

READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: *Reading comprehension plays an important role in learning a foreign language but it is also a very difficult subject. The current study investigates what difficulties in reading comprehension that the first-year English majored students encounter and what the most common difficulties they face. To handle the issues, 126 first-year English majors at a public university in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam were selected to become the participants in this study. The study results revealed that lacking of background knowledge, inadequate vocabulary, time pressure and inappropriate use of strategies are the four most popular factors causing reading comprehension difficulties. By contrast, the findings reveal that the participants could deal with grammatical structures of the reading texts and have no problem in understanding them. The findings of the study are a good source of information helping students to recognize their own reading comprehension difficulties.*

KEYWORDS: reading comprehension, difficulties, English-majored students.

INTRODUCTION

English has been widely considered the common means of communication across countries around the world. Many people learn it to satisfy the growing needs in this information era. To integrate into the foreign markets, a good proficiency in English can be the key to success of many Vietnamese. For that reason, the education program administered by the Minister of Education and Training has been innovative overtime and English is seen as an important foreign language which needs improving. It is a compulsory subject at public schools from primary level to upper secondary level. At present, learning of English has also become a trend among Vietnamese. More and more international schools as well as educational institutions have been established in Vietnam to create a variety of new opportunities for Vietnamese citizens to learn English to satisfy their professional development. Hence, the number of people who learn English is also increasing.

In order to achieve a good result in learning English, students first need to be proficient at all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Each skill has specific demands and difficulties. However, according to many English learners reading is seen as one of the most important and difficult skills. Ahmadi (2013) stated that reading comprehension plays an important role in the process of learning a foreign or second language and it must be accentuated in different parts of the process. In addition, reading playing a key role in the instruction of all academic skills has a predictive feature concerning academic performances of students. Reading is a necessary skill not only in learning language but also in daily life. Since childhood, children have been taught a list of alphabets in order to familiarize them with acquiring knowledge through reading because most of the knowledge is presented in texts. Reading is useful in many aspects of human's lives. For instance, people can read to relax, communicate, or obtain information. As a result, reading is considered as an important means for people to communicate with one another in society and the world. Because of its importance, the author attempted to investigate a group of first-year English majors' perspectives on their doing reading comprehension with the two research questions:

- (1) What are reading comprehension difficulties that freshmen majoring in English face?
- (2) Which difficulties do the English-majored freshmen encounter most?

LITERATURE REVIEW

What is reading?

Reading is the most natural activity in the world (Smith, 2004). People almost have to learn reading as a compulsory thing. Reading is also a daily activity. People often read books, news, messages and so on. However, it is very difficult to define "reading". For this reason, many researchers have made efforts to study about this topic. Although there is not a specific and exact concept for "reading", researchers have partly helped people figure "what reading is".

William (1984) stated that reading is a complex process in which people have to look and comprehend the meaning of the text. According to Rohani (1992) reading is an activity which is carried out silently and singly. Besides, reading is also known as the process of obtaining information from the text. Nutall (1996) stated that reading is a process of constructing meaning from the text and it is a process of transferring meaning from mind to mind. According to Akyol (2017), reading requires the ability to recognize combinations of letters and syllables to form words, the words organization in sentences as well as sentences in text. And Rasinski, Padak & Fawcett (2010) stated reading comprehension is a complex process. There are many physiological and psychological

factors that affect the reading process. The difficulties of reading are very various, including some outstanding things such as the ability to identify words, vocabulary, and ability to understand text.

What is reading comprehension?

Reading comprehension is defined as the ability to recognize the meaning of the reading text through consideration of context and knowledge. Grammar, knowledge of morphology, syntax, ability to recognize context, metacognition, ability to identify and predictability are required factors in readers (Hudson, 2007). In addition, reading comprehension requires the delicate interaction of several component processes that integrate information from the page that the student is reading with his or her background knowledge and experience, subject to a multitude of contextual constraints (Kintsch & Kintsch, 2005).

As Snow (2002) put it reading comprehension is a process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language. This process includes three main factors which are the reader who is doing the comprehending, the text that is to be comprehended and the activity in which comprehension is a part. There is a connection among the reader, the text and the activity in the reading process including pre-reading, reading, and post-reading. For example, in the pre-reading period, the reader begins with several certain characteristics involving motivational, cognitive, language and non-linguistic capabilities, along with a particular level of fluency. Then, some of these reader characteristics may change in the reading period. Finally, in the post -reading period, the reading process is finished and the final result of the whole process can make the reader's characteristics different again in comparison with the beginning.

The significance of reading comprehension

Reading and reading comprehension are two different concepts. While reading is defined as the ability to use eyes to observe words and signal the brain to identify and decode words into sounds, reading comprehension is a more complex process required. The reader must understand the meaning of the text, the author's point of view, be aware of the message from a reading text (Afflerbach, Pearson, & David, 2008). For example, children can read a lot of books but they may not get the meaning of those books because they do not have enough comprehension ability. The difference between reading and reading comprehension is how much people can understand after reading something. In summary, reading comprehension is a complex process including seeing, reading (by heart or vocalizing) and understanding (Rawson & Kintsch, 2005).

From this, we can see the significance of reading comprehension. It plays an important role in studying, working and personal's life. In studying, reading comprehension is a

crucial skill because most of the knowledge is presented by text. If someone wants to get to know something, they have to be able to read. In other words, it does not matter which subject they learn, they always need to read first. Especially, reading for understanding is a significant part of learning as well as education and becomes increasingly essential as learners progress from “learn to read” to “read to learn” (Jacobs, 2008). People read to widen their knowledge, to understand stories to relax, to collect data, to do research and so on. As a result, reading comprehension is really crucial. It is also one of the first subjects that students learn at school. It is a fundamental skill to develop other skills. Obviously, reading comprehension helps people approach knowledge and discover the world. In working, reading comprehension helps people know what to do. In fact, people cannot get information from a contract, an email, a message or a document without reading. In personal life, we also need reading comprehension ability to read messages from our relatives, read user manuals or read the subtitles of a film. As a result, reading comprehension is very necessary in many aspects of our lives.

Vocabulary in reading

When reading, it is essential to mention vocabulary. Plenty of previous authors agree that vocabulary plays an important role in reading comprehension. They pointed out the relationship between vocabulary and reading.

Hsueh-Chao & Nation (2000) stated that knowledge of vocabulary and reading comprehension has a close relationship. In particular, this is a two-way correlation relationship. Knowledge of vocabulary can affect reading comprehension and reading comprehension can change vocabulary ability as well.

More specifically, there is a linear relationship between vocabulary size and reading comprehension (Laufer, 1992; Schmitt, Jiang & Grabe, 2011). Moreover, “the crucial role of vocabulary knowledge in reading comprehension has been well recognized in first language (L1) situations and this has appeared to be true of second language (L2)”, (Zhang, 2008). Sharing the same idea, Pringprom (2012, p. 1104) stated “Learners will have difficulty comprehending the text if their vocabulary size is far from the required threshold”.

In addition, Karakoç & Köse (2017) investigated the relation between vocabulary and reading comprehension with 175 students studying intensive language program, in Turkey. The result of the study revealed that students’ receptive vocabulary knowledge was larger than their productive vocabulary knowledge. Especially, the lexical level of the students’ essays and the students’ productive vocabulary knowledge were significantly related.

Prior knowledge in reading

Next, prior knowledge or schemata is also considered as one of the crucial factors effecting studying reading. The importance of prior knowledge in the reading process has been demonstrated through many studies of different authors. Prior knowledge plays an important role in learning reading comprehension. For example, Ozuru, Dempsey & McNamara (2009) claimed that prior knowledge is even more important than reading skills. However, Baldwin et al. (1985) argued that reading comprehension is influenced by prior knowledge but not much. Carrell and Wise (1998) also found that the effect of prior knowledge on reading comprehension is insignificant.

Chen (2008) in his thesis found that there is statistically high significance of prior knowledge on reading comprehension. The mean scores of students who were given the chance of previewing the target passage and who are culturally familiar with the reading passage at times 1 and 2 were 9.70 and 9.35, respectively. On the other hand, those students who were not provided a preview or given a culturally familiar reading passage were 6.75 and 5.85 at times 1 and 2 respectively.

Additionally, the study of Priebe, Keenan, & Miller (2012) examined oral reading errors in good and poor readers when reading a passage where they either had prior knowledge of the passage topic or did not. The research found that prior knowledge of the passage topic significantly increase fluency and reduce reading errors, especially errors based on graphic information, in poor readers.

Grammatical structures in reading

Grammar knowledge plays a very important role in text perception, because it is an essential factor in the process of creating documents (Givón & Gernsbacher, 1995). Lack of grammatical knowledge also contributes to reading comprehension failures (Bowey, 1986). In L2 reading research, Alderson (2000) pointed out the importance of knowledge of grammar and the ability to handle them in some aspects of foreign language reading, he also stated that the ability to analyze sentences into specific grammatical structures is a significant factor in reading text. Besides, according to Akbari (2014), as soon as the learner learns how to manipulate the syntax structure while reading a text, their understanding is greatly promoted and helps increase their reading speed.

In addition, Carlisle (2000) investigated into the impact of the awareness of the structure and meaning of morphologically complex words on reading. The results showed that structural awareness and the ability to identify complex morphological words are significantly related to each other.

Related research on reading skills

Gersten et al. (2001) conducted a review named “Teaching reading comprehension strategies to students with learning disabilities: A review of research”. First, they describe the factors that lead to reading comprehension difficulties. Then, they describe their procedures for reviewing the literature. Finally, they review the studies involving instructional methods for improving reading comprehension ability. This study is followed by the research on techniques for improving the comprehension of expository text. According to their review, many factors affecting reading comprehension are represented such as strategic processing and metacognition, knowledge of common text structures, vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, reading fluency, active reading and task persistence.

Ouellette (2006) had a paper titled “What's meaning got to do with it: The role of vocabulary in word reading and reading comprehension”. This study aims to better explain the role of vocabulary in various reading skills the study distinguished between vocabulary breadth knowledge and vocabulary depth knowledge. Concurrent analyses revealed that each distinct reading skill was related to the vocabulary measures in a unique manner. Receptive vocabulary breadth was the only oral vocabulary variable that predicted decoding performance after controlling for age and nonverbal intelligence. In contrast, expressive vocabulary breadth affected visual word recognition, whereas depth of vocabulary knowledge affected reading comprehension.

Chou (2011) conducted research named “The Effects of Vocabulary Knowledge and Background Knowledge on Reading Comprehension of Taiwanese EFL Students”. The main objectives of the study focus on the effects of vocabulary knowledge and background knowledge in an EFL reading comprehension test. In the study, 159 students from a college in Southern Taiwan were chosen to be the participants. According to the study, vocabulary was significant in helping students understand the reading passages while background knowledge may not help improve reading comprehension in longer, more difficult passages.

A study titled “Vocabulary and Grammar Knowledge in Second Language Reading Comprehension: A Structural Equation Modeling Study” was conducted by Zhang (2012). Using structural equation modeling analysis, this study examined the contribution of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge in second language reading comprehension. The study included 190 participants. The study revealed that vocabulary knowledge related significantly to reading comprehension; grammatical knowledge showed a weak contribution to reading comprehension after controlling for the effect of vocabulary knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of the current study is to explore the difficulties in reading comprehension among first-year English majored students. A mixed-method is favored for the research which could not be done by a single method of data collection (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). The study was carried out in two stages. In the first step, a five-point Likert questionnaire was adapted as a tool to collect quantitative data, aiming at exploring the reading comprehension difficulties facing by English-majored freshmen. Then, a semi-structured interview was conducted as a qualitative method, with the aim of gaining insights into the freshmen's reading comprehension difficulties. The transcription of the interview was recorded with the consent of the interviewees for later analysis. To ensure the accuracy of the data, both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were conducted in Vietnamese language. The questionnaire was developed based on the literature review from earlier studies and most of the items in the questionnaire were adapted from the study of Thao and Tham (2018) who conducted research on reading comprehension difficulties faced by English major students. The questionnaire included twenty-three items in total which aimed to investigate the difficulties that the English-majored freshmen faced in reading comprehension. The questionnaire included two main sections. The first one insisted on some demographic information of the participants such as gender, years of studying English in high schools and their self-evaluation of English reading ability. The second section consists of seven clusters, belonging to difficulties related to vocabulary (items 1, 2, 3, 4), text structures (items 5 and 6), grammatical structures (items 7, 8, 9, 10), background knowledge (items 11 and 12), motivation (items 13, 14, 15 and 16), time relations (items 17, 18 and 19) and lacking of strategies (items 20, 21, 22 and 23). Due to the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic, both the questionnaire and interview were conducted via internet platform. The questionnaire was delivered to 130 students via Google form but only 126 students responded. All the quantitative data were subjected to SPSS version 22 for later analysis. The questions included in the interview were mostly based on the contents of the questionnaire. After receiving the responses to the questionnaire, six English majored freshmen were volunteered to join the interview via Google meet like informal talks. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded into themes regarding to the seven clusters listed in the questionnaire.

FINDINGS

Findings from the questionnaire

This section presents the results from the questionnaire. It shows the difficulties that freshmen majoring in English faced in reading comprehension.

Reliability of the questionnaire

First, the section presents the results of the scale tests run to check the reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Reliability of all items in the questionnaire

Clusters	Number of respondents	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Vocabulary	126	4	.830
Text structures	126	2	.984
Grammatical structures	126	4	.879
Background knowledge	126	2	.929
Motivation	126	4	.812
Time relations	126	3	.767
Lacking of strategies	126	4	.847

Table 1 shows the results of the Cronbach Alpha test of all seven clusters of the questionnaire. All the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ranged from .767 to .984 which were higher than the acceptable value ($\alpha = .60$), so it can be said that the questionnaire was reliable enough to be used to collect the data in the present study.

Table 2. Key to understanding of mean scores (Oxford, 1990)

Range	Level
1.0 to 2.4	Low
2.5 to 3.5	Medium
3.6 to 4.4	High
4.5 to 5.0	Very high

As mentioned above, twenty- three items were employed to find out the difficulties that the English majored freshmen faced in reading comprehension. Seven Descriptive Statistics Tests were conducted to measure the mean scores of seven clusters of reading comprehension difficulties. Table 3 displays the results of the tests.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the seven clusters of reading comprehension difficulties

Clusters	Mean	S.D
Vocabulary	3.93	0.20
Text structures	3.31	0.01
Grammatical structures	2.43	0.17
Background knowledge	4.33	0.01
Motivation	3.34	0.72
Time relations	3.93	0.20
Lacking of strategies	3.78	0.60

From Table 3, it can be seen that four categories, namely *vocabulary* (M=3.93, S.D=0.01), *background knowledge* (M=4.33, S.D=0.01), *time relations* (M=3.93, S.D=0.20) and *lacking of strategies* (M=3.78, S.D=0.60) were highest factors which cause difficulties for the freshmen in reading comprehension. These mean scores belong to the high level when compared to the adopted scale of Oxford (1990). It could be concluded that the four factors that hinder students' reading comprehension were related to their lack of vocabulary, background knowledge, time and strategies. It is further observed from Table 3 that *text structures* (M= 3.31, S.D=0.01) and *motivation* (M=3.34, S.D=0.72) also hinder students' reading comprehension at the medium level. The results also indicate that the freshmen deal with the grammatical structure difficulties (M=2.43, S.D=0.17) at low level.

Another Descriptive Statistic Test was computed on twenty-three items to examine which mean scores of frequencies gained the highest and lowest. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of twenty-three items of the questionnaire

No	Items	Mean	S.D
I	Vocabulary		
1	Most of the texts having vocabulary related to business which are strange to me.	3.83	0.53
2	I cannot guess the meanings of new words.	4.23	0.47
3	I do not have enough vocabularies to understand the whole texts.	3.89	0.54
4	I do not have enough vocabularies to translate the reading texts.	3.78	0.60
II	Text structures		
5	I cannot guess the main ideas of the paragraphs in the texts because the texts have complex organization.	3.30	0.49
6	I cannot define the structure of the reading texts.	3.32	0.50
III	Grammatical structures		
7	The texts have many structures which make me confused.	2.53	0.57
8	The texts have some tenses which I do not know.	2.29	0.49
9	The texts have many linking words/ transitional words which I have never learnt before.	2.28	0.48
10	I feel confused in determining the pronouns in sentences.	2.61	0.56
IV	Background knowledge		
11	The topics of the texts are very strange to me.	4.34	0.49
12	I cannot understand much about the content of the reading texts because I do not have enough background knowledge of the topics.	4.33	0.49
V	Motivation		
13	I think the reading course is not very useful to me.	2.35	0.52
14	I read the texts just to gain the evaluation from teacher and pass the course.	3.26	0.49
15	I do not like reading the texts because they do not interest me.	3.92	0.51
16	I do not want to read the texts whenever I cannot understand the texts properly.	3.81	0.59
VI	Time relations		
17	The time to read a text is too short.	3.83	0.53
18	My reading speed is slower than my friends.	4.23	0.47
19	I spend much time looking up the words in the dictionary when reading the texts.	3.89	0.54
VII	Lacking of strategies		
20	I do not know how to understand the main ideas of each paragraph in the texts.	3.31	0.01
21	I do not know how to guess the meaning of new words from the context.	3.30	0.49
22	I do not know how to skim and how to scan the ideas.	3.32	0.50
23	I do not know what to read and which unrelated details should be ignored.	3.43	0.17

Table 4 reveals that the two items having the highest mean scores of frequency were related to background knowledge. They highly agreed *that the topics of the texts are very strange to them* (M=4.33, S.D=0.49) and admitted that *they cannot understand much about the content of the reading texts because they do not have enough background knowledge of the topics* (M=4.33, S.D=0.49). It could be explained that the participants were freshmen so the reading topics were completely strange to them and their knowledge of the texts is limited. Importantly, it is observed that item 2, inability of guessing the meanings of new words (M=4.23, S.D=0.47) and item 18, slow reading

speed (M=23, S.D =0.47) gained high level of agreement. It can be inferred that these freshmen found that the vocabularies in the reading texts are difficult to guess the meaning from the context and they also believed that their reading speed is slow. Two items related to grammatical structures receiving low level are in connection with *the texts having many strange linking words/ transitional words* (M=2.28, S.D=0.48) and *the texts having some strange tenses* (M=2.29, S.D=0.49). This could be explained that these students have very few problems in understanding the grammatical structures used in the reading texts.

To identify whether there is difference between the male and female respondents' difficulties in English reading comprehension, an independent sample-t-test was conducted. The results are displayed in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Comparison between males and females in difficulties of reading comprehension

No	Items	Male (n = 38)		Female (n = 88)		t	sig
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
	Vocabulary						
1	Most of the texts having vocabulary related to business which are strange to me.	3.58	.500	3.94	.511	3.69	0.00
2	I cannot guess the meanings of new words.	4.00	.403	4.33	.473	3.75	0.00
3	I do not have enough vocabularies to understand the whole texts.	3.47	.506	4.07	.450	6.56	0.00
4	I do not have enough vocabularies to translate the reading texts.	3.47	.506	3.91	.600	3.91	0.00
	Text structures						
5	I cannot guess the main ideas of the paragraphs in the texts because the texts have complex organization.	3.24	.542	3.33	.473	0.97	0.34
6	I cannot define the structure of the reading texts.	3.29	.565	3.33	.473	0.41	0.68
	Grammatical structures						
7	The texts have many structures which make me confused.	2.55	.500	2.52	.606	0.50	0.62
8	The texts have some tenses which I do not know.	2.29	.565	2.30	.459	0.06	0.95
9	The texts have many linking words/ transitional words which I have never learnt before.	2.24	.542	2.30	.459	0.62	0.53
10	I feel confused in determining the pronouns in sentences.	2.63	.489	2.60	.598	0.37	0.71
	Background knowledge						
11	The topics of the texts are very strange to me.	4.42	.552	4.31	.464	1.20	0.23
12	I cannot understand much about the content of the reading texts because I do not have enough background knowledge of the topics.	4.37	.541	4.31	.464	0.65	0.52
	Motivation						

13	I think the reading course is not very useful to me.	2.13	.529	2.44	.500	3.16	0.00
14	I read the texts just to gain the evaluation from teacher and pass the course.	3.00	.403	3.38	.487	4.17	0.00
15	I do not like reading the texts because they do not interest me.	3.58	.500	4.07	.450	5.42	0.00
16	I do not want to read the texts whenever I cannot understand the texts properly.	3.58	.500	3.91	.600	2.97	0.00
	Time relations						
17	The time to read a text is too short.	3.88	.471	3.95	.450	1.18	0.25
18	My reading speed is slower than my friends.	3.37	.589	3.33	.473	0.39	0.70
19	I spend much time looking up the words in the dictionary when reading the texts.	3.34	.582	3.32	.468	0.24	0.81
	Lacking of strategies						
20	I do not know how to understand the main ideas of each paragraph in the texts.	3.86	.446	3.94	.450	1.80	0.19
21	I do not know how to guess the meaning of new words from the context.	3.88	.471	3.95	.450	1.18	0.25
22	I do not know how to skim and how to scan the ideas.	3.73	.506	3.80	.592	0.68	0.51
23	I do not know what to read and which unrelated details should be ignored.	3.37	.589	3.32	.468	0.51	0.61

The results from Table 5 reveal that there is significant difference in the mean scores between female students and male students in terms of vocabulary and motivation with sig. values are smaller than 0.05. The data also show that there is no significant difference between the males and females towards the difficulties in English reading comprehension in terms of text structures, grammatical structures, background knowledge, time relations and lacking of strategies with sig values are higher than 0.05.

DISCUSSION

The present study has explored that the first-year English majored students faced four categories of difficulties in reading comprehension at a high level.

Firstly, lacking of background knowledge is found the significant factor which hinders the freshmen from understanding the reading texts. The limitation of students' prior knowledge makes them unable to read well (Carrell & Wise, 1998). Besides, the research findings of Priebe et al. (2011) also verified the important role of prior knowledge in reading comprehension. For this reason, students should spend time reading newspapers and books to widen their knowledge in many different fields. Next, the results also indicate that the freshmen considered is hard to deal with. It may be not familiar with the time allotted for the reading exercises.

Secondly, vocabulary is the most common factor hindering the first-year English majors in comprehending the reading texts. This finding is in line with Karakoç & Köse (2017), Ouellette (2006) and Chou (2011). If students do not have good vocabulary, they cannot read well. Hsueh-Chao & Nation (2000) stated that knowledge of vocabulary and reading comprehension has a close relationship. To illustrate, in the reading comprehension process, if students want to understand the ideas of a text, they firstly have to understand the meaning of vocabulary. For this reason, vocabulary plays a key role in reading comprehension. However, it is not easy to learn vocabulary, especially for English foreign learners because English vocabulary is very rich and various. As a consequence, it takes students a long time to build a large load of vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, if students do not review it regularly, they may forget the learned words. Apart from the characteristics mentioned above, most participants in this study have limitation on vocabulary due to some reasons. First, when reading, they often ignore difficult words or use a dictionary instead of trying to guess the meaning of new words, brainstorming or getting the general idea of the text. Second, they do not have a habit of learning vocabulary or reviewing learned words. Finally, they spend little time learning vocabulary.

Thirdly, it was explored that time pressure was another noticeable factor affecting first-year English-majored students' reading comprehension. This finding is supported by the study of Thao and Tham (2018) who concluded that the English-major students have problems with timing when reading the texts. It can be explained that the participants have to struggle with the unknown words and try to translate the texts so they may find insufficient time to read the texts.

Fourthly, it was further revealed that lacking strategies can bring problems to students when doing reading comprehension texts. It can be explained that they are the freshmen who just started the first year of the four-year learning program so they may not use the reading strategies effectively or they have not grasped well the strategies provided in their reading course. This finding is inconsistent with the findings of Thao and Tham (2018) who found that the English-majored students in their study could employ the reading strategies rather well to handle the difficulties of the reading texts.

Additionally, the results also reveal that low motivation and kinds of text structures were the two other categories of problems that hinder the students from comprehending the texts though they are considered at medium level. They admitted that they do not want to read the texts whenever they cannot understand the texts properly. Furthermore, they reported that they have problems when they cannot define the structure of the reading texts or when they can not guess the main ideas of the body paragraphs. It may be inferred that the respondents still get confused in defining the structures of the texts and

when they have troubles with understanding the text they may be demotivated. The findings are supported by the study of Satriani (2018) who found that the students encountered difficulty in reading comprehension due to their low motivation.

Finally, the study also reveals that the first-year English -majored students have no problems in understanding the grammatical structures in the reading texts. It is obvious that the students have good knowledge of grammar to comprehend the contents of the texts. This finding is again in line with the results of the Thao and Tham (2018). It may be predicted that Vietnamese students have learned much grammar in their high education program.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Reading comprehension plays an important role in learning English but it is also one of the most difficult skills for students especially first-year English majors. For this reason, the present study is conducted to investigate what difficulties in reading comprehension they encounter. When reading, majority of first-year English majors meet difficulties in vocabulary, the familiarity of the topic, time pressure and lacking of strategies. Among of these, prior knowledge is the most underlining factor causing reading comprehension much difficulty and it also has a greatest effect on students' reading performance. Next, a great number of students do not have adequate vocabularies to comprehend the texts. They find insufficient time to complete the tasks required in an assignment. Finally, the unsuccessful use of strategies hinders the students from understanding the texts. However, it is found that the students seem to have no difficulty with the grammar structures used in the texts.

Recommendations

For further studies, it should expand the scope of research and increase the number of participants to increase the value and reliability of research results. Besides, it is necessary to have more research on this topic for not only first-year English majors but all English majors in order to have suitable strategies for doing reading comprehension. Finally, further researchers should combine various methods in the data collecting process such as interview, survey, qualitative instruments to obtain more reliable data sources for the analyzing process.

For students, they should self-evaluate their reading ability to find suitable strategies to apply in their reading classes. In fact, using effective strategies have great effects on improving reading comprehension ability. Besides, it is very important for students to

practice reading regularly. Especially, they need to build a specific plan to learn every day.

For language teachers, they should have students think about the significance of reading comprehension. They should choose texts related to students' favorite topics to boost students' motivation to read. In addition, they also need to determine their student's reading proficiency and therefore choosing appropriate materials to teach. Finally, creating changes for students to practice reading many different discourse patterns is also necessary because knowing the discourse pattern lets the reader know what to expect, and therefore increases comprehensibility.

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