

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

Vietnam National University of Agriculture (VNUA) is located in Trau Quy, Gia Lam, Hanoi. After many twists and turns, it is now known as the leading among the community of agriculture, forestry and fishery universities in Vietnam. It has 01 Graduate School and 13 Faculties. Students of all these faculties have one objective in common, studying English as a foreign language. This precondition seems to be challenging to most students in my university. The first rationale might be their low level before entering university. Specifically, their knowledge of English is very limited. Another reason is that almost all the students are not motivated to learn English. Owing to demotivation, students seem to be unself-conscious about learning English inside as well as outside classroom.

That students are not motivated usually occurs in almost all English classes at my university. During English lessons, very few students are really into learning English. This may result from their low proficiency level. The choice of the course book entitled *New Headway Elementary* (by Liz and John Soars, 2000) is primarily blamed. In this course book, a knowledge of basic grammar, common vocabulary, together with four skills is supplied; however, it seems to be of little use to my students. It is simply owing to the mismatch between the tasks performed in the book and the test format based on ToEIC. The most common pre-reading activity in *New Headway* is discussion, which can be organized as whole-class or pair/ group work but lacks competition.

If students show little or no interest in taking part in English reading lessons, it will be difficult for both teachers and students to work effectively as well as to meet the demands and objectives of the curriculum. In addition, the literature shows positive effects of games on enhancing students' motivation. Therefore, in this study, I would like to investigate the effects of language games adapted in reading lessons in *New Headway Elementary* for my non-English major students.

1.2 Aims of the study and research questions

The main purpose of the study is to adapt language games in reading lessons to increase the students' motivation in reading classes. To achieve this aim, the following question was sought: *“To what extent do language games in reading lessons enhance Elementary first-year students' motivation at Hanoi University of Agriculture?”*

1.3 Scope of the study

An action research was carried out to investigate what the main causes of students' low motivation were and find out some possible solutions to the problem. The paper focuses on applying some language games in pre and post-reading activities for the book “New Headway, Elementary” for non – English major students with the aim to increase their participation in reading classes at Hanoi University of Agriculture. This study was implemented for 9 weeks in a class of 26 first–year students at Hanoi University of Agriculture in the school year 2012–2013 only.

1.4 Significance of the study

It is hoped that the investigation into the main causes of the students' low motivation in reading lessons and some appropriate recommendations based on the findings could help the researcher solve the problem and also provide her with practical experiences in improving her students' motivation in reading lessons. This study will also contribute to the research of the development of teaching English as well as teaching reading at Hanoi University of Agriculture.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is organized into 5 chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results and Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Motivation in Language Learning

2.1.1. Definitions of “Motivation”

Motivation is believed to be one of the most important factors determining the rate and success of language learning. In the past decades, researchers in various fields have tried to explore the construct of language learning motivation from many different perspectives.

For this study, the researcher has chosen the definition of motivation given by Crookes and Schmidt (1991) “Motivation is *interest* in and *enthusiasm* for the activities used in classroom; *persistence* with the learning task, as indicated by levels of *attention* or *action* for an extended duration; and levels of *concentration* and *enjoyment*.” (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991, p.p. 498- 502)

2.1.2. Types of motivation

2.1.2.1. Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation is an outward force in the form of expectation, praise and rewards.

2.1.2.2. Intrinsic motivation

In contrast, intrinsic motivation is a response to needs that exist within the learner, such as curiosity, the need to know, and feelings of competence or growth (Eggen & Kauchak, 1994).

Although there are some differences between these two types of motivation, they are inseparable. Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are important and complementary to each other in English learning. Intrinsic motivation is the type of inner drive that propels students forward and onward with continuous energy fueled by its own curiosity and interest.

2.1.3. Role of Motivation in Language Learning

It should be added that there has been a great deal of research on the role of motivation in second language learning. Another role of motivation in foreign language learning is to promote the choice of strategies among students learning a second or foreign language. In a nutshell, motivation plays an

important role in the success of L2 learning students. When the learners set the goal of learning a foreign language, motivation helps them produce effort and have a positive attitude to obtain the goal. In other words, motivation is a basic element in language learning that no teacher could avoid being concerned with students’.

2.2. *Language games*

2.2.1. Definitions of Language Games

It can be defined that language games are activities with the rules, goals, and element of fun carried out by the players, pupils’ cooperation or competition for the language practice.

2.2.2. Types of Language Games

2.2.2.1 Communicative Language Teaching Games

Communicative language teaching games are designed to give students a chance to use language in more realistic situation. They have no specific language aim of teaching a particular structure or providing vocabulary practice. Instead, they are designed to develop learner’s general communicative skills. That is to say, students are given a non- linguistic task to complete, and their success depends on their ability to carry out instructions, directions, descriptions and so forth. The aim of the games is to get students to work together in order to achieve certain things through the use of language. However, it should be noted that communicative language games are also useful in developing linguistic elements or improving correctives in communication.

2.2.2.2 Language Practice Games

Language practice games can be defined as “those, which involve repeated use of particular language items, when the language form is given and controlled, and where accuracy of reproduction or spelling is required in order for the players to succeed” (Khan, 1991). Games of this sort are structure games, vocabulary games, spelling games, games, number games, picture filling/ drawing games and etc. The researcher adopted both kinds of language

games in the hope that they are useful for her students, especially for those at elementary level.

2.2.3 Advantages of Using Games in CLT classrooms

2.2.3.1 Games provides meaningful practice

2.2.3.2 Games create motivation

2.2.3.3 Games promote participation and cooperation

2.2.3.4 Games supply immediate feedback

2.2.3.5 Games provide active learner- centered learning

2.2.4 Effective ways to apply games in a language class

2.2.4.1 Preparation

- *Selecting games*
- *Teaching aid*
- *Timing*
- *When to use games*

2.2.4.2 Organizing games

Giving and checking instructions

Class organization

2.3 Stages of a reading lesson

There are three different stages: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading stage. Each of these stages has its own characteristics, although they relate to one another. That is, the pre-reading stage leads to the while-reading stage and finally to the post-reading one.

2.3.1 Pre- reading stage

Pre-reading stage is used with the aim to enable the students to understand a reading text, without their looking up every single word. It is vital for teachers to employ the pre-reading stage to build confidence and to create security within learners before they approach a reading text. Pre- reading stage plays an important role in the instruction of reading. It is considered to be an instrument which teachers can use in the class to activate students' background knowledge. It is the pre-reading stage that helps to make the next

stages of reading more easily adaptable for the readers. Also, without the pre-reading stage, the task (while – reading) might be more difficult and progressively less enjoyable. Also, pre- reading activities are, to some extent, to make students more motivated; consequently, increase the effectiveness of reading lessons.

2.3.2 While – reading stage.

- The aim of while-reading activities is to encourage learners to be flexible, active and reflective readers. While-reading tasks aim at encouraging active and reflexive reading, attempting to promote the kind of dialogue between readers and writer and helping students understand the writer’s purpose and understand how the text is organized as well as to clarify the content of the text. While- reading stage can help learners to improve their ability to become more fluent in learning languages. This stage also helps improve learners’ deeper layer of a text.

2.3.3 Post - reading stage.

Post-reading stage is the last stage of a reading text. The objectives of post-reading stage are to enable students to consolidate what they have read and to relate the content of the text to students’ own knowledge, experience and interest.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed the theoretical background to the definition of motivation as well as its importance in language learning. It also discussed the advantages, types of language games, together with the way to prepare and organize them in language teaching class. Additionally, the stages of a reading lesson were clearly illustrated. The final section listed the previous studies on applying games in L2 class, which were regarded as a clear view for the researcher doing the research.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research questions

“To what extent do language games in reading lessons enhance Elementary first-year students’ motivation at Hanoi University of Agriculture?”

3.2 Research method

Action research could be used in the study to collect data and implement the action plan.

3.3 Data collection instruments

To have a good and deep understanding of the issue, a combination of the two main data collection instruments: classroom observation and questionnaires for students were used to collect the data.

3.3.1 Survey questionnaire

3.3.1.1. Questionnaire 1

The questionnaire 1 was designed to identify the students’ perception of their participation level in reading lessons and probe the possible causes of the problem.

3.3.1.2 Questionnaire 2

The questionnaire 2 was designed to explore the 26 students’ opinions of the effects of language games implemented after the action plan implementation (Week 15).

3.3.2 Observation

3.3.2.1 Observation Sheet 1

The observation sheet adopted from Peacock (2007) was used in six reading lessons to identify the students’ level of motivation in real teaching situations and investigate to what extent language games help to increase students’ motivation.

3.3.2.2 Observation sheet 2

Observation sheet 2, adapted from Peacock (1997), was used to assess overall class motivation generated by reading activities.

3.4 Subjects

3.4.1 The researcher/ teacher

The researcher is a teacher of English at Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages, Hanoi University of Agriculture. She is twenty-eight years old and has been teaching English for 5 years. In this study, she also works as an observer.

3.4.2 The observers

Two English teachers of Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Education and Foreign Languages, Hanoi University of Agriculture were chosen as non-participant observers. They got BA in English and are currently working at HUA. They are both 35 years old and have taught for over 10 years.

3.4.2 The students

Twenty six first year non-English major students will participate in the study. They are in the second semester of the first year and arranged into Elementary level of proficiency (English 0). Their ages range from 18 to 20 years old. They come from different areas of Vietnam. Most of them have studied English for at least 7 years (4 years at Junior High School and 3 years at Senior High School).

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION

4.1. Initial data

This part would help the researcher examine the students' motivation level in reading lessons and find out the main causes of the problem. The result was collected from two sources: observations and questionnaire.

4.1.1. Students' previous English learning experiences

Question iii of part I in Questionnaire 1 asks how long the students had learnt English before entering the university. It is resulted that the students in this study had different learning experiences. However, they took the placement test and were all classified into English 0 module. Therefore, in the scope of this study, all the participants were considered of the same level.

4.1.2. Students' attitude to reading skill, reading texts and reading activities

The first two questions in Questionnaire 1 seek the students' opinions of reading skill. Most students admitted that reading skill is important but challenging. Many of them confessed themselves demotivated in reading texts. However, it is noticeable that only a few agreed on the difficulty of the texts. In addition, although pre and post –reading activities were not widely assumed to be hard, a high number of students did not feel like those activities. While only a few students felt uncomfortable with their grammar and background knowledge needed for the activities, a lot of students were not sure of their command of vocabulary.

4.1.3. Students' behavior in reading lessons

Question 10 in the first questionnaire examines what students usually did in the reading lessons. Through the result collected, the number of students scanned to be on-task was low. In order to confirm the students' low motivation in reading lessons, the students' answers to Question 11 were collected. The students' motivation in reading lessons was quite low during

the two observed lessons; the students were on-task for less than half of the given time.

4.1.4.3. Reasons for the low level of participation

The two most common reasons for the students' low participation level in reading lessons are pre and post-reading activities and lack of vocabulary to comprehend the texts.

4.2. Data collected in the action stage

4.2.1. Students' feelings about language games

The figure clearly describes that a large number of students highly appreciate language games.

4.2.2. Students' opinion about the effects of Language games on reading lessons

The results indicate a strong belief in the positive effects of Language games on reading lessons. In other words, the language games applied in the pre and post – reading stages might not be effective enough to change the students' behavior thoroughly.

4.2.3. Students' view on the use of Language games in the future reading lessons.

The findings of these questions imply that language games were preferred by most of the students. The results proves that many students realized the necessity of reading skill, but the demand for longer reading lessons was very low. It is more likely that 75 minutes for one reading lesson is enough for most of the students.

4.2.4. Students' opinions about the games applied in the reading lessons

The table illustrates that the students have different likes of the games used in the reading lessons. The two most preferred games are “Test your knowledge” and “Slap the board”.

4.2.5. Students' participation in the action stage

It can be concluded that the students were more involved and motivated when language games were applied in the reading lessons. This would be discussed further in the next section.

4.3. Action research evaluation

After collecting data to monitor change, an evaluation of the AR based on the data of the stage before and after the action plan was made to measure how the students' motivation changed.

4.3.1. Students' behavior at the initial and post stage

Chart 2 summarizes information about students' on-task behavior in two phases collected by Observation sheet 1. As could be seen from the figure, at the post stage, the students' on-task behavior was on an increase during the last four reading lessons. This proves that the students became more involved in the reading activities when the language games were applied.

4.3.2. Overall class motivation at the initial and post stage

Chart 3 presents the information of the overall classroom motivation for the students, collected by Observation sheet 2. What can be seen from this figure is that the mean score of overall classroom motivation at the post stage in comparison with that of the initial stage, increased. This revealed the fact that when the action plan was developed, there was a moderate increase in the students' motivation.

4.4. Findings

In this chapter, the data collected in different stages of the AR have been presented. The initial stage was aimed at identifying the main cause of the students' low motivation in reading lessons. Questionnaire 1 for the students, and Observation sheets were used to collect data for this purpose. After analyzing the initial data, the confirmed cause was inappropriate pre and post-reading activities. Then, the hypothesis of the study was drawn: *Implementing language games would increase the students' motivation*. Later, an action plan was developed. The post data were gathered through the analysis of

observation sheets and Questionnaire 2. The evaluation of the AR was made by comparing and contrasting the results in the initial and post stage of the action plan.

The evaluation reveals that the students' motivation marginally improved when language games were adapted in the reading lessons. To be more specific, the percentage of the students' on-task behavior after the action plan implementation increased by 14.4% of the given time. There was also a rise in the overall classroom motivation, demonstrated by a growth in the mean score of the two phases. The mean score of the first phase was 22.8 out of the maximum possible (40), in comparison with that of the second phase (30.1).

It is also noteworthy that the students became more motivated in reading lessons thanks to the use of language games, but their behavior was not as good as expected. There is a shred of evidence that only three out of twenty six students raised their hands to answer reading comprehension questions.

Another conclusion can be drawn that most of the students are well aware of the importance of reading skill. This can be proved by the fact that there were up to 65.4% of the whole class wishing to have more reading lessons. However, most students objected to the reading lessons longer than 75 minutes.

It is obvious that the students had positive feelings about applying language games during reading lessons. Many of them considered language games interesting, exciting, and useful. Nonetheless, the last finding reflected their different attitudes towards each game used. Of all the games adapted, the most popular one is "Test your knowledge" while the least favorite one is "Scavenger Hunt".

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1. Recommendations

The findings from this study raise the issue of reconsidering reading activities in the book *New Headway Elementary* for students at HUA where there is always distance of levels, background, interests...among students. Although this book is good for those who want to master the basic general English, not all the activities designed in the book are suitable for all students in Vietnam in general and in HUA in particular. Therefore, the most important thing for each teacher is her or his own flexibility and creativity in using suitable activities for her/his own students' circumstances. As for the subjects of this study, they lost interest in reading lessons mainly because of inappropriate pre and post – reading activities in the course book. Hence, the researcher/ teacher replaced these activities by language games which have been conclusively proven to be effective and practical in a vast number of researches.

Secondly, teachers should understand her/his students' interests, needs and dislikes as well as their background knowledge and learning styles in order to find out the suitable activities for them. This will make them more eager and willing to participate in the learning processes. In this research, when language games were regarded as a potential replacement, the researcher took everything into consideration to be able to adapt or design suitable games for the students in a certain context. For example, the age, level and needs of students; the language or language skill to be taught; when and how to deliver and organize the game...The students in my study were not confident in their lexical knowledge, which would make them find comprehending texts more challenging. Thus, most of the games applied in this research gave them a revision of vocabulary relating to the content of reading texts.

Thirdly, teachers should pay special attention to a lesson plan in which the timing for each activity must be taken into account. Whenever a game is organized in the classroom, it takes a certain amount of time to prepare, present, play and post-play. Therefore, to minimize the time for preparing and presenting the game rule, the researcher had to put much effort into the preparation for each reading lesson. She studied the lesson very carefully to decide on the game, how to organize, when to play. Especially, the teacher produced a lot of materials for the lessons, including slides, pictures, and handouts. In spite of this, the researcher still faced the timing problem when grouping the students seemed to be time-consuming. Consequently, it was challenging to be able to effectively manage the time of implementing games.

Fourthly, in the reading lessons of Unit 6 and 7, as a result of the students' excitement and enthusiasm while playing the games, too much noise was made. This greatly affected other nearby classes which were going on at the same time. Therefore, without caution, a language game can be useful to one class but harmful to others.

Fifthly, there is a strong evidence that the students' level of participation and motivation in the reading lessons increased, thanks to the application of language games in pre and post – reading stages. However, the subjects did not really behave as well as expected. Many of them were not active enough to volunteer to give their answers to reading comprehension questions. The question arises as to whether games should be applied in while – reading stage as well. Alternatively, are there any other activities to motivate students more and to make them totally change passive behavior in classroom activities?

Finally, it is a fact that each game applied motivated the student to a certain degree. The students in my study preferred the games which require a high level of competition and a reasonable demand of language. In addition, the game should be useful, providing them with background knowledge.

The recommendations above are expected to assist teaching staff in enhancing their students' motivation in learning not only reading skill but other skills as well.

5.2. Limitations and suggestions for further study

Some limitations of this study are acknowledged as follows:

Firstly, the action plan was implemented in a short time (only four weeks with four lessons) from unit 4 to unit 7 of the course book. Also, the researcher conducted the study in one class only. Furthermore, there were two data collection instruments: Questionnaire and Observation. These limit the generality of the results. The results would be more reliable if it were implemented in a longer period of time, with greater number of subjects and more data collection instruments.

Secondly, within the scope of the study, the researcher only focused on the influence of pre and post-reading activities on the students' participation, one of the factors affecting students' motivation in reading classes. Therefore, other factors such as students' attitudes, students' belief, and teaching method and so on have not been dealt with.

Thirdly, a lot of other games that students may like could not be used in pre and post-reading activities due to the time limit.

Finally, the study has only investigated the effects of language games on students' motivation in reading lessons at HUA without paying attention to the effects of other modified activities on students' motivation as well as students' motivation in learning other skills. Therefore, further studies on these fields should be done.

5.3. Conclusion

The action research was carried out during twelve weeks. It began when the problem of the students' low motivation in reading lessons was perceived during the first weeks of the action research. Initial data was gathered and analyzed to confirm the problem and explore the causes by means of class observations and Questionnaire 1.

It is clear that students' low motivation was caused by many reasons, however, one of the main reasons was the unsuitability of the pre and post-reading activities in reading sections of the course book "New Headway Elementary, 3rd edition". The fact was that the level of language of the original activities was higher than the students' competence; the activities did not bring about a comfortable learning atmosphere for the learners. After the initial data were analyzed and the problem was identified, the hypothesis of the study was formed, that was: *"Implementing language games would increase the students' motivation"*.

In order to enhance the students' motivation in reading lessons, the action plan was carried out by applying language games in the pre and post-reading activities of units 4, 5, 6, and 7. The choice of the games was based on the age, level and likes of the students; as well as the language used in the reading text.

The effectiveness of the action plan was evaluated by comparing the initial and post data. The results indicated that despite some shortcomings, the application of language games was moderately effective. The participants in the study were, more or less, engaged in the reading lessons.