

TEACHING READING TO E.F.L. (ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE)
VIETNAMESE STUDENTS AT THE HANOI FOREIGN LANGUAGE
TEACHERS COLLEGE (HNFLTC)

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A Field Study Report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Masters of Arts —TESOL (Teaching
English to Speakers of Other Languages) in the Canberra College
of Advanced Education, Canberra, Australia.

October , 1985.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Ralph Wingfield, my supervisor for allowing me to draw fully on his wisdom and experience during the course of this Field Study. His guidance and encouragement have been most generous and precious.

I am also grateful for the valuable suggestions given by Mrs. Leonie Cottrill and Dr. Elizabeth Patz as well as my colleagues who attended my project seminar.

Among the lecturers in the College, I wish to thank Dr. Patricia Denham, Dr. John Penhallurick, Mrs. Leonie Cottrill for their valuable instructions.

I cannot fail to thank Professor Dr. Bui Hien of the Educational Institute, Vietnam for his advice and suggestions.

Finally, my grateful acknowledgement is made to all those who have kindly helped me with source materials during the writing of this report.

Canberra, October , 1985.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

At present, in Vietnam, post-war reconstruction of the country is going on. More than ever before foreign languages in general and the English language in particular are widely used as a means of communication and international co-operation. More and more people from almost every field of economy, politics, culture, sciences, education, etc. are studying and using English. The more widely English is used, the greater is the need to teach it. And, as a result, the need to train teachers of English becomes more urgent.

Despite the achievements that have been made there is still considerable room for improvement in the area of foreign language teaching.

There are various reasons to account for this situation, both subjective and objective. Among them is the lack of effective modern methods and techniques for the teachers to arm themselves with. It is important, therefore, to look, as we do in Chapter I, at some of the problems with foreign language teaching and learning in Vietnam as well as those at the Hanoi Foreign Language Teachers College.

In Chapter 2 we look at specific instances of EFL Teaching of Reading at the College and suggest that greater emphasis be placed on Silent Reading which is at present largely ignored. We also list reasons pleading for more appropriate reading materials and increased time allocation in our EFL syllabus.

In order to improve the quality of EFL teaching and learning it is necessary to have an insight into some of the theoretical issues concerning reading and their practical implications. Thus, in Chapter 3 we look for answers to the all-important questions : What is Reading ? What are the levels at which comprehension takes place ? What are the factors that influence reading comprehension, etc.

Chapter 4 is an attempt to look at the content of reading lessons in our College, with all the practical and pedagogical implications involved.

In continuation, Chapter 5, is devoted to the dichotomy of Intensive and Extensive Reading with detailed suggestions for effective lessons on these two aspects of the reading programme.

In Chapter 6, the Concluding Chapter of the Study, the writer would like to make a number of suggestions as to what the teacher of reading, as a person, needs to contribute to make the reading programme a success. An attempt will also be made to look into the future of the study.

ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 introduces the aims and objectives of the study. It is followed by an analysis of the present situation at the Hanoi Foreign Language Teachers College and the problems encountered by teachers and administrators in ensuring the maximum efficiency of the EFL programme.

The Report continues by asking a number of pertinent questions about the methodology and techniques used in the teaching of reading. This, in turn, is linked with theoretical considerations which the writer examines at some length taking into account numerous issues about language processing, cognition, expectation and motivation, comprehending, discourse analysis, text cohesion and so on.

Attention is then focused on the reader and the environment in which he operates. In addition the reading lesson comes under scrutiny and procedures, as well as material selection and teaching systems are discussed. Finally the writer attempts to make suggestions to his colleagues in the EFL field based on his own experience and convictions.

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CHAPTER 1

THE SITUATION AND THE PROBLEMS

1. Foreign Language Teaching and Learning in Vietnam

1.1. Importance and Necessity

The importance and necessity of foreign language teaching and learning in Vietnam has for long been emphasised. In a talk given to the staff and students of the Hanoi Foreign Languages Teachers College (H.N.F.L.T.C.) on July 10th 1967, Pham Van Dong, President of the Council of Ministers underlined the need of foreign language teachers in the cause of national construction and defence. He also urged the College to find effective methods and techniques relevant to the concrete conditions of Vietnam to achieve the goals of training. He stated (1973 : p.8) :

"The basic question is what to teach and how to teach it so that after graduation, as teachers the students will be in a position to impart a fundamental knowledge of the target language to their pupils".

Since the liberation of the South and the National Reunification in 1975, communication and co-operation between Vietnam and other countries have been increasing considerably. Vietnam is establishing closer economic, political, scientific and cultural relations with various peoples the world over. International relations are being extended and strengthened through the exchange of delegations at different levels, as well as scientific, technical and cultural information. Vietnam would like to know what is going on in the world

in all spheres of human activity, such as science, culture, education, etc. It is also desirable for her to acquaint other peoples with details of her life and achievements and her post-war reconstruction. In this situation, foreign language teaching and learning are of national significance. Since English is the most widely used language in the world, it is considered to be a necessary tool which can facilitate access for Vietnam to modern scientific and technological advances, and in turn help to promote communication and co-operation between Vietnam and the rest of the international community.

1.2. Aims of Foreign Language Teaching

In foreign language teaching and learning in Vietnam there are, at least, three considerations to be kept in mind. These are of a practical, educational and cultural nature.

A practical aim means that the students acquire habits and skills in using a target language ; an educational aim implies that the students develop their mental abilities and intelligence in the process of learning the language ; and a cultural aim suggests that the students extend their knowledge of the world in which they live, develop a sympathetic understanding of the culture embedded in the language and enrich their own cultural and behavioural patterns.

Aims are the first and foremost important considerations in any teaching. The teacher needs to know exactly what the students are expected to achieve in learning the target language, what changes he can bring about in his students by the end of the course, and for shorter

interim periods. He also needs to be aware of the aims and objectives of foreign language teaching in general.

The terms 'aims' and 'objectives' are clearly distinguished in this report in accordance with the suggestion given by Roberts (1972 : p. 224). He writes : " The term 'aims' be reserved for long-term goals such as provide the justification or reason for teaching second languages ... the term 'objectives' be used only for short-term goals (immediate lesson goal), such as may reasonably be achieved in a classroom lesson or sequence of lessons". In this section we shall deal with long-term goals, that is, with the aims of foreign language teaching which dictate the teacher's approach to this subject.

As has been mentioned earlier, there are at least three aims to be achieved in foreign language teaching : practical, educational and cultural.

1) Practical aims

The teaching of a foreign language should result in the learner's gaining one more code for receiving and conveying information that is, acquiring a target language to use it as a means of communication.

In modern society language is used in two ways : directly or orally, and indirectly or in written form. Thus, we distinguish oral language and written language. Direct communication implies a speaker and a hearer, indirect communication involves a writer and a reader. Hence, the practical aim in teaching a foreign language is to develop the

four macro-skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Of these skills, in Vietnamese schools reading is considered to be the major one. According to Nguyen Tuyet Minh, Nguyen Hao (1982: p12)"reading is defined as the basic aim of the whole process of language learning in schools". In our country we adopt these aims after taking into consideration these factors : the political and economic conditions of the country ; the requirements of the state ; the general goals of school education and the conditions for instruction.

It can be stated that effective foreign language teaching makes it possible for educational and cultural aims to be achieved.

2) Educational aims

Learning a foreign language in our country is considered to be of great educational value. Through a new language we can gain an insight into the way in which words express thoughts and so achieve greater clarity and precision in our own communication. When learning a foreign language the learner understands better how language functions and this brings him to a greater awareness of his mother tongue.

Since language is connected with thinking, through foreign language studies we can develop the learner's intellect. Teaching a foreign language helps the teacher develop the learner's voluntary and involuntary memory, his imaginative abilities, and will power. Indeed, in learning a new language the learner should memorize words, idioms, sentence-patterns, structures and keep them in his long-term memory ready to be used when necessary. Teaching a foreign language under

conditions devoid of a natural language environment is practically impossible without appealing to the students' imagination. The lack of real communication forces the teacher to create imaginary situations for students to practise the language.

Teaching a foreign language is also considered to contribute to the linguistic education of the students. They can extend their knowledge of phonic, graphic, structural, and semantic aspects of language through contrastive analysis of language phenomena.

3) Cultural aims

Learning a foreign language acquaints the students with the life, customs and traditions of the people whose language they study through visual materials as well as reading materials dealing with the countries where the target language is spoken. Foreign language teaching can promote the students' general educational and cultural growth by increasing their knowledge about foreign countries, and by acquainting them with the traditions of the people who speak the language. Through learning a foreign language the students can gain a deeper insight into the nature and functioning of language as a social phenomenon.

These three aims are closely related. The leading role belongs to the practical aims for the others can only be achieved through the practical command of the foreign language.

2. The Hanoi Foreign Language Teachers College

The College is one of the institutions to carry out the above-

mentioned aims. Moreover, it is an important link in the chain of foreign language teaching and learning for it provides teachers of foreign languages to most of the schools in the country.

2.1. The Aims

The College is supposed to train foreign language teachers for schools. Besides, it is also a source of supply of teachers for other Teachers Colleges, as well as Vocational or Higher Schools of Education, either specialized or non-specialized in languages.

2.2. Requirements for a Teacher

1) He must have a good command of the target language, be able to use it as a means of communication both directly and indirectly. Thus he must be good at the four language skills.

Furthermore, he must be able to teach the language to the students, so that they will be capable of using it as a means of communication, too.

To make him a teacher we must teach him the target language not only in terms of skills, but also in terms of knowledge of the language. The latter means the fundamentals of the system and the structure of the language. These fundamentals will help the learners to produce language in a conscious manner for the sake of communication.

In this context it is important to see the difference between the first language and the target language. One is able to use one's own language effectively ignorant of its system and structure. Children

of three or four years of age can use the mother tongue fairly well to meet communicative needs. This is achieved through fresh memory and good imitation as well as the abundant natural language environment.

The situation is different in learning a foreign language. It is extremely difficult to firmly develop skills and habits outside the language environment. It would be more difficult still if the learner had no basic knowledge of the system and structure of the target language, especially when he is an adult learner. The adult learner has a limited power of memory and imitation, yet a developed thinking power. Usually, an adult learning a language from scratch will always have an accent, while a child under 9 might not. The adult often feels a need to find a reason for the phenomena he meets. The danger in a predominantly explanatory approach is that the adult might quickly pick up what he needs to know about the language, but his actual skills in using it might fall far behind. This must not be allowed to happen when we are training teachers.

Adult learners require a different strategy from that used with younger age groups. On the whole they will learn more quickly as they have been trained in learning for many years. Less demonstration is necessary but more explanation, since an adult mind demands reasons for things and a clear formulation of the principles involved. Hence, there are constant requests from an adult class for the 'rules' of English grammar. New knowledge and skills are integrated into his personality rapidly, although there is often much greater rigidity which comes with age and mature thought patterns and habits to take into account.

At this point it could be stated that, even when the students aim only at mastering rather than teaching the target language, they need to acquire a certain amount of syntactic conventions reflecting the internal structure of the language. Of course, this is far from sufficient for a teacher, because in order to teach a language, he needs to master it as an object for cognitive and scientific study. That is, he needs to have a deep insight into the structure and system of the language.

2) In learning a new language, one should not only pay attention to the linguistic aspects but also to the cultural aspects. It would be wrong to simply think that learning a language is just a matter of learning to express oneself in that language in a way which conforms to grammatical rules rather than that which is socially appropriate. Consequently, many of our students, after they have finished a training course, find it hard to be accepted by members of that language community. This situation is not due to the lack of vocabulary or grammatically correct sentence-patterns, but mainly and largely to the lack of what is called "a shared cultural knowledge" which is the consequence of teaching and learning only the linguistic aspects without taking into account the cultural aspects of the language. Therefore, it would be impossible to separate language from culture, society and all the social realities it reflects.

It is obvious that each language contains in itself an entire tradition of a people as well as the civilization of the community which has produced the language. One cannot, therefore, learn a language outside its culture. Teaching a language then would mean teaching a culture, and

the way of life as well as the values of life of the community within which the language is spoken. "The Teacher needs to acquaint his students with the modern culture, the current realities of the country where the language is used". (Do Ca Son, 1983 : p. 41)

Thus, our students need to be armed with the basic facts about customs and traditions or the 'cultural patterns' in general, of the people whose language they are studying so that, when in contact with these people, they will not violate rules of polite social intercourse, verbally or non-verbally. Without this 'shared cultural knowledge' it becomes very difficult for one to teach others to understand and to use the target language properly.

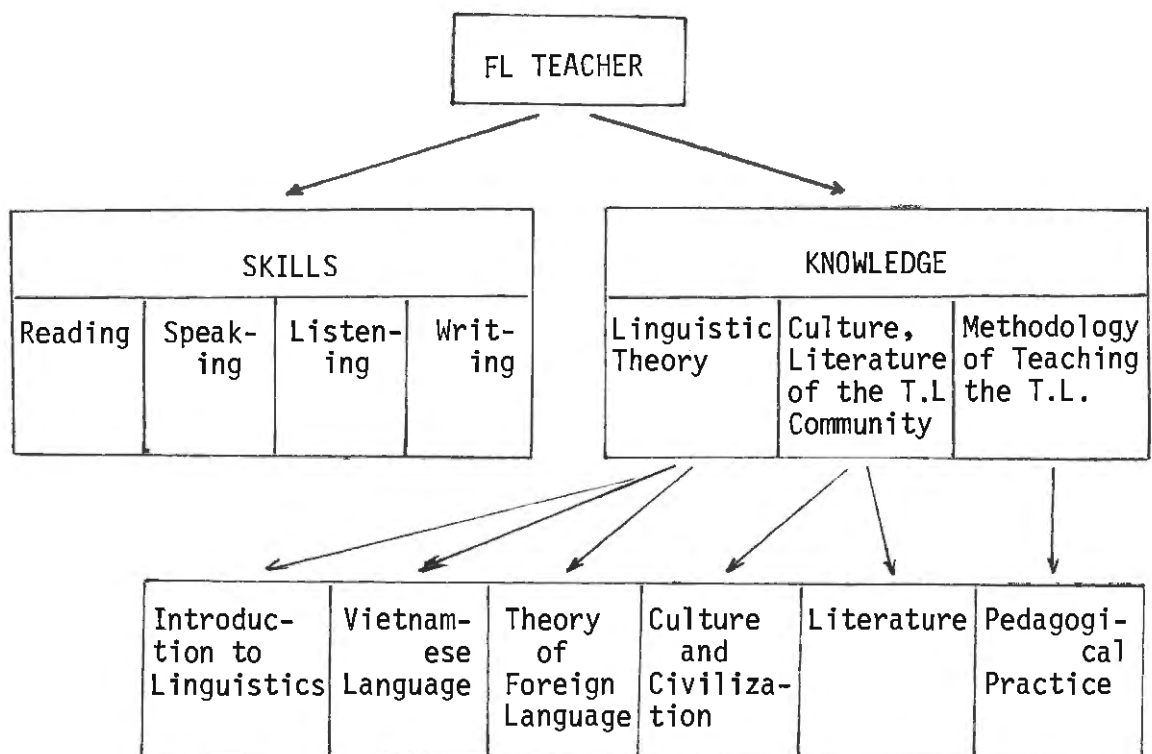
3) Teaching a foreign language is a science. Methodology of foreign language teaching is an applied science developed on the basis of the achievements gained in the fields of didactics, linguistics, psychology and so on. Different from the case of a mother who is ignorant of any methodology but is fully able to teach her child to use the first language properly, the success of target language teaching and learning definitely depends on a methodology of teaching in close relation with the aims of the training course. It would be impossible for one to teach a target language without following any methodology unless the learners were born in and exposed to the natural language environment.

For this reason the students from the College need to be equipped with the appropriate modern methodology of foreign language teaching in general, as well as of teaching a certain target language, in particular.

4) In conclusion it could be said that in order to be qualified as teachers the students from our College need to have

- a. A thorough mastery of the macro-skills of the target language.
- b. An ability to recognize and analyze patterns as well as conventions within the language.
- c. A cultural knowledge of the language shared with the language community.
- d. An effective methodology of teaching the language.

The following diagram sums up the requirements essential for efficient foreign language teaching :



It should be added here that besides a good command of the target language, a thorough mastery of Vietnamese is necessary. And so is a sufficient understanding of the culture of the source language and its speakers. This is because in teaching the target language a contrastive analysis between it and the source language is a necessary resource for the teacher. The teacher should base himself on the source language and the ethnic psychology to recognize or predict typical errors and mistakes made by the students due to what is called 'L1 interference'. And of course, he needs to find ways and techniques to overcome them. That is why in teaching a foreign language it is necessary to utilise the mother-tongue and the ethnic psychological characteristics of the learner.

3. Problems

Considerable achievements have been made in the field of foreign language teaching and learning. English, Russian and French are being taught in many secondary schools as compulsory subjects.

Recently there has been an increasing demand for foreign language learning among adults who are engineers, doctors, workers, etc. English is a popular choice. More and more people are going to different kinds of "evening classes".

However, there are still a great number of problems in the field, both subjective and objective. To be solved, problems must be analysed.

3.1. General Problems

In an interview granted by Mrs. Nguyen thi Binh, Minister of Education to VIETNAM COURIER (1980 : p.119) these problems have been clearly stated :

"Our tasks (in education) are especially big and complex in a country in which thirty years of war has left immense destruction and disrupted our social structures, our economy and the family life of our people on a tremendous scale... First, there is the problem of school building and equipment. The war destruction has been such that there will be many years before we will be able to meet all needs. Building materials, paper, printing facilities, everything is lacking. Our economic capabilities are not on a par with the level of development of our education. This is a major contradiction which we have to resolve. Perhaps this factor will prove to be a stimulant, helping us to find original solutions.

There is also the problem of administration and management of education, which in future should no longer be undertaken in a day-to-day, empirical manner".

Through what the Minister stated about educational problems in general, it is clear that foreign language teaching, as a part of education, also shares the same problems.

3.2. Some Other Problems

1) In a report by Hoang Lai, A.A. Chukuev (1983 : p.19) this big problem was mentioned :

"In conditions devoid of the natural language environment that is, the conditions where real communicative needs and stimuli from society... are lacking the learner can't grasp consciously a system of linguistic rules and therefore can, in no way, develop creative and steady communicative skills and habits. Consequently, the learner may easily lose interest. As a matter of fact, most of our secondary pupils are learning

a foreign language solely because the school system demands it with anything between one and five periods a week to contend with, and very little strong motivation".

2) Teachers are forced to put up with poor working conditions - big classes of fifty to sixty pupils, little available teaching facilities, antiquated school furniture, etc. However, rather than cause the teachers to become apathetic and uncaring - as would certainly happen in many other countries - they remain keen to teach and to improve their professional standards. However, due to some defects in teacher education, foreign language teaching is still suffering from a lack of good and highly qualified teachers. It might be said that most of the currently practising teachers cling to traditional methods. Their techniques are poor. They expect the students to memorise rules of grammar, learn syntax through mechanical drills and pay attention almost exclusively to the written form of the language for developing oral skills. Lessons usually suffer from boredom, which is another cause for the students to lose interest in language learning.

3) "A foreign language must go along with a cultural knowledge... As for the languages that I can understand, in most cases, our interpreters can't do satisfactory work. This is no wonder ! It is very difficult, I understand. But in this unsatisfactory work, misinterpretation is largely due to inadequate knowledge. The cultural background knowledge is inadequate and poor" (Pham Van Dong, 1973 : p.29).

What is true of interpreters also applies to teachers in our country. Due to the lack of the cultural background knowledge the teacher can't thoroughly master the language he is teaching, nor realize
cannot

the aims and objectives set for the teaching and learning of the language.

4) Due to the lack of paper and printing facilities textbooks are in short supply ; especially textbooks of English. Textbooks of French and Russian are now being compiled in the Soviet Union and France by Vietnamese, French and Russian writers. A relative number of them have been printed with French and Soviet aid, and are being tried in our schools on an experimental basis.

Because of the lack of good textbooks, added to the shortage of qualified teachers, the poor teaching conditions, the lack of teaching facilities, etc. foreign languages are not included in the curriculum of many secondary schools.

5) At present, our general education is undergoing "a broad and far-reaching" reform, both in the content of its curricula as well as in the system and methods of education. One of the objectives of the reform is to find satisfactory solutions to the above problems. The HNFLTC is supposed to meet the demanding needs of the school system in the field of foreign language teaching. For this purpose, it has to overcome its own problems as well as most of the problems stated above.

In his report to mark the 15th anniversary of the foundation of the College, the Principal, Professor Dr. Truong Dong San stated, "It can be said that all our efforts in the years ahead are concentrated on the preparatory work for the educational reform" (1983 : p.5). So we are trying to establish theoretical and practical background and bases

for teacher training in the light of the proposed reforms but with very limited resources.

6) It is now necessary to state some of the major problems facing the English Department in its efforts to achieve its aims and objectives.

At the moment, out of 95 teachers in the Department there is only one who has acquired the 'Candidate of Sciences degree' (equivalent to the M.A. degree). Twenty others have attended either intensive courses or post-graduate courses in Britain, Australia or India. The rest have never had a chance to get any further training, after graduation, in English-speaking countries. One might say their exposure to native speech through real communication was nil ; their understanding of the culture, ways of life, as well as the values of life of the community within which English is spoken, is only limited to the books and stories they read about English-speaking countries and people.

These teachers are able to have a chance to attend only short in-service courses given by Russian teachers and specialists of English once or twice a year to improve their English and their professional standards. There are no native specialists at all. The only valuable source of native speech the teachers can expose themselves to is the B.B.C. or V.O.A., some tapes or cassettes of Kernel Lessons, or New Concept English, etc. But, not everyone has got a cassette-recorder or a short-wave radio-set.

Besides, they can read books, magazines, newspapers originating in English speaking countries, yet these printed matters are not always

in good supply. As a result, they read less and less in English. By and by they lose interest in reading. They are not well-informed about the current developments in linguistics, methodology and teaching techniques.

Critically speaking, most of the existing textbooks used in the Department are ill-prepared by current standards. They are not very well-graded or truly authentic. Many of them are roneoed rather than printed.

Students are in general aged between 16 and 22. To be admitted to the College they had to take the State Entrance Exam of which English is a component. They learned some English in secondary schools, but know only a little grammar and understand simple pieces of written English. Their listening comprehension and speaking ability are very poor. Some remedial work is called for before the course begins. Actually, everything has to be done again from the very beginning.

It is necessary to admit that their living conditions and their learning conditions are poor. This, together with the other problems mentioned above have various negative effects on their performance. In general, their level of motivation and interest is low.

CHAPTER 2

THE PLACE READING SHOULD HAVE IN THE SYLLABUS.

READING ALOUD OR SILENT READING ?

1. The Teaching of Reading in the English Department -
Some Problems

1.1. In the early stage reading is viewed more often as recognising correctly the English words met in print than extracting their meanings, because, it is thought that without the ability to indentify written words in English, Vietnamese students can't even begin to read. This is the concern of the teacher of early reading. The first-year students in our Department have previously learned English for three years while at secondary schools. They have already passed this elementary stage. They are no longer absolute beginners, and so don't have to discover how writing is associated with the spoken words they have already learned to use.

1.2 Reading aloud is an activity widely used not only in the early stage but also at the intermediate and even advanced stages. Besides, reading in our English language classes is generally used to teach the language itself. In many classrooms the reading lesson is exploited as an opportunity to teach pronunciation, encourage fluent and expressive speaking, and so on. Therefore, the typical text in an English language course book is one that helps the teachers to present or practise specific linguistic items, such as vocabulary, structures, grammar and so on.

1.3. It is obvious that reading for language development is necessary.

It is perfectly true that reading widely in English is an effective means of extending our command of the language. However, this is not a natural use of reading. One reads because one wants to get something from the writing : facts, ideas, enjoyment, empathy, that is, the message expressed by the writer. In other words, the reader is interested in what the writing means rather than the pronunciation of what one reads or the grammatical structures used in it. It is the decoding of the writer's message that is the "authentic reason" for reading. It should be noted here that the term "authentic" is used by Nuttal (1982 : p.3) to mean reasons that are concerned not with language learning but with the uses to which we put reading in our daily lives outside the classroom. Also, according to her, for the foreign language students the authentic purposes of reading are often submerged by the demands of language improvement. This is true, indeed, because most of the reading we have been teaching is concerned with language learning. We have been paying more attention to the pronunciation of what our students read and wasting a lot of the classtime correcting the mistakes they make. Instead of enabling the students to understand what the text means, we have been telling them to look for the grammatical structures used in it and then spending a lot of time explaining their meanings and drilling them. Outside the classroom, the students only read English to learn the language. For them, language improvement is the purpose.

It is true that in order to become teachers of English the students need to improve their command of the language to the extent that they will be able to teach it. They need also to get to know more

about English-speaking countries, to keep up to date with current research and development in linguistics, psychology, methodology of EFL and other branches of studies related to their work, and to raise their professional standards. These are their non-linguistic purposes. They need to be guided and encouraged to achieve these purposes on the basis of their achievement of linguistic ones. After all, this is a "virtuous circle."

1.4. Concerning the course books used in our English Department, it is clear that they are composed of texts intended for the improvement of the students' command of the language. These texts are different from the reading materials met outside the classroom and have the following common defects as stated by Nuttall (1982 : p.19)

- 1) Texts are often contrived and distorted because of the desire to include numerous examples of a particular teaching item (e.g. a tense).
- 2) Texts often reflect spoken rather than written usage. This is not a serious problem in itself, though the two styles of language are different; but the spoken language presented in class in the early stages is often limited to describing the obvious, and this carries over into the texts. A common kind of text at this level is one that describes an adjacent picture, giving the reader hardly any information that he has not already obtained from the picture itself.
- 3) Also common in FL courses are texts which deal with over-familiar topics such as the "The clothes we wear" or

Transport", recounting facts that have long been part of the reader's general knowledge. At their most extreme, texts of this kind are clearly intended . not to convey a message, but to indicate how certain facts are expressed in the FL .

- 4) Many FL texts are over-explicit : they say too much, spell out too many details, so that there is no room for inference and hence no chance for the learner to practise this important skill.
- 5) Many FL texts are guilty of having virtually nothing to say : the writer is so absorbed by the need to include certain language items that the need for the text to have a message is overlooked. You often feel that the writer is playing with words rather than trying to convey meanings.

These characteristics of texts for FL learners are largely the result of the problem of early FL teaching, that is, the language has to be taught to beginners by expressing for them information which they already have. For example, they learn the meaning of the utterance 'John is writing' only because they already know the fact that John is writing. But, of course, the typical use of language is to express information which the reader or listener does not have. It would be strange if we spend time telling people what they know. This only happens in the FL class. Therefore, it is not very surprising that FL seems boring and unnecessary to the students who are obliged to learn it. Only those who are highly motivated will tolerate these defects.

It is essential for the language to be presented in a naturally informative way. But this is probably impossible in the early stages of FL learning. Later when the first stage is over, students need not be subjected to language that carries no message. Even the early text can be made more informative than they are at present. By the intermediate stage there should be texts which, however simple in language, have a message for the students and this message must be fresh and interesting.

1.5. On the one hand language improvement is a natural by-product of reading but, as has been pointed out earlier, the insistence to achieve it has unfortunate effects on the quality of texts. Besides, it can influence the procedures applied in lessons based on these texts. They are more often lessons on pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar than reading lessons.

According to Nutall (1982) it is necessary to stress the difference between giving a lesson based on a text and giving a reading lesson, because the purpose of such lessons is so often overlooked.

First, it is different because the type of text used is likely to be different. In a reading lesson we do not need to use texts that have been written to teach language but for all the authentic purposes of writing : to inform, to entertain and so on. Even if the language has been modified to suit the level of the learners, the purpose of the text must be first and foremost to convey a message.

Second, the procedures have to be different from language lessons because the aim of the reading lesson is to develop the students'

ability to extract the message the text contains. So, unlike a language development lesson, we are not trying to improve such skills as pronunciation, vocabulary extension and command of syntax, but instead we are trying to get them to make use of the knowledge they have in order to extract messages from texts.

Thus, the procedures used in reading lessons will have to be varied because different kinds of text make different demands on the reader. Moreover, the reading lesson needs to make allowances for both the variety of texts and the variety of readers, for different readers may respond in different ways to the same text.

2. A Typical Reading Lesson in the English Department — Reading Aloud or Silent Reading ?

Broughton, et al (1978 : p.89) was right in stating that nowadays teachers still tend to teach by the methods which were used by teachers who taught them. In no area of language teaching is this more true than in that of reading. It is probably for this reason that the procedure of reading round the class has been perpetuated, though anyone who considers it seriously, even briefly, in terms of what it contributes to new learning, or of pupil participation, or of communication function, realizes very quickly that it is a singularly profitless exercise.

It is obvious that the teaching of EFL reading in our Department has been suffering from the same situation, It will be useful, therefore, to look critically at what actually happens during a reading lesson and draw some relevant conclusions.

2.1. A Reading Lesson at the Intermediate Stage

1) It is now time for the reading lesson. The teacher begins, saying to his students : "Now open your books at page 33. Right ! Look at the passage and listen to me ! " The teacher then reads the passage from beginning to end for the whole class to listen to. After that he asks them first to read in chorus after him and then to stand up one by one to read. "Now, Nam, read the passage"; says the teacher. "Read it aloud" ! After a few lines or a paragraph, the teacher tells him to sit down and asks another student to continue. Bac, another student continues but he is, from time to time, interrupted by the teacher for correction of pronunciation, intonation or even pauses. This activity goes on until at least five students have done the reading or when the passage is finished. Sometimes the teacher asks a few other students to read it again to make sure that his students can 'read' the passage fluently. This takes quite a long time.

Then comes the teacher's explanation of new words and grammatical structures by means of fairly intensive techniques. Words are written on the blackboard, explained, examples given and further examples required during practice.

Again the teacher has one or two students to read the passage aloud while he gets ready to ask them a few questions about the part of the passage the students have covered. This goes on. The lesson is considered satisfactory if the students can manage to answer all the questions about the passage, with most of them being of the matching type. Besides, as a means of double confirmation the teacher asks his

students, especially the bright ones to give a Vietnamese translation of either the difficult parts or the whole passage. Time permitting, he ends the reading lesson by giving his own translation while the students listen to him attentively. They are all filled with admiration for their teacher as his translation is so perfect ! Then everyone is happy.

It is apparent that the lesson illustrates most of the points under discussion in section 1 : It is a language lesson rather than a reading lesson.

2) We shall now go into some further details. So what is supposed to be happening ?

Are Nam and Bac supposed to be practising 'reading' ? Are they extracting any new message from the text ? It seems unlikely.

What are the other students supposed to be doing ? They are supposed to be following the reading in their textbooks, but in fact, they are not.

The bright students are paying little attention to the one who is reading aloud. However, they cannot read ahead at their own speed because they know at any moment the teacher may ask them questions and they might be caught unprepared.

A few other students, especially those next to Nam and Bac are looking at the words in the passage and trying to guess when in the text their turn will come : one or two paragraphs ahead ? And, of course, they are paying little attention to the message the text contains.

As for the rest of the class, they are looking at the words in their books and they hear somebody else say them, slowly often incorrectly, with incorrect phrasing and often interrupted by the teacher for correction or questions. They are not thinking about the message conveyed by the text. Is there any benefit from that ?

And what about the teacher ? He only hears his students enunciate in the conventional way the sounds symbolized by the printed marks on the text in his hands. Actually, his students are saying the words rather than reading ; they are performing a 'vocal act' rather than a 'mental act'. The teacher is only teaching them to make the right noises to correspond with the marks on the page without having the slightest understanding of what the sense of it is.

The rest of the class are not learning anything from the oral reading which is likely to be slow, incorrect and interrupted. And if some better students are reading silently for themselves, the teacher's interruptions, explanations and questions may spoil their concentration.

Therefore, in reading lessons it would be better for our students to read silently to improve their ability to do this with ease and understanding.

As time goes by one will be a better reader than one is now if one has got into the habit of reading and practises it regularly. The ability to read can improve without any reading aloud being done.

- 3) This improvement can come by means of the following :
 - a. One gets to know more and more words by sight.

- b. One enlarges one's reading vocabulary : the number of words one understands in their context increases.
- c. The words one already knows well, take on new and wider meanings. For example, one learns the word 'branch' - 'the branch of a tree' , and later, 'a branch of the family', 'the main office' and 'the branch office'.
- d. One gets more and more alert in noting details in one's reading, especially implications (sarcasm, humour , personal bias , etc.)
- e. One gets more skilful in gathering together the thread of meaning as one reads through a paragraph. The ideas expressed in each sentence add up in one's mind, and at the end of the paragraph one understands the whole rather than individual bits and pieces. This is the real mark of successful reading.

In brief, improvement in our abilities to read can be attributed to :

- a. Increasing the number of recognizable words.
- b. Enlarging the reading vocabulary.
- c. Expanding the meanings of words.
- d. Increasing alertness in noticing shades of meaning.
- e. Gathering together the meaning of the whole paragraph at first reading.

When teaching reading, these criteria should be paramount.

2.2. Reading aloud or reading silently ?

We will discuss these two forms of reading further and see whether reading aloud or silent reading should be given priority and at what stage ?

The reading lesson procedure mentioned above shows that the teacher pays too much attention to reading aloud . As a matter of fact, one can't read well aloud unless one is good at reading silently. In other words, good silent reading provides the basis for good oral reading. This is because one has to be aware of the full meaning of the text in order to choose the correct expressive devices : stress, rhythm, intonation and so on.

Nuttal (1982 : p.6) writes : "For most of us, once we have passed the early reading stage, reading aloud is not common outside the classroom. Most of our reading is done silently, unless there are special circumstances such as reading to someone who has lost their spectacles. Since you are a teacher reading aloud will be a skill you use quite a lot ; but how much do you use it outside your job ? And how many of your students are going to need this skill ? If you think of the percentage of time most adults spend on reading aloud, compared with the time spent reading silently you may feel you should adjust the proportion of class time spent on each".

From this point of view it is clear that reading aloud has only a very limited value, compared with silent reading. However, silent reading has been neglected and improperly taught in our EFL

classes in Vietnam. Instead, reading aloud has been taking much of our time and attention. Consequently, many of our students, even when they are reading silently, are 'tongue - wobblers' or sub-vocalizers'. They fail to read adequately. Instead they read very slowly and with unsatisfactory understanding, because among other things, all their concentration is at word-level instead of phrase-level.

The guiding idea at intermediate and advanced reading stages should now be : "Less reading aloud, and more silent reading".

Silent reading, as most experts would agree, has four important characteristics :

- a. It is done alone.
- b. It is done in silence.
- c. It is done without interruption.
- d. It is done at our own speed.

If any of these is not adhered to, no satisfactory reading will take place.

Reading aloud can be quite harmful if it is not treated properly, because it tends to produce 'eye-to-mouth' reading or 'parrot-talking' without thought of any meaning. It tends to establish a direct path between the eye and the voice without disturbing the brain at all (West, 1941).

Reading aloud, with its attention to pronunciation and voice quality, may inhibit concentration on the meaning of what is being read.

One teaching technique to be used for achieving good oral reading is to have the students read the text silently before reading it aloud. This enables them to grasp the ideas and feelings intended by the author. This, in turn, will enable the reader to convey meaning to his audience. To do this, the oral reader must not only have mastered word-recognition and comprehension skills, but also the skills of oral expression, such as phrasing, stress, rhythm, intonation, pitch and so on. To save valuable and limited class-time we could give the students a text to prepare during their out-of-class time for oral reading, thus helping them with it. We need, of course, to use a familiar text whose content and language are well within their capability.

Not only should we see the potential harm of reading aloud but also recognize its values. For early readers, it is an important aid because they have to discover how writing is associated with the spoken word. For the teacher, it is useful in 'diagnosing difficulties in word-recognition skills, or reinforcing the visual image of the word at the beginning of reading. In teaching, it is a skill used quite a lot for dictation tests, listening comprehension, pronunciation and intonation lessons. Since we are training teachers, it is a skill we need to develop in our students, so that they will be able to use it later in their work.

However, special emphasis on reading aloud should be given in the early stages only.

3. The Place Reading should have in our EFL Syllabus

3.1. The Place

English teaching methods in use in our College have been mainly Grammar-Translation and a combination of Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual Methods until recently when the Communicative approach was suggested to replace them. However, it will take long before this approach is widely used.

In such a combination of methods, grammar is an essential element. As stated earlier, the reading text is used to introduce and reinforce grammatical points or structures. On the other hand, aural-oral skills are emphasized while reading and writing are neglected or even ignored. The view commonly held among teachers is that once one is good at listening and speaking one will, naturally, be good at reading and writing. Of course, these macro-skills are closely related but each of them is a skill in its own right although, of course, they reinforce each other.

In our EFL syllabus reading has not acquired a worthy place. Therefore, it is suggested that in the present condition of Vietnam and the specific FL teaching and learning conditions in which English is taught as a foreign language devoid of its natural environment and with so many constraints and difficulties as stated in Chapter 1, reading needs to and should have a major place in the syllabus.

3.2. The Reasons

We shall try now to justify the suggested place of reading in the EFL syllabus. In our understanding there are a number of reasons

as follows :

- 1) In learning EFL the more the students read the more they learn. The various kinds of English-language books provide them with the situations in which learning takes place. It is impossible for them to be provided with sufficient direct experiences of language used as part of real life in the way the native learners acquire their first language. In a developing and war-ravaged country like Vietnam where English films, television and video movies and films are in short supply, it is really difficult to obtain exposure to the amount of situational language required, such as apologising, requesting, sympathising, contradicting, etc. The students who really want to learn English will have to read themselves into an awareness of the situational appropriateness of lexical items and styles of discourse. They must substitute vicarious for actual experience.
- 2) Largely by reading can the students acquire the speed and skills they will need for practical purposes after graduation. Professional competence also depends on reading. The more English language literature about contemporary thinking in linguistics, language teaching, teacher training and other branches related to their work they tackle the more professionally competent they will be.

- 3) The students may have a chance to get postgraduate education either at home or abroad, and to qualify for this further education, as well as to benefit from it, they must do a lot of reading. All the important study skills require quick, efficient and imaginative reading.
- 4) Cultural background knowledge is indispensable and essential in learning a foreign language. It depends on the volume and quality of reading, too. The background or cross-cultural problems can only be tackled by wide reading. The more knowledge the students acquire of the way of life, behaviour and thought of the people who speak English as the first language the better his communicative competence will be.

CHAPTER 3
ON READING : SOME THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS
AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS.

1. Defining Reading

1.1. For the term 'reading' different people give different definitions and, as a matter of fact, there is some misunderstanding and confusion. This is why it is necessary to define the term before using it.

There are different preconceptions about reading among which these are the three main ones :

First, reading is a task of deciphering. One should recognize the printed or written words correctly before being able to read. According to this preconception reading is a process of identifying words, but it will not be dealt with as such in this study report, because that stage of reading is mainly the concern of the teacher of early reading.

Secondly, reading means 'reading aloud'. One should be able to enunciate or vocalize in the conventional way the sounds represented by graphic symbols. This is done by mothers reading bed-time stories to their children, by radio or T.V. announcers and news-readers, by teachers reading out loud a text or a short story in a listening comprehension lesson, etc.

Thirdly, reading is extracting meaning from texts. When one

says that one can read, it means that one can focus his attention on the meaning rather than the form of the printed words. The text one reads is treated as a form of discourse and not as a task of deciphering.

1.2. Reading has also been defined in many other ways by linguists and reading researchers such as Goodman, Widdowson, Rivers, Saviile-Troike, etc.

Goodman (1967 : p.126) considers reading to be "a psycholinguistic guessing game" in which the reader is actively relating to the language. With the aid of a number of cues , he attempts to reconstruct or decode the message encoded by the writer. In Goodman's view, the fluent reader takes advantage of the redundant features of language to extract the meaning from the writing. Such a reader does not process a text by identifying and interpreting each and every letter and word sequence in the text. Instead he looks at a sample of the text and predicts the meaning of a large part of it from what he has sampled and from his prior knowledge of the subject at hand. He then looks at another part of the text to test and to confirm his prediction. The efficient reader is one who guesses correctly with minimal text sampling. In brief, reading is the best possible reconstruction by the reader of a message encoded by a writer as a graphic display.

Widdowson (1979) defines reading as "the process of getting linguistic meaning via print". Saviile-Troike (1973) sees reading as "... reconstructing the meaning of the writer ... and processing the semantic content".

Other authors generally concur with Goodman's characterization of the reading process as a "psycholinguistic guessing game". In general it can be said that reading is a process involved with the getting of meaning out of a text for a purpose.

2. Two Levels of Comprehension

2.1. General

A number of writers suggest that comprehension takes place on two distinct levels or in two distinct phases. Carroll (1972 : p.11) considers the first level to be understanding the meanings of the given linguistic information :

"Words entail elaborate lexico-grammatical information with respect to the classes of experience to which they relate along with the kinds of grammatical construction in which they can participate".

At the second level, the text is related to the wider context of the passage. This may entail :

"The point to point relationships between the elements encoded in the sentence to things, attributes, events and relationships existing in some actual or fictional reality ". (Carroll, 1972 : p.12)

According to Goodman (1967) the first level is the decoding of graphic symbols and the second level is the understanding of the symbols by reference to the passage.

Rivers (1968, pp 215-221) sees the first level as "manipulation

of linguistic information" and the second as "expression of personal meaning".

Davies and Widdowson (1974, pp 155-157) regard the first level as recognition and restructuring of linguistic information and the second as interpretation of this information in the light of the total context.

At each of these suggested levels a number of different activities may be taking place in which the language user is involved. If one can isolate these activities, then material can be devised to help the reader to develop them.

2.2. Level 1

Goodman (1972) argues that when one is reading there are different cues that help in decoding various pieces of information. These are graphophonic, syntactic and semantic cues.

- 1) Graphophonic cue implies the recognition of letters as sequence.
- 2) Syntactic cue means the recognition of various structures and the prediction that others are on the way by the use of sentence-connectors, function words and influential affixes. These structures are held in short-term memory.
- 3) Semantic cue suggests the selection from the reader's lexicon based on experience ; and the conceptual attitude of the reader is fed into the process.

Goodman claims that proficient readers are generally able to predict what is coming correctly, but that if incorrect predictions are

made then they can recall from memory and reinterpret in the light of the new information.

Goodman's analysis is generally in line with that suggested by Rivers (1969). Apprehension, according to her, takes place in three phases. But unlike Goodman, she sees these phases as sequentially ordered :

- 1) Sensing - a rudimentary segmentation of the surface structure elements.
- 2) Identification through segmentation as we apply the collocational rules of the language. These are both syntactic and lexical. One looks for these conventions on the basis of past knowledge which one has and with which one compares any new items. It is at this point that ambiguous elements are suspended until one can see what comes next and one then uses a combination of past and new experience to disambiguate the element.
- 3) Rehearsal and decoding : Rehearsal is the recycling of material through the system for the purpose of comparison in phase (2) . The material is decoded into deep-structure elements which are stored in one's long-term memory.

A number of other writers also consider this type of analysis of information by the reader to be taking place. Among them are, for instance, Reibel (1972) and Slobin (1974).

From the above discussion, certain implications for the teaching of reading comprehension could be drawn : Students need to learn to :

- a. Identify structural markers such as punctuation, anaphoric and cataphoric references, cohesive markers, outer and inner clause relations.
- b. Recognize the overall sentence-patterning

In a study of sentence patterns , Pierce (1973) found that the majority of sentences conform to the basic patterns of :

- subject + verb (S + V)
- subject + verb + object (S + V + O)
- subject + verb + indirect
object + direct object (S + V + IO + DO)
- subject + verb + complement (S + V + C)

Material ought not to introduce many unusual sentence patterns or present basic patterns in complex forms. Otherwise, the students will not be easily able to reduce these to the "underlying deep structures". Strong semantic input will also help a widening of the conceptual grasp in specific subject areas.

In general, the first level of comprehension is that of extracting factual meaning from the given linguistic information.

2.3 Level 2.

At this level, the reader uses the information for a number of purposes, that is, he relates this information to a wider context. Therefore, an extensive range of abilities is needed.

However, as with level 1, it is similarly difficult to find out exactly what is happening, for this is part of an undiscovered

mental process.

A large number of taxonomies of the cognitive processes involved in comprehension have been given at various times. Barrett (1968) gives a long list of processes under these five headings :

- 1) Literal comprehension
- 2) Reorganization
- 3) Inferential comprehension
- 4) Evaluation
- 5) Appreciation

Each of these sections is divided into a number of sub-sections with examples of what might be expected in the case of each one. Nevertheless, as Walton (1975) points out, there are a number of objections to this kind of taxonomy over and above the fact that the processes are unknown to us. They tend to suggest a greater precision than the classification system really possesses. They also result in a confusion as to what areas of cognitive activity and behaviour can be characterized as reading comprehension. As Simons (1971) points out, it is important that one does not equate reading with thinking.

These problems have recently led writers to move away from the cognitive process analysis at this level and to consider the skills the students need in their efforts to understand a text. These we find by looking at the needs of the learner. Finocchiaro (1958: p.14) sees the comprehension skills as follows :

- 1) Recognizing main ideas

- 2) Seeing relations between facts, events and ideas.
- 3) Grasping a sequence of ideas
- 4) Drawing conclusions

The following is a list of abilities the students need :

- 1) To comprehend the whole, even if there is lack or incomplete comprehension of some of the parts.
- 2) To give close attention and follow step-by-step detail.
- 3) To give selective attention so that significant statements are committed to memory and explanation, elaboration, exemplification and objections are recognized as accompanying material.
- 4) To see the relationship of parts to the whole.
- 5) To distinguish fact from opinion and to appreciate the communicative values of emotive writing.
- 6) To reject the irrelevant and to skim.
- 7) To relate significant statements and to follow an argument.
- 8) To distinguish deductions and implications and to be able to state them.
- 9) To use language cues, namely, 'grammatical meaning' to help in comprehension.
- 10) To restate ideas.

This approach, emphasizing what the learner needs language for as well as the skills required to achieve this aim, would seem to be the best way of dealing with comprehension improvement at this level. It also enables the teacher to develop material to increase the

students' understanding of reading passages, rather than testing the knowledge they already have.

The analysis of comprehension taking place on two levels is useful in that it enables the teacher to identify general areas where extra help might be given.

However, this analysis is rather generalised and does not give specific information about some of the questions and problems that the teacher of reading concerns himself with.

3. Factors Influencing Reading Comprehension

3.1. General

Reading is often referred to as a complex cognitive process. Many think of reading as a reflection of the inner workings of the human mind. It seems to involve language, motivation, interest, perception, concept development, the whole of experience itself. It seems to be subject to the same constraints as thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving.

Pearson and Johnson (1978 : p.9) asserts :

"Whatever influences general thinking or problem-solving ability also influences reading comprehension"

Therefore, it is necessary to delineate those factors which affect reading comprehension. It is believed that knowledge about the reading process can make a difference in the way one teaches. For example, if a teacher knows that prior experience with a topic improves the students' comprehension, then he might offer experience on the topic prior to reading. If he knows that abstract words are more difficult to

understand than concrete words, he may make a selection of reading material for particular students largely based on this premise.

The factors influencing reading comprehension can be divided into two categories : inside the head and outside the head. The inside factors will be things like linguistic competence, interest, motivation and accumulated reading ability. In other words, they will be what the reader knows about the language, phonologically, syntactically or semantically ; how much he "cares" about various topics that might be encountered or about the task at hand, as well as his general mood about reading and learning ; and how well he can read.

The outside factors may be of two categories :

- a. The elements on the page i.e. textual characteristics such as text readability and text organization.
- b. The qualities of the reading environment. That includes the things the teacher does before, during, or after reading to help the students understand the text ; the ways the students react to the task; and the general atmosphere in which the task is to be completed.

These categories are not mutually exclusive and separate. For instance, interest is an aspect of motivation and reading ability is correlated with linguistic ability. Text readability depends on linguistic factors like word-difficulty and sentence complexity. In brief, these factors interact with one another to affect comprehension of written discourse.

However, as we understand it, motivation is the factor that affects reading most. Therefore we shall deal with this factor in some detail.

3.2. Motivation and Interest

Most language teachers would easily agree that the students' motivation is one of the most important factors that influence their success or failure in learning a foreign language. Highly motivated students work hard and learn more than those who are less motivated.

"Motivation" here is restricted to the degree of willingness to learn which depends largely on the students' needs in acquiring the language. Distinction has been made between two major attitudinal factors which play an important role in determining how willing the learner is to persevere with the task. One is called integrative motivation. Foreign language learners with this kind of motivation view the language as a key to social and cultural enrichment through the opportunities it provides for contact and association, physically or non-physically ; directly or indirectly with members of different cultures. Their goal in learning the language is, therefore, to be able to use it as a means of direct or indirect communication and of improving their professional competence as well as their knowledge of the world. Such motivation gives rise to perseverance and heightened concentration which can produce and stimulate more rapid learning,

The other kind of motivation is called instrumental and refers to the desire to learn a language for an immediate short-term goal, such as to gain an understanding of and respond correctly either

mentally or verbally to a language situation one becomes involved in. This doesn't generally lead to a high degree of accomplishment in learning unless such situations occur regularly.

In the context of reading, motivation is in the readers, our students. Teachers have the problem of how to get and maintain a high level of motivation in all students. It is often solved by using different kinds of rewards, by offering incentives, reinforcers, feedback and other stimuli such as the intrinsic forms of motivation described below.

In teaching reading, emphasis has often been placed on the cognitive aspects of learning to read at the expense of the affective (Pearson, 1978). And it is believed that any good instructional model of reading must include motivational factors. As a somewhat negative example, fear and anxiety can improve comprehension test scores quite dramatically: when people know they are going to be tested, they appear to gain more from their reading.

At this point it is worth mentioning the distinction made by Biggs (1971) between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation for learning is a state where the reasons for learning effort have nothing to do with the content of the learning material. The level of anxiety in the learning situations has often been regarded as an equivalent to motivation, but this type of motivation is often described as "negative" motivation.

Intrinsic motivation has a quite different quality and is characterised among other things by total involvement of self and lack

of anxiety. It is a state where the relevance for the learner of the content of the learning material is the main reason for learning. Biggs (1971) argues, there is no reason to expect disruptive effects of intense intrinsic motivation.

Saltz (1971) presents some evidence to prove that the anxiety that often accompanies extrinsic motivation has disruptive effects on thinking, problem-solving and other cognitive activities. If Saltz is right the task for the teacher working with extrinsically motivated students would be to reduce anxiety as much as possible and substitute intrinsic motivation.

The importance of making a distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation has been underlined by several researchers and educational reformers. They have argued that intrinsic motivation causes distinctly different "kinds of learning". Koch (1956) describes the experience of intrinsic motivation dramatically : "You do not merely 'work at' or 'on' a task ; you have committed yourself to the task, and in some sense you are the task or vice versa".

Experience has shown that some of the students sit in their room or the library for hours reading "Treasure Island" or "The Path of Thunder". They are totally absorbed, they may forget their meals. They seem happy but not aware of that themselves. Their level of intrinsic motivation is high. They really find the learning material interesting.

According to Fransson (1984) "level of real intrinsic motivation" can be paraphrased as "level of interest" and "level of

real extrinsic motivation as "adaption to expected test demands". Corresponding to these two kinds of motivation there are two different ways of approaching texts ; one being called "surface-level learning" and the other "deep-level learning".

"Surface-level learning" or "reproduction-oriented learning" , as it could have been called, takes place when a text is made instrumental to reaching important goals or to avoiding adverse consequences with no relation to the content of the text. The students try to memorize it in order to repeat or reproduce the whole passage. They will make their greatest efforts on the points that they think the examiner will ask them questions about. If there are no hints as to probable questions they will follow the outline of the text. The greater their extrinsic motivation the more effort they will put into their reading.

In contrast, "deep-level learning" , or "meaning-oriented learning" is carried out in a personal way. Students will not try to memorize the text, but rather use it for their personal needs, which means that they will read selectively and focus on the meaning of those aspects of the text that they find interesting. The higher their "level of interest" the better they will understand the text and the more satisfaction they will gain from their ability to draw the information they want from text.

Motivation and interest influence comprehension. In general, the students understand more when they are interested in a topic. By altering a student's state of motivation, positively or negatively,

we can change his or her degree of comprehension.

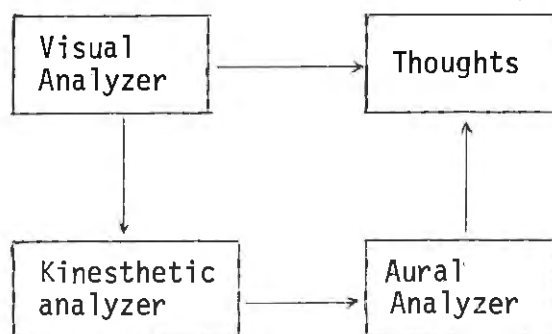
Some people argue that those who want to learn will do so no matter how they are taught. But surely it is well established that a student's interest in any subject may be permanently destroyed by poor teaching. The manner in which EFL reading has been taught in the past in Vietnam, and in many cases continues to be mistaught, constitutes a horrific example of the damage bad teachers can cause in destroying interest.

4. Reading as a Complex Process of Language Activity

Reading is a complex process of language activity and closely connected with the comprehension of what is being read. It is complicated intellectual work and requires the ability on the part of the reader to carry out a number of mental operations : analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction , comparison, prediction and so on.

Reading as a process is connected with the work of visual, kinesthetic, aural analyzers, and thinking. The visual analyzer is at work when the reader looks at the text. While seeing the text he "sounds" it silently, therefore the kinesthelic analyzer is involved. When he sounds the text he hears what he pronounces in his inner speech so it shows that the aural analyzer is not passive, it also works and finally due to the work of all the analyzers the reader can understand meaning . In learning to read, one of the aims is to bypass the activities of kinesthetic and aural analyzers so that the reader can associate what he sees with thought expressed in the reading

material, since inner speech hinders the process of reading making it very slow. Thus the speed of reading depends on the reader's ability to establish a direct connection between what he sees and what it means. This may be represented as follows :



"The aim of the teacher is to get his pupils as quickly as possible over the period in which each printed symbol is looked at for its shape, and to arrive at the stage when the pupil looks at words and phrases for their meaning, almost without noticing the shapes of the separate letters" (French, 1961 : p.58). "A good reader does not look at letters, nor even at words, one by one, however quickly ; he takes in the meaning of two, three, or four words at a time in a single moment. The eyes of a very good reader move quickly, taking long "jumps" and making very short "halts". (Rogova, 1975 : p.179)

5. Reading as a Communicative Activity

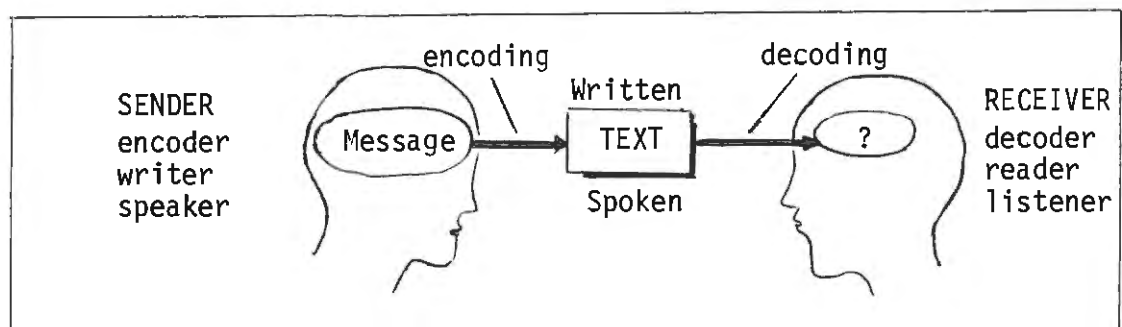
5.1. General

According to Widdowson (1984) it is common these days to refer to reading as a communicative activity. But communication is a more problematic concept than its current popularity might suggest. There are two kinds of communication, reciprocal and non-reciprocal. While conversation is an activity of the reciprocal kind, reading is

an activity of the non-reciprocal kind, i.e. the face-to-face aspect is absent.

Communication involves the transmission of information from one individual world to another. The following figure (Nuttall, 1982 : p.4) gives a very simple model of the process of communication. On the left is the writer, but we use the more general term "encoder" for his role because he could speak his message as well. The encoder has a "message" in his mind - it may be an idea, a fact, an argument, etc. - which he wants somebody else to share. To make this possible he must first put it into words, that is, he must encode it. Once it is encoded, in either spoken or written form it becomes a 'text' outside his mind. The text is accessible to the mind of another person who hears or reads it. In this way the person decodes the message it contains. Once it is decoded, the message enters the mind of the decoder and communication is achieved.

The question mark in the decoder's mind suggests that we can't be sure the message intended has been received by him. However, the process, though very simple, is clear enough to show that reading means getting out of the text as nearly as possible the message that the writer has encoded.



"The Communication Process"

There are, as shown from the figure, three components in this communication process : the reader, the text and the writer, with each playing a part. We shall now need to go into the part played by each component in some detail.

5.2. The Reader

Some hold the view that the reader plays a passive role in the communication process because the writer has done all the work, and the reader has only to let the meaning pour in his mind. However, this is not the case for the simple reason that not all the meaning in the text actually gets into the reader's mind. To one person a text may seem fairly easy and he can extract much meaning from it, but to another person it may seem difficult and, no doubt, he can get less meaning out of it.

5.3 The Text

Why is it that a text may appear difficult to some of its readers ? There are several reasons :

A text is found difficult when :

- 1) the amount of previous knowledge the reader brings to the text is poor. For example, if he knows little or nothing about science, he will find a scientific text hard to understand.
- 2) the concepts expressed in the text are too complex and

beyond the reader.

3) the vocabulary used in the text is unfamiliar to him.

In short, a text is difficult when the reader has problems due to ignorance of facts, intellectual limitations or limited vocabulary.

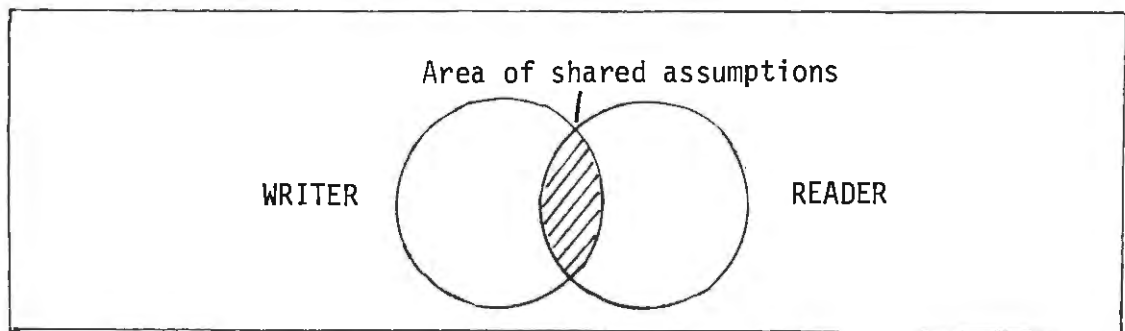
5.4. The Reader and the Writer

The above mentioned problems lead us to see the crucial fact that the reader and the writer should have certain things in common, otherwise communication between them will not be achieved. According to Nuttal (1982 : p.7) they should share :

- 1) a command of the same language that is not too widely different. The problem of comprehension will arise when the reader's vocabulary is far smaller than the writer's, This is, in FL reading, a basic and familiar problem.
- 2) certain assumptions about the world and the way it works. Problems in understanding arise when there is a mismatch between the presuppositions of the writer and those of the reader. Naturally there always is a mismatch of some kind because no two people have had identical experiences of life. So the writer is likely to leave unsaid something which he takes for granted while the reader doesn't.

The following figure will show how, for any two people certain kinds of experience will be shared, while others will not. The shaded

area where the two cycles overlap represents the assumptions or knowledge shared by the two people. All knowledge, including knowledge of language they have in common will be present here. Also in this area will be included more intangible things like attitudes, beliefs, values, and all the unspoken assumptions shared by two people from the same social background. In the unshaded areas lie the things that are not shared. These are the experience and knowledge that are unique to each individual.



Presupposition and Communication

5.5. Total Comprehension ?

The matter of cultural background is very important in comprehension. For people of the same background it is obvious that the shaded area in the figure will be much bigger than for people coming from different backgrounds. As for Vietnamese students who come from an entirely different culture, they will usually find it difficult to fully understand an authentic English language text. They are also very likely to misunderstand it. In this case, the size of the shaded area will be smaller and communication will prove more difficult. When the writer and the reader are entirely different in background, training, attitude and so on, the reader is likely to

misinterpret the text. To illustrate this, a little experiment was carried out.

An English text was given to a group of Vietnamese students here in the C.C.A.E. to read :

"Johnie, son of Scully, in a tone which defined his opinion of his ability as a card-player, challenged the old farmer of both grey and sandy whiskers to a game of High-Five. The farmer agreed with a contemptuous and bitter scoff". (Harris and Palmer, 1965).

The pertinent question on this passage reads as follows :

When Johnie spoke he sounded

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| A. self-confident | C. very polite |
| B. quite rude | D. rather angry |

Eighty per cent (80%) of the students ticked B, because in their culture challenging an older person for anything is considered to be 'quite rude', while in Western, American or Australian cultures it would be considered to be 'self-confident'. Actually, the same text was given to a group of Australian students in the same College. The result was that all of them chose A (self-confident). This is easy to understand : The writer and the readers in question are almost similar in background.

Misinterpretation of the text by 80% of Vietnamese students in this experiment shows the fact that except in the most severely scientific writing, total comprehension can never be achieved by people from different cultures who see things differently in spite of having a great deal in common as human beings.

"... One reason for reading is that we want to understand other people's ideas ; if we were all identical , there would be no point in most communication. Fortunately, for most purposes, the understanding need not be total ; but the fact that we can't get inside the writer's mind is no excuse for not doing our best to understand what he wants to say. If we are in conversation with someone, we can stop him and ask for explanations and examples whenever we need them. In the same way, when we have difficulties in reading, we need to interrogate the text. Since the writer is seldom available for consultation, the text is our only resource : and reading has been described as "active interrogation of a text".(Nuttall, 1982 : p.9)

5.6. The Reader's Involvement

By 'active interrogation of a text' is meant that the meaning is not merely lying in the text waiting to be passively absorbed rather the reader is actively involved and will very often have to work to get the message out. Especially when the reader has little in common with the writer and many problems with the language used, to get at the meaning involves a struggle for him. This is to say, he has to tackle problems of unfamiliar vocabulary, ignorance of facts or intellectual limitations with considerable effort.

5.7. Reading as an Interactive Activity

Reading is not just an active process, but an interactive one involving both the writer and the reader. The writer has a message which the reader wants to understand. The reader tries to make sense

of the text in terms of his own presuppositions to receive the message. Naturally, this kind of interaction in reading is rather different from the kind of interaction in conversation because the writer is not available. In conversation, what one speaker says influences the contribution of the other, whereas in reading the writer can get no feedback and does not know which parts of his text are causing problems of understanding so that he can reshape his text accordingly. As a result, the task of both reader and writer becomes more difficult.

However, in making sense of the text the reader can stop and think, go back to check an earlier reference and reread the most difficult passages to make sure he has got it right. This is an advantage for the reader. But he needs to be objective enough to see differences between his viewpoint and the writer's. This will help him to make the right inferences about what the writer means. Moreover, the reader needs also to assess all the evidence such as the choice of words, the selection of facts, the organization of material, and so on, in order to get the message intended rather than the one he might have preferred to receive.

5.8. The Technique of Prediction

Reading, as mentioned earlier, is an active process constantly involving guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself questions. The reader's sense and experience help him to guess or to predict what the writer is likely to say next. And when the reader shares many of the writer's presuppositions he can think along with the writer and he will find the text relatively easy. This is a skill, very useful in

tackling difficult texts. As the reader reads he makes hypotheses about what the writer intends to say ; these hypotheses are immediately modified by what he actually does say, and are replaced by new hypotheses about what will follow. Almost everyone has had the experience of believing he was understanding a text until he came across some word or phrase that would not fit into the pattern. He would then stop, reread and readjust his thoughts. This supports the notion of reading as a constant process of making and remaking hypotheses - a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'.

This technique of predicting, used consciously, can be very helpful when one is faced with a part of the text that one finds difficult. If one can see the overall pattern of the text and the way the argument is organized, one can make a reasoned guess at the next step. Having an idea of what something might mean can be a great help in interpreting it. It can be particularly helpful in leading us to interpret correctly the value of an utterance.

6. Text and Discourse

6.1. Distinction

It is essential to distinguish two ways of looking at language beyond the limit of the sentence. According to Widdowson (1979) . One may see it as a text, a collection of formal objects held together by patterns of equivalences or frequencies or by cohesive devices. The other approach sees language as discourse, a use of sentences to perform acts of communication which cohere into larger communicative

units, ultimately establishing a rhetorical pattern, which characterises the piece of language as a whole as a kind of communication.

6.2. Signification and Value

The term 'signification' is used to refer to the meaning that would be common to all utterances of a sentence, and the term 'value' is used to refer to the significance of the utterance for particular speakers in a particular situation, that is, the reason why it was said (Widdowson, 1978). The sentence: "Aren't you hungry?" for example, might be uttered in as many situations as one can imagine. Who is saying it? To whom is he saying it? And why is he saying it? In all the situations, the utterance will in one sense clearly have the same meaning, but in another sense, the meaning may be quite different. The difference lies in the distinction between what is said and why it is said. Said by a mother to her son, the question may express concern for his well-being. Said by a father to his son, it may express his anger or annoyance at his son who is busy playing and not getting ready to eat. It might also suggest that the boy should stop playing to come and eat his meal.

So the concept of value is important, because it is quite possible to understand the signification of an utterance without interpreting its value correctly.

A skilled reader needs to grasp both the signification of what he reads and its value with the signification being the necessary first step. This requires understanding the writer's presuppositions

sufficiently to recognize what he means by a particular statement. The reader needs to grasp not just what he says, but why he says it ; knowing that a sentence can occur in different contexts in each of which the sentence will take on a different value. A text usually consists of more than one utterance and to understand it properly the reader needs to get at the value of each utterance. The difference between signification and value corresponds to the difference between a sentence in isolation and the same sentence in use. A sentence has only signification until it is used in a certain context. It acquires value when it is used.

The reader, therefore, is supposed to make sure that he understands both the signification and the value of every utterance in the text and he needs to be actively aware of his responsibility for the meaning he extracts from the text.

6.3. Text and Non-text

We shall now need to study the characteristics of a text and find out what other features, apart from presupposition, make it easy or difficult to understand, because it is clear that the text is the core of the reading process and the means by which the message is transmitted from writer to reader.

A text is made up of sentences that do not go together accidentally but are closely related in a certain context. If there is a lack of relationship between them one can't work out their value at all. A text is available when it is coherent through the use of

cohesion that indicates relationships between elements in it.

6.4. Coherence and Cohesion

Strictly speaking, a text could consist of a single sentence but in teaching we often deal with texts that are composed of a number of sentences. These sentences are organized to carry a coherently structured message.

Cohesion is the linking of sentences into logical sequence. This is often aided by the use of linking and sequence expressions such as "next", "therefore", "finally", "on the other hand". These linking and sequence expressions help the reader predict the ideas ahead and thus, he can read faster.

Coherence means that all the sentences and ideas in a paragraph flow together to make a clear, logical point about the topic. The readers should be able to follow what is written and see easily and quickly how each sentence grows out of, or is related to, the preceding sentence.

Coherence can be achieved by five important means (Wyrick, 1984)

- 1) A natural or easily recognized order.
- 2) Transition words and phrases. These help the reader move smoothly from one thought to the next, so that the ideas ^{are} ^{connected} ^{by}. If they are used only when necessary to avoid choppiness and if their placement in sentences is varied, the reader's attention will be held

and his comprehension of the message improved.

- 3) Repetition of key words : Important words or phrases (and their synonyms) may be repeated to connect the thoughts into a coherent statement. As a result, the reader can follow the ideas easily.
- 4) Substitution of pronouns for key nouns : Although key words repeated at strategic points help comprehension, stylistic considerations make it imperative that pronouns be substituted in the same or immediately following sentences.
- 5) Parallelism : in a paragraph parallelism means using the same grammatical structures in several sentences to establish coherence. The repeated use of similar phrasing helps tie the ideas and sentences together.

Transition words are, according to Wyrick (1984), like the glue that holds sentences together. They lead the reader from sentence to sentence smoothing over the gaps between by indicating the relationship between the sentences. If this glue is missing there will be no coherent text. Instead there will only be a mere collection of sentences.

6.5. Coherence without Cohesion

According to Widdowson (1978) it is the discourse that has coherence while the text has cohesion. Coherence can be thought of as a quality of the underlying thoughts and the way they are organized

into a message. The way the message is expressed will reflect the coherence by means of the linguistic devices of cohesion.

Coherence depends on the value of the utterances that compose the discourse not on the use of cohesive devices, although these are customarily used to make things easier for the reader. In theory, it is therefore possible to have a coherent discourse expressed by a text without cohesion. In fact, examples of this can be found in conversation.

A. Have you bought a lot of things ?

B. I've just arrived.

These sentences seem totally disjointed on the surface because there are no observable linguistic connections between them. But in the context of the situation in which they are uttered such exchanges are readily understood. In this example, the context presumably is that A and B are in a market place, a super-market, for example. B has not bought anything because he has just arrived.

In written discourse, examples of coherence without cohesion can be commonly found :

"Suddenly from the dark road ahead came a terrible screaming. Gerard's hand tightened on his dagger". (Nuttall, 1982 : p.16).

"Terrible screaming" is associated with danger. That's why Gerard was ready to defend himself from it. It would be illogical or incoherent if, for instance, Gerard would take out a cigarette to smoke. Thus, we share the writer's presuppositions about "screams".

There are texts into which the reader has to read coherence without the help of cohesive devices. But unskilled readers may be

unable to cope with such texts, because they might appear incoherent to them. Even if they have got the signification right, the message of the text will remain obscure to them if they cannot understand the intended value of each utterance.

The sequence in which sentences are arranged, cohesive devices such as reference, substitution, ellipsis and lexical relationships, as well as explicit discourse markers pointing out the intended value of the utterance in which they occur are the things coherence depends on.

6.6. Reading and Meaning

The view of reading discussed so far sees it as essentially concerned with meaning specifically with the transfer of meaning from writer to reader. Any interpretation of the term "Reading" in which meaning is not central needs to be excluded. It has been noted that in the process, the writer, the reader and the text each, have a unique part to play so that communication can take place. In addition, the reader must be actively involved in the process to make sense of the text.

This view of reading with the focus on meaning and on the reader's active responsibility for extracting meaning out of the text is valid at all levels : elementary, intermediate and advanced.

Having decided on all this, we shall now concentrate on ways of developing the reading skills of the students at an intermediate level.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHING READING : LESSON CONTENT

1. The Student's Skills and Knowledge on Entry to the Intermediate Level

It is assumed that the average student, having finished the first two years of English studies in our College would :

- 1) be able to read at the 2,500-word level without much help, understanding the signification of practically all single sentences well, but would have difficulty in understanding their value.
- 2) understand the patterns of relationships between words, that is, the semantic patterns of lexical items.
- 3) understand the grammatical relationships which hold between the lexical items, but would have difficulty in grasping the semantics of a particular grammatical item in a particular context.
- 4) have some difficulty with the patterns of logical relationships within texts, and as a result understanding inadequately what the text is really about.
- 5) know little of western ways of life and thought. Cross-cultural problems would be numerous, insidious and not always easy to spot.

- 6) have problems in understanding the relationship which exists between the writer and the text, that is, he would not be aware enough of the writer's attitude and purpose.
- 7) have little or no understanding of the relationship that exists between the text and the culture of the English speech community.
- 8) have little skill in inferring the meaning of an unknown word from its context.
- 9) not respond readily to the emotional implications of words nor to their cultural value.
- 10) read very slowly from 100-150 words a minute and may have read very little of anything except his English course-book. He may never have read a whole book in English, even in a simplified version.

These assumptions show that the students present a very challenging task for the teacher of reading.

2. Aims of the Reading Programme

The general aim for an EFL reading development programme in our College could be stated as follows : (based on Nuttall : 1982)

To enable the students to read without help unfamiliar authentic texts, at appropriate speed, silently and with adequate understanding.

This carries some fairly specific implications for teaching when each phrase is examined in some detail.

- 1) To enable students : Instead of passing on the ability itself, the teacher can only try to promote it in the students. In the reading lesson, it is what the students do that counts.
- 2) To read without help : The students have to develop the ability to read on their own, independently, because in real life outside the classroom, one cannot always expect help with one's reading tasks. The teacher's job is to make his help unnecessary.
- 3) Unfamiliar texts : The teacher has to equip the students to tackle texts they have never seen before. It is often said that it is more useful to read two texts once each rather than one text twice, though sometimes it is necessary to do so. It also suggests that if the teacher wants to test reading ability, he should use a text that is not familiar to the students. The somewhat common practice of using familiar and already explained texts for reading tests in our department should be avoided.
- 4) Authentic texts : It is important to use authentic texts whenever possible, and right from the very beginning. This doesn't mean that simplified texts should be excluded, rather they should find acceptance because they prepare the students for eventual control of authentic texts. Making the connection between authenticity and simplification direct, Lautamatli (1978 : p.98) argues that "simplified

texts are used in the teaching of foreign language reading comprehension as a ladder towards less simplified and finally authentic texts". Thus, simplification and authenticity need to be seen as ends of the same continuum. According to Widdowson (1979) simplification is a pedagogic device, but as he says (p. 166) "Authenticity, then, is achieved when the reader achieves the intention of the writer by reference to a set of shared conventions". In brief, authenticity is our aim and to achieve it we use both simplified and authentic texts.

It will be of no practical use at all if the reading skill does not enable the students to read texts they actually require for some authentic purpose. The teacher needs to give practice with authentic texts, ~~that is~~, the sort of texts the students will want to read after graduation. Authenticity means that nothing of the original text is changed and also that its presentation and layout are retained. However, authentic texts need to be related to the students' command of the language to avoid or minimize the problems of comprehension as well as those of motivation and interest.

- 5) Appropriate speed : A competent reader tackles materials with a flexible speed. The teacher needs to train the students to use different rates for different materials and different purposes. Reading as fast as possible or

plodding through everything at the same careful speed are the extremes, and the students need to be aware of the type of texts and their own purposes before deciding on a suitable speed for their reading.

- 6) Silently : Apparently reading aloud is rarely needed except in the classroom. But since it is fairly useful in the early stages, it becomes an established part of the lesson and commonly persists far longer than desirable. Consequently, too little time is given to developing the skill of silent reading which is needed by all readers. The students need specific training, too, because they do need to be able to read well aloud, since after graduation they will work as teachers. But training for this should not be equated with the teaching of reading nor the teaching of pronunciation. (It is a distinct skill and not an easy one).
- 7) With adequate understanding : Instead of saying "with total comprehension" we say "with adequate understanding", as in the case of reading speed flexibility is required. We need to understand enough of the text to suit our purpose in reading, and this means that we frequently do not need to read or understand every word. Certainly, the students must be able to understand completely when necessary, but they must also learn that it is wasteful to read with the same amount of care for every purpose. This implies that various kinds of reading task must be given in class, not

all of which require the precision of careful study reading.

However, one thing must be made clear here, that is, understanding is central to the process of reading and must be the focus of our teaching. The choice of adequate understanding rather than complete understanding in certain reading tasks must be the result of a conscious decision, not the result of incapacity to understand.

3. Skills of Reading to be Developed

3.1. Reading involves a variety of skills. The main ones relevant to the intermediate level are listed below. (This list is taken from John Munby's *Communicative Syllabus Design*, 1978).

- 1) Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items through
 - a. understanding word-formation
 - b. contextual clues.
- 2) Understanding explicitly stated information
- 3) Understanding information in the text, not explicitly stated through
 - a. making inferences
 - b. understanding figurative language.
- 4) Understanding conceptual meaning, especially
 - a. quantity and amount
 - b. definiteness and indefiniteness

- c. comparison ; degree
- d. time (especially tense and aspect)
- e. location ; direction
- g. means ; instrument
- h. cause ; result ; purpose ; reason ; condition ; contrast.

5) Understanding the communicative value (function of sentences and utterances)

- a. with explicit indicators
- b. without explicit indicators

e.g. an interrogative that is a polite command; a statement that is in fact a suggestion, warning, etc. depending on the context; relationships of result, reformulation, etc., without "therefore", "in other words", etc.

6) Understanding relations within the sentence.

7) Understanding relations between the parts of a text through grammatical cohesive devices of

- a. reference (anaphoric and cataphoric)
- b. comparison
- c. substitution
- d. ellipsis
- e. time and place relaters
- g. logical connectors.

8) Interpreting text by going outside it

- a. using exophoric reference

- b. reading between the lines
 - c. integrating data in the text with own experience or knowledge of the world.
- 9) Recognizing indicators in discourse for
- a. introducing an idea
 - b. developing an idea (e.g. adding points ; reinforcing argument)
 - c. transition to another idea
 - d. concluding an idea
 - e. emphasizing a point
 - g. explanation or clarification of point already made
 - h. anticipating an objection or contrary view.
- 10) Identifying the main point or important information in a piece of discourse , through topic sentence in paragraphs of
- a. inductive organization
 - b. deductive organization
- 11) Distinguishing the main idea from supporting details, by differentiating
- a. primary from secondary significance
 - b. the whole from its parts
 - c. a process from its stages
 - d. category from exponent
 - e. statement from example
 - g. fact from opinion
 - h. a proposition from its argument.

- 12) Extracting salient points to summarise
 - a. the whole text
 - b. a specific idea/topic in the text
 - c. the underlying idea or point of the text.
- 13) Selective extraction of relevant points from a text.
- 14) Basic reference skills : understanding and use of
 - a. graphic presentation, viz. headings, sub-headings, numbering, indentation, bold-print, footnotes
 - b. table of contents and index.
- 15) Skimming to obtain
 - a. the gist of the text
 - b. a general impression of the text (good for reading aloud or for dictation reading).
- 16) Scanning to locate specifically required information.

3.2. In order to develop these skills, several types of exercises can be used. These question-types can have two different functions

- 1) To clarify the organization of the passage.

The questions can be about :

- a. The function of the passage
- b. The general organization (e.g. argumentative)
- c. The rhetorical organization (e.g. contrast, comparison)
- d. The cohesive devices (e.g. link-words)
- e. The intra-sentential relations (e.g. derivation, morphology, hyponymy).

2) To clarify the contents of the passage

The questions can be about :

- a. plain fact (direct reference)
- b. implied fact (inference)
- c. deduced meaning (supposition)
- d. evaluation.

The above skills, question-types and question-functions are constantly related since a given exercise uses a certain type of question, with a certain function, to develop a particular reading skill.

4 . Planning Reading Exercises

In constructing exercises it is necessary to bear in mind the following (Grellet, 1978):

- 1) There must be variety in the range of exercises. This is an important factor in motivation and it is necessary if different skills are to be covered.
- 2) Allow the text to suggest what exercises are most appropriate to it. In other words, the text should always be the starting point for determining why one would normally read it, how it would be read and how it might relate to other information before thinking of a particular exercise.

Too many exercises might spoil the pleasure of reading because many texts are meant to be read and enjoyed.

5. Questioning Techniques

5.1. General

Traditionally in reading comprehension lessons we have often used questions to find out if the students have understood, rather than to enable them to understand the text. In other words, they are devices for testing rather than teaching.

It is, therefore, essential that teachers should spend most of their time teaching rather than testing. The question now is how reading can be taught effectively when the traditional approach falls out of favour. The answer could be found along these two main lines of approach (Nuttall, 1982 : p. 125).

- 1) Developing types of questions and techniques for using them that are primarily intended to teach, not to test.
- 2) Developing other techniques for helping the students to develop their own strategies for making sense of texts.

In this section we are concerned with (1) above only.

5.2. The Use of Questions

In fact, questions can help the reader. If one cannot understand a difficult text one tries to answer the questions on

it. One then reads the whole text again and finds that one now understands it fairly well. The questions one answers help one to work at the text, to be actively involved in the process of making sense of it, rather than expecting understanding just to happen. They also pinpoint the portion of the text one has not understood so that one can concentrate on it. However, they will be valueless if they are not used in a proper way by a skilled teacher. Therefore, the teacher needs to :

- 1) create a favourable classroom climate in which neither he nor the students are afraid of making mistakes. He must help them to treat questions not as attempts to expose their ignorance, but as aids to successful exploration of the text.
- 2) make sure that the students have their texts open when they answer the questions on the texts because we are not interested in testing memory but want them to refer to the texts when they reply. Some of the questions will be too difficult to answer from memory.
- 3) have a positive attitude towards the students' wrong answers. This is very important because a perfect answer teaches nothing, but each wrong answer is an opportunity for learning. In case of an incorrect answer, it should be the concern of both the teacher and the class to see why it is so and how far, for sometimes an answer may be only partly wrong. The teacher should praise the students

for their correct understanding, and encourage them to look for other clues that help them to arrive at a satisfactory interpretation.

5.3. Using Multiple Choice (M.C.) Questions

Properly used, MC questions can be an effective tool for training reading skills. The teacher can turn such questions from "shallow tests" into the pointers we need for exploration if he applies the following procedure (John Munby, 1968).

- 1) The students read the text silently and individually.
- 2) The students attempt the questions (individually, in pairs or in groups). Group work at this stage is preferred, because it produces instructive discussion and forces the students to defend their choice of one option rather than another.
- 3) When all the groups are ready, the teacher records their choice for the answer to question 1 and, without disclosing which is best, promotes discussion between the groups about the reasons for their choices. Very often the students will discover the correct answer by this process, even if they got it wrong at first.

It is not easy to construct MC questions. To be successful they have to be well-constructed. The question setter must be sensitive to the potential difficulties in the text, and capable of devising plausible options that the students would choose if they

had misunderstood in the predicted way. He must construct the distractors after having taken into account possible misinterpretations of the text.

5.4. Using Discussion Technique

The way the question are used determines the success of the above-mentioned approach. Even if there is no group work in stage (2) the students should, in stage (3) be involved in the discussion of the alternative answers, and each will be supported or criticized by the students themselves. The teacher will do no more than the following :

- a. keep the discussion on track by asking occasional pointed questions if everyone has missed an important clue.
- b. make sure that everyone is involved in the discussion. There should be small groups of at most 5 students so that even the weaker students are active and learning.

5.5. Devising Questions

- 1) The teacher may need to devise some of his own questions relevant to the level of his students with regards to each individual as well, to supplement or even to replace some of the unsuitable questions in the textbook.

In order to do this he should know the purpose clearly ; that is, questioning in the reading class is not intended to test, but to enable the students to be aware of the way

language is used to convey meaning, and of the strategies they can use to extract the meaning from the text.

2) Two kinds of questions should be excluded :

a. Questions on grammar and vocabulary which have little bearing on the meaning of the text. In the reading class it is never justified to ask a grammatical question and leave it at that, though it may be necessary sometimes to draw attention to a grammatical phenomenon if it plays a crucial part in understanding the text.

b. Questions on general knowledge.

3) These questions should be included as they help the students to interpret what they read.

a. Initial questions that result in scanning and skimming activities.

b. Questions that direct the reader's attention to diagrams or other non-text features that will help him to interpret the text.

c. Questions that promote the use of word-attack skills.

d. Questions that focus on text-attack skills : all the other skills contribute to these, and these lead to the ultimate purpose - understanding the text as a whole.

4) These types of question can be used :

- a. Questions of literal comprehension. The answers to these questions are to be directly and explicitly found in the text, and could be answered in the words of the text itself.
- b. Questions involving reorganization or reinterpretation. Such questions require the students to get literal information from various parts of the texts and put it together, or to reinterpret information.
- c. Questions of inference .
With these questions the students are asked to work out the implication of the text on the basis of their literal comprehension of the text. The student should understand what is implied but not explicitly stated. These questions are difficult, and the difficulty is intellectual rather than linguistic in most cases.
- d. Questions of evaluation.
These are the most sophisticated questions of all for they require the students to judge the text in terms of what the writer is trying to do, and how far he has achieved it.
- e. Questions of personal response.
These questions record the students' reaction to the content of the text. They are such questions as :
"What's your opinion of A's behaviour ?" , "How would you have felt if you had been B ?" , and so on.

Basing himself on this classification of questions the teacher can on the one hand evaluate the questions found in textbooks and on the other develop his own .

CHAPTER 5

INTENSIVE AND EXTENSIVE READING

1. General

1) According to Broughton, et al. (1978) there are five kinds of reading activity. The first three, survey reading, skimming and superficial reading are sometimes grouped together and called 'extensive reading'. The object of such reading is to cover the greatest possible amount of text in the shortest possible time. A relatively low degree of understanding is perfectly adequate for this, either because that is all that is sought in any case, or because the material itself is highly redundant. It is by pursuing the activity of extensive reading that the volume of practice necessary to achieve rapid and efficient reading can be achieved. It is also one of the means by which a foreigner may be exposed to a substantial sample of the language he may wish to learn without actually going to live in the country to which that language is native.

The remaining two kinds of reading activity, content study reading and linguistic study reading are also often grouped together and called 'intensive reading'. The term indicates that it is not the nature of the skills involved that is of most interest but the results, that is, a deep and thorough understanding of the black marks on the paper. The concern is for detailed comprehension of very short texts. Intensive reading is typically concerned with texts of not more than

500 words in length. The objective is to achieve full understanding of the logical argument, the rhetorical arrangement or pattern of the text, of its symbolic, emotional and social overtones, of the attitudes and purposes of the author, and of the linguistic means that he employs to achieve his ends.

2) Brumfit (1977) points out that "reading for accuracy" and "reading for fluency" might be better labels than "intensive reading" and "extensive reading". These terms are more informative but still do not reflect all the purposes served by each type of reading.

According to Grellet (1981), extensive reading implies reading longer texts, usually for one's own pleasure. It is a fluency activity, mainly involving global understanding.

Intensive reading means reading shorter texts, to extract specific information. It is more an accuracy activity involving reading for detail.

3) The labels (Intensive and Extensive Reading) according to Nuttall (1982) indicate a difference in classroom procedures as well as a difference in purpose. Intensive reading involves approaching the text under the close guidance of the teacher, or under the guidance of a task which forces the students to pay great attention to the text. The aim of intensive reading is to arrive at a profound and detailed understanding of the text : not only of what it means, but also of how the meaning is produced. The intensive reading lesson is intended primarily to train students in reading strategies.

Nuttall also suggests short texts which can be studied in a lesson or two for intensive reading, without forgetting the demands made by longer texts in the extensive reading programme.

2. An Intensive Reading Programme

2.1. Objective

This is a set of objectives relevant to intensive reading as worked out by Nuttall (1982 : p. 146)

After completing a reading course, the student will :

- 1) Use skimming when appropriate to ensure that he reads only what is relevant, and to help subsequent comprehension.
- 2) Make use of non-text information (especially diagrams etc.) to supplement the text and increase understanding.
- 3) Read in different ways according to his purpose and the type of text.
- 4) Not worry if he does not understand every word, except when complete accuracy is important.
- 5) Recognize that a good writer chooses his words carefully and would have meant something different if he had chosen A rather than B. (An advanced student will also be able to explain the difference).
- 6) Make use of the reference system, discourse markers, etc., to help himself to unravel the meaning of difficult passages.

- 7) Be aware that a sentence with the same signification may have a different value in different contexts ; and be able to identify the value.
- 8) Be able to make use of the rhetorical organization of the text to help him to interpret a complex message.
- 9) Be aware that a writer does not express everything he means, and be able to make inferences as required.
- 10) Be aware that his own expectations influence his interpretation and recognize those occasions when the writer's assumptions differ from his own.
- 11) Be aware, when necessary, that he has not understood the text, and be able to locate the source of misunderstanding and tackle it.
- 12) Respond fully to the text in whatever way is appropriate.

The list will serve to remind us of the many different things that we want to achieve in our reading programme.

2.2. Suitable Texts for Intensive Work (based on Bright, et al : 1970)

- 1) Intensive reading is not done primarily for the purpose of widening the students' vocabularies. A text would be unsuitable if more than two or three new vocabulary items per page are present because the precise response to unknown words is impossible. The ideal text contains no unfamiliar words, but packs a great deal of meaning into familiar ones as well as no unfamiliar complex grammatical structures.

2) It is certainly desirable to use key passages in books the class are reading or have read for some of the intensive work, because a passage means more in its proper context. Most of our intensive work needs to be based on the class texts in this way.

3) It is perfectly acceptable to work on a selected passage out of context, especially if it is chosen to illustrate something specific, for example opinions masquerading as facts. Such a reading often fits into the composition syllabus. Another advantage of this technique is that interest in a good passage may make the students want to read the book from which it is taken.

4) The last and least satisfactory technique is to use a book of extracts and shut the intensive reading up in a period called "reading comprehension".

2.3. Lesson Techniques

1) The teacher needs to bear in mind that direct response to printed marks on paper is what we want to improve. So, the passage should first be read silently by the students. No reading aloud of the passage should be done before it is understood. There is no need for the teacher's voice. The slowest readers should not be given time to complete the passage. If the teacher waits for them, most students will feel no pressure at all to read quickly. The slow readers will perhaps read a little faster themselves next time and will not suffer unduly in any case because there is time during the questioning for them to look at the text again.

- 2) Now the teacher asks questions with the books open in front of the students. We are not testing memory and a student can look it up if he does not know the answer.
- 3) The teacher needs to ask questions in the order in which the answers appear in the text so that everyone knows where they are all the time. However, he may go back sometimes to the beginning and start again using the first run through to get out the plain sense of the passage and the second one to examine its emotional implications. It is possible that the teacher may want a third reading to draw attention to the overall pattern but if he does, it will almost certainly not occur in the same lesson.
- 4) The teacher needs to make sure that the students' answers are brief. He should not only accept but also prefer "sentence fragments" because they are more natural English and provide a good opportunity to practise conversational English. Besides, they are more efficient as they are quicker for the purpose of the lesson. It would be wrong to demand answers in sentences with fully expressed parts.
- 5) It is the teacher's responsibility to see to it that the lesson goes quickly. It is best for the students to remain seated and save them the trouble of standing up to give answers. There is no need to wait for answers. If a student has nothing to say, the teacher will try another student without "pillorying" failure. If no student can answer it is a bad question. This requires the teacher either to paraphrase or to abandon it. He should never answer a question himself,

because his response is not relevant. It will only be relevant if it determines the questions he asks.

6) The teacher needs to encourage direct quotation of the words from the passage for an answer. It will not serve the purpose of the reading lesson if he says "Give it to me in your own words, please".

7) When the students' span of attention has been exhausted the teacher needs to stop the questioning. Twenty to twenty-five minutes will do, for reading demands intense concentration on the text and is very hard work.

8) It is necessary for the teacher to ask the right questions and to build skilfully on the students' answers. This is the art of teaching intensive reading. It is impossible for the teacher to foresee all the possible answers from the students to his already - prepared questions. A sensitive and skilful teacher needs to improvise in dealing with the students' answers. He needs to do quick thinking and apply considerable tact to produce instantaneously just the reply that pinpoints what was missing in the student's first response.

9) The same questions can be asked again once more for very quick and brief answers which are to be jotted down in one or two words only on the board by the teacher.

10) Then the teacher can ask the students to reconstruct the whole passage from the answer notes on the board with suitable connectives added. He can also elicit sentences by prompting one or

two cue words when necessary, thus encouraging the students to go on with confidence. The result will be an oral reproduction of the passage. Another possibility is to have one student reproduce the text orally while the rest write down their own pieces with the teacher going round checking and helping. This technique enables the teacher to teach reading in combination with speaking and writing. But it should not take more than 5 minutes.

11) It is easy and profitable to train the students to ask a good many questions for themselves. This helps them to concentrate on the text more intensely. The teacher can give cue-words for questions to help the students with their asking. The cue-words need to be prepared in advance on a corner of the board. Take a passage about 'pollution' for example, the teacher may ask these questions "

'What spoils our environment ? '

'What pollutes the air we breathe ?'

The question cue-words may be :

What/spoil

What/pollute/air

The teacher can give a model for the students to start off. The more searching questions about the text the students themselves make up, the better it will be. One student may ask questions for either his teacher or his peers to answer.

It is necessary that the text should remain open so that it can be referred to as often as possible.

3. An Extensive Reading Programme

3.1. Extensive Reading should be Encouraged

Obviously, there has been no extensive reading programme in our College's E.F.L. syllabus. There has been, in fact, only a so-called "supplementary reading" list. The list is given to the students at the beginning of the year, but no teacher bothers to check if the students have done the reading or how far they have got. The excuse is that the students are already aware of the importance and necessity of reading and they should work independently for their own sake. In brief, no attention has been concentrated on extensive reading, and this state of affairs has left certain consequences : very few students have got the habit of reading for pleasure as they are not interested in reading in English ; the other students in general are slow readers ; and their cultural understanding tends to be poor.

It is perfectly true that we learn to read by reading.

Nuttall (1982 : p. 168) is right in providing this useful slogan :

"The best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it".

Experience has shown that the students who do a lot of reading will not become fluent very soon, but gradually after a year or two, there will be a marked improvement in their productive skills and they will progress rapidly, surpassing their classmates who have not developed the reading habit.

3.2. Objectives

These are the objectives of an extensive reading programme that can be relevant to EFL students in our College :

- 1) To foster the habit of reading for pleasure.
- 2) To develop certain important skills such as reading for gist and reading for required information and also improve reading speed.
- 3) To reinforce other aspects of the English course by exposing the students to a great deal of language in use. (This links up closely with the concept of language competence being a matter of acquiring desirable language habits. These are not only formed through practice, but also by means of constant exposure to the language in use).
- 4) To establish greater familiarity with English lexis. The more the students read the more familiar they become with the ways in which words are used. In the first two years they have been taught the 2,000 most common words of the language by means of fairly intensive techniques. Still there are occasional common words and words centred upon a topic of special interest which require such intensive treatment, but it would be a waste of time to teach the thousands of less frequent words and idioms of the language in the same way. There are two reasons for this :

The first reason is the students have no need to use the vast majority of these words. A rough idea gained from the situational context in which the word is first met is enough to begin with. Greater precision will be gained with each new encounter. Looking up words in dictionaries - except in special circumstances where one has to know exactly what a particular word means, or else miss a vital point that the author intends to make - should be discouraged.

To illustrate this, we shall take an example by Wingfield (1974 : p.1) . One is reading a novel about Brazil and a sentence occurs : "She looked up hungrily at the plops in the tree but saw that they were not ripe yet". Naturally, one doesn't know what a "plop" is because it is a nonsense word coined by Wingfield. One would not look it up in a dictionary because one can tell from the context that it is an edible fruit that grows on trees in Brazil, and it is not important to know more in order to follow the trend of the story. Many months later -one has probably forgotten all about "plops" by then -one comes across this sentence in another novel : "Her skin was the coppery colour of a ripe plop". One's previous acquaintance with 'plop' is now reinforced and one's knowledge of the referent behind the symbol "plop" has been widened.

The second reason is that defining the meaning of words, in the way a dictionary does, is no guarantee that we will be able to use them in context. This is due to the following :

Firstly, words could be marked as belonging to a particular professional or social register and would appear inappropriate outside them.

Secondly, words have peculiar collocations which we can only learn through usage (e.g. we climb a mountain, but mount a horse or a bicycle and we can both climb or mount a ladder, but only climb a tree).

Thirdly, different words and idioms have varying levels of formality which must be fully appreciated to avoid incongruity (e.g. personage, person, chap ; repast, meal, grub, tucker).

Fourthly, dictionary denotation can vary considerably from connotations inherent to the context (e.g. The rain we had in June was abnormal. Their eldest daughter is abnormal).

Only by a great deal of exposure to a language can we hope to become proficient in all these finer points of language skill. Unlike intensive reading, extensive reading should not concern itself with an analysis of unfamiliar words and idioms. It should constitute a language

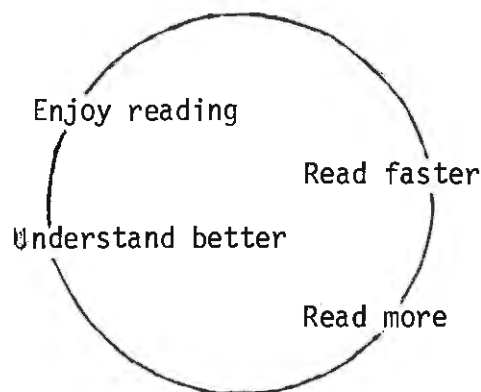
experience rather than a language study.

3.3. Choosing Books

1) General

The success of an extensive reading programme partly depends on whether the students want to read or not, and this mainly involves the factor of enjoyment. Needing to read books, for study or other purposes, is also an incentive for some students ; but wanting to read books because you enjoy them is an incentive for everybody.

When one wants to read books one will enjoy reading, one will read faster, one will read more. The more one reads the better one understands and the more one enjoys the reading. This virtuous circle should be established by the teacher for the students.



However, many of our students, in reality, are trapped in a vicious circle. They are seldom able to develop much interest in what they read, let alone enjoyment. Since they get no pleasure from it, they read very little. Deprived of lack of practice, they continue to find it difficult to understand what they read, so their reading

speed does not increase. They remain slow readers and the circle goes on.

The teacher, somehow or other, needs to help them to get out of this cycle of frustration and enter the above virtuous cycle.

It is clear that speed, enjoyment and comprehension are closely linked with one another and with the practice the students get. To get out of the vicious circle and into the virtuous one enjoyment will help the most. Moreover, the students' enjoyment greatly depends on how well the teacher chooses the books.

2) Criteria for Selecting Books

The criteria of readability (i.e. suiting the linguistic level of the reader) and suitability of content are even more important in choosing books for extensive reading than in choosing a class text, because the students are expected to read the books on their own.

Generally, extensive reading materials should be :

- a. Appealing : They must appeal to students, supplying what they really want (not just what they say they want). The appeal is greater if the book is attractive in appearance, well-printed and with good coloured illustrations - more illustration and bigger print for more elementary students. The books should look like the ones we buy from choice ; they should not smell of the schoolroom ; notes and questions are better omitted.

- b. Easy : The language must be easier than that found in the current English coursebook. If the language is a struggle for the students they cannot be expected to read from choice, or to read fluently. Reading improvement comes from reading a lot of easy material. As a rough guide, it is suggested that if a student finds that a book has more than four unfamiliar lexical items per page, it is probably too difficult for him.
- c. Short : The book must be of reasonable length. It is sensible to supply the students with fairly short books that they can finish quickly without getting a sense of strain and boredom.
- d. Varied : There needs to be a wide choice suiting the various needs of the students in terms of content, language and intellectual maturity.

In the field of EFL teaching there is a plentiful and varied collection of books. The major EFL publishers have had a wide range of supplementary readers for years. But due to many reasons, our College has not got any official access to them. This constitutes a big problem for us to solve. The books available for selection are published in the Soviet Union, and to some extent we can find a solution to the problem. Still there arises another problem that of authenticity.

3.4. Teaching Methods for Extensive Reading

According to Wingfield (1974) extensive reading activities can be divided into three categories :

- a. The Individual Reading Scheme
- b. The Class Reader ; and
- c. The Training of Specific Skills

We shall now consider methods and techniques used in each category of reading activities.

1) The Individual Reading Scheme (Class Library Periods)

a. Organization

The Individual Reading Scheme can be organized in several different ways, but the best is probably the Class Library System. Each class should have a library of at least fifty books of a suitable language level, carefully selected by the teacher, and separate from the main College library. The books should be kept in a box or a cupboard in the classroom. The library period should be the time when the majority of students exchange books for their private reading, but some time should be set aside on at least two other occasions during the week to enable the students to exchange books without having to wait for the next library period. The private reading that takes place in the library periods should be only a small part of the reading the students do in their own time. They should be encouraged to read at least one book per week, and should be expected always to have a book with them to read during any spare minute of an English lesson - for example when they have finished a piece of written work

and are waiting for the slower ones to catch up.

The success of the Individual Reading Scheme greatly depends on how well the teacher chooses the books for the Class Library. The teacher should take into account both the varying language levels of the members of the class, and also their different interests. In general, however, it is very important to ensure that the book chosen by the students from the Class Library can be read by them with ease and enjoyment.

The over-riding aim of the Individual Reading Scheme is to instil the private reading habit among the students - the habit most of them have not formed after the first two years. When the class has begun to acquire a zest for reading, it is important to ensure that the selection of books open to the class is, in general, on the easy side, though of course provision should be made for the better students, too. As the year progresses, the teacher may phase out the easier titles, and phase in some which are more difficult. He should also attempt to make sure that the better readers are reading the more difficult books, and the slower ones the easier books. One convenient rule of thumb is to relate the books read to reading speed. The students who have a high reading speed should be reading books of a higher level - though this is only an approximate guide, of course.

b. Conduct

The students read books of their choice, selected if necessary with the teacher's help. At the beginning of the lesson the teacher

will be mainly occupied with the details of the book exchanges. The easiest way is to have a page in an exercise book for each student, in alphabetical order, and any book the student takes out is entered on his page, perhaps by a number code to save time, together with the date, and subsequently deleted when the book is returned. A library monitor can be trusted with these entries, but the teacher will have to advise on selection and deal with such problems as books which are returned damaged or two students who have been waiting for the return of a particular book which both want to take out.

When the exchange has finished, the class will settle down to private reading. At this stage the teacher goes round the class examining the student's library record books and discussing briefly the books read during the previous week. This discussion needs only be very superficial and establish whether the book was actually read and enjoyed ; and if not ; why not ? The system of requiring the students to prepare a long written report on each book they read is not recommended. It turns reading into an academic exercise and may deter the students from reading as many books as they might without having to write a report on them.

It is not necessary to force the students to read a certain book. If they fail to read, the teacher should discuss the matter with him, and recommend alternatives. If a student does not read as many books as the teacher feels he should, the fault may lie as much with the teacher as with the student. Perhaps the books available are not suitable, or the teacher has not been advising the student properly.

It is essential to remember that the Individual Reading Scheme can only be a success if the students derive pleasure from their reading. They should be discouraged from using a dictionary except when absolutely necessary, and new words should never be recorded in vocabulary notebooks. Finally, the value of the Individual Reading Scheme may not always be apparent to the students. It is therefore vital that the teacher should arouse their interest in the scheme with all the charm and persuasiveness at his disposal. This is one of the most useful things he can do. Some of our students are puritanical. To them "enjoyment" and "education" may be a contradiction in terms. For these students the teacher can "advertise" his scheme by quoting some interesting and beautiful sentences from some of the books they are going to read, or by using the following argument, as suggested by Wingfield (1974 : p.3) : "One page contains (say) 25 correct sentences; a book of 60 pages will contain 1,500 correct English sentences. If you read 50 books a year, you will thus read 75,000 correct sentences in a year. Your chances of writing good English sentences should greatly increase from seeing all these." We may add "speaking English", too. The teacher can also excite the students' curiosity to read a book by reading a short passage from it and leaving it at a tantalizing point.

2) The Class Reader

a. Aim

The class reader is a set of books which the class reads privately, but the teacher chooses suitable portions for class activity.

While the aim of the class library is to get the class to read quantitatively, the aim of the class reader is to get the class to improve the quality of its reading. Success depends on whether the quality of its reading, in terms of imaginative response and capacity to enjoy books has improved.

b. Selection of Class Readers

Wingfield (1974 : p.3) suggests : "If a reader contains more than about five unfamiliar lexical items per page, it is probably too difficult". It goes without saying that to be successful, the class reader should appeal to the majority of the class. Nuttall (1982 : p.26) also suggests "... a rather small proportion of new words, perhaps, that is, about five on a page ... If there are more, the reader will be continually distracted and will very likely slow himself down by referring to a dictionary".

However, it should be noted that not all books chosen for the Class Library are suitable for use as class readers due to the difference in aim between the two : one aims at quantity, the other quality. It follows that a class reader should not merely be at the right language level, and enjoyed by all, but it should also be worth enjoying. A class reader which is worthwhile is a book which can be an experience meaningfully and enjoyably shared and discussed with others, and which can give new insights into language and life.

c. Conduct

Generally, such a lesson will follow a homework assignment,

and before the teacher does anything else he must check that the homework has been done. He does this with a quick list of factual questions which can be answered, often with one word - by anyone who has read the text. This can be done orally or on a piece of paper and should not take more than five minutes. The object is to make certain that the reading set for homework has been done. The teacher should then change the type of question to elicit the keynotes of the passage read and promote discussion by asking questions based on opinion rather than fact. Here the aim is to heighten class enjoyment and understanding of the book. He may single out paragraphs of particular importance which he may wish the class to re-examine, and read them. Of course he should have prepared these beforehand so that he can give as expressive and enjoyable an interpretation of the text as he is capable of.

When the lesson does not follow a homework assignment, the teacher may ask a few questions designed to remind the class of the trend the story has taken in previous reading. In both cases we are now ready to continue with the unread portion of the book. The teacher may wish to start the class off by reading a few paragraphs aloud, and should then leave it to continue on its own within a prescribed limit that will take them about 5-10 minutes to reach. Then he can say : "Hands up those who have finished", and unless practically everyone has, "An extra half minute for the slow ones to catch up". This is followed by question and discussion of the passage read.

Apart from those questions necessary to ensure that the students understand the outline of the story, there should be questions

of the personal response or deductive type, linking the students' own experience or their imaginative grasp with the action of the story so that they may acquire a clearer insight into the workings of character and plot.

Points of language should only be dealt with if they are essential for a clear understanding of the story. Students should be encouraged to ask questions or to comment, but questions on obscure words which have no bearing on the story should be discouraged by inviting the students to guess the approximate meaning themselves from the context. The teacher does not need to waste time on such explanations because it is a reading lesson, not a vocabulary one.

If the text says, for example, "After the accident John was incapacitated from earning a living" and the teacher is asked what "incapacitated" means, he can be quite certain that the questioner is perfectly capable of deducing the meaning himself and has probably only asked because it has become a matter of habit - that one turns to the teacher for an explanation of any word that one has not come across previously. In this case there are sufficient contextual clues, the teacher can say. "Can't you guess what it means?" or "Try and guess. Surely you can guess".

If there are no contextual clues, the teacher needs to give a simple synonym sufficient for that particular context - nothing more. For instance, if the text says : "She was a vivacious girl of sixteen". The teacher can give "lively" or "full of life" and leave it at that.

This way of doing things will have two effects : It will train the students in deducing meaning from context and it will diminish their reliance on the teacher as an explainer of words.

Only small parts of each reader are discussed in outline. The teacher must choose with care which are the most suitable passages to subject to detailed treatment. If the reader is a success, the class will usually have finished it in at most three weeks, and another may be issued. It is very important that the teacher should associate the class readers with interesting discussions, and not with academic study.

3) Specific Skills for Extensive Reading

- a. General : Two extensive reading skills require specific training
 - + Reading for gist
 - + Reading for specifically required information.

Both these skills will benefit from the results of a Faster Reading Course. They do not remove the need for careful reading, but will enable the reader to select the texts, or the portions of a text, that are worth spending time on.

b. Reading for Gist

b.1. This is a useful reading skill commonly used in many different circumstances. But too often the EFL students in our College receive no training whatsoever in it - largely because there

is practically no ready-made material available. This is a great pity for quite apart from the obvious general usefulness of the skill, it also has an obvious relation to the ability of making summaries. It is important to remember that there is not one type of reading, but several depending on one's reasons for reading. The students will never read efficiently unless they can adapt their reading speed and technique to their aim when reading. By reading all texts in the same way, the students will waste time and fail to remember points of importance to them because they absorb too much non-essential information.

Reading for gist involves swift skimming through a passage, and the ability to pick out and remember the "gist", or essentials, without referring back to the text, to know how it is organized or to get an idea of the tone or the intention of the writer, or to keep ourselves superficially informed about matters that are not of great importance to us. It is an activity which requires an overall view of the text and implies a definite reading competence.

b.2. Here are some samples of reading for gist exercises. But first it is important to remember that

- + The language level of the passage should be no more difficult than that of the class-reader. Where it contains unfamiliar lexical items, these should be deducible from the context. In brief, the materials must be simple and contain no language difficulties at all.

- + The questions devised by the teacher should test only the students' assimilation of the essentials. The question may be of the multiple choice kind, but free response questions are probably more practicable for the teacher.
- + The kind of questions to be asked has to be fairly general and is intended to elicit whether or not the students have gained a reasonable overview of the text. Here are some examples of useful questions (based on a passage about 'Magnesium')

Questions :(Wingfield, 1974 : p.5)

- i. In one word, what is the passage about ?
(Magnesium)
- ii. What are its two chief qualities ?
(Lightness, strength)
- iii. Where does much of it come from ?
(The sea)
- iv. It is very useful in the making of aeroplanes.
For it to be used in this way, what must be done with it ?
(Combined with other metals)

b.3. Points to note

There are two possible ways of handling this type of exercise :

Firstly, the students may be timed individually. When they finish reading they record the time, and then turn over and answer the questions printed on the back, without looking again at the text. This method makes allowance for a considerable variety of reading speed in the class, but it involves the teacher in getting the questions duplicated.

Secondly, the teacher can use the group approach. He has to have prior knowledge of the main speed groups of the class. For example, the class falls roughly into three groups consisting of those who can read at 100 words per minute, 150 words per minute, and 200. The first passage contains 100 words. The slowest readers get a minute. Fifteen seconds after they start, the middle group starts. They all finish at the same time, and the teacher tells them at once to put the passage away, and write down the answers to the questions that are asked orally.

Using the first method, the student competes with his own past performance, and not with the rest of the class. The second method introduces an element of competition which the teacher may or may not like. But it does enable the teacher to have exact control over the demands he is making of the class. For example, the next exercise might have the same time limits, but the passage chosen might have 110 words.

It should be noted that the questions given above are genuine gist-type questions and the students should normally be asked to give short answers.

A follow-up discussion of the exercises is, of course vital if it is going to train, rather than merely test.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Finally, the writer would like to consider what the teacher as a person needs to contribute to make the reading programme a success.

1) It is clear that teachers, peers and the "classroom climate" all influence the reading of the students. These are the ways in which teachers can affect reading as suggested by Pearson and Johnson (1978)

- a. The way they prepare the students for reading
- b. The kind of materials they select for teaching
- c. The kind of student model they encourage
- d. The kind of feedback they give
- e. The kind of incentives and reinforcers they use
- g. The kind of atmosphere they establish for taking risks (by placing value on curiosity and glossing over failures induced by risk-taking).

Peer influence can be positive or negative. A little amount of friendly competition can stimulate attention to a task and to achievement, but too much of it can be disruptive.

"Classroom climate" means both the physical and the emotional environment. There need to be, physically, classrooms which promote

curiosity by having an availability of resources. Emotionally, there also needs to be an environment where curiosity is encouraged and valued. In this environment the students know that it is acceptable to take risks when grappling with answers to difficult questions and that the teacher will not be displeased with wrong interpretations.

2) It is worthwhile considering in some further detail what the teacher needs to do as a person, because the success of the reading programme is largely dependent on him.

Hard work is certainly one necessity for him. No success in teaching can be achieved without it. All questions on reading done by the students need careful preparation. Boring questions eliciting only facts and testing memory alone need to be avoided. A conscientious teacher leads his questions towards deeper appreciation of the author's intentions and to fruitful discussion.

Still, this is not sufficient. His professional skills are needed, too, to plan class work which will enable even the weaker students to have reasonable success, particularly at the very beginning. A good beginning is half the battle and success builds on success. The more success the students gain the higher their level of interest will be. Moreover, a "positive approach" is necessary. It helps the teacher to comment favourably on what the students have got right and enables them to build on it, rather than simply pointing out what they have got wrong.

3) All this is necessary. But there is one factor of paramount

importance, that is, the teacher's own interest in reading. Nuttall (1982 : p. 192) suggests two of these slogans :

- a. Readers are made by readers ('Readers' refers to people who read in both cases).
- b. Reading is like an infectious disease : it is caught not taught. (And you can't catch it from someone who hasn't got it himself).

The sad fact that can be stated here is that most of our students, due to one reason or another, do very little reading at home. Some of them are not even convinced of the usefulness of reading in English, and don't enjoy such reading at all.

The teacher is the only person from whom they can "catch" reading. That is why it is important that their teacher is seen as an eager reader both in Vietnamese and English. This he can show by carrying books around with him, referring to books as he teaches, reading out brief passages or sentences that may interest the students, talking about what he is reading at the moment, and handling books in a way that shows his love for them.

4) The question now is how much reading does the teacher need to do himself ? The answer is simple : the more the better. Usually a number of our teachers can't manage time to do enough reading. They don't read much in any language. There are other teachers who read a lot in Vietnamese, but not much in English. In both cases, they are not able to set an example for the students to follow.

A teacher who has not yet caught the reading habit should motivate himself by thinking of the vast areas of interest that will be open to him once he can read fast. He can start by improving his reading efficiency in Vietnamese, and, once that has been improved, he can go on to improve his English language reading.

Those who don't do a lot of reading in English must motivate themselves by choosing books along the lines of the criteria they use when choosing books for the class : books that are easy to read and of real interest to the reader. They may persuade themselves to read for enjoyment and interest : light fiction or anything written in simplified English.

Another way is for teachers of reading to read all the English language readers available in the College or class library, starting with the easiest levels and reading them as fast as they can. This is like killing two birds with one stone. As they go along they can jot down the author and title of each book with two or three lines of comment, in a notebook. This will later enable them to help when the students want advice on what to choose, and check if they have read the book with understanding.

5) Again, the more English language reading the teachers do, the better. They should choose short, easy and enjoyable books for this purpose and use all the strategies that they want to develop in the students. They can learn a lot from this experience that will be useful to them in their teaching.

Also, it is to be hoped that they will develop a love of reading that will not only help them to become better teachers of reading, but will also give them a source of profit and enjoyment that will last throughout their lives.

The writer hopes that this Field Study Report with its analysis of the present state of affairs as regards the teaching of EFL reading in Vietnam, its place in the syllabus and the appropriate methodologies and techniques will stimulate discussion and further research among his colleagues in the field. Particularly where the perception of cultural factors that influence reading comprehension is concerned more study and analysis would be of value in achieving higher standards in the general level of English throughout Vietnam.

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