SOME METHODS FOR TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN GENERAL ENGLISH MODULES FOR FIRST-YEAR NON-LANGUAGE MAJOR STUDENTS AT HAI PHONG UNIVERSITY

Nguyễn Phương Lan
Đại học Hải phòng

Abstract: *In teaching language skills, reading is one of the basic skills that is very emphasized. Reading is an effective way for students to master and consolidate language knowledge, richen vocabulary as well as deepen their understanding of the style and the use of the language they are learning. Reading plays a very important role in developing language skills in general and reading comprehensipon in particular. First-year students in general and non-language students in particular need to become familiar with effective reading comprehension skills to serve their studies, research and career applications. In fact, first-year non-language major students at Hai Phong University have very little knowledge and skills in reading and understanding English texts. Most of them have just left high school, and their English reading and comprehension skills are practiced through simple reading passages in textbooks. Furthermore, the time to practice English reading comprehension skills of high school students is very little. It normally takes up one-eighth of the total time for a unit. Hopefully, with some methods of teaching reading comprehension skills mentioned in this article, it will help first-year non-language major students master reading comprehension skills, on that basis they can improve their own learning efficiency.*

Key words: *Methods of teaching, reading comprehension skills, scanning skill, skimming skill, the first year non-language students.*

Nhận bài ngày 12.12.2024; gửi phản biện, chỉnh sửa, duyệt đăng ngày 20.02.2025
Liên hệ tác giả: Nguyễn Phương Lan; email: lannp@dhhp.edu.vn

1. INTRODUCTION

As we know English is very important in updating international knowledge. It is one of the ways for us to have the culture, knowledge and scientific progress in the world.

Reality shows that in terms of reading skills and doing exercises after reading, students often make some mistakes. Students' vocabulary is too small, they do not know how to read a text, they cannot remember information in the text, they do not understand basic grammatical structures, and most students do not know how to ask questions about the passage and answer them. To overcome this situation, teachers must first make students love and care about learning reading more effectively. The teachers' lectures should be suitable for all students in class, teachers should have appropriate methods, and attract students into learning.

In fact, research on English teaching for first-year students at Hai Phong University shows that the majority still can not meet the requirements of reading comprehension skills. This fact is first and foremost related to the lecturers' teaching method. Therefore, as a university English lecturer, the writer soon realized the need to be proactive and pay more attention to helping students read better through new, effective teaching methods

As we know, studies have shown that good readers are those who know how to use reading comprehension methods effectively. There are many famous authors who have classified and analyzed reading comprehension teaching methods in the world, including Kalin [1]. The author has classified reading comprehension skills into 5 very clear types. And we also have very specific instructions on reading comprehension teaching methods of the authors in the book "Methods and strategies in teaching" [2]. In Viet Nam, the study on using activities to teach English reading comprehension skills for university students has author Chu Thi Bich Lien [3], the author has methods to combine websites to teach reading very usefully. In the current stage of technological development, the importance of developing reading skills and using online teaching methods has been emphasized. Understanding reading skills and incorporating them into teaching activities is very important to improve the comprehension of readers in general and university students in particular.

2. CONTENT

2.1. Characteristics of reading comprehension skills of first-year non- language major students

Knowing that reading is a receptive, psycholinguistic process. It starts with linguistic representation encoded by a writer, and ends with reader constructed meaning. Reading is a process where the writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought.

Reading comprehension: There are two-models, “the text model and the situation model”. The text model calls for understanding what the text itself is trying to communicate and the situation model calls for the reader to integrate background knowledge with text information to interpret the text.

Reading comprehension skills of first-year non- language major students: For the first-year non-language major students, reading comprehension skills are practiced in both The text model and the situation model, but the level is not required to be high. However, through practical teaching, it has been shown that the English reading comprehension ability of the first-year students is still limited, not actively grasping the primary information of the text, not understanding all the implications of the reading, leading to the birth of students. Students learn reading comprehension skills that are not effective.

2.2. Reading comprehension in the basic English curriculum of Hai Phong University

Currently, Hai Phong University's general English program has 2 modules, carried out in the first 2 semesters of the university program. The program has two versions applicable to two types of subjects, the general English program and the specialized English program.

In the 2024-2025 school year, Hai Phong University has divided classes according to the level of first-year students, with levels ranked by A, B, C and D. 20 A level classes with 1088 students; 21 B level classes with 1204 students; 12 level C classes with 670 students; 7 level D classes with 217 students. The reality shows that the number of students studying levels A and B is much higher than levels C and D. From this reality, we see that the English knowledge of first-year students at Hai Phong University is not good. Among language skills, reading comprehension is one of the basic and important skills. Students mainly practise this skill in class, or with teachers’ instruction online. For reading comprehension skills, testing and assessment are carried out both at the midterm tests and at the end of the term. It shows that reading comprehension skills are a key teaching focus of Hai Phong University. With that reality, I would like to offer some methods for teaching reading comprehension skills in the general English module for first-year students at Hai Phong University.

2.3. Some theoretical problems about reading comprehension

Reading comprehension skill as a concept and a theoretical framework has a connotation with specific skills. In this regard, Karlin [1] has classified 5 groups of reading skills as follows:

Word recognition skills group: includes the use of context, structural analysis and dictionary use.

Word meaning skills group: includes using context, analyzing structure, identifying polysemous words and quantity words.

Comprehensive skills group: created by recognizing the literal meaning of words, conjectural meanings (figurative meanings), evaluating and confirming documents.

Study skills group: is the identification of information, selection of information, use of graphic support, ability to predict and execute flexibly.

Appreciation skills group: is the identification of language and types of literature.

As for reading skill, comprehension techniques, there are two main techniques: scanning and skimming.

Skimming and scanning are techniques in reading that use rapid eye movements and keywords to move quickly through text for the different purposes. Skimming is reading quickly to get a general overview of the material. Scanning is reading quickly to find specific events. While skimming tells you what general information is contained in a section, scanning helps you locate a specific event.

When doing Skimming, students need to combine the following techniques:

+ Word grouping technique: Words in a sentence should be grouped into clusters according to their function and sentence components such as subject, verb phrase, object. This not only helps improve reading comprehension skills but also helps learners skim faster.

+ Sentence linking technique in a paragraph: each paragraph usually contains a topic sentence: stating the main content of the paragraph; sub-topic sentence: giving a smaller idea than the main content; supporting sentence: adding meaning to the topic sentence or sub-topic sentence.

When doing Scanning, students need to combine the eye movement technique. This is a very necessary technique for Scanning because it helps readers focus only on finding words without trying to understand the content of the reading, thereby saving reading time.

The steps to combine both Skimming and Scanning techniques are as follows:

Step 1: Skim the text to grasp the main information of the whole text and each paragraph

Step 2: Read the questions, identify keywords to narrow down the information

Step 3: Scan the keywords to find in the identified information area

Step 4: Read in detail, analyze and choose the correct answer

An example of how to do the above steps is the following passage, taken from Cambridge Practice Test 8, reading Passage 1.

Striking Back at Lightning With Lasers

Seldom is the weather more dramatic than when thunderstorms strike. Their electrical fury inflicts death or serious injury on around 500 people each year in the United States alone. As the clouds roll in, a leisurely round of golf can become a terrifying dice with death – out in the open, a lone golfer may be a lightning bolt's most inviting target. And there is damage to property too. Lightning damage costs American power companies more than $100 million a year.

But researchers in the United States and Japan are planning to hit back. Already in laboratory trials they have tested strategies for neutralising the power of thunderstorms, and this winter they will brave real storms, equipped with an armoury of lasers that they will be pointing towards the heavens to discharge thunderclouds before lightning can strike.

According to the text, every year lightning

A does considerable damage to buildings during thunderstorms.

B kills or injures mainly golfers in the United States.

C kills or injures around 500 people throughout the world.