

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING OF L2 READING AT HIGH SCHOOL IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This article studied teaching of English as a Foreign language (EFL) Reading at the secondary schools in Sindh Pakistan. This study may help the learners to know their reading skills level in English. It may have pedagogical implications to understand the reading capability of the learners. The article studies how learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) perceive reading and explores a change to improve their reading skills. This was a qualitative study. The classrooms were observed for data collection purposes. It was observed that reading was taught passively in secondary classes; least care was taken for the students' comprehension. The students were not involved in the reading activities in the text book. Students were observed as passive listeners in the classes. In the light of the findings of this study, it is recommended that the teachers may make their teaching students' centered so that it can encourage learning.

Key words: English Language Teaching, ESL, Reading Skill, Teaching Methods, Grammar

Translation Method

Introduction

Reading is an important language skill. Reading is understanding written texts like visual or print texts, environmental or digital texts and texts that appear in the books; So the aim is to engage learners with a written with a view to understanding it (Soomro and Mahesar, 2017). Reading level of the students is enhanced in early grades as it enhances reading at secondary school (Feather, 1993). L2 reading is an active skill that develops understanding of print and written text. The proper approach to reading may accelerate the process of L2 learning by leaps and bounds. Reading is one of the most important skills for academic learning and success Reading is essential for success in acquiring a second language (MURIEL, 1984). After all, reading is the basis of instruction in all aspects of language learning (Milkulecky,2008). Eskey (2002) considers reading as a major source of comprehensible input in language learning and recognizes it as a skill that is most needed to be employed by the learners at secondary school level. Reading is the key to success in schools and one's academic career as well. If students cannot read well, they are at a serious disadvantage (Salinger, 2003). Reading ability is vital and therefore it may be taught properly.

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Teachers have a dominant role in Pakistani classroom so the students enjoy least autonomy and often remain instruction-dependent; their individual differences in learning second language are not taken into consideration by the teachers. Teachers mostly employ methods of teaching reading skills which are outdated and do not cater the needs of learners. Teachers in rural Sindh do not make use of efficient teaching reading skills which commonly results into low proficiency in EFL learning.

In Pakistani context, it is important to evaluate the English reading skills of secondary schools because English has been taught for a long time in secondary schools but still, a majority of the students cannot read English effectively. They also have a problem in understanding the language while reading a text. One of the major reasons may be the lack of knowledge about the reading skills. That secondary schools do not promote reading as an important reading skill of a language. The English reading materials, which are used in secondary schools are not interesting and teachers do not teach anything out of textbooks. Teachers even do not teach reading skills in classrooms. For that reason, students lose their interest in the reading material, which has a direct effect on their reading ability. For these reasons, it is needed to evaluate the English reading skills of the students of secondary schools. It is a fact that one cannot gain proficiency in reading without enough exposure to the reading material.

Gaining proficiency in reading without enough exposure to the reading materials is challenging task. In our context, most of the secondary school students learn English as a second language from school but fail to gain proficiency over it. So, it is important to do an evaluation of the reading skills especially in secondary schools because it is an important level of education.

Sindh has a great diversity of languages (Rahman, 2010) where people speak several languages like Saraiki, Parker Keli, Mewari, Memoni, Kutchi, Jandavra, Goaria, Dhatki and Sindhi (Memon, 2014). Sindhi is the most common language among these all languages. Sindhi is a regional language, Urdu as the national language and English as an official language. Therefore, in Sindh province, the Sindhi is the first language (L1) and English is considered as the second language (Memon, 2014). Moreover, the teachers at secondary school levels are unaware of the latest teaching practices and skills that may attract the students and enhance their level of understandings about reading. According to the researcher's observations, teachers are neither adhered to acquire the skills nor are they trained properly, particularly in government schools.

The situation of English language in Pakistan, especially second language (L2) reading instruction calls for the teachers' and researchers' attention. Concerns have been expressed about the unsatisfactory situation of English language teaching, low English language proficiency, and weak English literacy skills of students in Pakistan (Memon and Khand, 2010). There was a room for more research in mother tongue (L1) inference, teacher centered classrooms, too much emphasis over grammar translation method. In this background current research was conducted to report new knowledge and fill in the gap of required fund of knowledge about teaching reading skills pertaining to EFL learning in rural Sindh.

The present essay aims to study the teaching of reading skills which are being employed by the teachers at secondary (Matric) level. In addition, it will also propose methods to teach reading skills.

Research Question

What methods teachers use in teaching reading of English at Matric level schools in Government High Schools?

Significance

This study posits significance to the secondary school level students and teachers. It may provide framework for improving teaching English reading in Sindh. This research may provide a detail of the understanding of reading skills used by teachers of English in secondary classrooms in the Pakistani context. It would also suggest some measures to enhance the reading skills in EFL learning at secondary school level. This study may bring forth the solutions for the teachers facing difficulties in teaching reading skills.

Literature Review

Importance of reading skills

Naiditch (2016) says that reading is something more than surface reading and it gets difficult for both competent and mediocre teachers who find it a challenging task to teach reading to ESL students so that they can enhance their reading skills. According to him, reading is a type of guessing game treasure hunt where teachers reward the students who can resume the original meaning of the text. Reading is considered as an interactive process and meaning is constructed because of the dialogue between text and reader.

According to Sugate (2013) current instructional practices and policies are not addressing the issues of reading at all levels. Teachers apply a range of skills to help learners to understand what they read. Not all experts will work for all students; however, teachers will discover that understanding the process of reading will help them to help their students to uncover the secrets of the printed word. He also argues that reading is needed to improve language development. Certainly, the language is written text is different to that in spoken text, making it conceivable that a precocious reader might learn words that anon reader would not learn.

Dey (2007) carried out a study to recognize the merits and demerits of reading skills of English with an opinion to help the students to advance their reading skills. He reported that English Proficiency of students in Bengali medium was not satisfactory. He further reported that the students hardly read anything besides their textbooks which were also the key reason of poor reading proficiency.

Rahman (2004) at an intermediate level in Bangladesh, examined the problems faced by students while reading an English text, their ability level of reading skills and the teaching reading skills of English. He reported that students in Bangladesh are weak in reading. Their speed of reading is so poor and their level of understanding the meaning of a text was also very poor. The study has tried to identify various problems faced by students in reading.

Reading be an “interactive” process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or reading fluency (Eskey, 1988). In this process, the reader interacts dynamically with the text as he/she tries to elicit the meaning and where various kinds of knowledge are being used linguistic or systemic knowledge. Reading is a lifelong skill to be used both at school and throughout life.

According to Anderson (1985), reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone of a child's success in school and, indeed, throughout life. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfillment and job success inevitably will be lost. Despite its importance, reading is one of the most challenging areas in the education system. The ever-increasing demand for elevated levels of literacy in our technological society makes this problem, even more, pressing (Snow,2002).

Teaching Reading skills in Pakistan

We are living in a multi-lingual, multicultural world (Manan, 2015). According to Khand and Memon (2010) the reading ability of the learners was not up to standards in Pakistan hence claimed that there was a need of a great attention to the teachers and the learners’ attitude. They further stated that learners gave a passive response in the classrooms due to the inactive role of learners and obsolete traditional teaching reading methods. The teaching methods are teacher-centered due to which the learners’ participations are insignificant in text based tasks, questions, discussions and learning through reading.

In secondary schools, the teaching is carried out only by lecture method; the whole text is explained to the students. The students are not trained how to develop strategies to read independently (Khan & Pandian, 2011).

Reading is a receptive language skill (Nuttall, 1996) because reading plays a key role in understanding, recognizing interpreting and making general perceptions of written or printed materials more appropriately (Smith, 2012). Reading can be seen an interactive process between a reader and a text which leads to automaticity or reading fluency (Alyousef, 2006); in this process, the reader interacts dynamically.

Research Methodology

Research site, Sample, Instrument

The current study was carried in the Government High Schools of Rohri Tehsil, District Sukkur. Classroom observation was used as the data collection tool in the said schools. Seven classrooms were observed for this purpose.

Classroom observation

Observation is a method extending an analysis for documenting classroom interaction. As classroom observation helps any teacher researcher for professional development along with quality teaching, it is desired that Classroom Observation based research get implemented in technical education, and not should be remain limited to language teaching (Nunan, 1992). Observations are a major source of data collection in qualitative research studies which are mostly combined with interviews and questionnaire (Yin,2003) The observations along with the other methods allow for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated (Merriam ,1998). The schematic class observation Pro-forma was from a study by (Sawada et al. (2002). and divided into two parts. The first part was a collection of the information about the school and of the classroom e.g. ‘Schools’ name’, ‘Teachers’ name’, ‘Name of the class’, ‘Total number of students’, ‘Students present’ ‘Date and time/period’ were written. Whereas, the second part comprised of 30 statements about their own teaching methods, knowledge, and expertise concerning numerous features of teaching reading skills in the classrooms. They were prepared to keep in view to be directly involved and personally observe their teaching methodologies for teaching reading skills, their resources and tools of teaching, their teaching reading skills and in what manner they are effective for classrooms. Besides, these additional paper sheets were used to record the imperative facts about the teachers’ teaching practices during classroom observation.

Sampling plan for classroom observation and sample size

Nunan (1992, p.93) describes ‘observation’ in language research as a method of watching behavior and understanding how the social events of the language classroom are enacted. This instrument was also selected for the following reasons: first, it allows the researcher to ‘look at what is taking place in situ rather than relying on a second-hand account’ (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.396). Second, some people might find it difficult to articulate their knowledge, so the instrument ‘enables the researcher to see some things that students and teachers may not be able to report on themselves’ (Mertler, 2012, p.121). Five classes in 4 targeted government schools have been observed

and included in the current study. From four classes, two classes were observed because earlier the researcher conducted questionnaire survey and interview.

Sampling Plan for the Classroom Observation

S. No	School Name	District	No. of matric classes in school	No. of classes Observed
1	Government High School Rohri	Sukkur	4	4
2	Government High School Loung Bhatti	Sukkur	1	1
3	Government High School Patni	Sukkur	1	1
4	Government High School Ali Wahan	Sukkur	1	1
Total	4		7	7

Procedure for data collection

Classroom observation

Only 7 classes were observed in four targeted high schools for classroom observation in taluka Rohri, District Sukkur as per permission granted by the administration and later permission granted from the concerned English teachers for class observation. After getting their consent, the scholar observed classrooms by sitting at the corner of each classroom of targeted schools. Meanwhile, the observations were made as per designed scheme regarding the teaching methodologies and skills for teaching reading English in the classroom. In addition, some imperative facts associated with the classroom observation and teaching about the reading were also recorded accordingly.

Results and Discussion

The interpretation of the Classroom observation results

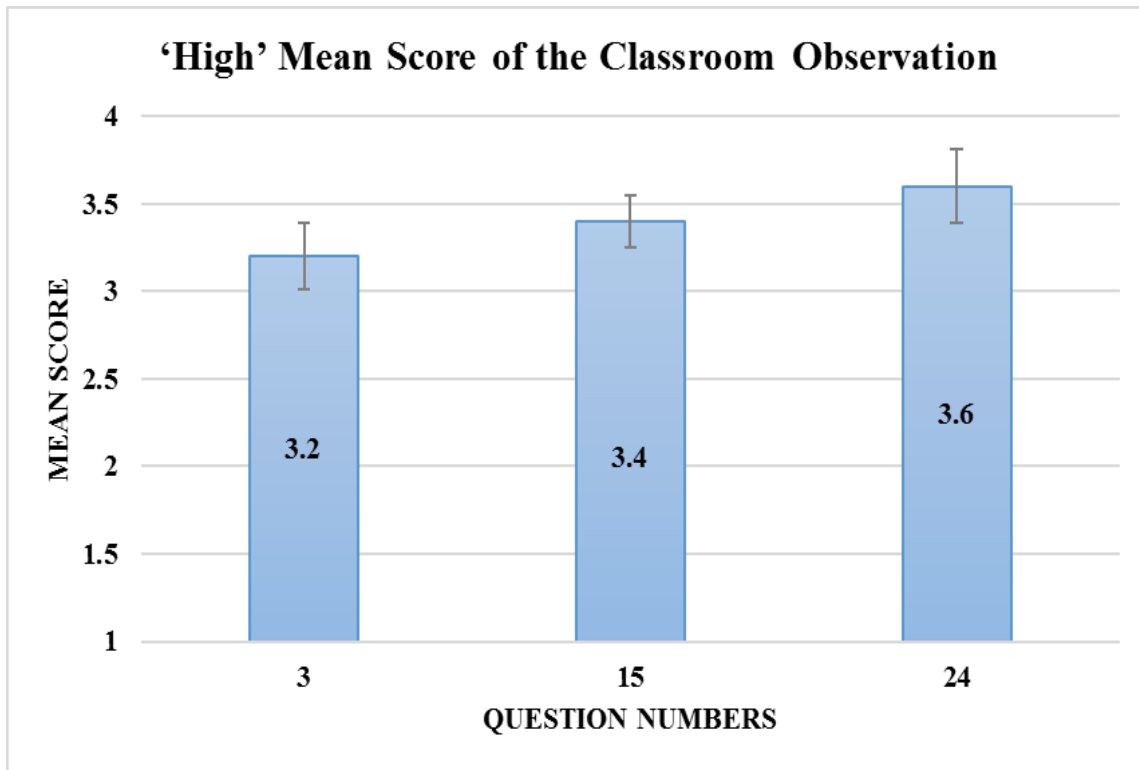
The results when categorized into distinct categories the mean score questions appeared significant with highest positive results. Only 1 question (QN 8) appeared as ‘Very High’ above 4 mean score (Table 11) and only 3 (QNs 3, 15 and 24) questions with ‘High’ mean score (Fig. 9). Whereas the major portion consists of ‘Low’ mean score in which total 16 (QNs 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, 21, 22, 26, 28 and 29) questions recorded above 3 mean scores (Fig. 10). Similarly, 9 (QNs 9, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 25 and 27) recorded as ‘Very Low’ above 2 mean scores (Fig. 11).

The overall mean scores during classroom observations are below par as Only 1 question appeared with ‘Very High’ and only 3 questions with ‘High’ Mean scores, while 16 questions with ‘Low’ and 9 questions with ‘Very Low’ Mean scores that showing a clear difference as compared to survey and interview results from teachers and students.

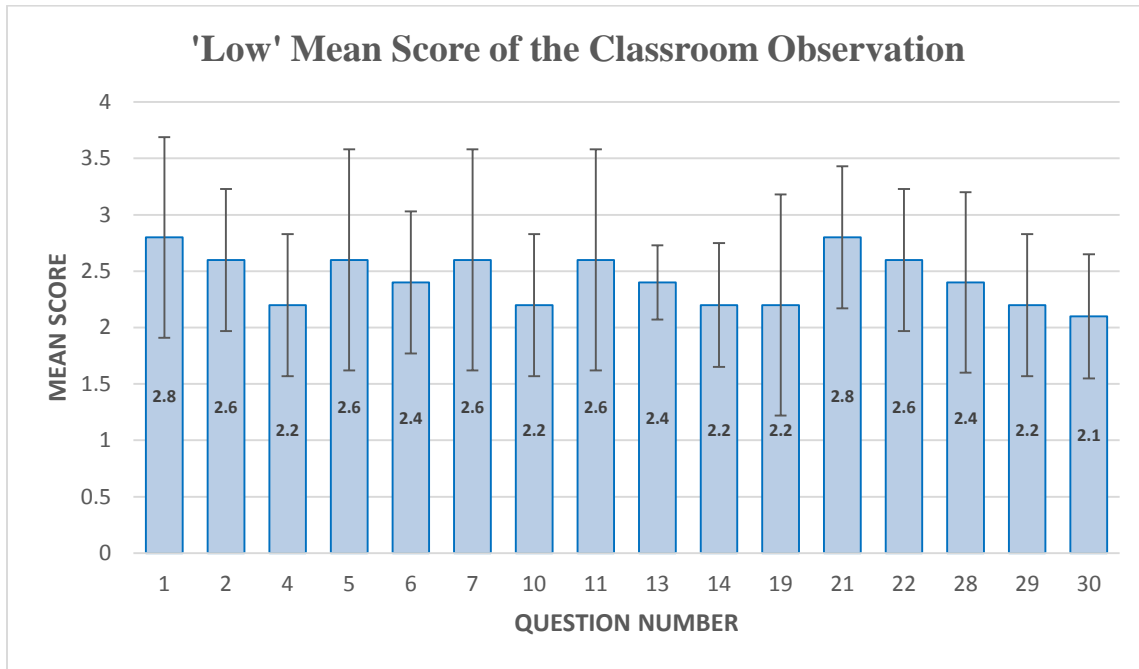
Consequently, the overall situation of the classroom observation demands huge efforts to improve students reading skills.

Very High' Mean Score of the Classroom Observation

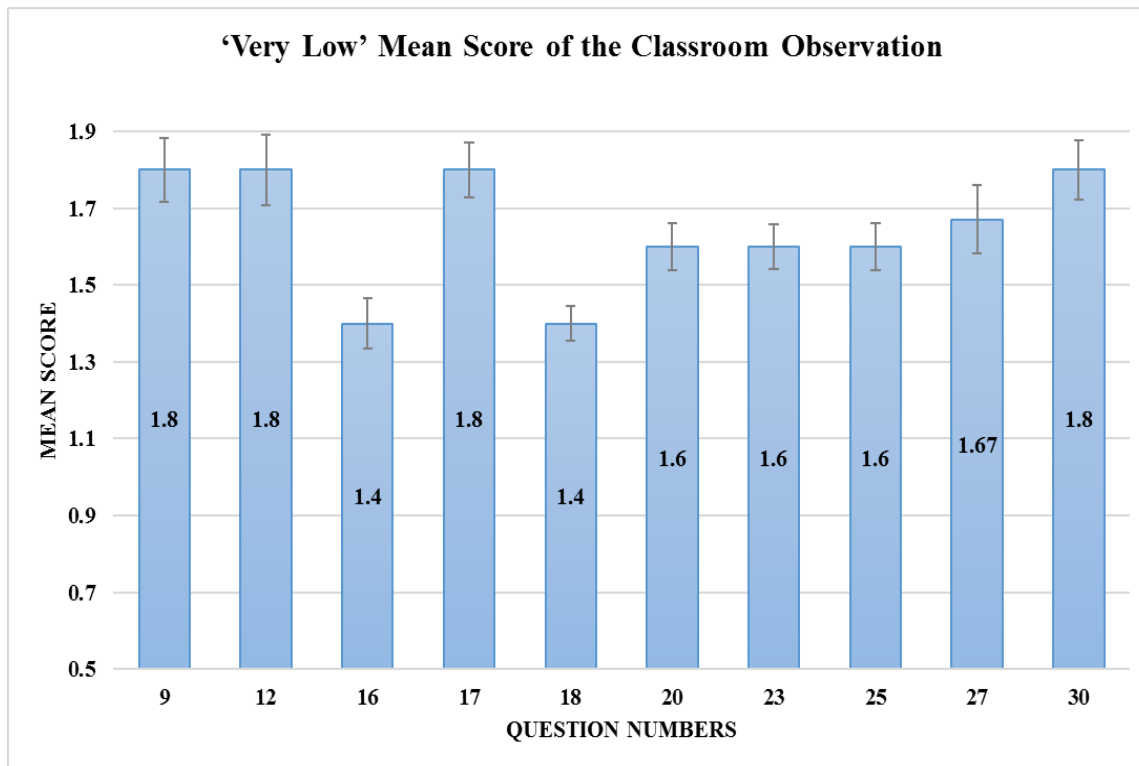
Q.No.	Questions	Result
		Mean±SD
8	The teacher usually reads lesson then describes the content to the students.	4.80±0.55



'High' Mean Score of the Classroom Observation.



'Low' Mean Score of the Classroom Observation



Very Low' Mean Score of the Classroom Observation

Analyses of Classroom Observation

At the time of the classroom observation, it was observed in all targeted schools that all the classes were lecture-oriented. The teachers taught the reading without taking consideration of student's level of understanding. In addition, the activities related to the books were not well performed according to the text. The coordination between students and teachers was hardly seen during the classroom activities. Students were observed as passive listeners. They were not playing any key role while reading in the classroom. It was noticed that in almost all classes teachers were the only speaker who dominated the classrooms while teaching reading. It was also observed that they were not apprehensive about to make sure that students are getting something while the reading. The teachers also appeared impassive in taking feedback from the students about reading the texts. Moreover, there was hardly any major point of student's feedback observed during the classes.

One common feature observed throughout the classroom observations that all teachers got used to using the same obsolete Grammar-Translation method that has long been prevalent in our educational system. Even the teachers showed carelessness in holding the consideration of the classroom. Excluding few learners at the forefront, all the students were negligent in the classroom and appeared to be not interested to pay attention to the class teachers. Contrariwise, few students sitting in the last benches rather preferred nattering during the classes and the teachers were not aware of that at all. Moreover, few students were found reading the text books of other subjects during English classes.

Findings

The studied area needs some special consideration, the results obtained some measures for reading instructions in the classes. Some modifications to modern methods of teaching in EFL and training of the teachers are required to make the certain involvement of students while reading.

In the current study, it was observed that teachers used outdated methods for teaching reading in L2 in Government schools at (Matric) level. All the classes were teacher-centered classes where teachers were the only speakers. Most teachers used grammar translation methods (GTM) for teaching reading where teachers were reading and the students were only the passive listeners. Moreover, the direct participation of the students was completely ignored. The activities and instruction plan as specified in the textbooks were not followed in the classrooms by the

teachers. As reading is the construction of meaning (Pang, et al. 2003) so the students in the said schools are not making sense of text.

Regarding the reading skills that attracted the students' interest in reading a lesson, it was observed that they were more interested in reading story books, sports related lessons and the lessons that were linked to their daily life. It was noticed that due to outdated teaching reading material students were feeling bored and they believed that other type of reading material should be incorporated to make their classes full of interest for learning.

Regarding the difficulties faced by teachers in teaching reading comprehension, it was observed that the level of the students in reading skills was not good due to which teachers were facing problems of transferring the knowledge to the students in a due time. The level of understanding of the students was also not as per the required text due to their poor academic background. Due to these reasons, teachers translated the reading material in Sindhi, Urdu and sometimes other regional languages for a better understanding of students. This code switching and code mixing normally seemed in all classes of the targeted schools.

It is recommended that EFL teachers may adopt techniques such as cloze reading activities, group activities, role play activates, group discussions, and use of internet etc. to make their teaching reading in their classes more interesting and effective. Furthermore, students should be provided with a variety of reading material such as magazines, newspapers, novels, story books, articles etc. as they develop their interest in reading activities.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical Consideration is an important part of the research (Bryman, 2015). Before collecting data for the current study, a letter of consent was given to each participant to obtain their informed consent. To safeguard the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, their personal information and identities are kept confidential and protected.

Conclusion

This study focused the teaching of English reading in Sindh, Pakistan and found the weaknesses in teaching reading skills which may render students poor at L2 reading. Moreover, the major difficulties faced by the teachers during teaching reading English were a poor understanding level of students and irregularity of students. It was also observed that the teachers were not well trained for teaching English as EFL. During the observations, it was noticed that the students were very slow at comprehending English reading texts. Simultaneously, the study showed that the

teachers and their teaching approaches were the main causes for student's poor knowledge in reading as well. The research question investigated during the study was; what methods teachers use in teaching reading of English at Matric level schools in Government High Schools? So it was observed that only Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was followed during the teaching of reading English at secondary school level in the current study. In the current study, the activities that were found more attractive to students during reading English textbook were least observed.

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