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The impacts of the reading environment on EFL learners' reading comprehension: A study at Thu Dau Mot University

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ABSTRACT

The study is aimed at examining the impacts of the reading environment on ELF learners' reading comprehension. To achieve this objective, the study was conducted at Thu Dau Mot University (TDMU) with the participation of 129 English majors and 19 teachers of English, who returned questionnaires and were interviewed on a voluntary basis. The findings show that EFL learners' reading comprehension is significantly influenced by the reading environment. If they read in the unorganized or uncontrolled environments where the atmosphere is noisy or they find it comfortable, e.g., at home, in bed room, or on public transports, they will have problems about comprehension. Therefore, the role of teachers is to let EFL learners read in the organized or controlled environments. In addition, more quiet reading spaces should be built for EFL learners because they can have high comprehension when reading in such places.

Keywords: *reading comprehension, reading environment*

1. Introduction

According to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy (2017), communication is a process in which the speaker/writer communicates his/her thoughts, ideas or feelings encoded in form of verbal or nonverbal messages to the listener/reader who is required to decode those messages to get meanings. Reading, in this process, is the activity involving decoding the messages to get meanings. However, the process of decoding to get meaning, according to Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, and Roy (2017), is often influenced

by internal and external factors considered as noise, resulting in the failure in communication out of misunderstanding. Out of the external factors affecting the process of decoding to get meaning, reading environment is evaluated as one of the leading factors. As observed, many EFL learners are sometimes identified as having problems with reading comprehension in spite of the fact that their vocabulary is adequate, their grammar is wide or even they have good reading strategies. One of the factors causing this issue might be environmental influence because it can distract them while reading. For this reason, the researcher carried out an investigation to find out the answer to the question “*Is EFL learners’ reading comprehension influenced by the reading environment?*” The findings of the current study are expected to make a small contribution to a fuller understanding of the problems in the reading comprehension. In addition, teachers of English, including teachers of English at Thu Dau Mot University, can use the findings of the research as a basis for designing the appropriate teaching activities in which their students read with high comprehension.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Reading and Reading Comprehension

Reading is an activity, using the eyes to recognize graphic symbols and letters and using the mind to think and keep contents. According to Grabe and Stoller (2002), reading is a process of getting the meaning of something written by the interpretation of used symbols. It is also defined as a process of grasping full linguistic meaning in the written language (Grabe, 2009). Moreover, Harris (1962) defined that “reading is the meaningful interpretation of printed or written verbal symbols which involves sensing, perceiving, achieving meaning, learning and reacting in a variety of ways” (p. 60).

In keeping with these definitions, reading involves at least two people: the writer and the reader. The reader has to decode the writer’s words to understand his/her message and construct meaning from text. Thus, it can be said that definitions of reading often go with the concept of understanding or comprehension. A number of researchers such as Lipka and Siegel (2012), Russell (2013), and McLean (2014) emphasized that the main goal of reading is comprehension. Reading without comprehension is pointless. Grabe (2009) stated that “reading is centrally a comprehending process” (p.14). Readers read to understand what is intended to be conveyed in writing.

According to Yogurtcu (2013), “the process of reading comprehension requires a link between thinking, textual content, and the reader’s level of readiness, expectations and objectives of reading” (p. 376). Reading comprehension from a psychological viewpoint as mentioned by Rivers (2000) is “a problem-solving behavior that actively involves the reader in the process of deriving and assigning meaning, drawing on contextual information” (p. 70).

Thus, based on the definitions of reading and reading comprehension as described above, a conclusion can be drawn that reading is an activity of recognizing the written words in the reading text, requiring the understanding or comprehension of what the writer tries to convey in those words. In other words, reading comprehension is an activity involving decoding the reading text and getting the intended meanings of the writer.

2.2. Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension Skills

As mentioned at the beginning, reading, the process of decoding used symbols to get meaning (Dennis, 2008; Block, 2004; Graves, Juel, & Graves, 1998), is often influenced by internal and external factors, namely noise (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2017), including: complexity of the reading text, environmental influences, anxiety during reading comprehension, interest and motivation, and decoding or word recognition speed. In terms of classification, anxiety during reading comprehension, interest and motivation, and decoding or word recognition speed are internal factors whereas complexity of the reading text and environmental influences are external ones.

In terms of the complexity of the reading text, Dennis (2008) pointed out that the readers' strength and fluency in language affect their comprehending of the reading text. The reason why Dennis (2008) links the complexity of the reading text to the readers' strength and fluency in language is that if the readers know all of the vocabulary as well as grammatical points in the text, it becomes easier for them to understand the reading text. In this explanation, the complexity of the text is low.

Dennis (2008) found out that the environmental conditions also have a considerable impact on the learners who try to read a passage. In particular, the readers may have a lot more problems understanding a text in an unorganized environment than those who read in a calm and controlled place. If learners are in an unsafe place, they find it difficult to focus on their reading. When they are in safe environments, their reading comprehension ability will be better. Additionally, readers will lose their concentration in understanding a text when there are noises like televisions or radios.

The third factor affecting reading comprehension that Dennis (2008) found out in his research project is related to the readers' anxiety while reading. In particular, readers have more pressure on reading if they read in examinations, class work, or homework situations while they get more excited if they read for enjoyment. Even worse, some learners react positively to examinations while others are overwhelmed by the pressure to carry out a reading activity. As a result, readers who experience anxiety while reading may not completely understand the reading text.

Similarly, the readers' interest and motivation are very important in developing their reading comprehension skill (Dennis, 2008). If readers find the reading material uninteresting, they will have a lot of problems concentrating on their comprehension. This can lead to a lowering of reading comprehension among readers. If the reading material

is interesting for the readers, they can easily understand it and can remember it clearly. Hence, EFL teachers should motivate their learners through providing interesting reading materials during their class time.

More importantly, decoding or word recognition speed was acknowledged to be one of the causes of poor reading comprehension (Dennis, 2008). This means that readers who have problems in decoding and recognizing words read slowly and find it more difficult to understand the meaning of passages than those without decoding problems. This factor is related to lexical processing which is a sequence of processes in which the readers recognize and access the meanings of word forms in a text (Tily, Fedorenko, & Gibson, 2010). In order to gain automatic access to words and their meanings, processing has to be practiced to a point that the lexical information contained in words takes less cognitive attention as it is easily recognized at surface (Hill, 2011). Therefore, many researchers support training learners to become automatic in word recognition to increase fluency (Chang, 2010), as automatic word recognition is crucial to fluent L2 reading comprehension (Grabe, 2010).

2.3. Reading Environment

As a matter of definition, reading environment refers to the space in which reading activities take place. It can be a classroom setting, an examination, a bedroom, a living room, a library, a coffee shop, a park, or a bus/train/plane. In terms of classification, reading environment can be classified into some categories, including: controlled (e.g., in an examination) or uncontrolled (e.g., at home) reading environment, organized (e.g., in a classroom) or unorganized (e.g., in a park) reading environment, quiet (e.g., in a library) or noisy (e.g., in a coffee shop) reading environment, comfortable (e.g., in bedroom) or uncomfortable (e.g., on a bus) reading environment. Therefore, reading environment is determined to be one of the influential factors, on the one hand, causing readers' distractions in reading comprehension and, on the other hand, supporting and fostering their reading comprehension. In this respect, teaching activities are also considered as environmental influential factors because they not only engage but also disengage readers in and from effective reading, respectively.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

To get the data to prove the answer to the research question, the researcher conducted a survey through questionnaires for students and teachers to find out and generalize the impacts of the reading environment on reading comprehension that English majors at Thu Dau Mot University report. In addition, the researcher interviewed students and teachers to get more insights into the issue under investigation. Questionnaires were considered the appropriate method for this research because it helps generalize the research problem

being studied by numeric data collected from a large group of population (Dörnyei, 2007; Snape & Spencer, 2003). In this regard, through questionnaires, the findings of the current research are expected to be reliable in terms of research methodology. Moreover, the interview data gives more convincing value to the data from the questionnaire.

3.2. Participants

3.2.1. Students

To ensure validity and reliability of the study, all of the English majors at TDMU were invited to answer the student questionnaire. After 20 days of questionnaire distribution, 206 questionnaires were returned, but 77 of them were invalid because the answers to the questions of the same meaning (purposed-designed) are inconsistent. Therefore, the data from 129 valid questionnaires were used and analyzed for the current study. Out of the total number of students who returned valid questionnaires, 29% are males and 71% are females (see Figure 3.1). The reason why there is such a difference in participants' gender is that the number of female English majors is much higher than male ones. In addition, out of the total number of 129 participants, 2% are freshmen, 48% are sophomores, 15% are juniors, 26% are seniors, and 9% are students who have studied for more than 4 years at TDMU (see Figure 3.2).

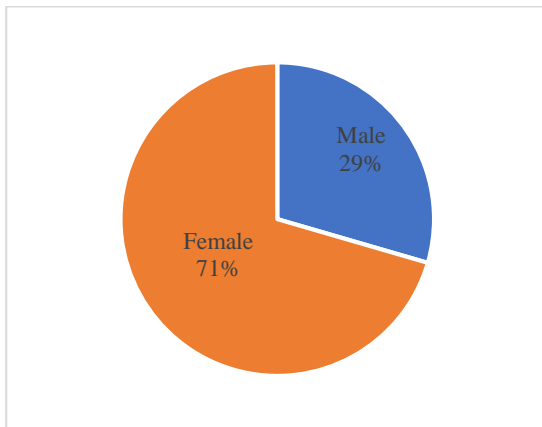


Figure 3.1. Students' gender

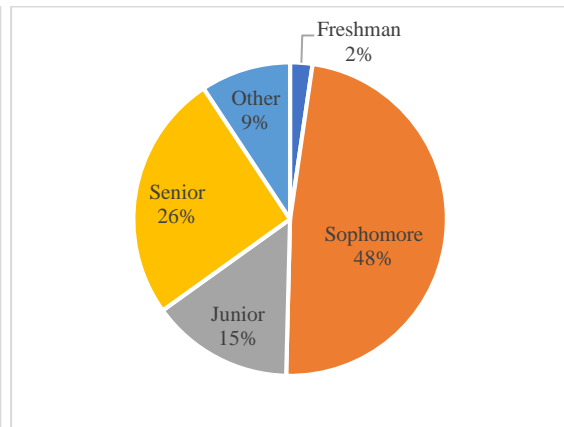


Figure 3.2. Students' academic levels

3.2.2. Teachers

Similarly, all of the 22 lecturers of English in the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Thu Dau Mot University were invited to take part in the survey. After 14 days of data collection, all 22 lecturers answered the questionnaires, but three of them were invalid because the answers to the questions of the same meaning (purposed-designed) are inconsistent. Therefore, the data from 19 valid questionnaires were used and analyzed for the current study.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The instruments used to collect data for this research were questionnaires and interviews for both students and teachers.

Questionnaires: The student questionnaire was divided into three parts. Part One seeks some demographic data about students including: their gender, academic levels and favorite language skills. Part Two (2 Likert-type items) tries to find out students' problems in reading comprehension due to the reading environment. Part Three (10 multiple-choice items) is to examine relation between students' favorite reading environment and their comprehension. Similarly, the teacher questionnaire was also divided into two parts. The first section contains questions to gain the teachers' personal information. The second section deals with how the teachers organize reading teaching and learning activities. For Likert-type items in the questionnaire, they have a five-point scale, ranging from (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree" for the respondents to choose from. For multiple-choice items, the respondents can choose one or more than one option.

Interviews: The open-ended questions in the student interview were designed in two parts asking students to share their opinion about the impacts of reading environment on their reading comprehension and their favorite reading environment. Similarly, the open-ended questions in the teacher interview were designed to explore teachers' teaching methods in terms of organizing reading teaching and learning activities.

3.4. Data Collection Procedure

After designing the questionnaires to collect data from the students and teachers, the links of the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents (both students and teachers) through Zalo groups and emails. It took 20 days to collect data from the students and 14 days from the teachers. This period was long enough to ensure that the respondents took the questionnaire items into consideration so as to give their valuable answers. In addition to the research purposes, explanations, as well as "thank you" presented in the questionnaires, the participants were also provided with this kind of information in Zalo groups and emails. This was to expect that the respondents would take time to send their valuable answers to the questionnaires.

After the time of questionnaire-based data collection, a total of 10 students and 5 lecturers were selected for the interview on a voluntary basis. After choosing participants for the interviews, the researcher made discussions with students to set up the appropriate time to meet them. For the convenience, for each student, the researcher made a Zalo video call to interview him/her. It took three days to interview all of ten students. However, for each teacher, the researcher met him/her in person because the researcher and the teachers all work at TDMU. Because of the teachers' busy jobs, it took the researchers two weeks to interview them. As a basis for data analysis, the interviews were recorded with all interviewees' agreement using an audio recorder.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

After eliminating invalid questionnaires and coding, data were entered into SPSS Statistics 22 software to make necessary descriptive statistics, such as the mean, SD (standard deviation), the range, variance, maximum and minimum values, correlation

coefficient, compare mean (one-way ANOVA), etc., for summarizing, presenting, and analyzing the findings.

For the interview data, the researcher listened to the recordings and transcribed all of the interviewee’s words. After transcribed, all interview data were organized according to the interview questions for the purpose of generalization. Then, the researcher identified pertinent themes for the analysis.

4. The Impacts of the Reading Environment on EFL Learners’ Reading Comprehension

According to Dennis (2008), the environmental conditions and anxiety have a considerable impact on the readers’ comprehension. In particular, the readers may have many more problems understanding a text in an unorganized environment than those who read in a calm and controlled place. If the readers are in an unsafe place, they find it difficult to focus on their reading. When they are in safe environments, their reading comprehension ability will be better. Additionally, readers will lose their concentration in understanding a text when there are noises like televisions or radios. In this regard, *do EFL learners have any problems in reading comprehension due to the reading environment?*

TABLE 1. Students’ Problems in Reading Comprehension due to Reading Environment

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Not decided		Agree		Strongly agree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
4. I will lose my concentration in understanding the text when there are noises.	2	1.6%	6	4.7%	27	20.9%	54	41.9%	40	31.0%
5. It’s easier to lose my concentration in understanding the text when I read for enjoyment than for examination.	1	0.8%	12	9.3%	31	24.0%	46	35.7%	39	30.2%

Through the survey, the answer to the question does not come out as expected because the majority of respondents reported having problems in reading comprehension due to reading environment. In particular, up to 73% of the respondents agreed that they lose their concentration in understanding the text when there are noises while only about 6% disagreed (see item 4 in Table 1). Moreover, up to 66% of the respondents reported that it’s easier to lose their concentration in understanding the text when they read for enjoyment than for examination while only about 10% reported their disagreement (see item 5 in Table 1). Generally, Table 1 shows that the majority of the EFL learners have problems in reading comprehension due to reading environment of being noisy and less controlled. As a matter of hypothesis, however, the researcher wondered that the EFL learners who are interested in reading could have fewer problems in reading comprehension due to reading environment than other EFL learners because the reading environment are not valued when they get self-motivated. Therefore, the researcher made a One-Way Anova test to test this hypothesis.

TABLE 2. *Problems in Reading Comprehension due to Reading Environment According to Students' Favorite Skills*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Min	Max
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
4. I will lose my concentration in understanding the text when there are noises.	listening	74	3.878	.9356	.1088	3.662	4.095	1.0	5.0
	reading	22	4.136	.7102	.1514	3.821	4.451	3.0	5.0
	writing	8	3.750	1.0351	.3660	2.885	4.615	2.0	5.0
	speaking	25	4.120	1.0132	.2026	3.702	4.538	1.0	5.0
	Total	129	3.961	.9220	.0812	3.801	4.122	1.0	5.0
5. It's easier to lose my concentration in understanding the text when I read for enjoyment than for examination.	listening	74	3.946	1.0054	.1169	3.713	4.179	1.0	5.0
	reading	22	4.182	.8528	.1818	3.804	4.560	2.0	5.0
	writing	8	3.375	1.0607	.3750	2.488	4.262	2.0	5.0
	speaking	25	3.440	.8699	.1740	3.081	3.799	2.0	5.0
	Total	129	3.853	.9851	.0867	3.681	4.024	1.0	5.0

Scale: 1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Not decided 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Surprisingly, the result did not come out as hypothesized. This means that the learners with high interest in reading have more problems in reading comprehension due to reading environment of being noisy and less controlled than other learners. Let us take a look at the average scores (mean) of questions from 4 to 5 that were marked by the respondents with high interest in reading (see Table 2). It is definitely clear that these average scores are all the highest. This indicates that there is a significant difference in their problems in reading comprehension due to such reading environment in terms of their favorite skills.

From the above discussion, the EFL learners are identified as currently facing problems in reading comprehension due to reading environment which are noisy and less controlled. More importantly, the learners with high interest in reading have more problems in reading comprehension due to such reading environment than those who are interested in listening, speaking, and writing. Simultaneously, the findings from the survey on teachers' reading teaching activities (see Figure 1) also show that a little attention has been paid to the impacts of noise on students' reading comprehension in teachers' teaching activities. In particular, up to 63.2% of teachers ask students to read in group/pair with discussion, an unfavorable reading environment, more than to read individually (47.4%). However, many teachers (63.2%) let students read in controlled environments where students can get concentrated the most in understanding the text while several teachers (31.6%) ask their students to read for enjoyment to get knowledge. Hence, what has been discussed so far urges the researcher to make a conclusion that the reading environment have big influences on EFL learners' reading comprehension; especially, on students with high interest in reading. However, teachers do not actually pay great attention to this aspect. Instead, they make students feel hard to understand the texts by asking them to reading in noisy environments.

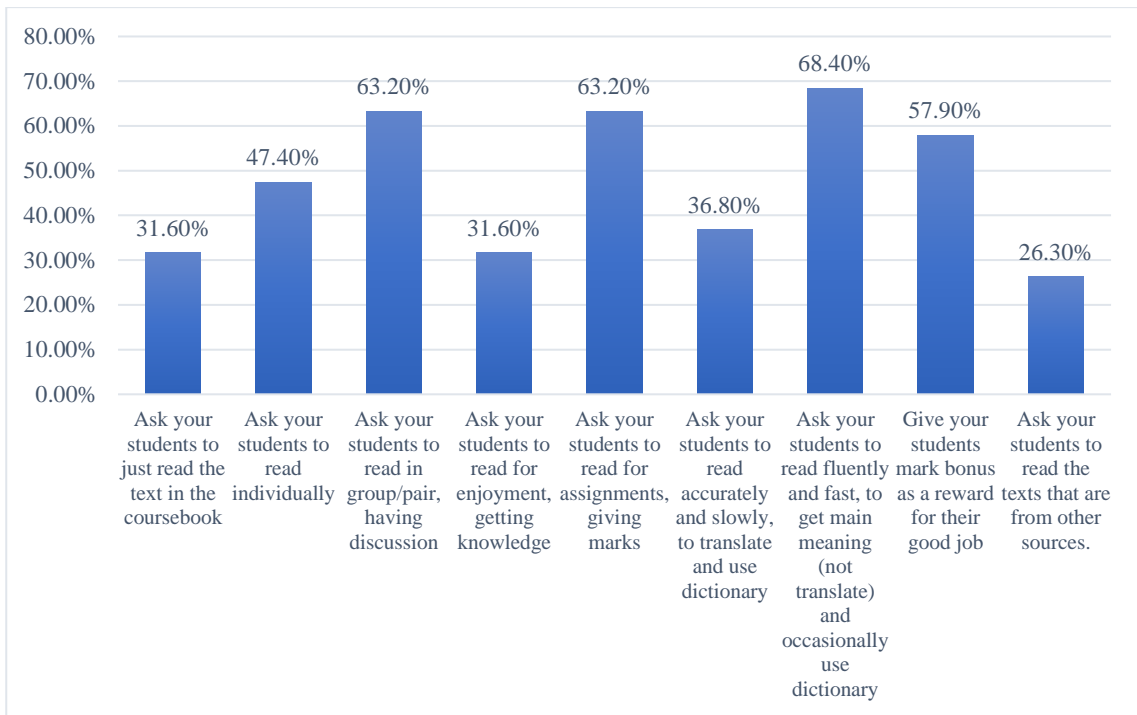


Figure 1. Teachers’ reading teaching activities

For now, it can be said that reading environment, especially noisy and uncontrolled ones, influence the readers’ comprehension considerably. However, *in which reading environment the EFL learners read the most, love reading the most, feel the most comfortable, feel the most uncomfortable, and read with the highest comprehension* is a big question which needs to be answered to uncover more about the impacts of the reading environment on the EFL learners’ reading comprehension.

TABLE 3. Relation Between Students’ Favorite Reading Environment and Their Comprehension

	You read the most.	You love reading the most.	You feel the most comfortable while reading.	You feel the most uncomfortable while reading.	You read with the highest comprehension
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
6. In class (individual work)	38 (29.5%)	18 (14%)	45 (34.9%)	19 (14.7%)	22 (17.1%)
7. In class (group work)	26 (20.2%)	19 (14.7%)	46 (35.7%)	29 (22.5%)	19 (14.7%)
8. In examination	28 (21.7%)	15 (11.6%)	30 (23.3%)	33 (25.6%)	37 (28.7%)
9. In bed for relaxing	21 (16.3%)	35 (27.1%)	49 (38%)	21 (16.3%)	9 (7%)
10. At home (in your own room)	20 (15.5%)	36 (27.9%)	60 (46.5%)	19 (14.7%)	12 (9.3%)

	You read the most.	You love reading the most.	You feel the most comfortable while reading.	You feel the most uncomfortable while reading.	You read with the highest comprehension
11. At home (in the living room where TV is on or others are talking, laughing, eating, or playing)	16 (12.4%)	23 (17.8%)	27 (20.9%)	60 (46.5%)	8 (6.2%)
12. In library where it's quite quiet	26 (20.2%)	32 (24.8%)	44 (34.1%)	20 (15.5%)	24 (18.6%)
13. In coffee shop where others are drinking and chatting	14 (10.9%)	18 (14%)	42 (32.6%)	44 (34.1%)	19 (14.7%)
14. In the park where it's quite quiet	19 (14.7%)	25 (19.4%)	49 (38%)	33 (25.6%)	16 (12.4%)
15. On the bus/train/plane with a lot of noise	11 (8.5%)	21 (16.3%)	22 (17.1%)	73 (56.6%)	10 (7.8%)

As clearly shown in Table 3 (column 2), the reading environment in which most students reported that they read the most include: individually in class (29.5% of the respondents reported), in examination (21.7%), in-class group work (20.2%), in library where it's quite quiet (20.2%), and in bed for relaxing (16.3%). Also, the result shows that very few students read in noisy environments, including: on the bus/train/plane with a lot of noise (8.5%), in coffee shop where others are drinking and chatting (10.9%), and at home (in the living room where TV is on or others are talking, laughing, eating, or playing) (12.4%). These findings indicate that the respondents read in controlled and quiet environments more often than in unorganized and noisy ones.

In terms of the favorite place to read, the statistics (see Table 3, column 3) show that students prefer reading in quiet places, including: at home (in their own room) (27.9% of the respondents reported), in bed for relaxing (27.1%), and in library where it's quite quiet (24.8%). On the contrary, very few students (11.6%) prefer reading in examinations and in class (both individual work (14%) and group work (14.7%)). These findings indicate that many respondents love reading in a quiet and uncontrolled environment rather than in a noisy and controlled one. When interviewing students, the researcher also found the same results. In particular, when asked “*Do you like reading in quiet or noisy places? Why?*”, all (100%) of the interviewed students clearly stated “*quiet places*” because most of them explained that in quiet places, they can focus or concentrate on their reading and read more comprehensively. For example, Student 9 said “*For me, I like quiet because I can concentrate and think of the best answers*” and Student 10 shared “*I prefer to read in a quieter place because I can concentrate and read more effectively*”.

With regard to the comfort while reading, the statistics (see Table 3, column 4) show that a large number of respondents feel the most comfortable when reading in quiet places, including: at home (in their own room) (46.5%), in bed for relaxing and in the park where it's quite quiet (38%), and in library where it's quite quiet (34.1%). Although many

students do not love reading in class (individual and group work), they feel comfortable when reading there. For example, 34.9% of the respondents feel the most comfortable when reading in class (individual work), and 35.7% feel the most comfortable when reading in class (group work). On the contrary, a large number of students feel the most uncomfortable when reading in noisy places (see Table 3, column 5). For example, 56.6% of the respondents said that they feel the most uncomfortable when reading on the bus/train/plane with a lot of noise, and 46.5% students reported that they feel the most uncomfortable when reading at home (in the living room where TV is on or others are talking, laughing, eating, or playing). Hence, these findings can explain the reasons why many students love reading in quiet environments or hate reading in noisy ones.

What has been discussed above shows that many respondents love reading in quiet places because they feel comfortable when reading in such places. However, the main purpose of conducting a survey on reading environment is that the researcher wanted to explore in which reading environment the students read with the highest comprehension because the purpose of reading is comprehension. As a matter of result, as remarkably shown in Table 3 (column 6), 28.7% (highest) of the respondents read with the highest comprehension when they read in examination, despite the fact that up to 25.6% of the respondents find it uncomfortable when reading in examination. Moreover, from teachers' perspective, many teachers think that their students have high comprehension if they read in examinations. In particular, when interviewing teachers, the research found that three out of five interviewed teachers think that their students reading in examinations will have high comprehension because they explained that it is quiet in examinations which most students prefer, and students can concentrate completely. For example, when asked "*Do you think that students reading in examinations will have high comprehension? Why?*", Teacher 1 said "*I'm not sure but I think yes because it's quiet in exams, so students often have high concentration*" and Teacher 2 said "*Yes, because I see they stay concentrated all the time*". However, some teachers are not so sure that reading in examinations, students can have high comprehension. In particular, when interviewing five teachers, the research found that two teachers do not think that their students reading in examinations will have high comprehension because their students often feel nervous or stressed and time-limited. For example, Teacher 3 said "*No, because they often feel nervous or stressed*" and Teacher 4 said "*Maybe not because it's stressful and time-limited*". At the same time, 18.6% of the respondents reported that they read with the highest comprehension when they read in a library where it's quite quiet (see Table 3, column 6). Also, 17.1% reported they read with the highest comprehension when they read individually in class (see Table 3, column 6). These findings indicate that in academic environments where the atmosphere is quiet like an examination, class, or library, the ELF learners read with the highest comprehension. In contrast, the survey found out that very few learners read with the high comprehension if they read in noisy places like at home (in the living room where TV is on or others are talking, laughing,

eating, or playing) (6.2% of the respondents reported) and on the bus/train/plane with a lot of noise (7.8%); or if they read uncontrolled environments like in bed for relaxing (7%) and at home (in their own room) (9.3%).

In brief, from the findings from the student survey, it can be concluded that most ELF learners read comprehensively if they read in quiet or controlled environments, e.g., in classes, in examinations, or in libraries. On the contrary, they will have problems about comprehension if they read in unorganized or uncontrolled environments, e.g., at home, in bed room, on public transports, where the atmosphere is noisy or they find it comfortable.

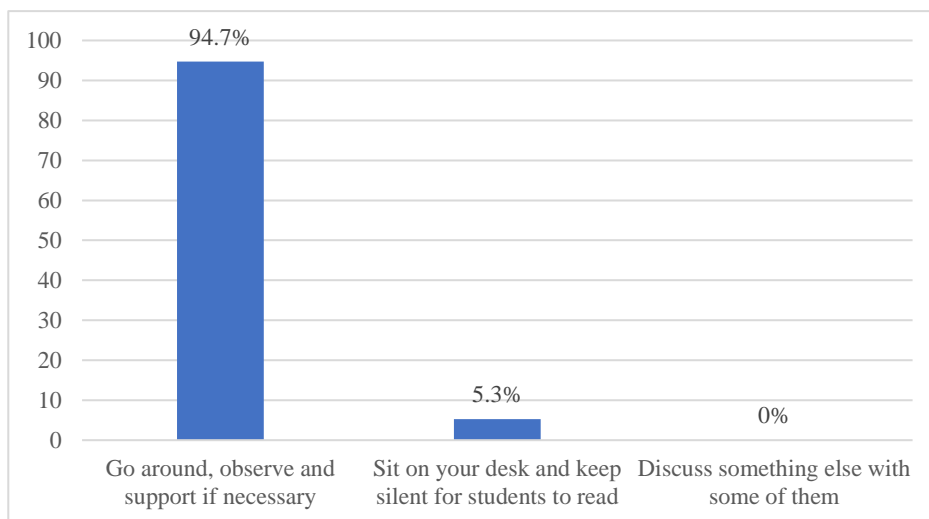


Figure 4.2. Teachers’ roles while students read

However, what do teachers often do in their reading classes? Do their teaching activities affect their students’ comprehension? Unfortunately, the findings from the teacher survey show that most teachers ask their students to read in the controlled but noisy environments. For example, as shown in Figure 1, up to 63.2% of the teachers ask their students to read for assignments and give marks. Also, 47.4% of the teachers ask their students to read individually. Especially, very few teachers (31.6%) ask their students to read for enjoyment. However, up to 63.2% of the teachers ask their students to read in group/pair having discussion. Hence, to get more insights into the issue being studied, the researcher surveyed teachers’ roles while students read. The result (see Figure 2) is that teachers hardly make any noise while their students read. In particular, the survey found that no teacher makes conversation with students while they read. Instead, teachers just go around, observe and support if necessary (94.7%) or sit on their desks and keep silent for students to read (5.3%). Therefore, in terms of reading environment, teachers’ teaching activities do not currently affect their students’ reading comprehension. This is because most teachers let their students read in controlled environments where, as reported, the students read with the highest comprehension. Furthermore, they never do anything that may distract their students while they read. Additionally, in the interview, when asked “*In class, do you usually arrange your class to read individually or in group? Why?*”, one teacher (Teacher

5) shared that “*I often ask them to read individually because when they work in a group they chat rather than reading*”. This finding is absolutely valuable because, from the researcher’s observation, when Vietnamese students work in groups, they often start their personal conversation rather than doing the assigned tasks. Therefore, that is why up to 47.4% of the teachers ask their students to read individually (see Figure 1).

In the end, as stated early in this section, in order to conclude the extent to which students’ reading comprehension are influenced by reading environment, it is necessary to compare the results from student and teacher surveys. As found from the teacher survey, very few teachers (31.6%, see Figure 1) ask their students to read for enjoyment, which is considered less effective from students’ perspective in enhancing comprehension. Instead, most teachers let their students read in controlled environments where, as reported, the students read with the highest comprehension. Furthermore, they never do anything that may distract their students while they read.

Therefore, it can be concluded that EFL learners hardly encounter problems with reading comprehension due to the reading environment that teachers create in class. However, if the students read in the unorganized or uncontrolled environments, e.g., at home, in bed room, on public transports, or where the atmosphere is noisy or they find it comfortable, they will have problems about comprehension. Hence, here are valuable findings that teachers should take advantage of when they design reading activities for their students.

5. Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, a conclusion is made that EFL learners’ reading comprehension is significantly influenced by the reading environment. If they read in the unorganized or uncontrolled environments, e.g., at home, in bed room, on public transports, where the atmosphere is noisy or they find it comfortable, they will have problems about comprehension while reading. Therefore, the role of teachers in improving their students’ reading comprehension is that they should avoid letting students read the unorganized or uncontrolled environments where the atmosphere is noisy or they find it comfortable because they will have problems about comprehension if they read in those environments. In addition, more quiet reading spaces should be built for EFL learners because most of them love reading in quiet places and they can have high comprehension when they read in such places.

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