

FACTORS RELATED TO THE READING COMPETENCE OF ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT COLLEGE OF SCIENCES – THAI NGUYEN UNIVERSITY

Phan Thi Hoa*

College of Sciences – TNU

SUMMARY

Reading is a great way leading people to the world of knowledge. One's reading competence, however, may be affected by many factors such as his reading habit, reading interest or types of reading materials used and so on. This descriptive correlational study attempts to analyse some key factors and establish relationship between the profile of students to their reading competence. The study sought to answer the question of whether there are any significant relationships between the profile of students and their competence in reading English texts. The respondents of the study were 66 English major students of the College of Sciences, Thai Nguyen University in the first semester of the academic year 2010-2011. The findings revealed that there is significant relationship between reading comprehension ability and vocabulary ability, types of reading materials used during lesson, location of high school which graduated from.

Key words: *Factors, reading competence, vocabulary ability, significantly related, English major students, College of Sciences, Thai Nguyen University.*

INTRODUCTION

In Vietnam, since 1975, the teaching and learning of foreign languages have experienced many great changes. Year 1986 was seen as an important turning point for Vietnam, because in that year the Communist Party of Vietnam approved the policy of renovation. Vietnam decided to expand its relations with all foreign countries irrespective of different political systems and to adopt a market-oriented economy. As a result, foreign language subjects were taken into consideration. The role of foreign languages in national development was recognized.

Nguyen, H.C (2007) stated that the current foreign language education policy encourages the teaching and learning of a variety of foreign languages, with an emphasis on English. English is recognized as the most important foreign language. The Prime Minister's Order confirmed the central status of English in foreign language education policy. As a result, English has been considered an ideal choice of majority of the Vietnamese and has become compulsory

subject in many schools from primary to college. Especially, since 2006 with the great event: Vietnam joined World Trade Organization, which remarked the turning point of the country in the globalization process, English has considerably confirmed its prime role in the association trend. Studying English is not only an opportunity but also the duty of almost Vietnamese students in order to adjust themselves to the changes of the world, the area in general and the country in particular.

However, to master this language is not as straightforward as it appears to be. Vietnamese learners certainly face numerous unavoidable difficulties such as lack of qualified teachers, learning and teaching materials, standard teaching and learning facilities and so on. It cannot be denied there is poor quality of teaching and learning English in Vietnam, especially in rural areas although English learners are of great quantity. This seems to be the consequence of the traditional methods of teaching and learning existing for long in the country.

In recent years, communicative approach which considers the development of all four skills: speaking, listening, reading and

* Tel: 0986 249 269; Email: phanho83@gmail.com

writing, has been applied in teaching English. Thus, the process of teaching and learning foreign languages especially English has had new achievements. However, for several reasons, there still exist many challenges and difficulties for both teachers and learners of English. Among the four skills, reading is the input skill through which one gets information to provide materials for others. Sheila (2006) stated that Reading is the key that unlocks the door in the world of enjoyment. Reading is perhaps the most important language skill to develop in all learners, requiring a permanent process. Therefore, reading should become indispensable to learners because if they do not learn reading especially from the beginning, they would surely find difficulty in learning other skills. However, few learners even teachers realise its vital role. Most of English learners have poor reading habits and negative attitudes toward reading. However, even motivated learners soon lose their interests in reading the texts. This is because of the fact that there has not been a thorough analysis on all factors related to reading. Teachers and learners, therefore, are unable to find good solutions for their remaining problems in reading teaching and learning.

In the College of Sciences, the similar situation exists. According to the result of the survey that the researcher had conducted, most of English major students have good attitude toward reading skills. However, their reading results varies on the reading topics as well as the types of reading materials used. In addition, they find information from the reading selections are not of their concern and the reading tasks designed beyond their abilities, which cannot attract them. Gradually, they neglect to improve and develop their reading skills.

In order to solve the problem, long-term solutions are therefore necessary. The researcher would like to analyse some factors affecting students' reading abilities and hopefully offers to the learners of The College of Sciences some recommendations to improve their reading comprehension skills.

SUBJECT AND METHODOLOGY

The research uses the descriptive correlational method to establish relationship between the competence of the students in terms of reading comprehension and vocabulary ability to their profile. The respondents of this study were 66 freshmen English major students at the College of Sciences during the first semester of the academic year 2010-2011.

The data gathered were described statistically using frequency, percentage, and rank; and inferentially analyzed using Pearson r, Chi-square test of correlation at a threshold P-value of 0.05.

FINDINGS

The following are the findings of the study:

1. The profile of the respondents implied that female dominated the foreign language learning. Most of the respondents were at the age of 19 to 20 – the appropriate age of college level according to Vietnam education system, lived in small family with a rather low monthly income of 3 million VND and below. Most of the respondents' parents were farmers and reached at high school. Fifty three (53) students like to read interesting topics only. Fifty eight (58) out of 66 wished to know more about the world through reading. Forty eight (27.43%) were most interested in love story. The teacher and materials as indicated by 25.73% and 25.15% respectively were the factors considered most to have motivated them. Also, 33 or 50 % of the 66 students reported that the games used motivated them most. There were in addition to holding discussion before and after reading as revealed by 28.20% and 27.48 % respectively. The students, somehow, viewed games as an incentive or inspiration in dealing with the text to get rid of stress and feel more relaxed. Another technique that appealed the students were holding discussion before and after reading which accounted for 28.24% and 27.48% respectively. The students expected much from reading. The highest frequency fell on to build up a rich vocabulary (26.79 percent). Ranked second was to know more necessary grammatical structure which reached 21.43%.

2. Level of reading competence

The results implied that the level of competence of the students in reading comprehension and vocabulary skills were quite high with the mean of 6.53 (reading comprehension). The grade ranged from 3 to 8 (reading comprehension) and 3 to 9 (vocabulary skills). The most popular grade in reading comprehension was 7 with the frequency of 29 and in vocabulary skills were 7 and 8 with the frequency of 19 and 18.

3. Relationships

Table 1 shows the significance of relationship between reading comprehension ability and personal factors.

The findings revealed that significant relation existed between reading comprehension ability and location of high school which the students graduated from; the obtained P-values of 0.014, being less than the threshold P-value of 0.05. Thus, the foregoing null hypothesis was rejected.

The study failed to show any significant correlation between reading comprehension ability and students' profiles with respect to age, size of family, monthly family income, gender, educational attainment of mother, topics of interest in reading, educational attainment of father, types of high school they graduated from, Profession of father, profession of mother; the obtained P-values of 0.826, 0.246, 0.472, 0.220, 0.551, 0.974, 0.322, 0.635, 0.400, and 0.725 respectively, being higher than the threshold P-value of 0.05 which indicates that there was very little evidence against the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis was, therefore, accepted.

Table 2 showed the significance of relationship between reading comprehension ability and academic factors.

The findings revealed that significant relation existed between reading comprehension ability and vocabulary ability, types of reading materials used during lesson; the obtained P-values of 0.024 and 0.050, being less than the threshold P-value of 0.05. Thus, the foregoing null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1 Relationship between reading competence and personal factors

Variables tested for relationship	Statistical tool	Statistical value	P-value/ critical value	Verbal interpretation
Reading comprehension ability and				
a. Age	r	-0.028	0.826	Not Significant
b. Size of the family	r	-0.145	0.246	Not Significant
c. monthly family income	r	0.090	0.472	Not Significant
d. gender	chi-square	1.505	0.220	Not Significant
e. Topics of interest in reading	chi-square	0.496	0.974	Not Significant
f. Educational attainment of father	chi-square	4.680	0.322	Not Significant
g. Educational attainment of mother	chi-square	1.193	0.551	Not Significant
h. Types of high school graduated from	chi-square	0.226	0.635	Not Significant
i. Location of high school students graduated from	chi-square	8.561	0.014	Significant
k. Profession of father		1.833	0.400	Not Significant
l. profession of mother	chi-square	0.642	0.725	Not Significant

Legend: If P-value < 0.05, and statistical value > critical value, reject Ho (significant) at level of significance 5%. Otherwise, fail to reject Ho (not significant)

Table 2: Relationship between reading competence and academic factors

Variables tested for relationship	Statistical tool	Statistical value	P- value / critical value	Verbal interpretation
Reading comprehension ability and				
a. Vocabulary ability	r	0.278	0.024	Significant
b. Frequency in reading	r	-0.229	0.065	Not Significant
c. Length of time spent in one reading session	r	0.037	0.765	Not Significant
d. Types of reading materials used at home	chi-square	0.104	0.949	Not Significant
e. Types of reading materials used during lesson	chi-square	9.500	0.050	Significant

The study failed to show any significant correlation between reading comprehension ability and academic factors with respect to frequency in reading, length of time spent in one reading session, types of reading materials used at home; the obtained P-value of 0.065, 0.765, and 0.949 respectively, being higher than the threshold P-value of 0.05 which indicates that there was very little evidence against the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis was, therefore, accepted.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing findings, it is therefore concluded that there was significant relation between reading comprehension ability and vocabulary ability, types of reading materials used during lesson, location of high school graduated from; but none with respect to age, size of family, monthly family income, frequency in reading, time spent in one reading session, gender, types of reading materials used at home, educational attainment of mother, topics of interest in reading, educational attainment of father, types of high school graduated from.

RECOMMENDATION

In the light of the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations are advanced:

Firstly, the teacher can motivate learners by varying activities, tasks and materials to increase their interest level. Warm-up activities at the beginning of the lesson are very necessary to motivate them.

Next, enriching activities is very essential to involve students in the learning activities. The teacher should create a relaxed and supportive to encourage students. Also, in order to enhance the English classroom atmosphere and encourage learning, some kind of written language input appealing the eyes and the mind such as: advertisements, interesting articles, warnings, bulletin boards, pictures, puppets drawings and photos should be posted on the walls of the classroom. In that way, the students are surrounded by items that resemble the culture of the target language and give them a feeling of the language environment or learning which strongly stimulate their reading.

Besides, the teacher should introduce the students interesting texts of different types and genres. These can be taken from the newspaper or download from internet. It is important that the materials should be of their favourite topics and organised and relevant to students' world knowledge and experience.

Moreover, it is important that teachers should exploit the advantages of games and visual aids such as music, pictures, maps, or handouts to motivate the students at any stage of the lesson to regain enthusiasm.

Further more, teachers should select appropriate reading materials for students because there is a big gap among students graduating from schools in different areas. A thorough consideration should be taken to students graduating from schools in rural areas.

REFERENCES

- [1] Carrell, P.L (1993). *Can Reading be Successfully Taught?*
- [2] Day, R.R. (1993). *New way in teaching reading*. TEOL.
- [3] Grabe, W. (1991). *Current development In Second Language Reading Research*. TEOL Quarterly vol.25.
- [4] Grellet, F (1991), *A Practical Guide to Reading Comprehension Exercises*. Cambridge University Press.
- [5] Nhung, N.T.M. (2003). *Motivation and factors affecting Motivation in learning english writing of the freshmen at the Department of english and Arglo- American Culture, VNU- CFL*
- [6] Nguyen Huy Can (2007). *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in Vietnam: The Current Situation and some Solutions*. English Foreign Language Journal.
- [7] Nuttal, C (1996). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. Oxford: Heinemann.
- [8] Phan Le Ha (2004). *University Classrooms in Vietnam: Contesting the stereotypes*. English Language Teaching Journal.
- [9] Sheila B. Porto (2006). *Determinants of Reading Difficulties among First year High School Students of Santa Maria, Languna*.
- [10] Williams, E. (1984). *Reading in a Language Classroom*. New York: Macmillan

TÓM TẮT

CÁC NHÂN TỐ ẢNH HƯỞNG ĐẾN KHẢ NĂNG ĐỌC CỦA SINH VIÊN CHUYÊN NGÀNH TIẾNG ANH TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC KHOA HỌC, ĐẠI HỌC THÁI NGUYÊN

Phan Thị Hòa*

Trường Đại học Khoa học – ĐH Thái Nguyên

Đọc là nhu cầu tất yếu để có tri thức. Tuy nhiên khả năng đọc của mỗi người lại bị ảnh hưởng bởi nhiều nhân tố như thói quen, sở thích, hay tài liệu đọc mà họ sử dụng,... Do đó, nghiên cứu này tập trung vào việc phân tích các nhân tố ảnh hưởng đến khả năng đọc và tìm ra mối quan hệ giữa các nhân tố đó với khả năng đọc tài liệu tiếng Anh của sinh viên và từ đó đề xuất các giải pháp để dạy và học kỹ năng đọc đạt hiệu quả cao. Đối tượng của nghiên cứu là 66 sinh viên ngành tiếng Anh trường Đại học Khoa học, Đại học Thái Nguyên của học kỳ I năm học 2010-2011. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy khả năng đọc có mối quan hệ chặt chẽ với vốn từ vựng của sinh viên, loại tài liệu đọc được sử dụng trên lớp và vùng hay khu vực trường phổ thông mà sinh viên đã tốt nghiệp trực thuộc.

Từ khóa: Nhân tố, khả năng đọc, vốn từ vựng, mối quan hệ chặt chẽ, sinh viên ngành tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Khoa học- Đại học Thái Nguyên

Ngày nhận: 24/04/2012; Ngày phân biện: 25/05/2012; Ngày duyệt đăng: 12/06/2012

* Tel: 0986 249 269; Email: phanho83@gmail.com