Demotivating Factors in Reading Comprehension of English Non-Majored Students at Thai Nguyen University: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

It is a fact that many students find reading comprehension one of the most challenges when they learn a foreign language. This study aims to find out the demotivating factors in reading comprehension that learners at Thai Nguyen University may have. The study carried out among 105 English non-major students at School of Foreign Languages - Thai Nguyen University (SFL-TNU). The main instrument employed for the data collection was questionnaires for both teachers and students. The findings of the study reveal that students' lack of linguistic and cultural background knowledge, the teachers' teaching methods, and difficulties from the textbooks were the most dominant demotivating factors for learners at TNU.

KEY WORDS: language learning, demotivate, demotivating factors, reading comprehension

I.   INTRODUCTION

Since English was chosen an international language, learning English has long been important to students of almost all levels in Vietnam. The remarkable shift from traditional method to communicative language teaching approach emphasizes the need for developing the communicative competence of the learners in four language skills. Through a great deal of effort has been made to achieve the goal, there are still a lot of shortcomings in teaching and learning English in general and reading comprehension in particular. To much extend, the reason is due to the fact that the students have to pass their exams which mainly focus on extensive vocabulary and grammatical rules. It is commonly acknowledged that reading is one of the most complex skills. When one reads, they are not able to control the message or the language used like they can in speaking and writing. Reading is also a skill that must be carried out under the real time pressure if it is done fluently. In addition, there is no chance for readers to ask for additional information or clarification like they can in speaking or listening. Moreover, Stanovich (2000:252) states that "the range of vocabulary encountered in reading is much greater than is typically used in speaking and listening settings".

The study aimed at investigating demotivating factors in reading lessons of English non-majored students at SFL-TNU. To achieve the above mentioned aims, the following research questions were proposed:

- *What are demotivating factors in reading comprehension of English non-majored students at SFL-TNU?*
- *What should be done to minimize the demotivating factors of the English non-majored students in reading comprehension?*

Methodology: The subjects of the study included 105 students (47 male and 58 female) and 6 teachers (2 male and 4 female) from SFL-TNU. To collect data, questionnaires for both students and teachers were used.

Data collection: The questionnaires were delivered to 105 students and 6 teachers from SFL-TNU. Before the participants answered the questions, they had been informed in Vietnamese about the purposes of the questionnaire and how to do it. The questionnaires for students consists of three main parts: Questions 1-4 (part 1) request the matter concerning students' motivation in learning reading English; Questions 5-8 (part 2) aim at finding out students' opinions on factors demotivating them in learning reading English; Question 9 (part 3) focuses on finding out students' expectations towards teachers of reading skills. The questionnaires for teachers included five questions and were sent to ten teachers.

Data analysis procedures: The data obtained through the questionnaire. The information from the questionnaires was displayed in the form of tables and figures while the information from the interviews was used as reflective notes and quotation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Reading: Goodman (1970:135) considered reading as "a psycholinguistics process by which the reader, language user, reconstructs, as best as he can, a message which has been encoded by a writer as a graphic display". Sharing the same view point, William (1990:2) stated that "reading is a process whereby one looks at and understands what has been written". Reading is considered to be a process of mechanic by Harmer (1989:153) "eyes receive the message and the brain then has to work out the significance of the message". The mechanical process of reading consists of two actions which are monitored by the eyes and brain. Thus, it is the reader that decides how fast the text runs.

Reading Comprehension: Reading comprehension is ability to get information from the text as efficiently as possible. It has long been considered to play an important role in teaching and learning reading. There are three elements involving in the reading process: the text being read, the background knowledge of the reader and the contextual aspects relevant for interpreting the text. Concerning what reading comprehension is, Swan (1975:1) stated that "A student is good at comprehension we mean that he can read accurately and efficiently, so as to get the maximum information of a text with the minimum of understanding". It is obvious that the students can show his understanding only by doing some tasks such as summarizing the text, answering questions, making true or false, etc. After reading, the readers can master the grammatical structures, words pronunciation, understanding the context of the texts and use it in real life as effective as possible. Through expressing the nature of reading comprehension in different ways, most of the scholars seem to agree that "reading without comprehension is meaningless" (Karlin and Kartin, 1992:2).

Motivation : In learning second language, motivation is considered to be an important factor determining the success of the learners. Thus, there have been a number of motivation concepts by different authors. Keller (1984) assumed that "interest" is one of the main apparatus of motivation in foreign and second language learning. Meanwhile Gardner (1985:10) considered the importance of efforts and desires to obtain the learning goal "motivation in the present context refers to the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language". Sharing the same opinion, Ellis (1997) attached importance to the role of attitudes and effectives states, which affect learner's efforts in learning a second language. However, Littlewood (1998: 53) found that motivation is complexly combined by different components including "the individual's drive, need for achievement and success, curiosity, desire for stimulation and new experience, and so on". Besides, McKay and Tom (1999) emphasizes it is the need to communicate with others in anew language that provide strong motivation for most learners. Meanwhile, Gardner and Lambert (1972) propose that the board concept of the "integrative motive" includes three main components: attitude, integrativeness and motivation.In addition, there are some other researchers attempting to make close the gap between theories of motivation in educational psychology and in the second language (L2) field. The researchers of this period added some new elements to the concepts of L2 motivation. Dornyei (1998) classifies three levels: language level, learner level and learning situational level and each level posses different elements. M. Williams and B. Burden (1997 in Dornyei, 1998) offered a detailed framework of L2 motivation with the internal and external motivation impacts. Nine internal factors are analyzed by them: intrinsic interest of activity, perceived value of activity, sense of agency, mastery, self-concept, attitudes, affective states such as confidence, anxiety and fear, developmental age and gender. Human factors supposed to be included in the internal factors such as parents, teachers, peers, feedback, rewards or punishments, the learning environment and the broader context.

The important of motivation in reading second language: It s is commonly acknowledged that reading motivation plays a vital role in second language reading process. Reading motivation is a kind of desire to read and it has a major role in students' success because most academic knowledge is gained through reading. To become effective readers throughout their school years, students must read early and often. Motivation for reading is important to develop their reading skills and make strong efforts to get over their shortcomings. Students become skilled at reading when they read a lot, and motivation is crucial for them to realize this change. Being aware that, "it is important part of a reading teacher's job to motivate learners", teachers should raise their students' interest and curiosity in the text, encourage their expectation and activate them in reading activities (Girard, D., 1977:120).

Demotivation : Traditionally, motivation has been considered as many-sided construct consisting of various positive influences. However, there is another aspect of motivation left without being properly attended, it is demotivation. Dörnyei (2001:143) defines demotivation as "specific external forces that reduce or diminish the motivation basis of a behavioral intention of an ongoing action". In other words, Dörnyei regarded motivation and demotivation as two contrary forces in the learning process of learners. According to Dörnyei (2001), there are two sources of demotivating factors: external and internal. External factors include grading and assignment, learning facilities, etc. and internal factors include reduced confidence and negative attitude toward the foreign language. In his study, Dörnyei also identifies the three negative factors that cannot be considered as instances of demotivation: powerful distractions, continuing loss of interest in a long-lasting, ongoing activity, and the sudden recognitions of the costs of an activity.

Dörnyei (2001) also insisted that demotivation does not mean that a learner has lost his/her motivation entirely. In contrast, the positive influences that originally made up the motivation basis of behavior can still be there.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data analysis of students' responses
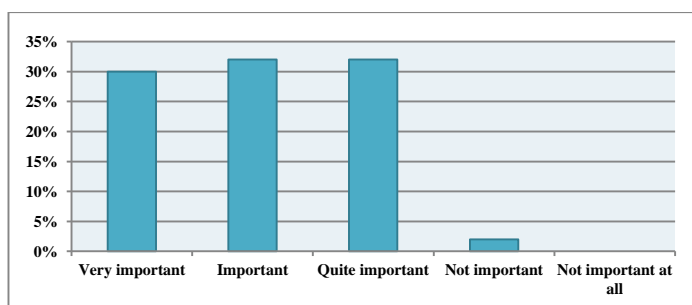*Students' motivation in learning reading English*

Figure 1. Students' attitude towards the learning of English reading

As can be seen from the figure, a majority of the students consider the importance of learning English reading comprehension in different ways. The reason the students gave for their perception of the importance of reading were various, but they seemed to see the association of reading to other language skills or to the acquisition of other formal elements of the language. Only a small portion of the students does not value the importance of reading, and they rank it under other skills in learning English.

Options	Percentage
a. To improve your knowledge of English	13.2%
b. To pass the exams	37.8%
c. To get high marks in the tests	33.0%
d. To read news and books in English	11.4%
e. For pleasure	3.7%
f. Other purposes	0.9%

Table 1. Students' purposes of learning English reading

The collected data of Question 3 shows that the students' purposes of learning English reading were various. Different ideas were provided for these purposes. 37.8% of the students in the study said they learn English to pass the exams, and get high marks in the test (33%). Ranked the next is the idea of students who considered improving knowledge of English as his/her reading purposes (13.2%); 11.4% of them have purpose of reading news and books in English; the percentage of the students who read for pleasure is 9.5%. Finally, only 0.9% of the participants agreed that they liked reading texts for other purposes as to get good job, etc. It is clear that the students' purposes of reading in English were different. Many students thought that reading could help them much in reinforcing language skills.
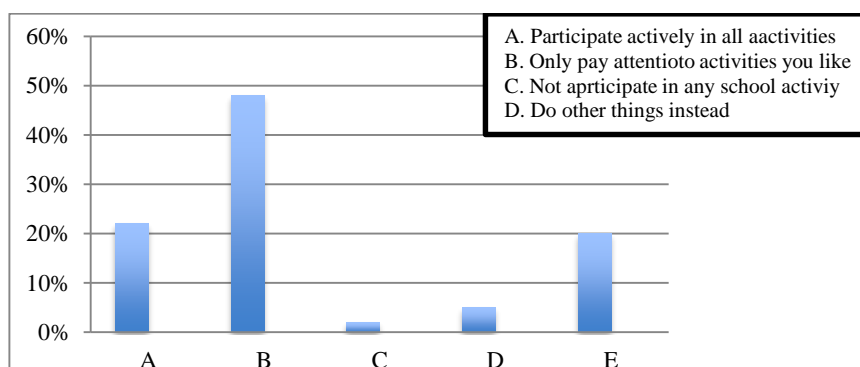

Table 2. Students' participation in English reading lessons

The figure shows that only 48% of the students participate in all class activities, others do not show their interest in all activities. Moreover, up to 20% of them get bored to concentrate on English reading lessons. Thus, the demotivating factors in their English reading lessons should be found out.

No.	Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1	There are so many new words in the reading text.	40.8%	20%	39.2%
2	The topics in the reading text are boring and difficult.	20.5%	27%	52%
3	The reading text is long and difficult.	50.5%	9.5%	37%
4	Reading tasks are difficult and not suitable to students' level.	45%	19.5%	35.5%
5	The time allowed in the reading lesson is not enough for me.	12%	10.5%	77%
6	Lack of modern teaching and learning facilities	29.5%	40%	30%
7	Teacher's personality and competence	53.5%	35%	14.5%
8	I am not confident when I am reading to English because I do not have basic background knowledge of English.	49.5%	13%	37%
9	I do not like the teachers' teaching method.	55.5%	22%	22.5%
10	Classroom activities are boring and overloaded.	48%	22.5%	29.5%

Table 3. Students' opinions on factors demotivating them in learning reading English

As can be seen from the table, 53.5% the students said that teacher personality is the factor causing demotivation in English reading comprehension lessons of the students. Similarly, 55.5% of them think the source of their demotivation factors is due to their teachers' teaching methods. Meanwhile, 50.5% of the students reached an agreement that they are demotivated by long and difficult reading texts. Besides, a high percentage of the students perceive the demotivation by the textbook. However, the data collected showed that most of the topics in the reading texts in the textbook are up-to-date and interesting. In addition, students' background knowledge were found to be the main source of demotivation, 49.6% of the participants agree that they are not confident when reading English because they do not have basic background of the language. As a result, they are not confident and become demotivated. Another factor causing demotivation to the students is the lack of modern teaching and learning facilities. Last but not least, the activities organized by the teachers during the reading lessons are considered to be a big demotivation for students. 48% of the participants agreed that it is boring and overloaded to participate in all activities. As commonly known, how a teacher designs and organizes classroom activities reflects his/her teaching method. The next question of the survey is designed to get students' opinion about their teachers' teaching method. From the collected data, it is surprising that a big portion of the students agree that their teachers' teaching method is boring, and demotivating their learning English reading lessons. 13% of the students agreed that their teachers' teaching method is inflexible, and the other 8% said that their teachers are tense. There are only 8% of the participants agreed that their teachers' teaching methodology are interesting and motivate learners.

Opinion	Percentage
a. Boring	44.5%
b. Inflexible	13%
c. Demotivating learners	26.5%
d. Tense	8%
e. Motivating learners	5.5%
f. Interesting	2.5%

Table 4. Students' opinion on their teachers' teaching method

It can be seen from the table that most of the students like interacting activities with their classmates and with their teachers. 89% of the participants want their teachers create a competitive atmosphere in their reading lessons. Similarly, using visual aids and using games are preferred by a majority of the students. In contrast, translating the reading text into Vietnamese is not considered to be an interesting task by 74% of the participants.

No.	Techniques	Much like	Like	Alright	Dislike	Not like at all
1	Creating a competitive atmosphere	89	4.5	5.5	0.5	0
2	Translating the reading text	5	8.5	22	45	29
3	Giving some pre-reading questions	45	40.5	12	4	3
4	Giving short discussion before reading	41	33.5	14	6	5
5	Pre-teaching new vocabulary and new structures in reading text	31	33	17	12	4.5
6	Giving a brief introduction of the text	35	32	5	14	13

7	Setting up a goal for students to read	28	50	12	7	2
8	Using games	50	27	15	4	3
9	Using visual aids	60	25	10	3	2
10	Giving feedback	35	33	12	10	8
11	Asking students to write summary after reading	25	21	41	12	1
12	Asking students to discuss about the text	23	21	45	9	2
13	Giving students supplementary reading materials	20	13	39	13	5

Table 5. Students' opinions on their teachers' employment of activities

In the next question, "*To what extend do teachers' teaching methods demotivate you?*", 42% of the students chose the first option, which is "giving lessons limited to textbook". It is true that the textbook is very important, however the teacher should be flexible in designing the task and organize the activities suiting the need and interest of their students. A similar portion of the students (41.5%) agree that the teaching method of their teachers is demotivating in terms of being inflexible in designing the tasks and activities. Besides, 17% of the students think it is unclear task instruction that demotivates then. It is true that without proper instructions, the students do not understand how to deal with the assigned tasks. As a result, they will get bored and demotivated.

Students' expectation towards teachers of reading skills

Opinions	Percentage
Design more suitable reading tasks to students' reading levels and interest	68%
Design more interesting activities	87%
Provide more background knowledge related to the topics	35%
Help students to choose suitable reading strategies for each reading text	37%
Ask students to work in pairs or in group	62%
Encourage students more in learning reading	57%

Table 6. Students' expectation towards teachers of reading skills

The collected date showed that 87% of the students expected the teachers to design more interesting activities and 68% preferred designing more suitable reading tasks to students' reading levels and interests. We can see that the employment of the activities in English reading lessons needs to be enhanced to make the lessons more interesting and motivate the students to learn.We can see from the table that 62% of the students expected the teachers to ask students to work in pairs or in groups. It is true that pair, working and group working will enable to interact and share with each other. In addition, these activities type will create a competitive atmosphere which is preferred by almost all students (as the result of the question seven showed). 37% o the students expect to be equipped with necessary strategies in reading comprehension and 47% of them hope that teachers are supported to encourage students more in learning reading.Apart from the above suggested responses, some students show different expectations such as giving more corrective feedback, spend time explaining the new words' and phrases' meaning and the associated grammar. Many of the students in the interview revealed that they expect their teachers to change the ways of teaching by using more techniques and creating a competitive environment for them to express themselves without being afraid of making mistakes.

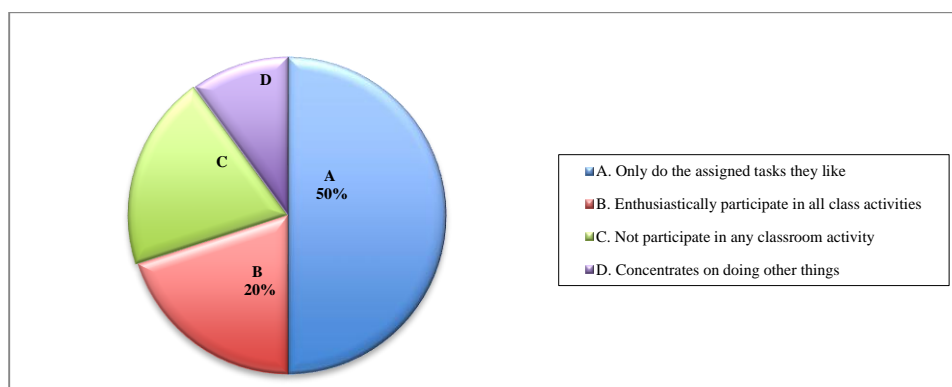## IV. DATA ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' RESPONSE

Figure 2. Teacher's perception of students' participation in activities in the reading lessons

As can be seen from the figure, 50% of the teacher said their students just do assigned tasks they like in the reading lessons. It could be inferred that the teacher aware that their students are not motivated enough to learn English reading. One teacher reported the majority of the students in his/her class often concentrate on doing other things instead.

No.	Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1	The reading tasks and texts are difficult.	60%	10%	40%
2	Lack of modern teaching and learning facilities.	50%	20%	30%
3	Teachers' personality	0%	20%	80%
4	Lack of basic background knowledge of English.	60%	20%	20%
5	Teachers' teaching method	0%	30%	70%
6	Classroom activities are boring and overload.	0%	30%	70%

Table 7. Teachers' perceptions of students' demotivation in reading skill

It can be seen from the table, most of the teachers (60%) agreed that the biggest demotivating factors in learning reading is related to the students' poor background knowledge of English. This is understandable as most of the students at SFL-TNU come from the rural areas. The majority of the students in the interview said there are some reading texts are long and difficult. Therefore, the reading tasks and texts are also considered to be demotivating factor to their students by 6 teachers in the survey. Half of the teachers (50%) participated in the survey agreed that the second ranked demotivating factor is lack of modern teaching and learning facilities. When being asked about other factors related to teachers such as teaching method, personality and behavior, none of the surveyed teachers found them as demotivation factor. Similarly, no one thought the students are demotivated by the boring and overloaded activities in their English reading lessons.

No.	Items	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
1	Creating a competitive atmosphere	10%	20%	50%	20%
2	Asking students to translate the reading text	60%	20%	10%	0%
3	Giving some re-reading questions	10%	40%	40%	10%
4	Giving short discussion before reading	20%	30%	20%	30%
5	Pre-teaching new vocabulary and new structures in the reading text	60%	20%	10%	10%
6	Giving a brief introduction of the text	30%	20%	30%	20%
7	Setting up a goal for students to read	10%	10%	40%	40%
8	Using games	20%	20%	40%	20%
9	Using visual aids	0%	10%	30%	60%
10	Giving feedback	10%	10%	20%	60%
11	Asking students to write summary of the text after reading	0%	0%	20%	80%
12	Asking students to discuss about the text	10%	20%	30%	40%
13	Giving students supplementary reading materials	10%	10%	20%	60%

Table 8. Teachers' frequency of using activities in reading lessons

The table shows that in an English reading lesson, pre-teaching new vocabulary and new structures in the reading text were the most frequently used technique (70%). This could be explained that it was among the common techniques for pre-reading stage or students' vocabulary was limited and they are unable to guess the meaning of the new words from the context. By doing so, the teachers believed that they can deal with the reading text is frequently used by 6 of the teachers. Combining with the result in question 7 of the questionnaire for the students, the following table presents an overview on the employment of the techniques and activities by the teachers, and the preference of the students for those activities.

No.	Techniques	Numbers of students	
		Teachers employ frequently (%)	Students like (%)
1	Creating a competitive atmosphere	10	93.5
2	Asking students to translate the reading text	60	13.5
3	Giving some pre-reading questions	10	85.5
4	Giving short discussion before reading	20	74.5
5	Pre-teaching new vocabulary and new structures in the reading text	60	64
6	Giving a brief introduction of the text	20	67
7	Setting up a goal for students to read	10	77
8	Using games	20	63

9	Using visual aids	0	85
10	Giving feedback	10	68
11	Asking students to write summary of the text after reading	0	46
12	Asking students to discuss about the text	10	44
13	Giving students supplementary reading materials	10	34

Table 9. Techniques and activities employed by the teachers and the preference of the students for those activities

The above table indicates that most of the students like competitive atmosphere, interacting activities whereas just a very small number of the teachers employ them. Thus, it is really necessary for the teachers to change their way of teaching by applying more and more suggested techniques and activities. The last question for the teachers aims at getting their ideas on how to motivate their students to learn English reading comprehension lessons. It is surprised that 60% of the teachers think of improving students' related factors such as their background knowledge, their English proficiency by having more extra classes. Besides, 70% of the teachers suggest adapting the learning material (the textbook) to suit the students' level, and 90% of the teachers think that the improvement of learning facilities can help to motivate their students more in learning English in general and English reading comprehension in particular

V. CONCLUSIONS

The major factors cause of demotivation for the students in English reading lessons are the reading materials, the teachers' teaching method, the learning environment and students' inadequate background of English. There is a difference regarding demotivating factors according to students' responses and teachers' responses. Among those, students' lack of background knowledge and teachers' teaching methods and behaviors should be most focused. Basing on the findings, five suggestions were recommended to minimize the demotivating factors including: Adapting the textbook that suit students' level, Teachers behaviors to students, Teachers' teaching methods, The facilities for teaching and learning, and make the classroom atmosphere exciting.

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