

11th grade students' awareness of English reading strategies: a descriptive research at Yen Vien High school / Hoàng Thị Oanh

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the problems and rationale of the study

Internationally, teaching English has changed tremendously over the last few decades. In the field of second language acquisition research, focus has been shifted away from finding perfect teaching methodologies to investigating why some learners are very successful in their language learning while others are not although they have made much effort learning the language. Several studies have been carried out by Oxford (1990), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) Nunan (1991), Rubin and Thomson (1994) and Cohen (1998) In Vietnam, some studies into this field have been conducted with different types of learners to find out particular strategies employed by effective and ineffective students in order to help the effective ones aware of leaning strategies such as Huyen Tran's study (2004) on vocabulary learning strategies used by students of English at Qui Nhon university or Mai Duong's study (2005) on writing strategies employed by the first – year students at HaNoi National University. However, Such studies are scare, thus, more research should be done to help more learners use appropriate strategies in their different settings.

At Yen Vien high school, students have difficulty with reading comprehension Students can not pass examinations such as school's examination, GCSE, university examination without being equipped with effect strategies. However, with the limitations of a high school, the number of students who even do not know learning strategies is not small. With ten-year experience of teaching English at Yen Vien high school, reading is considered one of the most difficult skill for Yen Vien's students especially the 11th grade ones. Although they know the importance of reading and they have also tried their best, their test scores are not satisfactory due to both subjective and objective causes. Their low

reading comprehension results from not only their own causes as their lack of vocabulary, grammar and background knowledge, but also some other factors such as the textbook, motivation in class, the teaching staff and their reading teaching methods, schedule, administration and so on. With a view to bettering the situation, Both teachers and learners have to adapt. However, it is necessary for students to have appropriate reading strategies. Therefore, I intend to examine the awareness of English reading (henceforth called reading) strategies of 11th grade students at Yen Vien high school in this study and find out the differences in the strategies used by students of higher reading abilities and those of lower reading abilities. Based on the finding, I am going to make some recommendations to improve the students' reading proficiency.

1. 2. Aims of the Study

The study aims at finding out the strategies Vietnamese 11th grade students use when they read English so that improvement of the quality of teaching and learning English reading as a second language in the upper secondary education for Vietnamese students could be achieved.

To achieve this aim, the study sets out to obtain these specific objectives:

1. To investigate the awareness and possible use of reading strategies of 11th grade students at a Vietnamese high school when they read English,
2. To explore possible ways for improving the students' English reading proficiency level.

1. 3. Research Questions

To achieve the aims of the thesis, the following research questions were proposed with questions 1 and 2 addressing the first aim and question 3 the second aim):

- 1) What are the levels of awareness and use of English reading comprehension strategies of Vietnamese 11th grade students?
- 2) Do the good readers (11th grade students) have different awareness and use of reading strategies from the medium and weak ones?

- 3) What can be done to help Vietnamese grade 11th poor readers to improve their reading comprehension level?

1. 4. Research Methodology

This study is to be conducted as a descriptive one that employed a written questionnaire and interview to collect information about students' awareness and possible use of reading strategies. The data collected were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively to help the author achieve the aim of the study, that is answers to research questions 1 and 2 to deal with aim number 1 and research question 3 with aim 2.

1. 5. Scope of the Study

The study is designed to explore the 11th students' awareness and possible use of reading strategies in Yen Vien high school in order to make some methodological recommendations for English learners. This study is, therefore, descriptive by nature.

The subjects of the study are three groups of 11th grade students in seven classes. Three hundred and eighteen students divided into three groups based on the levels of English measured by end-term English test scores. All of them are living in Gia Lam district. They all have learned English for five years (four years in lower secondary school and one year in upper secondary school). Based on their English test score of the final examination and the whole year, I divide three hundred and eighteen 11th grade students into three groups: 1st group consists of 68 students (with the total test score from 7 to 10), 2nd group consists of 200 students (with the total test core from 5 to 6) and 50 students in the third group (with the total test below 5).

1. 6. Significance of the study

The study helps solve the problem of uplifting the quality of English reading of Vietnamese grade 11 students. It would enable the teaching and learning of English to be more effective and efficient. Above all, it would help to promote reading power of students and this is very important to them in study as well as in their future jobs.

It is also hoped that the study would make some valuable contributions to the field of language teaching methodology. Results obtained from the study can help English teachers to enhance their teaching with Vietnamese students especially with poor readers.

On the other hand, students can use the suggested techniques to self-improve their English learning.

1. 7. Design of the Study: This study consists of 3 parts with part 2 dividing into 3 chapters:

Part 1: Introduction. This part supplies an overview of the study with specific reference to the rationale, the aims, the methodology and the design.

Part 2: Chapter 1 deals with an exploration of the theoretical background of the research. It is concerned with the issues relevant to the topic of the research such as reading and reading comprehension, classification of reading, strategies and the importance of strategy training as well as the teacher's role in strategy training.

Chapter 2: The methodology of this study is presented. This chapter presents the background information of the subjects of the study, the instrument used to collect the data, the procedure of data collection.

Chapter 3: is aimed at describing data analysis in detail and a thorough discussion of the findings of the study. Some explanations and interpretations of the findings are also presented in this chapter.

Part 3: Conclusion gives the summary of the findings and some implications which are proposed for improving 11th grade students; points out the limitations and some recommendations and directions for further research and makes a final conclusion of the study.

The appendixes lie on the last part of the study, preceded the References

PART 2: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. What is Reading and Reading Comprehension?

2.1.1. What is Reading?

Reading is an interactive process that goes on between the reader and the text, resulting in comprehension. The text presents letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs that encode meaning. The reader uses knowledge, skills, and strategies to determine what that meaning is. So far reading has been defined differently by lots of scholars, however no single definition is acceptable to everyone.

Reading is a completely individual activity which takes place in all types such as newspapers, magazines, written texts, telephone directories, labels on medicine bottles, etc. The ability to read is such a natural part of human beings. These views are divided into three groups named the bottom - up, the top – down and the interactive ones

The bottom - up model

Top down model

Interactive model:

2.1.2. What is Reading Comprehension?

Reading comprehension results in the fact that when readers know which skills and strategies are appropriate for types of texts and understand how to apply them to accomplish reading purpose. Swan (1975, p.1) stated that “A student is good at comprehension we mean that he can read accurately and efficiently, so as to get the maximum information of a text with the minimum of understanding”. It is obvious that the student can show his understanding only by doing some tasks such as summarizing the text, answering questions, making true or false etc.

2.2. Classification of reading

2. 2.1. According to manner :

According to Doff (1988), reading is divided into two main types: reading aloud and silent reading.

2. 3. Reading strategies and the importance of strategy training

2.3.1. Defining strategies

Nunan (1991) defined learning strategies as “a communicative procedure learners use in order to learn and use a language”. According to Scarcella and Oxford (1992: 63) learning strategies are “ specific actions, behavior, steps, or techniques – such as seeking out conversation partner, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task – used by students to enhance their own learning”.

O'Malley and Chamot's framework has been the most useful and generally accepted. In their framework, there are three major types name as metacognitive, cognitive, social awareness

- **“Metacognitive” strategies** are responsible for planning, and arranging learning, centering one's learning, and self-monitoring.
- **“Cognitive” strategies** involve more direct manipulation of the learning material itself and are responsible for marking new words in a text, memorizing by sentences, taking notes, etc.
- **“Socio/affective” strategies** have to do with cooperation with other learners, relaxation, asking questions. (see Table 2.1)

2.3.2. The importance of strategy training

A training strategy is basically an explanation of the process that will be used to provide training.

2. 4. The Teacher's Role in Strategy Training

The language teacher aiming at training his students in using language learning strategies should learn about the students, their interests, motivations, and learning styles

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants and settings of the study

2.1.1. Participants:

The research was carried out at Yen Vien high school with the participation of 318 11th form students, aged 16, both males and females. To students, English is a compulsory subject in the schedule the English. The classification of good readers, weak readers and average or medium readers was based on their English final results and their marks in second term examination with the assumption that the tests of English are both valid and reliable. Good readers were the ones who got above 7, bad readers were the ones who got below 5 and the medium readers are the ones who got their marks from 5 to 7.

2.1.2. Settings of the study

The present study was conducted from early April to mid June 2011 when they were in the second semester of the school year. Up to the time of the study, they have been studying English at Yen Vien high school for nearly two years and all of them have learned English for 6 or 7 years.

2.2. Instruments of data collection and data analysis methods

To obtain data for the study, two different instruments were employed: a survey questionnaire and interview.

a. The questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed with two main parts. Part one asked about the students' attitude towards the importance of reading skill (question 1) and the factors affecting this skill (question 2). Part two was about their reading strategies

b. The interview

Twenty five students were chosen randomly from these three groups for more in-depth data which mainly focus on their awareness and possible use of strategies including metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies.

2.3. Summary

This chapter reported the methodology employed for the study in terms of collection methods, participants, data collection procedures. Description of participants and settings of the study was given. The data collection instruments including questionnaires and interviews were also presented.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study suggested that the two groups of readers

significantly differed in the frequency of metacognitive and cognitive strategy use. Specifically, the good readers employed these strategies more often than the bad ones. Basically, the outcome of the present study partly confirmed the findings of the previous studies (see chapter 2). The good readers tended to combine both top-down and bottom-up strategies while the bad readers mostly based on the bottom-up ones. The good readers often:

- previewed the headings, illustrations and the text to guess the main idea of the text before reading;
- read questions to know what to focus while reading;
- determined suitable strategies according to their reading purposes;
- scanned for key information;
- skipped unimportant words;
- determined the functions of words;
- guessed meanings of new words in content
- related their prior knowledge to the new information;
- wrote down key words while reading;
- reread difficult parts for better comprehension;
- mentally summarized main ideas and checked their answers after reading.

In contrast, the weak and medium readers sometimes or rarely employed these strategies and mainly focused on the bottom-up strategies. During the reading process, the ineffective readers tried to translate the text into Vietnamese but lost the general meaning of the text. This abuse of the translation strategy by the weak readers might slow down their reading speed and badly affect their reading comprehension.

Another interesting point in the present study is that there were more significant differences found in the readers' use of metacognitive strategies than that of cognitive ones. The effective readers used most of metacognitive strategies with a significantly higher frequency than the ineffective ones. This finding indicated that these strategies considerably influenced the readers' reading comprehension. In addition, results of questionnaires showed some kind of dissimilarity in the subtypes of metacognitive and cognitive strategies. The questionnaire result analysis showed that the good and bad

readers employed the metacognitive strategies namely advance organizers and selective attention with the same frequency.

Concerning the cognitive strategies, the questionnaire analysis proved that used the elaboration strategy with the same frequency (scaled as sometimes). The analysis of another cognitive strategy (translation) also came up rather contrasting outcomes. While the questionnaire analysis confirmed that the medium and bad readers translated the text while reading with the same frequency.

The findings of readers' attitudes to reading comprehension also showed some interesting points. Both medium and weak readers were not aware of the importance of reading comprehension. Another noticeable difference was the way these groups of readers considered reading strategies very important to reading comprehension, the bad ones regarded them as only a little important. was the way the two groups of readers evaluated the importance of effective reading strategies. While the good readers considered reading strategies very important to reading comprehension, the bad ones regarded them as only a little important. This revealed that the good readers understood the role of reading strategies and it could be a reason why they used these strategies more frequently than the bad ones. All the above factors might considerably affect the readers' reading comprehension in particular and their reading proficiency in general.

PART 3: CONCLUSION

Data collected from 318 11 grade participants showed that the readers of three groups use the same range of reading including metacognitive, cognitive and social/ affective strategies. The different frequencies of use by the three groups greatly affected their reading proficiency. some suggestions to help poor readers in particular and 11 grade students in general to improve their reading proficiency were given

Further research direction: The awareness and use of reading strategies of 10th form and 12th form should be conducted so that we can see the dissimilarity among those students' reading strategies. The impacts of reading strategies on English learners' reading proficiency should also be investigated.