Innovations

Assessing Teachers' Practices of While-Reading Activities in ELT Classes with Reference to Bule Hora High School

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Abstract

This study was principally focused on exploring teachers' practices of the while-reading activities in ELT classes at Bule Hora School. Besides, it examined factors that had influenced teachers' classroom practices of while-reading activities. The study utilized descriptive design to elucidate credible data from the subjects. Two hundred and eight students with eight teachers were involved in the study. Data were collected through observation, questionnaire and interview. Questionnaire was used to verify whether English teachers really put into practice the activities prescribed in the teacher's guide during the while-reading activities. Classroom observation was used to obtain direct information about the teachers' actual classroom practices, and interview was used to gather data on factors, which had an impact on teachers' classroom practices. Interview was also used to supplement the questionnaire and observation data. Questionnaire data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Data from observation and interview were analyzed qualitatively. Findings of questionnaire data indicated that the great majority of the respondents claimed that the teachers did not make their students practice the while-reading activities during reading comprehension; results of classroom observations confirmed the respondents' response. As interview findings indicated, shortage of time, learners' low language proficiency level, unmotivated students, became some of the contextual factors, which influenced teachers' classroom practices of while-reading activities. The findings call for all ELT stakeholders' participation to solve this critical problem.

Key words: 1. Assessing 2. Practices 3. While-reading 4. Activities 5.ELT

Introduction

Reading is the most important of the four language skills for EFL learners. It enables the students to get ample exposure to the target language and receive valuable linguistic input to build up language proficiency (Erten & Razi, 2003). A large number of scholars in the field teach us about the important role reading plays in enabling students to get sufficient exposure to the target language.

Ur (1996) argues that reading activities should be used in reading classrooms. The purpose of reading activities is to provide regular/poor readers with the opportunity to go through the process that good/ mature readers automatically go through (Stoller, 2003). One of the activities recommended during reading class is while-reading activities. Wallace (1990)

argues that the aim of while-reading activities is to encourage students to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words and expressions from the context. Wallace (1992) further asserts that the aim of while-reading activities is to prevent failure and support readers' interpretation of the text through interaction between the reader and the text. Moreover, Chen and Graves (1995) claim that while-reading activities can promote strategic reading behaviors and thus play a vital role in schema activation in order to comprehend and interpret the text better.

To promote an interaction between the reader and the text, while-reading activities aim to encourage learners to be active reader. To achieve this purpose, Harmer (1991) states that while-reading activities enable readers to understand the text and help them to deal with difficult vocabulary, the style and language of the text. The activities can therefore help readers tackle texts by assessing them in linguistic and schematic knowledge through an active engagement with the text (Alyousef, 2006).

Dubin (1991) and William (1984) further strengthen this view when they point out that while-reading activities help the learners to comprehend the content, understand the structure and to guess meanings of unfamiliar words in the text.

Furthermore, it is suggested in grade nine teacher's guide and also by reading scholars, for example, Aebersold & Field (1997) and Ying (2001) that guessing meanings of new words and text organization are the while-reading activities which the students need to practice under their teachers' guidance. Such while-reading activities give students a structure for continual, active engagement with a text and force them to grapple with comprehension while they are reading, as opposed to simply moving their eyes down the page.

Statement of the Problem

Reading is one of the four language skills which can play a vital role in the language learning process. For this reason, teachers are expected to make their students engage in the while-reading activities which enable them to get ample information and comprehend the text. This is done to enable students to enhance their comprehension skills in such a way that they can interact through the text and the writer's message in a reliable manner. Furthermore, if students are aware of the while-reading activities, they can involve themselves in the while-reading lesson and communicate with the writer's message effectively. It is argued in grade nine English teacher's guide that while-reading activities encourage students to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words and expressions from the context. This study has been designed to gain insight into the teachers practice in the while-reading stage that has led to students' failure to read and comprehend effectively.

However, it is often heard and observed that students of Bule Hora School show failure to be engaged in the while-reading activities. Besides, the English language teachers of this school are observed complaining that their students have no interest to respond to while-reading activities.

Objectives of the Study

The study was aimed to assess teachers' Practices of while-reading activities in ELT classroom. Under this broad objective, this study was specifically designed to:

1. Assess how teachers' practice different types of while-reading activities.
2. Find out the strategies teachers use in the while-reading activities practice.

3. Identify the main factors that influence teachers' practices of the while-reading activities.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do teachers practice the while-reading activities?
2. What strategies do teachers use in while-reading activities practice?
3. What factors influence teachers' classroom practice in the while-reading activities?

Methodology of the study

The study design, the subject, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, procedures of data collection, and data analysis are presented in detail under the chapter.

Research Design

The study attempted to asses teachers' practices in the while-reading activities. Thus, descriptive survey was chosen as it enables the researcher to describe the current status of an area of study. According to McDonough (1997), a descriptive study is helpful when a researcher wants to look into a phenomenon.

Subjects of the Study

The target subjects of this study were 280 grade twelve students and eight English teachers of Bule Hora high school. Two hundred and eight students were randomly selected together with eight English teachers to participate in the study from this school.

Sampling Technique

The researcher took the sample of 25% because the sample size of 25% is recommended to be taken by researchers. In order to draw sample from the population, simple random sampling was used. In this sampling technique, the lottery method was applied. Thus, 208 grade nine students and eight English teachers were involved in the study. Bule Hora High school was chosen since research related to the issue in the present study has not yet been conducted in this school. Grade nine teachers were preferred since they hold much responsibility to help students who join English as a medium of instruction class for the first time.

Instruments

The study employed classroom observation, questionnaire, and interview to gather relevant data. Classroom observations were used to collect qualitative data whereas questionnaire was used to gather quantitative information on teachers' practices in the while-reading activities. Besides, interview was used for data triangulation.

Data Gathering Procedures

Data was collected in the following steps. First, lesson observation was carried out. It was hoped that this helped the researcher to obtain an authentic data. Sometimes respondents adjust their responses to satisfy the researcher based on information in the questionnaire and

interview. In order to avoid this problem, data collection through questionnaire and interview were held later.

Data Analysis procedure

In data analysis procedure, the questionnaire data was analyzed before the analysis of observation data. Because it was found that this step could create convenient condition to compare the results of questionnaire data with the results of actual lesson observation data. After observation data was analyzed and compared with questionnaire data, interviews were held to clarify points which were observed. Finally, all data were analyzed and interpreted to reach conclusions and recommendations.

Methods of Data Analysis

Data collected from students' questionnaire, observations and interviews were analyzed and interpreted both qualitatively and quantitatively. Since the study was descriptive type, the data were presented and interpreted chiefly through descriptions qualitatively. However, the numerical data were presented in tables and then further explained in words.

Discussion and Presentation of Data Gathered Through Questionnaire

Table1. Students' responses to issues related to the frequency in which their teacher engages them in the while-reading activities

Item	How often does your teacher engage you in the while-reading activities?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	A. Most of the time	-	
	B. Some times	23	11.06%
	C. Rarely	148	71.15%
	D. Not at all	37	17.79%
Total		208	100%

As shown in Table1, the highest number of the respondents (71.15%) said that their teacher engages them in the while-reading activities rarely whereas, 17.79% of them replied that their teacher does not engage them in the while-reading activities. From this, one can observe that there is absence of students' engagement in the while-reading activities. This may lead to students' lack of effectiveness in reading, specifically in the while-reading activities. The remaining 11.06% said that their teacher engages them in the while-reading activities some times.
The researcher witnessed that most teachers were rarely observed engaging the students in the while-reading activities during classroom observation.

Table2. Whether or not the while-reading activities guide students to read effectively

Item	Do the while-reading activities guide you to read effectively?	Number of respondents	Percent
Variable	Yes	128	61.54%
Total	No	80	38.46%
		208	100%

As shown in the above table, the greatest number of the respondent (61.54%) believe that the while-reading activities guide them to read effectively whereas, 38.46% of the students said the while-reading activities do not guide them to read effectively. But most students said their teachers do not engage them in the while-reading activities.

Table3. Whether or not the students practiced the while-reading activities at lower grade

Item	Did you practice while-reading activities in grades 6, 7& 8?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	49	23.56%
	No	159	76.44%
Total		208	100%

As the table above revealed, the majority (76.44%) of the respondents replied that they had no practice of the while-reading activities when they were in elementary school. On the other hand, the minority (23.56%) of the students claimed they practiced the while-reading activities. Students blamed their teacher for not motivating them to practice the while-reading activities in lower grade. The majority of the respondents claimed that lack of practice with the while-reading activities at primary level can be the causes for their ineffective reading skill in grade nine. Consequently, lack of background experience to practice the while-reading activities was one of the root causes for their being inactive and inefficient readers at grade nine.

The results, in general, show that the great majority of the students lack prior knowledge of while-reading activities practice.

Table4. Students' response to the item asked to know if their teachers engaged them in identifying the logical organization of the text

Item	Does your teacher encourage you to identify a logical organization of a text during the while-reading activities?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	48	23.1%
	No	160	76.9%
Total		208	100%

As the table above clearly shows, the majority of the respondents i.e., (76.9%) replied that their teacher does not encourage them to identify a logical organization of the text during the while-reading activities whereas the only about one-fourths of them said their teacher encouraged them in identifying the logical organization of the text.

The classroom observation data has no evidence which shows the teachers support and encouragement to help students to identify a logical organization of the text during the while-reading activities

Table5. Students' response to the question related to whether their teacher trains them how to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words they meet at the while-reading activities

Item	Does your teacher train you how to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words you meet at the while-reading session?	Number of respondents	Percent
Variables	Yes	17	8.2%
	No	191	91.8%
Total		208	100

As clearly indicated in the above table, almost all (91.8) of the respondents claimed that their teacher does not train them how to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words they meet at the while-reading stage. The researcher witnessed during classroom observation that almost all teachers did not care much about the while-reading activities. They simply ordered the students to open their book and read the passage. They asked their students the meanings or definitions of the words rather than training them in word guessing strategies. This might be due to lack of orientation and awareness in the while-reading word-attack skills practice through which the learners can actively engage in the while-reading activities.

According to Hermer (2001) "If the unknown word appears several times and the students cannot get the general idea without it, they have to train how to arrive at the meaning using word- attack skill such as guessing word meaning from the context and using word-building or word formation process." However, the observed teachers do not seem to be implementing the scholars' suggestion in this regard.

Table6.Whether or not the teacher draws students' attention to different parts of the passage

Item	Does your teacher draw your attention to the relationship between different parts of the passage?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	61	29.3%
	No	147	70.7%
Total		208	100%

As displayed in the above table, nearly three-fourths of the respondents (70.7%) replied that their teacher does not draw their attention to different parts of the text whereas; the minority (29.3%) of them said their teacher does this kind of activity.

As the researcher witnessed during the observation, teachers were not found motivating students to see the relationship between different parts using the organizational patterns of the text and help them see the relationship between the different parts of the passage so as to help them grasp the main ideas of the text.

With regard to this view, some researchers have recommended that drawing the students' attention to the relationship between different parts of the text facilitates comprehension of the passage. For example, Mei-yun (1994, p. 185) stated "the logical relationship between different parts of a text helps the learners easily comprehend the text." The relationship between different parts of a text can often be signaled by organizational patterns such as

cause-effect, definition, sequence of events and so on. Therefore, drawing the students' attention to these patterns of relationship between different parts of a text is the "best indicator of ideas" and hence "most important for reading comprehension." In line with this, the teacher's guide has recommended that teachers help the students to see the relationship between different parts of the passage using organizational patterns, references and connectives that help the learners to comprehend the text. This enhances the students reading skill and involves them in the while-reading activities.

Table7. Students' responses to a question asked to see if teachers ask them to look at certain words and divide them into component parts at the while-reading activities

Item	Does your teacher ask you to look at certain word and divide them into component parts at the while reading activities?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	82	39.4%
	No	126	60.6%
Total		208	100%

Table seven shows that more than half (60.6%) of the respondents replied that their teacher does not ask them to look at certain words and divide them into component parts whereas, 39.4% of the students claimed their teacher ask them to look at certain words in the passage during the while-reading activities.

As observation data shows, teachers were not seen asking and motivating the students to look at certain words like cohesive device, discourse markers, transitional words and references used in the text. One can conclude from this table that lack of teachers' realization of such activities which enhance students' comprehension skill and help them to involve actively in the while-reading activities has a negative effect on the development of students reading skill.

Table8. Items teachers draw students' attention to

Item	Which of the following items do you think your teacher most frequently draws your attention to during the while-reading stage?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	A. Vocabulary	107	51%
	B. Connectives	37	18%
	C. References	14	7%
	D. All	50	24%
Total		208	100%

As can be seen from the above table, slightly more than half (51%) of the respondents responded their teacher draws their attention most frequently to vocabulary whereas, 24% of the respondents answered that their teacher draws their attention to all. On the other hand, 18% of the students replied their teacher draws their attention to connectives.

The researcher witnessed during classroom observation when some teachers most frequently drew students' attention to vocabulary. However; connectives, references and vocabulary are important items that enhance students' comprehension skill.

Table9. Students' response to questions asked to know if students write the main idea in the paragraphs in the while-reading stage

Item	Do you write the main idea in the paragraphs in the while-reading stage?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	56	26.9%
	No	152	73.1%
Total		208	100%

As indicated in the table above, the greatest number (73.1%) of the respondents replied that they do not write the main idea in the paragraphs whereas, 26.9% of the students said they write the main idea in the paragraphs. They complained that they did not experience to involve in such activities.

The observation data confirmed that teachers did not motivate their students to write the main idea in the paragraphs in the while-reading activities.

Table10. Whether or not the teacher engaged students in silent reading under his/her guidance

Item	Does your teacher engage you in silent reading under his/her guidance?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	60	28.8%
	No	148	71.2%
Total		208	100%

As can be seen from the above table, almost two thirds (71.2%) of the respondents replied that their teacher does not engage them in silent reading under his/her guidance during the while-reading activities. Conversely, a slightly less than a third, responded that they have been given silent reading practice under their teacher's guidance in the while reading activities. In fact, these students blamed that they have simply been ordered to open their book and read with no support and guidance what to do at the while-reading stage.

From the data, it can be said that the teachers were not found engaging students in actual while-reading activities. This was confirmed when the researcher conducted classroom observations in eight sections. The teacher's book recommends that teachers need to engage students in silent reading under teachers' guidance so as to enhance the students' comprehension skills.

Table11. Students' response to the questions asked on whether or not their teacher makes them analyze and synthesis some elements

Item	Put the following items in the order you think your teacher makes you analyze and synthesis most frequently during the while-reading stage?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	A. The semantic structure	75	36%
	B. The language structure	60	28%
	C. The language system	49	24%
	D. All	24	12%
Total		208	100%

As the table above reveals 36% of the respondents replied that their teacher make them analyze and synthesis the semantic system (language meanings organized as a conceptual structures) while 28% of the respondents replied they analyze the language structure (the grammar of the language). Furthermore, 24% of them said they analyze the symbol system (sound in oral language and graphic shapes in written language) the remaining 12% of the students reported they analyze both.

Table12. Students' responses to the item designed to see if the teacher encourages them to understand the message of the text

Item	Does your teacher encourage you to understand the message of the text during while-reading stage?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	95	45.7%
	No	113	54.3%
Total		208	100%

As revealed in the table above, just more than half (54.3%) of the respondents replied that their teacher does not encourage them to understand the message of the text whereas, less than half i.e., (45.7%) of them said their teacher encourages them to get the point from the text they read.

The observation data confirmed that most teachers were not found motivating and encouraging their students to get the point from the text they read. They simply ordered students to open their book and read the passage. Then, they rushed to do the post reading activities. This shows lack of commitment to enhance students' comprehension skill.

Table13. Students' response obtained from a questionnaire asked students to see if the teacher makes them skim the text

Item	Does your teacher make you skim the introductory and concluding paragraphs to get the main point?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	81	38.9%
	No	127	61.1%
Total		208	100%

As indicated in the table above, the greatest number (61.1%) of the respondents responded their teacher does not make them skim the text to get the main point whereas, 38.9% of them responded their teacher make them skim the text to get the main point from the introductory and concluding paragraphs.

In this regard, teacher's book has recommended that teachers make their students skim and scan the passage to enhance students' reading speed. However, classroom observation data has no evidence to support this argument.

Table14.Whether or not the teacher encourages students to guess the meaning of new words in the text using contextual clues.

Item	Does your teacher encourage you to guess the meanings of new words in the text using contextual clues?	Number of respondents	Percent
variables	Yes	112	53.8%
	No	96	46.2%
Total		208	100%

As can be seen from the above table, more than half (53.8) of the respondents claimed that their teacher encourages them to guess the meanings of new words using contextual clues whereas, 46.2% of them replied their teacher does not encourage them to guess the meanings of new words from the context.

With regard to word guessing using contextual clues, the researcher witnessed that most teachers seem to engage their students in guessing the meanings of new words using either contextual clues or word building process. As observed in the classroom, they usually see vocabulary teaching as one part of teaching reading comprehension. However, students replied that teacher should encourage students to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words in the context in order not to expose their teacher.

Teachers Interview response to questions on factors that influenced teachers' practice in the while-reading activities

A semi-structured interview was used in the present study for two main purposes: to enrich the data gathered through questionnaire and classroom observations and to collect data on the factors which have influenced teachers' classroom practices of the while-reading activities. Therefore, when interviewed the teachers gave the following response:
To answer the question "What challenges do you face in the practice of while-reading activities?"
In response to the question asked on the challenges they faced during the while-reading sessions teacher A said:

> *"There is something…but practicing the while-reading activities in the given time needs teachers' effort and techniques. Unless we use our own technique, you know… we face challenges to practice such activities. Students have low language proficiency to perform the given activities and time constraints are the factors that influence my actual classroom practice of the while-reading activities."*

Teacher C answered the same question as follow:

> *"As for me, the most difficult challenge in the practice of while-reading activities is students' poor language proficiency and they do not respond for what they are asked."*

Similarly, teacher B responded the same question as follow:

> *"Most of the students are not active enough and they are not take part in the practice of while reading activities. Some of them consider it as time wasting, they need to focus on grammar aspect of language…, shortage of time, learners' low language proficiency level, unmotivated students, all these factors influence the classroom practice in the while-reading activities."*

Conclusion

- Findings of the questionnaire data indicated that the majority of the students claimed that their teacher did not make them practice the while-reading activities and realize as one of the strategies available to enhance learners' comprehension skill. It is believed that the while-reading activities help the learns' to be active and efficient reader as well as arouse their interest and motivate them to read.

- However, classroom observation indicated that only few teachers made their students practice guessing word meanings during their reading lesson. It was found that although majority of the teachers were dealing with the same reading lesson, their classroom practices of the while-reading phase were quite different. Observation data showed that when few of the teachers had practiced, the majority of them skipped them.

- Further, observation findings indicated that none of the teachers encouraged students to practice:
  - guessing meanings of unfamiliar words using contextual clues
  - to identify the logical organization of a text using references and cohesive device
  - recognizing text organization
  - Word- attack skills which are believed to facilitate reading comprehension.

- The study has shown the following contextual factors which influenced teachers' classroom practices of the while-reading activities. The results of interview data indicated that learners' low language proficiency level was one of the factors that had influenced teachers' practices of the while-reading activities.

- However, students' English language deficiency can restrict this critical participation, and hence it might create a profound influence on teachers' classroom practices of the while-reading activities.

- As interview findings further indicated, lack of student motivation and time constraint were also identified as factors that influenced teachers' classroom realization of while-reading activities.

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