and can practice different ways of approaching a text. Various formats give out different purposes of reading: skimming, scanning, extensive reading...This is a useful way to improve the students' reading skills

3.5.3.4. Improving background knowledge for English teachers

From the finding in the previous part, it is obvious that the most challenging of the teachers of English for the first year students is their poor background knowledge. There has been much discussion on this aspect.

In addition, the teacher should try to create more exercises for students to do after each reading lesson because it is not only advantageous for reading class but also for the teachers themselves. On one hand, the reading class becomes more attractive and efficient, the learners are more interested in the lesson as they are involved in more activities, they have chance to practice their knowledge.

3.5.3.5. Improving teachers' classroom techniques

Basing on characteristics of different groups of students, the teacher should use appropriate techniques of even in the same class the teacher also has to employ various techniques in different reading lessons in order to renew the classroom atmosphere and make reading class more interesting and efficient. However, whatever to change, whatever to employ, the teacher cannot omit any of the three stages in the reading lesson: pre-reading, while reading and post-reading. In each stage, various techniques should be applied.

First, in pre-reading stage, the teacher should raise students' expectations and activate their background knowledge so that they will become less dependent on the words in the text. The students are provided with new words, terms and necessary information about the topic. The activities may include:

- Using visual aids such as illustrations, drawings, tables, charts, etc. relevant to the topic to be learnt.
- Raising questions to explore the topic.
- Providing students with new words, terms, key concepts.

3.5.3.6. Equipping teaching facilities

The poor classroom equipment is also part of poor reading lecture. Therefore, beside the existing teaching facilities (board, chalk, cassette player, course book), it is necessary to equip classroom with modern facilities such as over-head projector, or projector, equip the library with various reference books' on English.

The modern facilities will make the lecture more effective as the teacher can explain the subject matter lively and efficiently and save a lot of time in writing down everything on board as usual. Saving more time in this stage, the teacher may arrange time to provide students with further exercises of supplementary reading texts.

3.5.3.7. Adapting the course book

The course book, although, is assessed to be appropriate and useful to this English course, it is not completely suitable for Vietnamese learners as it is written for learners of the first year students.

Thus, its content should be adjusted to adapt our students' levels and needs. The adaptation should be done with exercises and content of reading text. This process may include:

1. Change some texts which are too difficult to read to understand.

For example: The reading text in Unit 3 “The name’s Bond, James Bond” in page 26-27 (**Appendix 4**). Its content is not familiar with students. So it is very difficult for them to understand.

2. Create more necessary exercises for reading texts.

eg: in unit 4 with the reading text "Market around the world" in page 35 (**appendix 5**) has few exercises so the students are impossible to understand the text and remember content of the text

3. Give students chances to play role in some texts possibly

For example, with the text “Jobs for the boys ...and girls” in pages 66-67 in Unit 8 (**appendix 6**), teachers may help students to play roles as employees and employers or interviewers or interviewees

The first and second suggestions for adaptation help to reduce the student's difficulty in understanding the reading text and doing the exercises. The last one helps students practice their knowledge and make the activities in reading hour more various and useful.

Part III: CONCLUSION

In this final part, I would like to make a brief summary of the issues discussed in the study and offer some suggestions for further study.

1. Summary of the study

In combination with research instruments, the result of study has pointed out some common problems that English teachers face with in their daily teaching:

- the lack of background knowledge
- the lack of various teaching techniques (teaching method repeats in every reading class)
- the lack of reference materials (for both teachers and students)
- the lack of teaching aids (over head projector, projector)

2. Limitations and suggestions for further study.

. First, the author's practical experience in teaching reading and knowledge of this field is limited, the suggestions to overcome difficulties are likely to be subjective and incomplete. Second, within the scope of the study, the study cannot indicate concrete application in adapting the course book (the last suggestions to overcome difficulties). In addition, the study has no chance to deal with other three skills in language teaching: Listening, Speaking, and Writing. All the existing limitations of this study call for further research