The EFL Reading Strategies Implemented at the Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract: This study aims at exploring different reading strategies taught by EFL teachers that improve students' learning at the Higher Secondary Level of Education in Bangladesh. To elicit the relevant data, the study used a quantitative instrument, that is Teachers' questionnaire. The participants of the questionnaire were 15 EFL teachers teaching at Higher Secondary level of education. The study reveals that (i) "asking about the reading strategy" and "discussion on relevant topics" are the two major important strategy that the EFL teachers mostly apply, (ii) they apply both cognitive (macro-level) and metacognitive (micro-level) reading strategies to teach their students at the HSC level; The findings of the study have some pedagogical implications for the students. Then the implications for future research and for teaching English in EFL settings were provided, based on the discussion and the results of the study.

Keywords: Reading, EFL education, cognitive strategy, pedagogy

1   Introduction

Reading builds knowledge and allows readers to be inquisitive knowledge seekers that they ought to be. Not only does it help students tremendously when they need to study for tests but also it improves listening and writing skills. Reading well allows one to spend less time figuring out the words, and increases speed and concentration. Learners can improve their concentration with systematic breaks in between reading and by avoiding regression. Reading is thought to be the primary means for gaining access to various sources of information, providing the basis for synthesis and critical evaluation skills (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

In foreign language situations, where language input sources are limited, English reading becomes a practical means of developing foreign language ability (Gorsuch & Taguchi, 2010) which, in turn, can facilitate or hinder academic success for many foreign language learners across educational contexts (Taylor, Stevens, & Asher, 2006). Thus, in a foreign language setting like ours, reading is given special attention due to the fact that reading is one of the most important language learning goals for foreign language

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students. One of the major reasons for regarding English as a world language is that most of the world's knowledge is treasured in English.

Researchers (Maniruzzaman & Hoque, 2010; Cobb, 2007) have found that there is a strong correlation between reading and academic success. A student who is a better reader is more likely to do well in school and score higher in the examinations than a student who is a weaker reader. Good readers can understand the individual sentences and organizational structure of a piece of writing. They can comprehend ideas, follow arguments, and detect implications. They know most of the words, determine the meaning of many of the unfamiliar words from the context and use their dictionary effectively. Therefore, the EFL students should try to develop their reading skills. Teaching reading and prepare the students as good and successful readers are very important. Reading strategy instruction approves that the target learners, at the end of the course, will be well prepared for successfully meeting the challenges reading texts of different types. The learners will be able to cope with any reading assessments and reading tasks they might encounter after their assessment. Regrettably, EFL reading is seem to be neglected at the HSC level.The curriculum document of the NCTB states that successful teaching and learning of English ultimately depends on an effective teaching methodology. This study is conducted to explore the strategy use instruction that the teachers provide to their students of HSC level in order to develop their EFL reading skills.

1.   Research Questions

To investigate the EFL reading strategy instruction and its impact on learning outcomes of the students, a research question is formulated which is stated below:

RQ How do the EFL teachers apply reading instructional strategies in EFL reading classes?

2.   Literature Review

Reading is a complicated and psycholinguistic process that starts with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs. 'Reading' has been described in a variety of ways to explain the process of what happens when one reads and how one comprehends a text. However, a widely accepted explanation of reading is not found in the literature (Dubin, Eskey & Grabe, 1986). Mitchell (as cited in Dubin et al., 1986, p.27), for instance, defines 'reading' as the ability to make sense of written messages. Smith (as cited in Dubin et al., 1986, p. 28),

on the other hand, sees reading as "an anticipatory, selective, purposeful, and comprehending process" wherein the reader interprets the text based on the questions formulated about the text. Widdowson (as cited in Dubin et al., 1986) views reading as an interaction between the text and the reader; he adds that reading is a process of relating information presented in a text to the reader's existing knowledge about the topic.

A central goal of academic purposes of reading is to help students develop reading and thinking strategies needed to read academic texts in their content classes. There is evidence that academic second or foreign language learners can compensate for a lack of knowledge and abilities in L2 reading by "invoking interactive strategies, utilizing prior knowledge, and becoming aware of their strategy choices" (Hudson as cited in Auerbach & Paxton, 1997, p. 238). Thus, second/foreign language readers need to be taught how to utilize these skills and prior knowledge, develop vocabulary skills, and improve reading comprehension through the use of reading strategies (Anderson, 1991; Li & Munby, 1996). In terms of preparing students for academic reading in English at the higher secondary level, the reading task types in the selected curriculum seem to include training students on major reading task types such as identifying main, ideas, identifying details and making inference. Reading skill is associated with other skills. It combines many complex activities, including categorizing, building key terms and concepts for a subject, measuring one's reaction to a subject, making new connections, abstracting, figuring out significance, and developing arguments.

The HSC students in Bangladesh study English as a compulsory study subject of 200 marks out of which 50% marks is allocated for the reading comprehension. In the present education system, EFL reading is received top priority at the HSC level English syllabus for many reasons. It is considered as the most important language skill to be taught and tested in the academic system. The students are to practice two types of reading texts: seen comprehension based on the text from their prescribed textbook, and unseen comprehension based on the text taken from outside the textbook. The reading comprehension section deals with the question answering, multiple choice questions, information transfer, inference, summary writing, and rearranging with a view to checking students' vocabulary and linguistic knowledge. So, an empirical and comprehensive study needs to be carried out to explore how EFL reading is practiced, taught, and tested in the classroom and in the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination. Therefore, an integrated curriculum framework can support the following developmental

goals: promote word recognition skills; build a large recognition vocabulary, comprehension skills that combine: awareness of grammar, main idea identification, and comprehension strategies.

The curriculum designed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has provisioned sufficient amount of classroom practices for the development of reading skills for the students at the Higher Secondary Level. The main objective of including "Reading" in the curriculum is to develop students' lower order thinking skills such as knowing and understanding as well as higher order thinking skills i.e. comprehending, analyzing, synthesizing and evaluating. The curriculum emphasizes students' use of reading to learn; their use of a range of texts; and their enjoyment of reading from word and sub-word level, sentence level, text level, and beyond individual texts.

The study of Takallou (2011) on "The Effect of Metacognitive Strategy Instruction on EFL Learners' Reading Comprehension Performance and Metacognitive Awareness" aimed at examining the effect of metacognitive strategies instruction on reading comprehension performance to investigate the probable effects of text type on the EFL learners' performance in reading comprehension tests. The findings of the study showed that the two experimental groups which received instruction on 'planning' and 'self-monitoring' outperformed the control group on the reading comprehension test. The findings of this study also indicated that both experimental and control groups outperformed in the authentic section of the reading comprehension test which seemed to suggest that metacognitive strategies instruction increased the metacognitive awareness of the experimental groups.

Zhang and Seepho (2013) conducted a study on "Metacognitive Strategy Use and Academic Reading Achievement: Insights from a Chinese Context" to investigate the metacognitive strategies used in academic reading by the undergrad students of English major. The subjects were 33 third-year English majors studying in Guizhou University in China. Pearson correlation analysis was run to examine whether the participants' overall use of metacognitive strategies, planning strategies, monitoring strategies and evaluating strategies were correlated with their English reading comprehension scores. The result indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between metacognitive strategy use and English reading achievement. The study advocated for some practical implications for EFL teaching and learning for Chinese university students. It suggested that EFL teachers should help

students develop metacognitive awareness in the reading process to become strategic and self-regulated readers.

Zoghi et al. (2010) conducted a study on "Collaborative Strategic Reading with University EFL Learners". The study attempted to probe into the feasibility and effectiveness of a reading instructional approach called Modified Collaborative Strategic Reading (MCSR), a modified version of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) that combined cooperative learning and reading strategy instruction. The subjects of the study were 42 university-level EFL learners. For collecting data, a reading comprehension test, Modified Collaborative Strategic Reading (MCSR) was administered at pre-test and post-test. Data were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings suggested that EFL students' strong preference for communicative and cooperative activities ran counter to the popular thinking; it disapproved group work due to students' long-standing conventional learning tradition. The study recommended for further research on MCSR effectiveness with appropriate instructional frequency and duration and also with a stronger research design.

The previous research as reviewed here has helped to shed light on various issues related to EFL reading. However, not much research has focus on the possible impact of reading strategy training on EFL students' reading motivation and outcomes. Based on the expectancy-value theory proposed by Day and Bamford (1998), reading strategy instruction involved reciprocal teaching method which has the potential to inspire EFL students' motivation and improve their reading comprehension.

3.   Research Design

For collecting data, this study has applied quantitative method of questionnaire survey that includes descriptive statistics like the mean, median, and standard deviation, inferential statistics like t-tests, ANOVAs, or multiple regression correlations (MRC). The present study followed simple random sampling for selecting the participants from the target population, higher secondary students and the EFL teachers. The respondents of the study were teachers selected both from urban (33%), sub-urban (33%), and rural (34 %) colleges. The present researcher contacted the college authorities of the respective colleges and obtained permission to include their students as subjects of this study.

4.   Data Analysis

In order to analyze the quantitative data, teacher responses to the two questions i.e. (i) Asking students about the reading strategy use ; (ii) Discussion on relevant topics. Questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 24 for windows. The frequencies, standard deviations, and mean scores of the results were calculated. To investigate the possible differences between male and female teachers in terms of reported strategy use and recall of instruction, t-tests, and cross-tabulations were run. An ANOVA was also conducted to assess the potential differences in a scale-level dependent variable by a nominal-level variable having urban, sub-urban and rural categories. The options responded by the teachers are presented in the columns of the histograms in chronological order from 'left to right' as neutral (1) never (2) sometimes (3) often (4) and always (5).   The findings of the teacher questionnaire are presented step-by-step in the following sections:

TQ 01

Mean =3.87
Std. Dev. =0.819
N =30

TQ 02
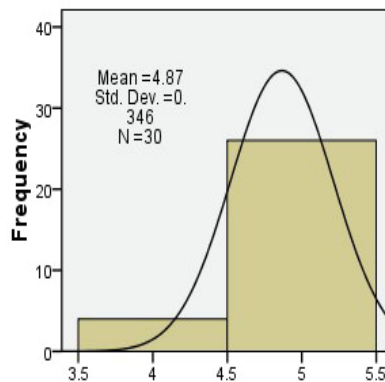
Mean =4.87
Std. Dev. =0.346
N =30
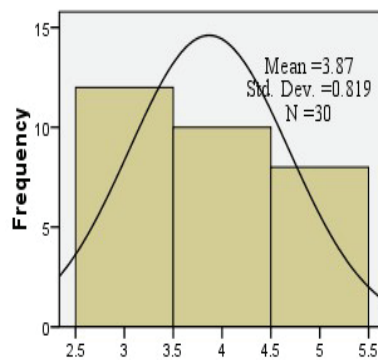
Figure 5.1: Asking about the reading strategy   Figure 5.2: Discussion on relevant topics

In question TQ1, the teachers were asked if they questioned their students about the strategies they usually used to understand a text in the class. It was found 60% teachers (M=3.87, STDV=.819) asked their students either 'often' or 'always'. The findings of the question (TQ1) are projected in the above histogram (Figure 5.1) and the tables below (Table 5.1 & Table 5.2). The findings showed a number of teachers 40% (n=12) responded that they 'sometimes' asked their students what reading strategies they applied in the EFL reading classes:

Table 5.1: Frequency counts on asking students about the strategy use

	Significant Frequency (%)		Insignificant/Negligible Frequency			Valid
No	Often	Always	Sometimes	Neutral	Never	
TQ 1	10 (33.3%)	8(26.7%)	12 (40%)	0	0	100%
TQ 2	26 (86.7%)	0	4 (13.3%)	0	0	100%

The skewness (.259) of Q1 response showed that the distribution of data set was symmetric as the responses concentrated to at least three significant points on the Likert scale (1932). The skewness demonstrated that the responses of TQ1 were spread in adequately normal distribution. The Kurtosis (-1.457) showed that the data was in normal distribution, though it was negative.

Table 5.2: Descriptive statistics on asking students about the strategy use

Items	TQ 01	TQ 02
Mean	3.87	4.87
Std. Error of Mean	.150	.063
Median	3.82	4.87
Std. Deviation	.819	.346
Variance	.671	.120
Skewness	.259	-2.273
Std. Error of Skewness	.427	.427
Kurtosis	-1.457	3.386
Std. Error of Kurtosis	.833	.833

Table 5.3 shows how responses differed based on the location. From the table, it was found that the 80% (n=08) rural teachers asked the students 'often' or 'always' about the use of reading strategies in the class. On the other hand, 54% (n=6) sub-urban teachers 'often' and 'always' asked their students about the benefit of use of reading strategy while reading EFL texts; while 40% (n=6) urban teachers discussed the issue with their students. The table below shows details:

Table 5.3: Cross tabulation of responses on reading strategy by location

Variable	Location								p-value
	Urban		Sub-urban		Rural		Total		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
TQ1									
Sometimes	6	60.0	5	45.5	2	20.0	13	41.9	.237
Often	3	30.0	4	36.4	3	30.0	10	32.3	
Always	1	10.0	2	18.1	5	50.0	8	25.8	
Total	10	100	11	100.0	10	100.0	31	100.0	

*Significance at p < 0.05 level

To authenticate the findings, the study conducted a t-test to observe the difference between the male and female teachers on how frequently the teachers asked the students about the use of reading strategy. The t-test analyses (male and female teachers) focused the two populations' means through the use of statistical examination. The t-test indicated whether or not the difference between two groups' average most likely reflected a "real" difference in the population from which the groups were sampled. It was found that the means in TQ1 for male (M=4.00) and female (M=3.75), the t-value was .801 indicating the difference between male and female was statistically insignificant (p<.431), because the mean difference was only 0.25. Table 5.4 below illustrates the statistical results:

Table 5.4: Findings from t-test analysis on discussion on reading strategy use

Variable	Male		Female		Mean Diff.	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% CI of the Difference	
	N	Mean	N	Mean				Lower	Upper
TQ01= asking students about the strategies/techniques they already use	15	4.00	12	3.75	.25	.801	.431	-.393	.893

*Significance at p < 0.05 level

The present study also conducted one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to determine whether there were any statistically significant differences between the means of three independent (unrelated) EFL groups: urban, sub-urban, and rural. From the ANOVA test, it was found the means of the urban (M=3.50), sub-urban (M=3.73), and rural (3.84) teachers were close to each other, and their standard deviations were 0.707, 0.786, and 0.823 respectively. It disclosed that the teachers from all three demographic locations responded almost similarly. In addition, the P-value (p<.075) of the TQ1 in ANOVA indicated that the response differences among urban, sub-urban, and rural teachers were statistically insignificant:

Table 5.5: ANOVA on reading strategy use in the class

TQI									
Area	N	Mean	STDV	Std. Error	95% CI for mean		Min	Max	p-value
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Urban	10	3.50	.707	.224	2.99	4.01	3	5	.075
Sub-urban	11	3.73	.786	.237	3.20	4.26	3	5	
Rural	10	4.30	.823	.260	3.71	4.89	3	5	
Total	31	3.84	.820	.147	3.54	4.14	3	5	

Providing information and the discussion on the reading strategy use in the class can make the learners more strategic and autonomous. Teachers create opportunities for learners in the class by discussing how to read by being a reading role model, and by creating a classroom culture where reading for pleasure is encouraged and supported. Harputlu (2014) in a study in Turkey found that when teachers discussed the importance of reading strategy, the learners became autonomous in their study which helped them discover, or remember the pleasures of reading, and students could engage effective reading strategies according to individual preference. Alsamadani (2012) found that Saudi teachers believed strongly in the importance of awareness of reading strategies of the students. However, the present findings show similarity with Hong-Nam and Leavell (2006) who found that gender and demographic variations and differences did not make any differences in learning outcomes of reading comprehension teaching.

In the TQ2, the teachers were asked if they discussed the previous lessons or relevant topics before reading a new text. In response to the question, it was found 86.7% teachers (M=4.87, STDV=.346) gave their opinion that they discussed the previous lessons with their students either ''often' or 'always' before starting a new lesson. The findings of the question (TQ2) are projected in the above histogram (Figure 5.2) and the table (Table 5.1). The skewness (-2.273) of TQ2 in the histogram showed that the response of TQ2 centered mainly to "Often" (86.7%). It showed that the distribution of responses was not in a normal mode and it was highly negatively skewed. It was found that the distribution, or data set, had a negative skewness as the tail of distribution

data skewed left of the center point. The kurtosis (3.386) showed that the "peakedness" of the probability distribution of a random variable 'always'.

The findings of the cross-tabulation analyses based on the demographic location were also conducted to indicate the difference among the responses of urban, suburban and rural teachers. The findings were shown in the following table which showed the difference of responses based on the locations. From the table, it was found that 90% (n=09) of urban and rural teachers discussed the previous lessons or relevant topics before reading a new text 'often' or 'always'. On the other hand, 81% (n=9) sub-urban teachers 'always' discussed the benefit of discussing relevant topics before teaching reading; and another 90% rural teachers practised the reading strategy before starting a lesson. It was found that the difference among the urban, sub-urban and rural teachers was statistically insignificant (p<.809). The table below illustrates the findings on this issue:

Table 5.6: Cross tabulation of responses on discussing previous lesson by location

Variable	Location								p-value
	Urban		Sub-urban		Rural		Total		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
TQ2									
Often	1	10.0	2	18.2	1	10.0	4	12.9	.809
Always	9	90.0	9	81.8	9	90.0	27	87.1	
Total	10	100	11	100.0	10	100.0	31	100.0	

*Significance at p < 0.05 level

In t-test analyses for TQ2, the study found that the means for male (M=4.87) and female (M=4.92) were nearly similar. The t-value was -.397 indicating the difference between male and female which was statistically insignificant (p<.695) because the mean difference was only -.050. It suggested that the male and female teachers' classroom behaviour with regard to discussion on the previous lessons or relevant topics before reading a new text was almost similar. The table below illustrates the statistical results:

Table 5.7: Findings from t-test analysis of discussion on relevant topics

Variable	Male		Female		Mean Diff	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	95% CI of the Difference	
	N	Mean	N	Mean				Lower	Upper
TQ2= discussing previous lessons	15	4.87	12	4.92	-.050	-.397	.695	-.310	.210

*Significance at p < 0.05 level

From the ANOVA, it was found that the means of urban (M=4.90), sub-urban (M=4.82), and rural (4.90) were close to each other and their standard deviations were .316, .405 and .316 respectively.

Table 5.8: ANOVA on discussing previous lesson in the class

TQ2									
Area	N	Mean	STDV	Std. Error	95% CI for mean		Min	Max	p-value
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound			
Urban	10	4.90	.316	.100	4.67	5.13	4	5	.825
Sub-urban	11	4.82	.405	.122	4.55	5.09	4	5	
Rural	10	4.90	.316	.100	4.67	5.13	4	5	
Total	31	4.87	.341	.061	4.75	5.00	4	5	

It is found that the teachers from all three demographic locations responded almost similarly. In addition, the P-value (p<.825) of the TQ2 in ANOVA indicated that the response difference among urban, sub-urban, and rural teachers was statistically insignificant.

Discussion on previous lessons or relevant topics before reading helps students recall and relate facts from the text. Most students cannot expand their reading abilities on their own, even if they are given time to read.

Research shows that students need a personal connection to the material, whether through engaging them emotionally or connecting the new information with previously acquired knowledge. Swinney and Velasco (2006) in their study found that relatedness provides relevance to students first via the developing relationship between teacher and student. This arouses students' interest in what the teacher has to say. Relevance then helps students see that the content is worth knowing by showing how it fits into their current and future frame of reference. Kantarci (2006) found that making sharing previous knowledge was practised by the teachers in Turkey. The present finding contradicts with Phajane's (2014) study which finds that the rural students face difficulty in EFL reading because their teachers hardly practice reading making connection strategy.

5.   Result

The results of this study indicate that reading strategy instruction can and does make a contribution to increasing the reading comprehension and reading strategy choice. The findings are consistent with those of other existing studies of Alfassi (1998), Dreyer (1998), Kern (1989), Lau and Chan (2003), and Van Keer and Verhaeghe (2005). The findings confirm the intervention as a viable method for enhancing the reading comprehension of the HSC learners. The findings in this study support the previous studies (Alexander & Jetton, 2000; Roehler & Pearson, 1991) on the effect of reading strategy instruction on learners' reading comprehension.

6.   Recommendation

A majority of the research indicates that the most successful way to teach comprehension strategies, reading fluency, pronunciation, and phonemic awareness to students with limited reading proficiency is to use very direct and explicit instruction. On the basis of the findings, the study puts forward a number of recommendations for teachers to support reading comprehension and reading strategy instruction. It is found that all stakeholders have their roles to play in order to ensure that there is effective teaching and learning of reading comprehension. This section provides suggestions for the teachers, students, policy makers and text-book writers. The major recommendations include:

1. Help the students in activating prior knowledge and experiences; retrieving word meanings; examining the surface and grammatical structure of the printed text

2. Discuss reading schemas for different types of textbooks. Highlight salient information that each genre addresses.

3. Provide focus to readings, especially those that are long in length. Highlight key points for students to look out for.

4. Create statements that will provoke discussion. A few statements will suffice, no more than ten should be used, and five or fewer is preferable.

5. Provide opportunities to the students to read for pleasure. Reading for enjoyment should be modelled and encouraged at all grade levels. This requires providing ample materials to read at their independent reading level.

7.   Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that most of the findings from this study confirm earlier findings. Yet, since this study investigates the use of the academic reading strategies by considering the potential influence of learners' characteristics, it has added to what is already known. Basically, EFL learners' characteristics, experience, self-concept, and time-perspective influence their use of the strategies. This could either aid or hinder their better understanding of the reading text. Finally, with an awareness of time-perspectives, readers can make their reading more meaningful since they can relate the new information to their working situations and other future purposes. Thus, the close relationship between strategy use and reading comprehension provides support for the possibility that educators should enhance learners' reading comprehension through explicit reading strategies instruction.

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