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ABSTRACT

For students from high - quality classes in Vietnam Maritime University (VMU), English reading skill takes a very important role in their foreign language learning. It is undoubtful that reading helps students to improve other language skills, improve their background knowledge and initially prepare them for their learning ESP in the following years. This study is aim to give some possible suggestions for the improvement of teaching reading skill to the high - quality students in VMU. These suggestions were due to the results of an investigation into the teaching of reading skill to the students in high – quality classes. The researcher has carried out this investigation into the teaching reading skill by delivering survey questionnaires to 150 students in high – quality classes and 6 English teachers in VMU. To give an analysis to the collected data, the researcher used both quality and quantitative technique. Through analyzing the data, the researcher managed to find out students’ interest in learning reading skill, then to get a full understanding of their difficulties in learning this skill and propose some solutions to enhance the efficiency in learning of students and teaching of lecturers.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

VMU : Vietnam Maritime University

ESP : English for specific purposes

Ts : Teachers

Ss : Students

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PART A: INTRODUCTION

I. Rationale

In 2008, our country started an ambitious project to increase foreign language proficiency among its people. The Foreign Languages 2020 Project was initially intended to renovate the teaching and learning of foreign languages within the national education system. The foreign language we place an emphasis here is English. This project has been managed by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam with an aim to improve the English capacity of its workforce and increase their ability to engage in a globalized world. To have this achievement, the project will try to find out new approaches to make English language teaching and learning in Vietnam more relevant, efficient, and productive. Vietnam Maritime University is on the top 17th of key national universities in Vietnam and has been an active member of The Foreign Languages 2020 Project. Teaching and learning English in our university have been put great emphasis on. To achieve university's degree, every student has to pass the TOIEC test with 450 score. As a result, having a good command of English has become a necessity of all learners of English in Vietnam Maritime University and teaching and learning English should be effective to meet the growing demands.

In teaching and learning English as a foreign language in Vietnam nowadays, besides grammar, the requirement of four practical language skills: reading, speaking, reading, writing has been concerned. In the context of Vietnam, reading is perhaps the most used skill, which Vietnamese learners of English will be working with after leaving their colleges or universities. It is said that for many students, reading is by far a very important skill in a second language, particularly in English as a second or foreign language". This is also true to the

students from high – quality classes, Vietnam Maritime University. It is necessary for them to read effectively and efficiently in English because they will be offered a lot of interesting information as well as a variety of language expressions and structures which are very useful for developing other skills. However, there are some limitations in the effectiveness of the teaching and learning reading skill, especially to the first year students. This problem perhaps is due to some factors. Firstly some teachers have been accustomed to traditional teaching methods. They tend to spend too much time explaining new words and grammatical structures instead of providing different reading strategies for different reading tasks to develop the students’ reading skill. As a result, the text plays as a source of material for language lessons instead of skill lessons. Secondly, it’s more challenging to achieve effectiveness when the students in high quality classes in this university have different language learning ability. The other reasons may come from the reading materials, syllabus and teaching and learning conditions.

With this situation, the researcher wishes to investigate the attitude of students towards teaching and reading skill currently, their difficulties in learning reading comprehension and types of strategies applied by teachers to teach students. After that, the author can have some implications to improve learning and teaching English reading skill to the students. It is the reason why the writer has chosen the research topic:

“A survey on teaching and learning English reading skill in high-quality classes at Vietnam Maritime University”

II. Aims of the study

The purposes of the study are to investigate students’ teaching and learning English in high – quality classes in Vietnam Maritime University and give some implications to improve learning and teaching English reading skill for the students and teachers.

The specific aims are:

1. To examine the attitude of students towards teaching and reading skill currently.
2. To have better insight into students' difficulties in learning reading skill.
3. To investigate the teaching strategies used by the teachers in the reading lessons.

III. The research questions

The study was intended to answer the following questions:

1. What is the attitude of students towards teaching and reading skill currently?
2. What are students' difficulties in learning reading skill?
3. What are teaching strategies used by the teachers in the reading lessons?

IV. Scope of the study

This study is designed to investigate the current situation of the teaching of English reading skill to the first year student in high quality classes in Vietnam Maritime University.

V. Methods of the study

In the study, the quantitative and qualitative approach which involves survey questionnaires is used to collect data for the study. The survey questionnaires are administered to both teachers and students. The results obtained from the teachers will be compared with those from the students for more reliable data.

VI. Significance of the study

Hopefully, this study can be useful for both teachers and students in Vietnam Maritime University as well as the researchers with interest in this field. If this study is completed successfully, it will provide a picture of teaching and learning reading skill to the students in high – quality classes. Through the findings of the study, the researcher will point out some implications to enhance

the effectiveness of these activities. Besides, this study can offer various and useful references for further studies. It can also be an idea that attracts other researchers to go further.

VII. Design of the study

This research is divided into three main parts:

Part A is the introduction which states the rationale, aims, scope, method, significance and organization of the study.

Part B is the development which consists of four chapters

- **Chapter one** reviews some linguistic concepts most relevant to the research topic
- **Chapter two** presents the research methodology
- **Chapter three** refers to the results and discussion of the survey in addition to the summary of the main findings.
- **Chapter four** gives implications and offers recommendations on teaching and learning reading skill to the first year students in high quality classes in Vietnam Maritime University.

Part C is the conclusion that summarizes what has been done through the study, presents the limitations and gives some suggestions for further researchers.

PART B: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, theories and previous researchers related to reading comprehension skill will be taken in consideration.

Theory of reading in second language teaching and learning

1.1 Definition of reading comprehension

It is undeniable that reading comprehension takes an important part in teaching and learning a foreign language. As a result, it is very essential to have a deep understanding about the nature of reading because the knowledge teachers gain about it will have a great influence on what they teach in the class. In fact, there are different definitions of reading comprehension.

According to **Grellet (1981, p3)**: “Reading comprehension or understanding a written text means extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible”. From the point of view of author, reading comprehension is an activity to aim at decoding the meaning of word combination in the text in the most efficient way.

Eddie William (1984, p.2) had a slightly different idea from Grellet. He defined reading as a process whereby one looks at and understands what has been written. **Carrell and Esday (1988, p.12)** also said that “reading is receptive language process in that it starts with linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning that the reader constructs”. These two authors shared the same point. In their opinion, reading doesn't mean that a foreigner need to understand everything in a text, he is not simply a passive object, fed with letters, words or sentences, but is actively working on the text and get the conveyed messages without looking at every letter and words.

Richard and Thomas (1987, p.9) added more detail in their definition:

Reading comprehension is best described as an understanding between the author and the reader. The emphasis is on the reader's understanding of the printed page based on his individual unique background of experience. Reading

is much more than just pronouncing words correctly or simply what the author intends. It is the process whereby the printed pages stimulate ideas, experiences and responses that are unique to an individual.

Their opinion indicates that reading comprehension refers to the student's understanding of the text using their own ideas, experiences and responses. In other words, the readers use their knowledge to get meaning out of printed pages which includes not only facts or details but also emotion, beliefs and critical evaluation.

Although, these opinions are not exactly the same, it can be concluded that reading comprehension is a process of obtaining the required information in the lesson as efficiently as possible. In reading process, the reader plays an active role and both of his knowledge of the language and that of the world are extremely important to his reading success.

1.2 .Models of reading process

In the last 40 years, many researchers have developed models to describe what happen when people read, among which bottom – up, top – down and interactive models are the three most important ones.

1.2.1. Bottom – up model

From the viewpoint of Christine Nuttall (1982), “In bottom – up processing, the reading builds up a meaning from the back marks on the page: recognizing letters and words, working out sentence structure” (p.17)

David Nunan (1991, p.64) shared the same opinion that “the bottom – up approach is basically a matter of decoding a series of written symbols into their aural equivalent”. It is certain that in bottom- up process, readers focus on individual words and phrases and achieve understanding by combining the detailed elements together. This model helps readers much understand the elements in the text such as vocabulary and grammar structure. However, this kind of reading process reveals some shortcomings.

According to Christine Nuttall (1982, p.17), if only using bottom – up model, readers cannot believe that the apparent message was really what the writer intended. Moreover, the reader in this case is put in a passive state and the text is treated as a grammatical unit rather than a textual one as a whole. In addition, it was difficult to account for the role of contextual clues and that of the reader's prior knowledge in understanding the text.

1.2.2. Top - down model

In contrast to the bottom – up model, the top – down one argues that readers bring a great deal of knowledge, expectation assumptions, and questions to the text and they continue to read as long as the text confirm their expectation (Goodman,196, p.126).

In the definition of Cambourne (1979,p.78 - 90) it is said that, top – down reading is an active process of prediction, selection, and confirmation in which the reader brings to bear not only knowledge of the language, but also internal concepts of the processing of language information, encoded in graphic, symbols, past experimental background, general conceptual background knowledge.

These viewpoints indicate that top – down process emphasizes the reconstruction of meaning rather than the decoding form. The interaction of reader and the text is the center to this process. Readers bring to this interaction their knowledge of the subject, expectation about how language works, interest and attitudes towards the content of the text.

Just like bottom – up model, this model has some limitations. It is sometimes implausible because of flexibility of information processing. It also underestimates the functions of lower order information. Furthermore, readers who have little knowledge of the topic cannot generate predictions. And it is also time consuming and fails to describe skilled reading behavior. (Samuel &Kamil 1988).

Theoretically, bottom – up and top – down approaches provide us with different pictures of reading process and both of them show strength as well as weakness, so elements of them are combined to a more insightful model under the name of interactive model.

1.2.3. Interactive model

Eskey (1988,p.84) defined interactive reading model as a reading model that “posits a constant interaction between bottom – up and top – down processing in reading, each source of information contributing to a comprehensive reconstruction of the meaning of the text.” He also believed that to achieve both fluency and accuracy in reading, good readers must work at perfecting both their bottom – up recognition skills and their top – down interpretation strategies. In other words, good reading can only result from a constant interaction between these two processes.

This idea is then proven by Penny Ur’s opinion. To her, “ The construction of meaning that occurs in reading is a combination of bottom – up process (decoding and understanding words, phrases and sentences in the text) and top – down one (our expectation, previous knowledge, construct of the text content and genre)”(1996, p.141).

The mentioned points of view convey the same thing that both bottom – up and top – down process contribute to the understanding of the text in reading. In reading process, sometimes it is the individual details that help readers understand the whole; sometimes it is the overview that allows them to process the details.

Interactive model is really the best reading process because it can make use of the advantages of bottom – up and top – down models and eliminate the shortcomings within them.

1.3. Features of an effective reading lesson

To have a successful reading lesson, it is advisable to know the characteristics of an effective reading comprehension lesson. According to Penny Ur (1996,p.148), an effective reading lesson should contain the following points :

- a) The language of the text is comprehensible to the learners. It is not too difficult or too easy.
- b) The content of the text is accessible to the learners; they know enough about it in order to apply their own background knowledge.
- c) The reading process is fairly fast: mainly because the reader has automatized recognition of common combinations, and does not waste time working out each word or groups of words.
- d) The reader concentrates on the significance and skims the rest. He does not have to pay the same amount of attention to all parts of text.
- e) The reader takes incomprehensible vocabulary in his or her stride: guess its meaning from the surrounding text, or ignore it.
- f) The reader can think ahead, hypothesize, and predict what will be next.
- g) The reader can use his background information for understanding the text.
- h) The reader is motivated to read by an interesting context or a challenging task.
- i) The reader has a clear purpose in reading.
- k) The reader uses different strategies for all texts.

All the features listed by Penny Ur above indicate the important roles of the teacher in a successful reading lesson. Concerning to this issue, Moore (1992) said that “The teacher is an environmental engineer who organizes the classroom space to fit their goal and to maximize learning. The way the physical space of the classroom is organized can either help or hinder learning”. (p.5)

Being concerned with the roles of the teacher in teaching reading, Marianne (2001, p57 -62) listed a lot of the teacher’s roles in teaching reading such as controller, organizer, assessor, prompter, participant, resource, tutor and

observer. In his opinion, all these roles aim at facilitate the students' process of reading.

In general, all the features of an efficient reading lesson are equally important. In teaching reading comprehension, teachers should be aware of his or her teaching roles and take these characteristics into consideration and apply them flexibly.

1.4. Reading problems and solutions

According to Christine Nuttall (1982), when dealing with texts, students often have difficulties in establishing the plain sense of the text, dealing with vocabulary and syntax and have difficulties with the conceptual content of texts, particularly if the topic is unfamiliar or if writers and readers are from different cultures.

More recently, Marianne (2001, p.203) has added more problems in reading. He finds that teaching and learning of receptive skills (reading and listening) presents a number of particular problems which will need to be addressed. There are to do with language, topic, the task students are asked to perform and the expectation they have.

Both of the two authors suggested solutions for these problems. The solutions below are suggested by Marianne (2001). They are very brief but easy for teachers to follow.

Language problems

- Pre – teach vocabulary: Students can be provided with meaning and usage of new or difficult vocabulary that appear in the text. This will strongly support the reading process later.
- Extensive reading: students read at length, often for pleasure and in a leisure way. That is the best way for students to develop automaticity.

Topic problems

- Choose the right topic: it is wise to choose topics which are appropriate with all students because if they are not interested in a topic or if the topic is unfamiliar with them, the students may be reluctant to engage fully in the followed activities.
- Create interest: Unfamiliar topics can cause problems in reading but they can be improved if teachers succeed in creating interest in reading lessons. They can get students engaged by talking about the topic, showing a picture for prediction, having them to look at the headlines before reading, etc.
- Activate schemata: The reading process becomes easier if students can relate the topic to what they already know in their real life.

Comprehension task problems

- Differentiate testing and teaching: the best kind of tasks are those which raise students expectation, help them tease out the meaning of text whereas tests are used to explore students and their weakness, therefore, teachers should base on these purposes to choose suitable activities in reading lessons.
- Appropriate challenge: when asking students to read, it is better if texts and tasks are either far too easy or far too difficult. Getting the level right depends on the right match between text and tasks. Thus whether a text is difficult or easy, it may still be used only if the task is appropriate.

Negative expectation

- When students have a low expectation of reading, it will be the teacher's job to persuade them to change these negative expectations into realistic optimism.
- Manufacturing success: by getting the level of challenge right (in terms of language, text and tasks), students are sure to succeed.

And by giving them a clear and achievable purpose, teachers can help them achieve that purpose.

- Agree on a purpose: It is important for teachers and students to agree on both general and specific purposes for reading. Are the students trying to discover detailed information or just get a general understanding of the text? If the students know what they are reading for, they can choose how to deal with the text. If they understand the purpose, they will have better chance of knowing how well they have achieved it.

1.5. Stages of a reading lesson

A reading lesson can be divided into three stages which are pre – reading, while reading stage and post – reading stage. Each of these stages carries its own features and purposes and requires different techniques and strategies (William, 1984, p.37).

1.5.1 Pre – reading stage

In a reading lesson, the pre – reading stage is an important one because it creates motivation and positive attitude towards the reading text for students. It will focus their attention on what they are going to read. According to Williams this stage happens to introduce and arouse interest in the topic; motivate learners by giving a reason for reading and provide some language preparation for the text (1984,p.37). Drucker suggested the following procedure teacher can take before reading a text:

“..... relate the passage students are going to read something that is familiar to them. Next, provide a brief discussion question that will engage the students and after that, provide an overview of the section they are bound to read. Name the selection, introduce the characters, and describe the plot. Last, direct the students to read the story or look for particular information”. (2003, p.23)

General speaking, this stage is really necessary to set a good preparation for students, provide them the sense of what they are going to do in their reading lesson.

1.5.2. While – reading stage

While - reading stage is the main part of a reading lesson. Without this stage, the students will lose the chance to deal with the text to understand the writer's purpose and clarify the text's content in detail.

Williams (1984, p.38) pointed out that the aims of the while reading is to help to understand the writer's purpose; to help to understand the text structure and to clarify the text.

There are various activities that teachers can choose for his students in this stage, such as skimming for the gist, scanning for specific information, recognizing the organization of a text or understanding the relation between sentences and clauses, etc (Mathews, Spratt & Dangerfield, 1999,p.67).

Studying the reading lesson, Sheils (1993 : 92) suggested a wide range of activities in the while reading stage such as deducing meaning, questioning, recognizing, matching, ordering, following instructions, comparing, note – taking, completing and decision – making / problem – solving.

It is, however, essential to be flexible in this task. The selection of any of them depends on the nature of the reading text and the level of the students. Besides selecting suitable activities, during the while – reading stage, the teacher should bear in mind his roles of an organizer, observer, assessor or prompter, etc.

1.5.3 Post – reading stage

This is the final but not the less important stage of a reading lesson because it is time for students to apply what they have got from the text into real life communication. In William's opinions (1984,p.39), the post – reading stage aims at consolidating or reflecting upon what has been read and relating the text to the learners' own knowledge interest or views. After completing the tasks in

the previous stage, students may be asked to discuss the text's main points, retell or rewrite the stories.

In summary, each of the reading stages carries its own aims and activities. It is very effective if these three stages are combined flexibly and appropriately for an efficient reading lesson.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the author firstly discusses the contextual conditions of learning and teaching conditions in VMU. Then, a survey on the teaching of reading skill is presented focusing on the informants, the data collection instruments and data collection procedure.

2.1 The context

The survey was conducted at VMU, which was established in 1956. VMU which is one of the top 17 key national universities in Vietnam has become a reliable address for those who are eager to be good at both majors and foreign languages. This university is situated in 484 Lach Tray street, HaiPhong city.

The researcher has been an English teacher in VMU for four years and has taught reading skill for a long time. This following part deals with some features of the author's teaching context which show some difficulties of learners and strategies used by teachers to develop students' English skills.

2.1.1. The learners

VMU is a non – language major university and because of its distinct maritime Majors (Ship Building, Ship Control, Navigation...), the students of this university come from all areas in our countries and most of them have a low background of English. In these recent years, with the determination of the university's leaders, VMU has been in the top 17 key universities of the country, many new majors and training programs have been opened. High – quality class training program is one of these activities. The teaching and learning English have been put great emphasis on. The university has required students to achieve English international certificate such as TOEIC, IELTS as a learning outcome about English to graduate from university. In particular, the students from high

quality classes have to gain TOEIC 550. In their training program, they have to learn some majors in English.

2.1.2 The teachers

The high – quality classes have been taught English by 8 teachers (including the researcher) from Division of General English, Faculty of Foreign Languages. They graduated from Vietnam National University, College of Foreign Language, Ha noi University and have teaching English for a long time. General speaking, all teachers here have a good command of English and they are enthusiastic in teaching. These teachers have to teach around 30 periods a week.

2.1.3 The syllabus

There are some training programs for different faculties in VMU so the students from different programs are taught with different syllabus and materials. The students from high quality classes learn 150 periods of general English in the first year which is divided into two phrases. In the first phrase, the students review the main content of grammar in a grammar book compiled by a group of teacher from Division of General English, Faculty of Foreign Languages. In the second phrase, the students study 9 units in American English File 2 Student Book with grammar, vocabulary, reading, speaking, writing, listening.

During the course, the students have to do 3 tests including two in the middle, one at the end of the course. These tests focus on grammar, vocabulary, reading, speaking, writing, listening.

2.1.4 The teaching and learning condition

Although VMU is a non – English major university, the condition of teaching and learning English is quite good. There are about 30 – 35 students in each class. Besides, to make English lessons more effective, English classrooms are equipped with cassettes, televisions and projectors. However, most of the high

quality classes located in C2 building are equipped with a big screen TV without laptops and cable wire to connect from a laptop to a computer so some teachers are hesitant to use them.

2.2. A survey on the teaching of English reading skill to the first year students in high quality classes in VMU

Basing on the teaching and learning conditions, the author has carried out a survey to find out the opinions, difficulties of students in these classes when learning English reading skill and strategies applied by teachers in their teaching.

2.2.1 The informants

This survey was conducted with the participation of 150 students of which 64 were male and 86 were female and 6 teachers.

- These first - year students were from 5 high quality classes of K56 from VMU. All of them had to sit in a placement test at the beginning of the course to be grouped into different classes with the same levels of English background.
- The teachers are all the teachers in the Division of General English, Faculty of Foreign Languages. They have a good knowledge of English and have been teaching English for a long time.

2.2.2. Data collection instruments

To obtain the information for the study, the researcher used two instruments.

Instrument one: A questionnaire completed by the students

Two main parts were focused in the questionnaire. The first part was about the students' demographic information which included the students' gender, age, the number of years they had been learning English. The second part was designed to elicit the students' opinions about the reading subject. It consisted of 12

questions, ten of which were closed and two of which were open - ended. The first two questions 1,2,3 dealt with the students' attitudes towards reading English, questions 4,5 mentioned the opinion about current reading materials in class and difficulties the students often have in learning reading. The students' strategies of learning reading skill in three periods of reading were the focused of questions 6,7,8,10. The two last questions emphasized the chance of students to work in pairs and groups to make the reading lesson more interesting and effective. Due to these ideas, the research can recommend some ways to help the teachers enhance the effectiveness in their reading lessons.

Instrument two: A questionnaire completed by the teachers

The survey questionnaire completed by the teachers included 12 questions (two of which was open ended). These questions were mainly about what they had done to teach their students to read. The first part in the survey was about demographic information, which contained the teacher's gender, age, the number of year they had been teaching English and reading. The second parts with the questions from number 1 to number 4 showed the teachers opinions about reading comprehension skill, textbook. Questions from number 5 to number 10 showed activities and techniques they had used to teach students in their reading lessons. The two last questions (question 10,11) was about the teachers' activities to make their students work in pairs or groups, and the benefits of these activities.

2.2.3. Data collection procedure

Firstly of all, all the questions for the teachers and students were designed concerning some of the important issues in the English reading classes.

Secondly, the author piloted the questionnaires by having some teachers and students answer them to examine whether they help to elicit the kind of intended data. Basing on the feedbacks from these students and teachers, these

inappropriate or ambiguous questions were revised to omit or change to the respondents and therefore improved the quality of the data obtained.

Finally, the collected data was analyzed quantitatively. The results were presented in the forms of tables for clear analysis and comparison.

In summary, this chapter reveals some information about the survey on the teaching of English reading skills to the first year students in high – quality classes in VMU. It mentioned the teaching context, the informants, the data collection instruments and the data collection procedure. The survey's results and discussion will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter will first present the results of the survey in addition to some discussion or comments, then summarize of the main finding will be given.

3.1. Results and discussion

3.1.1 *The attitudes of the students and teachers towards learning and teaching English reading skill*

Questions 1,2,3 from the survey to wards learning and teaching English reading skill

The importance of reading in comparison with other language skill	Ss' choice (%)	Ts' choice (%)
a) more important than any other language skill (Listening, speaking, writing)	0	0
b) as important as three other language skills	94,6	100
c) not as important as three other language skills	0,53	0
d) not important at all	0	0

Table 1: The importance of reading in comparison with other language skill

The importance of developing reading skill to the first year students	Ss' choice (%)	Ts' choice (%)
a) very important	14	33,3
b) important	86	66,6
c) not very important	0	0
d) not important at all	0	0

Table 2 : The importance of developing reading skill to the first year students

As can be seen from 2 tables, nearly all of the students (94,6% and 86 % respectively) reading comprehension was as important as speaking, listening and writing and developing reading skill to the first year students in VMU is important. While all of the teachers thought reading comprehension was as important as speaking, listening and writing, one – third of the teachers thought developing reading skill is very important and two – thirds of the teachers

thought it was important to develop this skill. It is really positive that none of the participants thought reading comprehension in general and learning reading in the first year at university was not very important and not important at all. This was due to the fact that a majority of the students who are chosen to join into high quality classes have good knowledge of English and understand the importance of learning English. This is very convenient for teachers to teach in these classes.

The importance of reading in comparison with other language skills	Ss' choice (%)	Ts' choice (%)
a) to reinforce vocabulary and grammatical structures	84	66,6
b) to develop reading skill and improve other language skills	16	33,3
c) to improve background knowledge	0	0
d) to do the school exam well	0	0
e) to prepare for learning ESP in the next term.		

Table 3 :The main purpose of teaching reading skill for the first year students in high – quality classes in VMU

As can be seen from the table, the most important purpose of learning and that of reading skill for the first year students are quite identical. Ranking in the first place is the purpose of reinforcing vocabulary and grammatical structures, accounting for 84% of the students and 66,6 % of the teachers. A small number of the students (16%) and one – third of the teachers chose the objectives of improving other language skills. And no percentage of them thought of the effect of learning reading to improve background knowledge, do the school exam well or prepare for learning ESP in the next term. Obviously, the teachers' reading lessons tend to focus on the reinforcement of vocabulary and grammatical structures rather than the development of reading skill. Thus, it will

be better if the teachers pay more attention to the purpose of developing their students' reading skill.

Opinion about reading texts in the textbook	Students' choice (%)	Teachers' choice(%)
a) interesting and suitable to your level	0,8	16,6
b) boring and not suitable to your level	23,3	33,3
c) interesting but not suitable to your level	62	50
d) boring but suitable to your level	0	0

Table 4 : Opinion about reading texts in the textbook

Question 4 focuses on the student's and teacher's opinion about reading texts in the textbook. There are some different ideas between teachers and students. Only small number of students and teachers 0,8% agreed that texts in the textbook were interesting and suitable (0, 8%,16,6% respectively). 23,3% of students in comparison with 33,3 % of teachers claimed that the current reading material was boring and not suitable to your level. 62% of students and 50% of teachers thought that the textbook was interesting and not suitable to the students' level. From these figures, we can see that teachers have to adjust the content of the reading material to meet the demand of learners. For example they can omit some unsuitable reading texts and supplement suitable ones.

3.1.2 Difficulties of students in learning reading texts.

Question 5 is to find out the frequency of difficulties faced by the teachers when teaching reading texts. The results are shown on table 5 below:

Frequency of difficulties	Often		Sometimes		Never	
	Ss' choice (%)	Ts' choice (%)	Ss' choice (%)	Ts' choice (%)	Ss' choice (%)	Ts' choice (%)
A. There are many new words in the text	64	66,7	26	22,2	10	11,1

B. Grammatical structures are difficult	31	33,3	57	55,6	12	11,1
C. The texts often have strange topics	36	22,2	41	22,2	23	55,6
D. The comprehension exercises are difficult to complete	48	22,2	32	11,1	20	66,7

Table 5 : Frequency of difficulties

As can be seen from the table, a lot of students have difficulties with new words and grammatical structures. 64% of the students often had difficulties with new words in the text and 66,7% of the teachers shared this fact. 57% of the students said they sometimes had difficulties with grammatical structures and 55,6 % of the teachers thought the same. However, for the last two mentioned difficulties, the participants are at the two sides. Significantly, whereas only 23% of the students said that they did not have difficulty with the topic of the text, 55,6% of the teachers thought they did. In addition, 48 % of the students in comparison with only 22,2% of the teachers complained that the comprehension reading exercises are often difficult. This fact is unbeneficial to the students' reading success because the teachers can not help them to overcome the difficulties about which they do not know.

3.1.3 Strategies in teaching reading texts

To investigate the current techniques in teaching reading skill in VMU, some questions concerning the activities before, while and after reading are administered to both students and teachers

Question 6 is used to find out the frequency of pre – reading activities. The result is presented in table below:

Frequency	Often	Sometimes	Never
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of pre – reading activities	Ss'choice (%) 68	Ts'choice (%) 65,7	Ss'choice (%) 30	Ts'choice (%) 32,3	Ss'choice (%)	Ts'choice (%)
A. Learn new vocabulary	56	54,6	27	32,3	0	0
B. Set up a clear goal to read	11	10,1	41	43,5	14	10,1
C. Answer some pre – reading questions	7	10,1	34	32,3		43,4
D. Using the title, subtitles to predict content	18	21,2	46	43,5		54,6
E. Look at picture to guess the topic	0	0	7	10,1		32,3
F. Play games (to know about the topic)	4	10,1	26	32,3		87,9
G. Brain storm words, structures or ideas related to the topic						54,6

Table 6: The frequency of pre – reading activities

From the table, it can be seen that some possible pre – reading activities used most frequently by the teachers are pre – teaching vocabulary (65,7%) and setting up a clear goal to read (54,6%). Sometimes the students are asked to answer pre – reading questions and using the title, subtitles to predict content before reading or look at pictures to guess the topic. Both the students and the teachers said that there were hardly activities of playing games or brainstorming words, structures or ideas related to the topic. It is positive when students are often provided with new vocabulary and grammatical structures before reading and it is more positive when the reading purposes are emphasized in this stage. However, because quite a large number of students complained about the strange topics (35%), other solutions such as answering pre – reading questions, brainstorming things related to the topic, using pictures to guess the topic, playing games or using the title, subtitles to predict the text content, etc should be used more often.

Secondly, to find out what happen in the while – reading stage in terms of teaching techniques, questions 7,8,9 in survey questionnaires for teachers and students are delivered and the results are again compared between the teacher's and the student's. From the survey, most of the students read quickly through the text, pay attention to the title, subtitles or topic sentences, ignoring new words to find the mains ideas of the text and read quickly through the text, ignoring the new words to look for the specific information. This result is due to the whole teachers apply this strategies in their teaching reading lessons.

Question 9 was designed to investigate the frequency of using various types of while reading tasks. From the data, the teachers and students gave roughly the same opinion about the frequency of using these exercises. Teachers obviously often use some common types of exercises in their reading lessons: Questions and answers, True / False questions and Multiple – choice questions. This is due to the fact that these types of exercises are the most common ones in the

textbooks. In fact, exercises in the textbooks are sometimes not enough and they are not very useful for exploiting the text efficiently and using only such common kinds of exercises frequently may make students feel bored. It is advisable to use some other ones for a change such as finding topic sentences, finding synonyms and antonyms or finding equivalents etc (Mathews, Spratt & Dangerfield, 1999, Sheils, 1993).

Finally, both students and teachers were questioned to give information about the frequency of post reading activities. The collected data seems to be unpleasing when most of the students responded that they did not carry out these mentioned post – reading activities and nearly the same number of the teachers admitted the fact. It is beneficial to students to summarize the text so that they can gain better understanding of the text and discussing the main text is really a good chance for students to practice speaking and in some ways, relax after reading. All of the teachers also never ask their student to write on topics relevant to the reading text. This technique may be difficult for their students to apply. The participants' response assumes that after exploiting the text, the students often do nothing. The reason may be due to the limited time at class, thus class meeting time should be negotiated for the activities of all three reading stage for a more successful lesson.

Also from the survey and interview, to make the reading lessons more effective and interesting, most of the teachers often ask students to work in pairs or groups. It is fine that 25% of the students see the benefits of having chances to participate in the classroom's activities, 26% said they feel pleasant to learn reading, 15% asserted that stronger friends could help them to complete the classroom tasks. However, there are numerous students who make use of working in pairs / groups to chat to their partners. To the teachers, their purposes of organizing their students in pairs / groups are varied, most of them (67%) said that they wanted to create chance to all students to participate in the classroom activities; to enable them to help each other in completing reading exercises; to

offer them an opportunity to work with each other and to create a pleasant learning atmosphere. Their purposes of grouping the students are very positive to their reading lessons, but they should have ways to control their students to prevent some students from chatting to each other.

3.2 Summary of main findings

Attitudes: The data analysis revealed that almost all of the teachers and a majority of the students have positive attitudes to teaching and developing reading skill. None of them deny the necessity of teaching and learning this skill in the first year at university because they all have clear purposes for this.

Difficulties in reading lessons: many students face to difficulties related to reading texts, ranging from the limited capacity of vocabulary, grammatical structure to the topics and the comprehension tasks. Some reading topics and given reading exercises also challenge their students.

Teaching strategies: In fact, three stages of a reading lesson (pre – reading, while – reading, and post reading) are carried out in reading classes. Some of the teachers applied effective strategies such as pre – teaching vocabulary, skimming or scanning with different activities and different kinds of comprehension exercises which help their students exploit the text successfully. Besides, to make the reading lessons more effective, pair work / group work, has been used more frequently by most of the teachers. Most of the students also have strong awareness of these benefits.

CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the result convey the special need to improve the teaching and learning reading skill to the first year students from high – quality classes. In this context the challenge for the teachers in this context is to find solutions to attract students to the classroom activities and verify their teaching techniques to help their students understand the text easier and to develop the student's reading skill. Through the survey, the researcher proposes some suggestions for the remaining problems.

4.1. Improving student's participation in classroom activities

Obviously, student's participation makes a great contribution to the success of any lesson so if the teachers encourage their students to join in the classroom activities, they can solve the problems of some student's negative attitude towards reading skills. There are some suggestions for that.

4.1.1 Clarifying learning goals to the students

From the viewpoint of Marianne, 2001, the teachers should clarify learning goals to their students right from the beginning because they will affect their ways of learning.

From the survey we can see that, most of the teachers focus on widening the students' vocabulary and strengthen grammatical structures and help them to pass the final exam. In fact, when English is one of the compulsory subjects in the university and at the end of the course, the students have to do the paper tests on grammar and reading, these goals are necessary. However, since reading is also very useful in improving background knowledge and helps to improve other language skills. Especially, to the first year students, learning reading skill at this time is one of the initial preparations for reading ESP in the next years.

Therefore it is necessary for the teachers to fully understand their purposes in teaching and let the students know about these purposes right from the beginning of the term and refer to them frequently. In each reading lesson, the students should be known clearly what they are going to learn in the lesson, why they need to learn and how they learn all these things.

4.1.2. Making use of pair / group work

It is clear that, using pair / group work is an excellent way to increase participation of the shy students into the discussion. The students will have chance to have some independent thinking and express their ideas in their group. Through the group activities, the relationship between students and students, students and teachers will be improved.

Through the survey and interview, most of the teachers have right attitudes to the use of pair / group work and use this way to manage their class. Because of many benefits from pair / group work, the teachers should use it more often to eradicate the problems of low rate of participation in their classroom activities.

To make pair / group work effective and prevent students from abusing it to do personal things, here are some tips that the teachers can follow:

- Divide the students in most possible convenient way, avoiding chaos and noise.
- Give clear instructions, so that students will know exactly what they have to do. The instructions can be given orally, and then specific tasks are written on the board.
- Allot time limit for each activity, so that students can engage in the work productively.
- Make sure that the activities are simple, so that a large number of students who can get it right for the first time.
- Control noise level when necessary through signals.
- Monitor the activities by moving from pair to pair, group to group without disturbing the students.
- Circulate to answer questions and encourage weaker students or slower groups.

- Provide feedback immediately to tell the students how well / badly they perform. Alternatively make a note of mistakes and help the students to avoid them in the next lessons

(Adapted from Salli – Copur, 2005, Byrne, 1987, Hong, 2007)

4.1.3 Changing the roles while teaching

One of the major keys to motivation is the active involvement of students in their own learning. It is just a relatively poor method of teaching if the students only stand in front of them and give the lecture. It will be better to get students involved in activities, and the teacher should be an organizer, a prompter, an observer, a feedback organizer and a friendly evaluator. (Moore,1993, Marianne,2001, Gao, 2008)

An organizer: This is the role of organizing students to do various activities. It often involves giving students information, telling them how they are going to do the activity, putting them in pairs or in groups and finally closing down when the time is up.

A prompter: When students are reading the text, it is also necessary to draw their attention to the language features in that text. The teacher may direct the students to certain features of the text construction, clarify ambiguities and make them aware of issues of the text structure which they have not come across previously.

An observer: While students are reading, the teacher observes their progress to know how well/badly they are doing and to know whether to give them extra time or not.

A feedback organizer check if they have completed the task successfully or not. He may start by having the students compare their answers in pairs or in groups and then ask for their answers. When asking students to give answers, it is effective to ask them where in the text they found the information. This will help him/her recognize his/her students' problems if their answers are inappropriate.

A friendly evaluator: The teacher's evaluation to what the students achieve should be praising and encouraging. Praising is the recognition of the capability of the students and it can enhance their achievement. When the students cannot answer the questions adequately the teacher should give proper incentives and provide hints to correct the mistakes. Never use sarcastic comments in order not to damage the student's self – esteem.

4.1.4 Making use of modern technology in teaching

These days electric lectures in the form of power point are commonly used in many universities because it can help to save time and hold student attention through the use of video, graphics and music, etc. PowerPoint is very useful in the pre – reading stage to introduce the topic of the text. For example, the students can be provided some pictures which relate to the text and they have to make a guess about the reading topic. Power point is also useful in giving information or clear instructions to the entire class in the while or post reading stage (Fisher, 2003).

As mentioned before, English classrooms in VMU are equipped with projectors or TVs which are useful to enhance the effectiveness of English lessons but they are not used very frequently. Some teachers in VMU have their laptops and are good at using this type of teaching aid, but some of them , because of some reasons do not use it frequently. To enhance the effectiveness of foreign language teaching and make use of these current teaching tools, all the teachers should use it as supporter in their reading lessons.

4.2. Improving teaching techniques

From the survey, we can see the importance of improving the teacher's techniques in teaching reading to develop the student's reading skill. For this purpose, ways of adjusting teaching time and efforts in addition to various activities in the three reading stages (before, while and post reading) will be suggested.

4.2.1. Adjusting teaching time and efforts

Findings from the survey shows that the teachers has carried out three stages of a reading lesson but most of the time seems to be spent to the while reading stage whereas activities before and after reading are also useful for reading success. Therefore, in a reading lesson time should be balanced for the activities of all the three reading stages for a more successful lesson. The following are some suggestions to negotiate the teaching time:

- Plan the lesson carefully
- Give students clear directions so the need for repetition is minimized: Write the directions, assignments, sequences of activities, etc. on the chalk / whiteboard or PowerPoint screen.
- Identify what difficulties their students often cope with in each stage of reading for more emphasis on these difficulties.
- Depend on reading material to choose suitable activities in each stage.
- Limit the time for all reading activities
- Control the class to minimize the noise.

(Adapted from: Marianne,2001,William,1984)

4.2.2 Varying strategies in three stages of reading lessons

In fact, all the reading texts in the American English File 3 , are included with various activities for three stages of reading; however most of the teachers seem not to spend enough time for the pre and post reading activities. They should make use of these activities, and sometimes apart from available things in the textbook, they should apply other activities to understand the text more.

4.2.2.1 Before reading

From my point of view, the teachers should motivate students in three stages together, however, they should pay more attention to the pre - stage because it will make the students excited before they do the reading tasks.

Through the findings of the survey, we know that before their students start learning reading, most of the teachers have used some useful techniques in their reading lessons such as pre-teaching vocabulary, grammatical structures, establishing purposes before reading or answer some pre – reading questions. However, to make the reading lessons more effective, the teachers should apply more often other strategies such as brain storming words, structures or ideas related to the topic or playing games to know about the topics.

4.2.2.2 While reading

This stage is regarded as the main part of a reading lesson when the students understand the text deeply and at the same time develop their reading skill. Thus, the teachers have to guide their students with clear instructions for various kinds of activities according to each reading purpose. The teachers who get used to traditional teaching methods basing on the understanding of vocabulary for the meaning of the text can use certain strategies for different reading purposes

Skimming for general understanding: The students do not need to pay attention to every word in the text, but run their eyes quickly over it, read a few important sentences and recognize certain words or expressions as clues for the main message. It is advisable to ask the students to pay attention to the title, the beginning, the end as well as the topic sentence of each paragraph that usually conveys the main ideas of the text.

Scanning for specific information: When searching for some particular pieces of information in the text, the students should be reminded that they do not need to read the whole text carefully, but pay more attention to the paragraph which includes the information they need. It is wise to limit the time of scanning skill.

4.2.2.3. After reading

To check the students' comprehension of the text, there are some ways to help them to use what they have read in a meaningful way, the last reading stage should be employed. There are many type of post – reading activities, so

depending on the feature of the text, the teacher can choose suitable ones for their students.

- Summarizing the text
- Discussing the main point of the text
- Discussing something of the same topic of the text
- Writing on topics relevant to the reading text
- Practice new vocabulary in the text by doing extra exercises
- Discussing coming – up topics
- Reading texts of contrasting topics

(Adapted from William,1984, Drucker,2003)

The researcher has suggested a number of activities in the reading stages presented in this chapter with the hope to facilitate the students to read better. The implementation of these suggestions will come to success easier if there is support from the university. To be more specific, the teachers should be given chance to take part in teaching training courses more frequently or enroll to international workshop to develop their profession and update changes in foreign language teaching.

PART C: CONCLUSION

In this chapter, a summary of the findings, discussion, recommendations, and suggestions will be dealt with.

1. Summary of the study

This study was conducted with the aim of giving possible solutions to improve the situation of teaching reading skill to the first year students in high – quality classes in VMU. All the suggestions were based on both theoretical and practical basis.

The theoretical basis or the literature review of the study mentioned a number of issues relating to English reading comprehension, difficulties of students when learning reading skill, teaching English reading comprehension.

The practical basis was the data collected from the survey on the teaching of reading skills to the first year students in high – quality class in VMU. By using survey questionnaires for both students and teachers, the researchers wished to find out the difficulties of students when learning reading skill and strategies applied by teachers to teach reading skill.

From the findings of the survey, some solutions were suggested to improve teaching and learning reading skill. The first solution was that to make the students join in the reading lessons, the teachers should clarify learning goals to the students, make use of pair/group work, change the roles while teaching and make use of modern technology in teaching. The second solution was proposed with the purpose of teaching reading techniques which consisted of ways to adjust teaching time and efforts in reading in reading lessons as well as useful activities in the three reading stages, before, while and post reading. The researcher hope that with these solutions the teaching and learning reading skill for the first year students in high quality classes in VMU will be improved.

2. Limitations of the study

With this survey the author believes that the study has made a certain contribution to the teaching and learning reading skill to the first year students in high quality- classes in VMU. However, the author also has to admit that there are some limitations of the study.

Firstly, because the time is limited, the researcher mainly chose survey questionnaire as the instrument to collect the data and the number of participants was not very large, so there may be other points of view.

Secondly, all the suggested solutions for improving the situation of teaching reading for the first year students in high – quality classes in VMU have not been experimented, thus their effectiveness has not been proven and they may be considered subjective or uncompleted.

Thirdly, this study was carried out only within the scope of the first years students in high – quality classes in VMU, not all the students in VMU so the mentioned solutions may not be suitable to the teaching of reading skills to other students because of their differences in English proficiency and the teachers' competence in teaching English as well as other objectives learning and teaching conditions.

Finally, within the scope of the study, the writer only had chance to carry out the survey on the teaching of reading skill, whereas the teaching of other language skills (listening, speaking, writing) also need to be investigated for the improvement of English language teaching.

3. Suggestions for further study

Due to some limitations, following are some implications from the study:

First of all, the next time, the researcher will carry out the study with more data collection instrument such as interviews, class observations, etc, on a larger number of participants for more reliable data.

Secondly, to prove the effectiveness and significance of the study's results and abolish the subjunctive assessments from the researcher of this study, there will be experimental researches for the suggested solutions.

Finally, there should be other researches on three other language skills listening, speaking and writing to provide a whole picture of teaching English to students in VMU so that we can improve teaching and learning conditions.

In conclusion, in this study the author tried to carry out a survey on the teaching of reading skill to the first year students in high quality classes and suggest propose some practical implications to improve teaching and learning reading skill.

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- a) very important
- b) important
- c) not very important
- d) not important at all

3. In the first year at university, what is your most important purpose of learning reading skill?

- a) to reinforce vocabulary and grammatical structures
- b) to develop reading skills and improve other language skills
- c) to improve background knowledge
- d) to do the school exam well
- e) to prepare for learning ESP in the next term.

4. In your opinion, the reading texts in the textbook are

- a) interesting and suitable to your level
- b) boring and not suitable to your level
- c) interesting but not suitable to your level
- d) boring but suitable to your level

5. How often do you have the following difficulties when reading an English text?

a) There are many new words in the text			
b) Grammatical structures in the text are difficult			
c) The topics in the text are strange			
d) The reading comprehension exercises are difficult			

6. In your reading lessons, how often do you take part in the following activities before you read a text?

<i>Pre – reading activities</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Never</i>
a) Learn new vocabulary			
b) Set up a clear goal to read			

c) Answer some pre – reading questions			
d) Using the title, subtitles to predict content			
e) Look at pictures to guess the topic			
f) Play games (to know about the topic)			

7. At class, how do you read to find out the main ideas of the text?

- a) Read slowly from the beginning to the end, trying to understand the meaning of every word.
- b) Read quickly through the text, pay attention to the title, subtitles or topic sentences, ignoring the new words

Other strategies

8. At class, how do you read to find out specific information of the text?

- a) Read slowly from the beginning to the end, trying to understand the meaning of every word.
- b) Read quickly through the text, ignoring the new words to look for the specific information

Other strategies

9. In your reading lesson, how often do you use the following types of while – reading exercises?

While – reading exercises	Often	Sometimes	Never
1. Questions and answer			
2. T/F exercises			
3. Multiple – choice exercises			
4. Finding the topic sentences			
5. Finding synonyms and antonyms			
6. Blank – filling exercises			

7. Reordering exercises			
8. Completing exercises			
9. Matching exercises			

10. After you finish the comprehension exercises, how often do you take part in the following activities?

Post – reading activities	Often	Sometimes	Never
a) Summarizing the text			
b) Discussing the main point of the text			
c) Writing on topics relevant to the reading text			
d) Practising new vocabulary in the text by doing extra exercises			

11. How often does your teacher ask you to do in pairs or in groups?

- a) often b) sometimes c) never

12. What benefits can you get when you work with your partners?

- a) I have a chance to participate in the classroom activities.
- b) Better friends can help me to complete the classroom tasks
- c) I have a chance to chat to the others about everything
- d) I feel pleasant when learning reading
- e) All of these above

Appendix 2:

Survey questionnaire (for teachers)

This survey questionnaire is designed for my research into “**A survey on teaching and learning English reading skill at Vietnam Maritime University**”. Your assistance in completing the survey is highly appreciated. All the information provided by you for the study purpose. So please answer the questions as honestly as possible. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Do Thi Anh Thu, teacher of English in Faculty of Foreign Studies, Vietnam Maritime University.

For all the questions, please answer by ticking one or more of the boxes or writing in the given spaces.

I. Personal information.

Your gender : Male Female

d) Your age :

e) How long have you been teaching English ?..... year(s)

II . Your opinions on teaching reading

1. In your opinion, reading comprehension is

- a) more important than any other language skills (Listening, speaking, writing)
- b) as important as three other language skills
- c) not as important as three other language skills
- d) not important at all

2. In your opinion, developing the reading skills for the first year students is

- a) very important
- b) important
- c) not very important
- d) not important at all

3. In the first year at university, what is your most important purpose of learning reading skill ?

- a) to reinforce vocabulary and grammatical structures
- b) to develop reading skills and improve other language skills
- c) to improve background knowledge
- d) to do the school exam well
- e) to prepare for learning ESP in the next term.

4. In your opinion, the reading texts in the textbook are

- a) interesting and suitable to the students' level
- b) boring and not suitable to the students' level
- c) interesting but not suitable to the students' level
- d) boring but suitable to the students' level

5. How often does your students have the following difficulties when reading an English text?

Difficulties	Often	Sometimes	Never
a) There are many new words in the text			
b) Grammatical structures in the text are difficult			
c) The topics in the text are strange			
d) The reading comprehension exercises are difficult			

6. How often do you ask your students to take part in the following activities before reading?

<i>Pre – reading activities</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Never</i>
a) Learn new vocabulary			

b) Set up a clear goal to read			
c) Answer some pre – reading questions			
d) Using the title, subtitles to predict content			
e) Look at pictures to guess the topic			
f) Play games (to know about the topic)			

7. At class, how do you often ask your students to read to find out the main ideas of the text?

a) Read slowly from the beginning to the end, trying to understand the meaning of every word.

b) Read quickly through the text, pay attention to the title, subtitles or topic sentences, ignoring the new words

Other strategies

8. At class, how do you often ask your students to read to find out specific information of the text?

a) Read slowly from the beginning to the end, trying to understand the meaning of every word.

b) Read quickly through the text, ignoring the new words to look for the specific information they want

Other strategies

9. In your reading lesson, how often do you use deliver the following types of while – reading exercises?

While – reading exercises	Often	Sometimes	Never
1. Questions and answer			
2. T/F exercises			
3. Multiple – choice exercises			

4. Finding the topic sentences			
5. Finding synonyms and antonyms			
6. Blank – filling exercises			
7. Reordering exercises			
8. Completing exercises			
9. Matching exercises			

10. After you finish the comprehension exercises, how often do you take part in the following activities?

Post – reading activities	Often	Sometimes	Never
a) Summarizing the text			
b) Discussing the main point of the text			
c) Writing on topics relevant to the reading text			
d) Practising new vocabulary in the text by doing extra exercises			

11. How often do you ask your students to do in pairs or in groups ?

- a) often b) sometimes c) never

12. Why do you ask your students to work with their partners ?

- a) To provide them chance to participate in the classroom activities.
b) To enable them to help each other in completing reading exercises
c) To offer them an opportunity to work with each other
d) To create a pleasant when learning atmosphere
e) All of these above