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Original Paper

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES OF EFL READING SKILL AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL IN BANGLADESH

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Abstract

One of the most crucial language skills is reading, and language education puts a lot of emphasis on both teaching and mastering this skill. It is essential to provide good and rigorous instruction to non-native speakers learning English as a second language in order to develop their English reading skills and help them become competent and confident readers. This study focused on the teaching methods used by Bangladeshi secondary level EFL teachers to impart reading instruction to their students. The researchers used the Mixed Methods (MM) approach with the goal of gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. To collect quantitative data, a questionnaire survey was used, and to collect qualitative data, classroom observations were conducted using an observation checklist. The acquired data was examined and evaluated using the appropriate methodology. The researchers found those English teachers' approaches to teaching English reading did not align with current teaching practices and curriculum requirements. Based on the findings of the current study, the researchers put forward some suggestions which show a variety of techniques and strategies could help learners develop their reading skills.

Keywords: Teaching, EFL reading, Classroom activities, methods, approaches

1. Introduction

One of the four fundamental English language skills is reading, which is essential for success in life (Billah, 2014). Understanding what we read is crucial for both social and economic advancement. (Cathrine, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). According to Clarke, Truelove, Hulme, and Snowling (2014), reading may be awesomely motivating, joyful, and an event of transformation for a reader when they properly comprehend a piece of written language. Additionally, according to Clarke et al. (2014), text has the power to expand our knowledge, teach us new words, and inspire fresh ways of thinking. Reading comprehension abilities of students also play a significant role in higher education (Bright & McGregor, 1977). Language learning would be little if there was little reading (Bright & McGregor, 1977).

Bangladesh's primary and secondary curricula place a high importance on students' development of English reading skills because reading proficiency is crucial to creating fully developed and skilled citizens and because English is one of the most widely spoken international languages (Podder, 2019). In class, students would practice all four of the fundamental language skills: speaking, reading, and

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writing (NCTB, 2012). Although the development of English reading skills is given particular attention in the secondary curriculum of Bangladesh, proper teaching-learning, and assessment of English reading skills are not given as much attention during the implementation phase (Podder, 2019). Both curriculum reports place a strong emphasis on helping students reading in classes nine and ten improve their ability to read in English so they can comprehend written instructions, narrative and descriptive texts, argumentative texts, formal and informal letters, and texts that have been carefully chosen and, if needed, modified (NCTB, 2012a & 1995). In addition, the curriculums from 2012 and 1995 demand that students be able to use dictionaries and reference materials as well as read extensively and quickly. Additionally, they must be able to skim for the main ideas, scan for specific information, infer the meanings of words and phrases from their context, separate facts from opinions, come to their own conclusions after reading, and recognize each of the linkers, punctuation marks, and graphological elements (NCTB, 2012 & 1995).

An effective teaching approach is necessary for an efficient language learning process. According to studies, scientists are constantly looking for effective strategies that could speed up language learning. The effectiveness of teaching the reading process at the secondary level in Bangladesh must therefore be examined. In light of this, the current study examines the instructional strategy used in Bangladesh's secondary level EFL reading instruction.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are as to investigate the strategies used by the English teachers to teach EFL reading at the secondary level in Bangladesh and find out the methods that the teachers follow to EFL reading comprehension at the secondary level in Bangladesh

3. Literature Review

In contrast with substandard teaching and unclear instructions, which can cause students to lose interest, excellent instructions can positively influence students' learning and motivation (Salataci, 2002). Due to their instructional methods, teachers may be somewhat too responsible for pupils' aversion to reading (Yildirim, 2014). According to Aswan et al (2010), a teacher's plan to accomplish a predetermined goal during the teaching and learning process is known as a teaching strategy. To put it another way, teaching techniques are methods for instructing students. The teachers must implement a strategy that maintains a balance between their teaching techniques and how they apply the material (Yildirim, 2014). Nunan (1999) adds that "teaching techniques are one of the many aspects that influence performance in teaching.

Teachers can help students understand the meaning of a text better by using a variety of different reading practices. The most significant and widely applied reading techniques and they are activating prior knowledge, responding to questions and elaborative interrogations, forming questions, associations, monitoring, previewing, summarizing, text-structure awareness, using graphic organizers, rereading, adjusting speed, focusing, selective reading, etc. (Grabe, 2011; Hudson, 2007; Roe, 2009). All of these techniques are useful tools for instructing students on how to become better readers, and subsequently better learners. Understanding a book also requires the application of comprehension strategies, which are consciously or purposefully planned actions taken by someone to attain a goal (Afflerbach et al., 2008). The best way to introduce these strategies is through explicit education, which includes both explanation and modeling or demonstration of the approach's application (National Reading Panel, 2000; Duffy, 2009; Dewitz et al., 2009). Additionally, teachers' scaffolding and chances for students to practice and apply concepts should be part of instructional strategies (Palinscar and Brown, 1984; Rosenshine et al., 1994). Although the teacher first acts as the instructional leader, students should gradually be given the chance to assume responsibility for understanding when and how to employ strategies (Grabe & Stoller 2002, National Reading Panel, 2000).

According to the NCTB of Bangladesh, English should be a skill-based topic at the secondary level, and as a result, all four of the fundamental English language skills should be practiced in the classroom (NCTB, 2012). Teachers were urged to go beyond the textbooks and integrate real-world

scenarios in their interactive activities so that students may practice their English in a real-world setting (NCTB, 2012a & 1995). The aforementioned curriculum keeps room for the usage of additional reading materials to hone students' reading abilities throughout time (NCTB, 2012). The curriculum requires that teachers choose/prepare reading materials (textbooks and other authentic materials, such as pictures, diagrams, graphs and charts, literary pieces, etc.) and organize, facilitate, guide, and monitor reading activities and- students read silently for scanning, skimming, inferring, and interacting with students and teachers, sharing opinions, creating dialogues, asking and answering questions, participating in pair work, simulations, and group discussions/debates (NCTB, 2012a & 1995). Additionally, teachers should set up tasks such as MCQ, gap filling, true-false, matching, open ended questions, knowledge transfer, summarizing charts, graphs, and so forth while or after students have finished reading. According to the curriculum, students would be evaluated on their ability to read and comprehend authentic texts and respond to questions at a higher level (NCTB, 2012).

The goal of this study is to find out how secondary English teachers perceive the strategies used by them to teach and assess English reading ability, how well English teachers follow the curriculum guidelines (NCTB, 2012a & 2012b) for doing so, how often they use textbooks developed by the NCTB, and how reading instruction can be made better in classrooms. The researcher is also a teacher who works with English language learners of different levels, so he finds it vital to understand about the aforementioned issues.

4. Research Methodology

The present study was carried out using the Mixed Method (MM) approach because was seen to be a potent means of achieving the study's goals. Data collection and analysis for the current study involved the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The secondary level EFL teachers were surveyed using a questionnaire, which included a five-point Likert scale (Likert 1932). Participants in the research questionnaire were selected using a simple random sampling procedure. For the questionnaire survey, 48 secondary level instructors were randomly selected from 19 secondary level schools located in the three districts of Dhaka Division; Dhaka, Manikganj and Munshiganj. Two participants were chosen at random from each school. Schools of both the government and non-government types were used to choose the participants. The statements in the questionnaire were created around topics including the language of instruction, the method of classroom activities, and instructional tactics for reading.

On the other hand, qualitative data collection primarily used the classroom observation method. Classroom observation provided useful information regarding the actual setup of an English language classroom aimed at improving students' EFL reading skills as well as the language teachers' preferred methods of instruction.

For the purpose of gathering data, the researcher included 10 classroom observations—five in government schools and five in non-government ones. The analysis of the qualitative data that was gathered through the use of classroom observation checklist involved the use of content analysis, in which the data was coded and then divided into categories for comparison. In order to create theories, categories were then merged based on their respective properties, with the boundaries of the integrated categories being determined. While composing the report, the researcher covered every aspect of the categories' characteristics. Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS, 26.0) for Windows has instead been used to analyze the quantitative data that was gleaned from the questionnaire survey.

5. Findings

The results are presented in two main sections. One section deals with the theoretical results collected by the questionnaire. Another section is about the practical results collected from the observation of teachers' classroom practices.

5.1. Findings from the questionnaire survey

The responses of the participants for each statement were tabulated and converted into percentages. The percentages were then tabulated to allow a clear view and understanding at a glance of how the responses were of participants. Since the responses were actually on a binary scale, the two categories of 'strongly agree' and 'agree' were collapsed into single category *agree*, while 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were collapsed into single category *disagree* to allow easier discussion of the results. In the first section, the findings from the questionnaire survey have been discussed.

Table 5.1.1. Concept of Teaching Reading and Medium of Instruction

Statement	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Clear conception of Teaching Reading	Disagree	0	0%
	Neutral	6	12.2%
	Agree	42	87.5%
Medium of Instruction	Disagree	8	16.7%
	Neutral	16	33.3%
	Agree	24	50.0%

The results show that 87.5% of the teachers agreed that their conception of teaching reading was clear. The success of teaching reading greatly depends on the respective teachers' ability and conception level. The result of this analysis shows us that most of the teachers are competent and able in teaching EFL reading at the secondary level. In the same table we find another result related to the medium of instruction in the classroom. The question was asked whether the teachers use both English and Bangla while teaching EFL reading. The analysis shows that 50% of the teachers believed that the teachers' medium of teaching instruction is both Bangla and English. Notable thing was found while analyzing the frequency and percentage of the respondents that 33.3% of the teachers chose neutral option while responding.

Table 5.1.2. Conducting group discussion, pair work and picture description

Statement	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Conducting group discussion	Disagree	0	0.0%
	Neutral	8	16.7%
	Agree	40	83.3%
Conducting Pair work	Disagree	0	0.0%
	Neutral	10	20.8%
	Agree	38	79.2%
Use of Picture	Disagree	14	29.2%
	Neutral	2	4.2%
	Agree	32	66.7%

In the table, we see a picture of condition of group work. We know the curriculum designed for the students of the secondary level aims at developing students' reading ability through conducting different types of communicative activities such as group work, pair work etc. The teachers were asked the question 3 (Q3) to investigate whether group work was conducted while teaching EFL reading. In the table 5.2 we see that 83.3% teachers agreed that they conducted group work for teaching reading. The table also shows that pair work (Q4) is conducted by 79.2% teachers. It is notable that 20.8% teachers remained neutral regarding giving opinion about their conduction of pair work. The neutral teachers' percentage indicates that a number of the teachers are confused about the idea of pair work. In response to the question (Q5), 66.7% teachers agreed that they used pictures while teaching reading. 29.2% teachers disagreed with that question. And only 4.2% teachers were neutral.

Table 5.1.3. Use of Scanning and of Skimming

Statement	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Conduction Scanning	Disagree	22	45.8%
	Neutral	10	20.8%
	Agree	16	33.3%

Use of Skimming	Disagree	0	0.0%
	Neutral	10	20.8%
	Agree	38	79.2%

In response to the question (Q6) a good number of teachers (33.3%) agreed that they used scanning techniques while teaching reading. Almost half of the teachers, 45.8%, disagreed with that question. And 20.8% (frequency 10) teachers were neutral. In response of the question 7 (Q7) related to conducting reading class using skimming techniques, 79.2% (frequency 38) teachers told that they used skimming. Both scanning and skimming are very important techniques for mastering EFL reading. In this case, it has been seen that majority of the teachers are not used to imparting 'scanning' technique to the students while teaching reading.

Table 5.1.4. Teaching Vocabulary and Grammar

Statement	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Teaching Vocabulary while Teaching Reading	Disagree	0	0.0%
	Neutral	2	4.2%
	Agree	46	95.8%
Teaching Grammar while Teaching Reading	Disagree	4	8.3%
	Neutral	0	0.0%
	Agree	44	91.7%

In response of teaching vocabulary (Q8) in reading classroom almost all the teachers, 95.8% (frequency 46) agreed that they teach vocabulary in the EFL reading classroom. In response of teaching grammar (Q9) in reading classroom majority of the teachers, 91.7% (frequency 44) agreed that they teach grammar in the EFL reading classroom. From data, it can be assumed that teaching vocabulary and grammar is a common practice among the EFL teachers while teaching reading.

Table 5.1.5. Simplifying techniques, moderating exercises and giving feedback

Statement	Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Use Simplifying techniques	Disagree	0	0.0%
	Neutral	2	4.2%
	Agree	46	95.8%
Moderating exercises followed by reading text	Disagree	42	87.5%
	Neutral	6	12.5%
	Agree	0	0%
Teacher Feedback	Disagree	18	37.5%
	Neutral	10	20.8%
	Agree	20	41.7%

In response to Q10 about teaching EFL reading in classroom using simplifying techniques, almost all the teachers, 95.8% (frequency 46) agreed that they taught EFL reading using simplifying techniques in the classroom. In response to Q11 related to teaching speaking using of moderating exercises, majority of the teachers, 87.5% (frequency 42) disagreed that the teachers taught EFL reading with the help of moderating exercises. In response of the question (Q12) 41.7% (frequency 20) teachers agreed that teacher feedback in EFL speaking class is not effective. And 37.5% (frequency 18) teachers disagreed and 20.8% (frequency10) teachers were neutral while answering the question.

Table 5.1.6. Inclusion of Reading in the Mid-Term Exam & Final Exam

Statement	**Opinion**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Inclusion of Reading Final Mid Term Exam	Disagree	0	0%
	Neutral	0	0%
	Agree	48	100%
Inclusion of Reading in the Final exam	Disagree	0	0%
	Neutral	0	0%
	Agree	48	100%

In response to Q13 about inclusion of reading in the mid-term examination 100% (frequency 48) agreed that reading test encouraged students in learning EFL reading. In response to Q14 about inclusion of reading in the final examination 100% (frequency 48) teachers agreed that reading test encouraged students in learning EFL reading.

5.2 Findings from the Classroom Observation

The classroom observation checklist had items pertaining to the environment of the classroom, additional instructional strategies, activities planned by the teachers to teach EFL reading, and classroom organization techniques. The findings from the researchers' classroom observation have been presented in this section based on that information. The researchers gathered a lot of data to learn more about how reading instruction was then being delivered at the secondary level in this country. But this article has only provided a few general details. The current researchers have concentrated particularly on two key elements that are connected to the research objectives: teachers' activities and teaching method.

5.2.1. Classroom Organization

The primary patterns that were noticed in this section included whether or not instructors were working with the entire class, if the students were placed in groups or pairs, whether they were doing individual work, and how it was set up. The results provided a clear picture of how the classroom was organized. The majority of the lessons were teacher-focused. The least amount of student involvement was seen in the teaching and learning process. The organization of the classes did not encourage students to participate in communicating activities. In the classroom, there were no groups or pairs of students. While teachers occasionally involve their students in activities, most were completed by each student alone.

5.2.2. Classroom Activities

Reading instruction for EFL students should include activities such as skimming, scanning, picture descriptions, stories, information gaps, jigsaw activity, read-aloud, predictions, and so on. Pre-reading exercises are crucial in an EFL reading class as well. To make students practice reading in English, several teachers used activities like skimming and pictures descriptions. While instructing EFL students in reading, no teachers used pre-reading exercises, jigsaw activity, or scanning in the classroom. When teaching reading at the secondary level, the majority of the teachers hardly ever used the read-aloud and prediction techniques. The conventional method of reading from the text and completing exercises after it was the emphasis of classroom activity. The class lasted for 45 minutes. Nearly half of that was used for checking the homework given in the previous class by the teachers. The students' attendance was also checked during this time period. The remaining part of the time of the class period was typically utilized to teach a new topic, usually one that involved reading and writing practice, as well as to talk about the homework assignments for the next day. As a result, there wasn't any time available for communicative reading instruction.

5.2.3. Medium of Instruction

Although CLTA promotes using both L1 and L2 as a classroom instruction medium, only English can be utilized in an EFL classroom for the benefit of the students' language skill development. The researcher noticed that the majority of teachers using Bangla as their primary language of instruction in secondary level reading classes. When instructing students in EFL reading at the secondary level, English was seldom ever utilized with Bangla. None of them only used English for instruction. The study's findings revealed that students spoke Bangla with their teachers and peers as well. Even when the researcher asked them to use English in some lessons, the students were unable to construct proper sentences in the language. The secondary English curriculum's goals and objectives encourage the use of English language in the EFL classroom; however, the results of classroom observations portray a different image.

5.2.4. Teaching Vocabulary, Grammar

In terms of vocabulary and grammatical instruction, the researcher discovered various images in the schools situated in various locations. The teachers of the non-government schools put less emphasis on the proper use of vocabulary and grammar as the children practiced reading in class, whereas the teachers of the government schools focused on grammatical accuracy and word choice.

5.2.5. Classroom Environment

The process of teaching and learning is also impacted by issues related to the environment. The majority of the classrooms, the researcher discovered, lacked proper air conditioning and decoration. The noise from outside and inside the classrooms interfered affected the ability of educators to teach reading to EFL students. The intense noise produced by the ceiling fans also disrupted teachers' and students' focus. Classrooms without noise pollution are very important for conducting reading activities and teaching various reading skills. The fact that there were no air-conditioned classrooms at all in observed schools; the researchers suggest that air conditioning might be a potential solution.

5.2.6. Teacher Feedback

In every situation, teachers are crucial to the success of English education. Every teaching-learning environment continues to revolve around the feedback provided by the teachers. Teachers' feedback plays a key role in the progressive development and achievement of students. Most students who were studying and practicing EFL reading at the secondary level did not receive positive feedback from their teachers. Instead, the teachers' critical comments seemed to stop students' steady advancement. Teachers frequently made negative criticism of their students for making errors when reading practice.

5.2.7. The Use of Textbook

Textbooks are accepted globally as instructional tools, including in Bangladesh. The curricular aims and objectives developed for secondary level students act as the basis for the secondary textbook English for Today for Classes Nine and Ten. The four English language skills of the students are to be developed according to the curriculum's objectives and aims. The exercises and activities that are beneficial to the growth of the student's four language skills are included in the textbook English for Today Classes Nine to Ten. The textbook's tasks and exercises are organized in the appropriate order for the students. The majority of the time, the researchers discovered, the teachers disregarded the textbook "English for Today" to make students practice reading. The instructors mostly focused on 'guide books' and their activities that connected to exams.

6. Summary of the Findings

The teachers believed that they were qualified due to their training in this field and their extensive background in teaching English. However, the researcher discovered no effect of any ELT-related training on them. Sometimes the success rate of their students in the public examination tended them to have a positive view of themselves. In this case, the researchers have found that the success of their students depends on a variety of factors, and their abilities and skills are certainly typical. Some of those success factors are connected to their educational institutions, and some of those are connected to certain external circumstances. Students sometimes go to coaching institutes and individual tutors where they receive specialized guidance and instruction on how to prepare for examinations. In their studies, numerous other researchers also asserted that the majority of English teachers lacked a clear concept of what teaching reading included and how to assist pupils at the secondary level in developing English reading proficiency (Podder 2019, Alamgir 2019).

Instructors are seen using Bangla as their primary language of instruction while conducting EFL reading the classes. The majority of teachers, according to the results of a teacher questionnaire survey, believed that they teach EFL reading in both Bangla and English. However, when the researchers observed the classrooms, they discovered that the teachers primarily spoke Bangla. Even though there is evidence that the curriculum suggests teaching strategies that promote the choice of English as the language of instruction (NCTB, 2012), the results of numerous other studies also

demonstrate that teachers do not instruct reading in the manner recommended in the curriculum (Goldman et al., 2016; NCTB, 2012, & 2016; Rogers, 2005).

The results of the questionnaire survey indicate that more teachers than the researchers actually observed in the classrooms say they engage students in different types of classroom activities for teaching EFL reading. According to Goldman et al. (2016), Black and William (2014), and Yussof et al. (2013), an effective instruction technique is one that engages learners in attentive reading to improve their reading comprehension. However, the researcher discovered while monitoring the classroom that the majority of the teachers did not use the interactive and communicative reading activities that might promote EFL reading. The duration of the class is a major concern in this situation. It is really concerning that most of the teachers were seen to use guide books while teaching reading. However, in a 45 minutes class, and in large class consisting of more than 50 students, teachers are somehow bound to use ready-made assessment oriented handy materials. Alamgir (2019) reported that 37% of the secondary teachers use guidebooks and Test Papers in teaching. The percentage might be much more if investigation could be conducted in all the secondary level institutions.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The data was triangulated by the researcher using several instruments and data from different sources. After critically analyzing the results, the researcher provided a reasoned interpretation of the data in light of the most recent literature. The researchers made an effort to demonstrate how English teachers' approaches to teaching English reading did not align with current teaching practices and curriculum requirements. Research shows that Teaching English reading a foreign language requires a variety of techniques and strategies to help learners develop their reading skills. Based on the findings of the current study, the researchers put forward some suggestions that are mentioned below:

Choose NCTB book: In terms of reading activities, vocabulary, and grammar, the NCTB text book for classes 9 to 10 sounds like a good choice for your students. It was created by a group of specialists who took into account the motivations and interests of the students and tried to encourage their involvement in the reading process through appropriate reading activities.

Arrange pre-reading activity: Introduce new words to students before they begin reading. This can improve their comprehension of the content and lessen the possibility that they will become confused by unfamiliar terms.

Use reading strategies: Teach students how to skim, scan, predict, and infer while they read. These techniques might help students in comprehending the content more clearly and improving their ability to understand what they read. Additionally, make an effort to engage them in collaborative activities such as pair and group work.

Encourage active reading: Encourage students to interact with the text by highlighting, underlining, or taking notes. This can help them focus their attention and remember what they've read.

Provide feedback: Give students feedback on their reading comprehension and provide opportunities for them to practice their reading skills. This can include activities such as discussions, comprehension questions, or writing responses to the text.

Use technology: Incorporate technology such as online reading materials or audio recordings to provide learners with a variety of reading resources and make the reading experience more engaging.

Overall, the key to teaching EFL reading is to create a supportive and engaging learning environment that encourages students to practice their reading skills regularly and develop their confidence and proficiency in English.

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