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Reading Comprehension Activities in the Ugandan English as a Foreign Language Classroom

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The study examines the reading comprehension activities in the Ugandan English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. It particularly analyses the activities that the learners of EFL participate in as part of their reading comprehension lessons. The study focusses on EFL learners from countries such as Congo, Eritrea, South Sudan, and Ethiopia, among others studying in Ugandan adult language schools. The specific objectives of the study were to identify the reading comprehension activities in the Ugandan EFL classroom and to establish the learners' response to the reading comprehension activities used in the EFL class. Drawing on the transactional theory, the study analyses the reading comprehension activities and the learners' response to them. The findings indicate that the most profound activities in the classes were pre-reading activities. In their order of frequency, pre-reading activities were the most profound in the classes observed, followed by while-reading and the post-reading activities, which were the least used. In the classes where reading activities were used, they excited the majority of the EFL learners and they paid attention to the lesson. The learners' response to the activities was diverse with the majority expressing interest in the activities as others chose not to participate at all. The study recommends the use of more reading comprehension activities especially at the while- and post-reading comprehension stages of the lessons which were lacking in most of the classes observed. It further recommends involving the learners and putting into consideration their views during the identification and selection of reading comprehension activities to ensure their maximum participation in the reading comprehension activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a key issue in learning English as a foreign language and the goal of teaching reading is comprehension. When comprehension is not attained, learners are frustrated and they at times lose interest in learning the language itself. Reading should be carefully and intentionally taught for the learners to achieve comprehension. Promoting competence in reading is also critical to efforts to prevent high school dropout and to achieve the goal of ensuring that students complete school with the academic skills necessary to survive and thrive in society, Reschly, (2009). Learners who cannot recognize words on a page or even pronounce them correctly without the ability to tell what they mean when combined into a phrase, sentence, or paragraph cannot be called good readers. Instead, skilful reading comprehension is a combination of word recognition skills and language comprehension ability. It involves being able to read the words on the page and understand what the words and language mean (Davis, 2006). This is because such learners are not in position to tell the meaning or the subject matter of the text when asked. Limited comprehension presents serious challenges to the EFL learners who characteristically have a limited interaction with the foreign language itself. Mastery of reading comprehension requires regular exposure to reading; including exposure to the reading comprehension activities themselves. In order to ensure success, reading activities ought to be carefully selected from the perspective of the learners, taking into account their interests, and learning needs so that reading turns out to be an enjoyable activity for them.

Reading activities take place in the classroom (before, during and after the lesson) and they are often determined by the teacher(s). Successful reading comprehension is a result of the diverse activities readers engage in to demystify texts. Mohammed and Ofori (2018) posit that language learners are characteristically shy and often times unable to give answers when comprehension-related questions are asked in class. It is through such

activities that learners get involved with their friends and possibly deal away with the shyness.

The use of reading comprehension activities in the Ugandan EFL context has not been deliberately studied and documented. Much of the work done in Uganda has been on reading and comprehension of local languages and does not focus on reading comprehension activities in the EFL context (Dubeck, Stern & Nabacwa, 2021, Kaggwa Namugenyi, 2018, Ssentanda ,2014). Other researchers writing from external contexts continue to report that reading instruction in EFL is based on only some skills such as identifying words, finding main ideas, identifying cause and effect relationships, comparing, and contrasting, and sequencing in isolation. In some of the EFL classes, the teacher asks students to read a text on their own and then, students are directed to identify the main idea and draw inferences from the information given (Collins & Gillies, 2010). Often times, this approach leaves the struggling readers without means of attaining comprehension when they read. Literature suggests that the use of reading comprehension activities is of immense benefits to the learners through their use, although they are yet to be appreciated by both teachers and learners. It is therefore important to establish the activities the EFL learners take part in before, during and after the reading comprehension lessons and the teachers' justifications for using or not using them in the Ugandan context.

Reading comprehension has been of interest to several researchers in language studies, world over. The same researchers have argued for the use of pre-, while and post-reading comprehension activities in the language classes. Cui (2002) and Grabe (1991) argue that activities prepare learners to read, enhance their motivation to read in addition to several other benefits. Despite the above-documented benefits associated with the use of reading comprehension activities in other contexts, limited literature points us to their use in the Ugandan EFL context. Much of the work on reading comprehension about learners in Uganda focusses on local languages and does not

focus on reading comprehension activities among the learners of EFL in Uganda (Dubeck, Stern & Nabacwa, 2021, Kagwa Namugenyi, 2018, Ssentanda, 2014). Consequently, information about the reading activities used in the Ugandan EFL classroom and how the learners respond to them is not readily available.

This study therefore seeks to establish the reading activities that the learners of EFL in Ugandan adult language schools take part in during the reading comprehension lessons and how they respond to them. This study will enrich our understanding of the activities in the EFL classroom and how learners respond to them while pursuing reading comprehension. The most effective and relevant activities will be documented for teachers of EFL to apply to their classes as they aim to improve their learners' reading comprehension abilities.

English as a Second and Foreign Language in Uganda

This study notes that English is taught and learnt as a second language in Uganda. This is true for cases where the language is taught to the Ugandan learners and those that have stayed in Uganda for a considerable amount of time as they advance their knowledge of the same language. A case in point, English is taught as a second language in Ugandan secondary schools and universities. In fact, the non-Ugandan children in Ugandan secondary schools who are from countries where English is not commonly used or where it is regarded as a foreign language, they study the English as a foreign language. The same applies to the adult language learners from such countries. This is supported by Kachru's Concentric Circle Model (1985). This model explains English as a native or first language as used in contexts such as Britain, USA where English is spoken and used as a first language. This framework is made up of 3 circles namely the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle.

The Inner Circle is made up of the traditional bases of English and its speakers are the ones in charge of providing the norms. These places are where the norms are created and from which they spread to the other circles. Some of the countries that conform the Inner Circle are USA, UK and Canada. The countries under this circle use English as their native

language. Some of the countries under this circle colonised those in the outer circle thus contributing to the spread of English there.

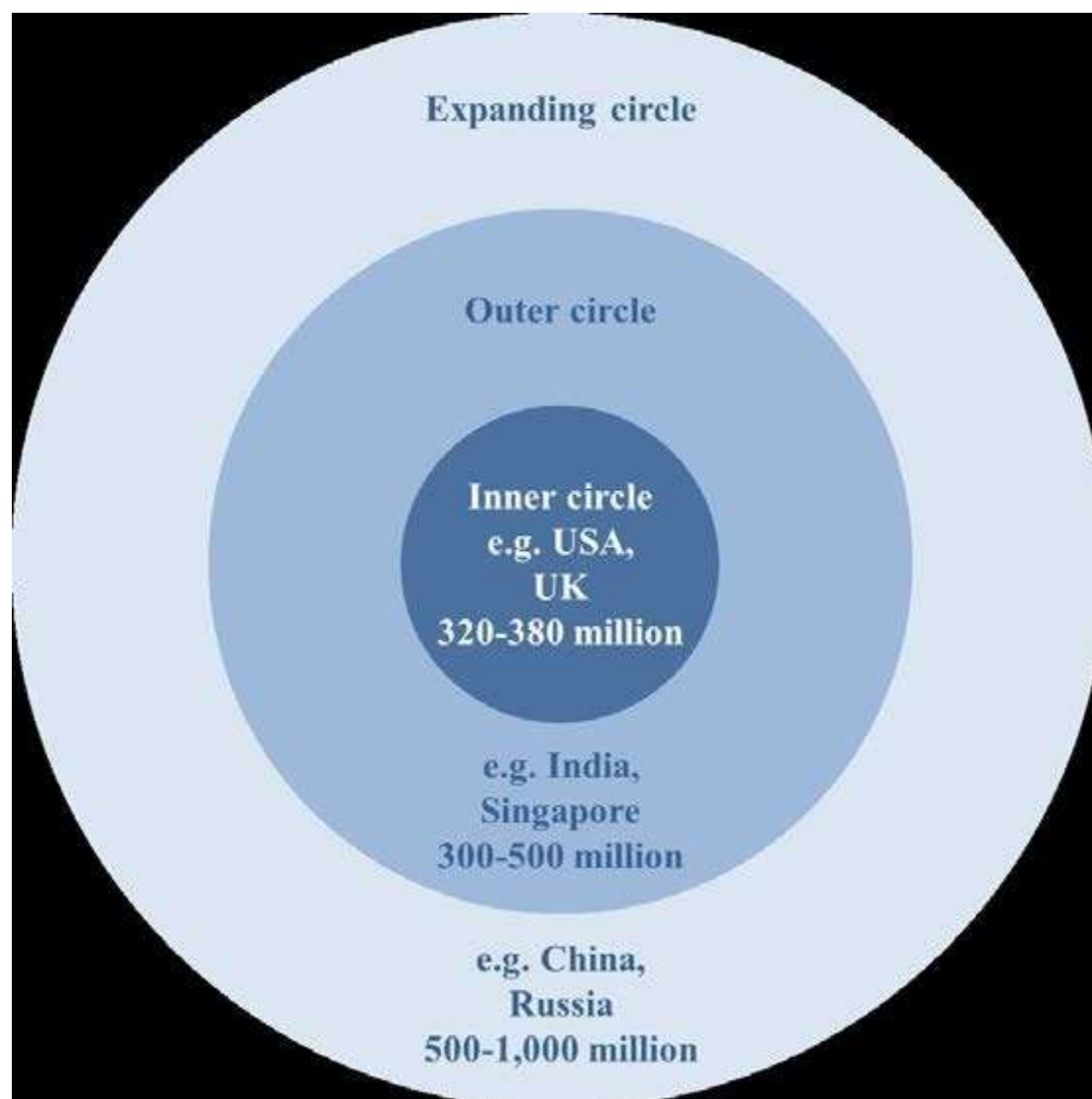
The Outer Circle represents the places where they speak official non-native varieties of English because of their colonial history. The speakers of these places are the ones who challenge the norms and develop them. They are mainly ESL. Some of the countries that belong to this circle are India, Pakistan and Egypt, Nigeria. Uganda and the rest of the British colonies which use English as their official language also belong to the outer concentric circle of this model.

The Expanding Circle is made up by EFL speakers where English is not usually spoken. In this circle the speakers have to follow the rules established by the Inner Circle and developed or challenged by the Outer one. Some examples of countries that belong to this circle are China, Russia and Brazil. In line with the model, other countries include Eritrea, Congo, Somalia, Ethiopia and several Arab countries that were not colonised by Britain but appreciate the role and importance of learning the English Language. People from these countries speak languages that enjoy an official status other than English. Such are the people who study English as a foreign language.

In the context of this study, we have people from the countries above that studying the English language as a foreign language in Uganda in addition to those that study it as a second language. These have limited exposure to the English Language in Uganda. Such learners are always experiencing English for their first time or times have had very limited exposure. After their classes, these tend to they spend most of their time with family and friends; with whom they share and speak home languages.

Furthermore, English may also be considered as a foreign language for many Ugandans, particularly those in rural areas or with limited or no formal education. This is because these, like the students from other countries have limited access or exposure to the English Language. This study adopts the definition of EFL as the study of English by non-native speakers from a non-English-speaking

country in a context where there limited usage of the same language those learners.



EFL Learners in Uganda

The researcher takes note of the fact that EFL learners can be both adults and the young. However, this study focusses on only adult foreign language learners because they are the subjects of interest in this study. Furthermore, observations by the researcher indicate that adult language learners are commonly found in the adult language schools compared to their young counterparts who tend to join international schools or even the Ugandan primary or secondary schools to learn the English Language in addition to other content. The adult language schools are highly sought for by such adult language learners because of their flexible nature in

terms of time and how such adult language are treated or how they expect to be treated.

The adult language learners tend to enrol into the adult language schools to learn the English language for various reasons and they tend to have other roles or status such as diplomats, refugees or even business people who seek to ease communication with the people in Uganda. In other cases, the EFL learners are on transit to join universities here or in other English-speaking countries and so require proof of knowing the English Language. Drawing from the Ugandan EFL experience, the adult language learners come with very minimal and at times no knowledge of the English Language. They

start at zero level with the English and come with ambitions they expect to achieve at the end of the various levels that they undertake.

Drawing from the language acquisition and language learning domain, language is best learnt when still young due to the active presence of the language acquisition device. This enables the learners attain the language with a considerable degree of ease compared to their adult counterparts. This points to the fact that the adult learners of English tend to be challenged and disadvantaged in terms of language learning compared to their young counterparts. This therefore calls for innovation and hard work on the side of the teachers and learners to ensure that the expected results are realised. One of such elements of hard work is to ensure that reading comprehension strategies are devised, taught and well used to facilitate reading comprehension.

ESL learners in Uganda are characteristically introduced to the language at the lowest levels of education primary and secondary schools which is different from the adult language learners who join the language schools in Kampala. These receive continuous exposure to the English Language since it remains a subject and a medium of study. The ESL learners are comparatively better than their adult EFL counterparts because they have a vast exposure to the English language. They are in position to access and use the English Language in their communities and schools unlike their adult EFL counterparts who have minimal or no access before they come to learn it in Uganda.

The EFL learners have minimal opportunities to practice the English Language especially when they have just arrived in a community where they are going to study the English Language. This is because they come with very little or no exposure to the English Language and are thus fearful to even dare to express themselves in that language. Observations further indicate that after their English Language lessons, they resort to their home languages and spend time with friends or people with whom they share a country of origin. This situation justifies why the teachers, EFL instruction and experiences have to be quality to help move such learners from lower to higher levels of English Language use.

RELATED LITERATURE

Reading comprehension activities are grouped into three, similar to the three stages of the lessons. These are namely pre-reading activities, while reading activities and post reading activities. In the three stages teachers should train the students to be efficient and active readers in target language. Consequently, teachers have the responsibility of providing learners with activities that promote a balanced learning of EFL. While choosing activities to use in the class, the teacher seeks to facilitate learners' abilities to compare, inform, persuade, and analyse, which makes the author's goal and message explicit to the readers. Reading; like any other language skill is characteristically taught under the pre-writing, while-reading and post-reading stages of the lesson. At each stage of the lesson, there are corresponding reading comprehension activities which ought to be part and parcel of the lesson. When used, reading comprehension activities play a pivotal role in the EFL learners' pursuit of reading comprehension.

Edward (2001) asserts that the activities related to practical experiences of life will support the learners in converting information into individual knowledge that can be used in many diverse circumstances. This confirms that the activities ought to speak to the lives and experiences of the EFL learners if they are to be considered meaningful. The selection of the reading activities is done without their learners' input and consequently their views or interests are not accommodated. Through the reading comprehension activities, the learners have an opportunity to interact freely using the target language in order to learn well. Tuttle (2007) and Rivers (2010) on their part present ideal activities applied to the classroom. They suggest that such activities ought to be full of fun, engaging and achievable within a classroom context, while also focusing on authentic aspects of language use.

Teachers should therefore use activities and strategies for increasing the reading comprehension. The researcher's preliminary observations, however, indicate that teachers focus on covering the course requirements which characteristically lack depth, complexity, duration, and relevance to the real world. Studies on the nature of the reading activities

in school confirm that teachers give learners low-level work consisting of recognition and reproduction of memorized information or practice of isolated skills and do not supply contexts for functional uses.

Consequently, Herrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003) suggested 10 characteristics of authentic activities or tasks that, when used as design guidelines, may provide the necessary and relevant conditions for bridging the gap between the classroom and the real world. These are; 1. have real world relevance, 2. are ill-defined, requiring students to define the tasks and sub-tasks needed to complete the activity, 3. comprise complex tasks to be investigated by students over a sustained period of time, 4. provide the opportunity for students to examine the task from different perspectives, using a variety of resources, 5. provide the opportunity to collaborate, 6. provide the opportunity to reflect, 7. can be integrated and applied across different subject areas and lead beyond domain-specific outcomes, 8. are seamlessly integrated with assessment, 9. create polished products valuable in their own right rather than as preparation for something else, 10. allow competing solutions and diversity of outcome.

Activities are the means through which linguistic content is shared. Language classrooms especially foreign languages require a range of activities through which learners can access the linguistic input in a fun and relaxed way. In several classes, teachers determine how the classes will be conducted. The selection of the reading comprehension activities considers several factors. The teacher is required to have knowledge of the learners' background which also includes their cultural adaptation. The extent to which the foreign language learner has accepted and can successfully participate in the culture of the new language, gender. i.e. in some societies, males do not participate in certain types of mixed group activities.

Despite the above literature reviewed, it does not to reveal the reading comprehension activities used in the EFL class in Uganda. From the reviewed literature, it is evident that reading comprehension activities occupy a central position in the learning of EFL. However, the exact activities introduced by the

teacher and how the learners respond to such activities are yet to be known.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study design was used in order to establish the activities that were used in the EFL class. 10 EFL teachers from 10 adult language schools in Uganda were purposefully selected. The reason for selecting the classroom teachers as participants in this study was because they were actively involved in teaching English as a foreign language to advance learners according to the schools' classification/grading criteria.

Data were collected through lesson observations in order to establish the reading comprehension activities that were used during reading comprehension lessons and how the learners were responding to them. One advanced class in each of the 10 adult language schools was purposively selected and observed for at least 5 times in order to establish the activities the learners were taking part in during the reading comprehension lessons.

This study was guided by Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory which stresses that meaning cannot be created in isolation from the reader. Reading is therefore a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances. Both the reader and text are given relevance according to this theory in order to gain meaning of a text. Therefore, the process of reading comprehension requires an active transaction between readers, as the heart of the reading process, and the text at a particular time in a specific context in order to obtain meaning of the reading materials (Alvermann, 2013). As the reading activity takes place, the learners also transact with the activities that the teacher introduces. Data was thematically organised and later analysed drawing on the similarities and differences in the activities seen in the different EFL classes observed.

In the context of this study, readers bring their knowledge and experience to the text that the reading comprehension activities in the EFL classroom have activated. Through such activities, the learners are able to interact with the text as they seek to attain reading comprehension. Therefore, for comprehension to be attained, readers need to

interact with the text since the words alone in the text cannot carry meaning.

FINDINGS

Pre-Reading Activities Observed in the Ugandan EFL Classroom

Data from the observations made and feedback from the interviews revealed that the learners took part in the activities that the teachers arranged. The classes were teacher-centred and had limited room for flexibility on the side of the learners to engage freely in the activities. The following are the pre-reading activities that were observed during the reading comprehension lessons and how the EFL learners took part in;

Brainstorming

Here, the teacher in class posed questions to the learners to check their thoughts or knowledge about a subject before explaining anything about it. The question asked was; have you ever gone shopping in a mall in Kampala? What was your experience? Through this activity, the teacher aimed to check the learners' understanding of the concept of shopping and later on prepare their minds for the reading comprehension text about shopping in London. During the reading activity, the learners had an opportunity to compare the two shopping experiences basing on what they had read and also earlier experienced in Kampala and other cities. The teacher gave the class five minutes during which the learners shared information about their shopping experiences in Kampala and other cities. The teacher then gave them more five minutes to organize their ideas to form sentences.

Watching Short Video Clips

In this class, the teacher asked the learners to watch a short video of 4 minutes before the start of the class. After watching the video, the learners were asked to have a discussion with each other which was later followed by a general discussion involving all the students. Watching the video clips and discussions preceded the reading comprehension activity itself.

Role Plays

The teacher invited learners to take up roles of a patient and doctor. They acted out parts of a pre-reading dialogue, which was very exciting and memorable. The learners were asked to use language pertaining to the roles assigned to them before a reading text was introduced. This aroused the learners' interest in reading and prepared their minds for while-reading stage of the lesson.

Picture Descriptions

The teacher put a picture in front of the classroom and the learners are requested to look and later talk about it. The learners had an opportunity to say anything about the picture in terms of colour, size, shape, among others. The teacher asked prompting questions to guide the learners towards using descriptive language as contained had prepared to teach. and even write a paragraph about it. This was done for cover pages of texts and pictures related to the texts that the teacher had prepared for the learners to take part in.

Predictions

The teacher invited the learners to share their thoughts about the text based on its title, and illustrations. The intention was to give the learners an opportunity to reflect on the text basing on some of its features so that when they are later engaged in the actual reading, they are able to confirm or reject their earlier predictions about the same text. This was helpful in keeping the learners enthusiastic and motivated throughout the reading activity in order to see the outcomes of their predictions about the same text.

7 out of the 10 classes observed lacked pre-reading activities. During observation in one of the classes, the teacher entered the room, gave out the reading passages and asked the learners to read them and later write down their answers. In principle, this teacher expected the students to find the answers by themselves. Whereas it was acceptable to do that by way of testing their reading comprehension abilities, this was just a lesson where the teacher was expected to teach not to give a test since the test was not announced for the learners to prepare their minds for it. The same teacher later returned the marked work

and went through the questions to give the correct answers so that the students could do corrections. In this same class, no special assistance was given to the learners as a way of preparing them for the reading lesson or even to justify why their responses were wrong or right. EFL teachers need to be intentional about the use of pre-reading activities and should allow learners enough time to enjoy them because of the benefits associated with their use. Teachers who do not apply pre-reading activities miss an opportunity of preparing the learners and capturing their minds to focus on the lesson to be conducted. Eventually, such teachers suffer to get the learners' attention and maintain it throughout the lesson because the teacher has not taken time to arouse such learners' interests.

While-reading activities observed in the Ugandan EFL Classroom

The reading activities at this stage serve to increase students' understanding of the text and enable the teacher check if students understand what they are reading. They further avail an opportunity for the teachers to check the areas where students need help during the lesson. At this stage, learners should be guided by the teacher through the process of interpreting the text using a range of reading activities. During the reading lessons observed at school A, the learners were involved in reading texts on their own without assistance from the teacher. The teachers gave the learners texts to read and analyse and later respond to the questions at the end of the passage. From the interviews with the learners, it was confirmed that the teachers simply returned to mark the assignments given and later share what they considered to be the correct responses to the questions given.

At language school B, the teacher took the learners through the reading task, helping them break it down for them to understand it. The learners actively participated in the lessons and were involved in interpreting the text and confirming the predictions made earlier during the pre-reading stage of the lesson. This was seen as one of the successful reading comprehension lessons because the teacher took the learners through the text, guiding them towards confirming or rejecting the predictions made. This activity was exciting for the students, and

they demonstrated understanding of the text by talking about it and answering the questions correctly.

At language school C, the students were involved in identifying the subject matter of the passage. The teacher first introduced the title and shared some pictures which aroused the learners' interest in reading. The learners in that lesson went ahead to identify connectors in the text they were reading. At a certain point, the learners were involved in pair work rehearsing and miming the actions of the characters in the texts read. This was very exciting for the students because they were evidently enthusiastic while taking part in the role play. Having had an opportunity of taking part in such an activity, the storyline/ plot of the play sticks into their mind and so they cannot not forget the subject matter of such a text read.

According to the while reading observations made, some of the learners in the language schools were not assisted to read and interpret the text. In a situation where they were interacting with a new text introduced by the teacher, the learners they should have been assisted to appreciate the new concepts which the teacher wanted them learn. One of the teachers in her own words said, "learners are meant to read on their own as I come to mark/check their answers to see if they are correct. If they are correct, well, and good. If they are not, then I come to class and do corrections with them".

During the while-reading part of the lesson, the learners also took part in activities such as visualizing, predicting, asking questions, and summarising. Under visualizing, the learners were asked to think about the actions /scenes in the text for them to have a feel of what the text was all about. While reading, the learners were actively involved in predicting or telling beforehand what was coming next in the text. Summarizing was made possible through the teacher asking the learners to focus on the contents of a paragraph they had just read. The learners were asked to talk about it in a paragraph. This enabled learners an opportunity to assess their understanding of the parts of the text they had read.

Post-reading activities observed in the Ugandan EFL Classroom

As observed in the literature review, the post reading activities are meant to provide the learner with opportunities for reflecting on the text as they further enhance their knowledge or understanding of the text. The post-reading activities help to consolidate the gains made by the learners after the reading comprehension lesson. In the absence of post-reading activities, the learners lack adequate opportunity for practicing reflecting and demonstrating the understanding they have attained.

Out of the 10 classes observed, 3 teachers gave post-reading activities for learners to reflect on in 3 classes. In the 3 classes above, it was up to the learners to do the activities or not because the teachers never expressed interest in supervising the activities or even having a look at what the learners had done thereafter. As part of the post-reading activities seen, the learners were required to react to the text they had just read. For example, the learners were required to make their assessment of a text read by commenting on whether they liked it, and found it useful or not.

The learners took part in activities such as story retelling where they were asked to verbally tell the story of the text they had just read. They were also asked write a summary of the text they had read and more imaginative or 'what if' questions were given to the learners to respond to at this post-reading stage. These activities helped the learners to reflect on the text read, remember what they could have missed and to share their personal views about the text read.

In the remaining 7 classes, no post-reading activities were assigned to the learners, and the reflection ended with the lesson. Without post-reading activities, the learners immediately switched to other things forgetting the focus of the lesson and so no additional learning took place thereafter. This was the observation in several classes which did not have post reading activities because the learners immediately left the class and did not have time to talk about what they had read. On the other hand, in the three classes where the post reading activities were involved, the learners stayed behind and were

seen discussing and at times arguing about the text read.

The post reading stage was not just an opportunity for them to demonstrate their understanding of the text but a golden one to understand the same text better. The related post-reading activities observed included students answering questions related to the text. The learners were also able to summarise the text read at the end of the reading activity as another way of confirming that they understood the text they had read. The students were also given chance to present follow-up texts about what they had just read. Here, the learners had an opportunity of providing alternative texts as a demonstration of their understanding of the text.

Learners' Response to the Reading Comprehension Activities Used in the EFL Class

Learners' responses to reading comprehension activities in class varied depending on several factors, including their individual abilities, interests, and the way the activities were structured. Below is a presentation of their response;

Some learners were passive and did not actively engage in the activities. Others refused to take part in some of the activities because they were deemed inappropriate. Some of the activities that called for holding hands between male and female, singing and dancing were rejected by some of the learners because they were unacceptable to their culture and religious practices. Despite repeated encouragement to participate, the learners refused and the shy ones reluctantly participated.

Some activities were found less exciting to the learners, so they were less excited to take part despite the teachers' repeated calls for active participation. The same learners responded differently to the reading comprehension activities that aligned with their personal interests. They freely took up roles in the reading comprehension activities, demonstrating enthusiasm for reading and a willingness to participate whenever called upon. Furthermore, the way students responded also depended on the format of the activity. For example, discussions were more exciting and easier for the learners to participate in than role plays which required a few people to act in front of the class.

In other cases, the learners were shy to take part in the classroom activities. They responded that they were not in position to take part in the activities because of their limited ability to use the English language. One of the learners said that he could not participate because he did not know all the words to use in the activities. Consequently, the learner could not participate as expected. In other classes, no reading comprehension activities were seen. An interaction with the teacher of that class revealed that he did not think that activities were necessary in that lesson because he believed that there were no relevant activities to be used to teach the reading comprehension content that day.

When teachers were asked about their learners' participation in the selection of the activities, all the teachers confirmed that they did not involve their learners in the selection of the reading activities and texts to be read. One of the teachers added that she chooses the activities thinking about her learners' interests with a belief that they would enjoy the activities.

Successful readers demonstrated a good understanding of the text, provided acceptable responses to questions, and actively participated in the reading activities. It is therefore essential for educators to be aware of these various responses or reactions to the reading comprehension activities and provide support address the diverse needs of their learners as they prepare and apply reading comprehension activities in their classes.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The findings indicate that pre-reading comprehension activities were the most profound in the EFL classes observed. This is premised on the understanding that the learners have to be prepared for the reading comprehension by way of getting their attention. This is because like Taglieber (1988), the teachers considered pre-reading activities as motivational devices, which might not only increase students' comprehension of the text they read, but might also make reading more enjoyable and thus encourage more extensive reading. However, getting the learners' attention in preparation for a detailed reading activity is not enough. That attention received has to be maintained throughout the lesson through more and relevant activities that will keep

them interested in the lesson. Indeed, the while reading and post reading stages of the lessons which were characterised by very few activities were boring to the extent that the learners lost interest in the lessons.

It is also worth noting that the use of reading comprehension activities at times comes with mixed feelings of excitement and fear to read in the new language since such EFL learners have had minimal interactions with the target language. Such EFL learners tend to be shy and at times have cultural and religious beliefs that limit their participation in such activities. On the other hand, where the activities are exciting to the learners, teachers should be able to use them continually and guide their use to ensure that they motivate the learners to read and achieve reading comprehension. At times, when the activities are used, the learners get excited and miss out on the reason for the very activities. This is when the EFL teacher should come up to guide the learners towards the reading comprehension goals of the class.

The classes that lacked the reading comprehension activities were less active and the reading morale of the learners was observed to be very low. This is supported by Tudor (1989) who named pre-reading activities "enabling activities" because they provide a reader with the necessary background to organize activity and to comprehend the material. Therefore, classes that lack pre-reading activities tend to leave the learners without any resources and background knowledge to rely on in order to comprehend the reading material before them. Eventually, such learners lose motivation to read. Whereas some teachers had prepared some post-reading activities, they were not used in a considerable number of classes and where they were used, they were not supervised. This is because the teachers assigned the activities and students had the onus to do them or not since the teacher did not remain to supervise them or even express interest in confirming that the learners did them.

The findings confirm that the reading comprehension activities were few in the EFL classes observed and their order of occurrence in terms of number was pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. The learners confirmed that

the activities were very instrumental in arousing their interest in reading comprehension lessons when used because some of them were fun. The situation in the 7 classes where no activities were seen could be attributed to employing unqualified teachers who lack the appreciation and mastery of the fact that reading comprehension activities are for the learners' attainment of reading comprehension. This is confirmed by Botha et al. (2008) who claim that the employment of unqualified language teachers has had a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning of how to read. Had the adult schools hired qualified teachers, there would have been activities seen in at least one of the 4 times the lessons were observed.

Reading comprehension activities play a crucial role in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. These activities are designed to help learners understand and interpret written texts, develop vocabulary, and enhance their overall language proficiency. They are an avenue through which learners transact with the text. Pre-reading activities increase comprehension by activating the learners' prior knowledge and generating interest in the topic or lesson to be studied. The teacher should pay attention to the learners' interests when choosing activities to be used in the reading comprehension lessons. When activities are carefully selected and used, they arouse the learners' interest in reading which in turn positively impacts on their reading comprehension. It is evident that the EFL learners in the observed classes missed out on the above and other benefits associated with the use of reading activities especially while-reading and post-reading activities which to a large extent were lacking in the classes. This in turn suggests that their reading comprehension was also negatively affected.

Learners' response to the reading comprehension activities is largely determined by the quality of such activities and how they are chosen from the learners' point of view. This implies that teachers of EFL should be deliberate in their choice of activities in order to ensure that they create the intended learning impact. When learners interact or transact with the reading activities and the text during their reading comprehension lessons, meaning is created and comprehension can be potentially achieved. Therefore, reading is a social interaction or

transaction during which learners interact or transact with the text and with each other. Such social interactions are essential for the learners to attain reading comprehension and they ought to be enriched by a conducive environment in class that facilitates their free interaction between the learners themselves and later with their teacher. That conducive environment is realized through the use of relevant reading comprehension activities. When such interactions are enabled through the reading comprehension activities, the learners are in position to acquire new vocabulary and demonstrate understanding of the text through talking about it (discussions and debates), summarising and text evaluation.

In a reading lesson, learners bring experiences and expectations to interact with the reading comprehension text. The learners rely on these experiences as they read in order to realise reading comprehension. The learner experiences combined with reading comprehension activities become very instrumental in facilitating the EFL learners' reading comprehension. Learner experiences (background knowledge); activated by the reading comprehension activities arouses their interests and prepares their minds to read and comprehend the text.

These findings seem to confirm the study assumptions which we based on the transactional theory of reading comprehension. Just like the tenets of the transactional theory posit, the learner and the text are very important in the reading process. Their thoughts and experiences ought to be taken into consideration while selecting activities and texts for them (Rosenblatt, 1978). This would go a long way in ensuring that the activities are engaging and relevant to the reading task at hand. Furthermore, it would be useful in determining the learners' participation and eventual attainment of reading comprehension.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the foregoing, it can be concluded that reading comprehension activities play a vital role in facilitating the learners' interest in reading comprehension because their use comes with benefits such as motivating the learners and making them active and independent readers who are able to

pursue reading comprehension. These activities, however, ought to be selected with the learners' interests in mind and putting into consideration their experiences, and socio-cultural practices. The EFL teachers should therefore create and introduce very many activities in their EFL classes especially while activities help the learners experience the content of the lesson. The teachers should think creatively while selecting and applying reading comprehension activities.

The study established that in the classes where reading activities were used, largely pre-reading activities were seen, with very few while-reading and post-reading activities. All the three stages in the progress of the reading comprehension are essential and so relevant activities should be selected and introduced to the classroom. The pre-reading activities prepare the minds for the readers, the while-reading activities help them experience reading itself and interpret the text. The post-reading activities help in assessing whether the learners have successfully read and understood the text. Teachers must therefore be very innovative and select reading activities in which the learners will participate to prepare their minds for reading to consolidate what they have read or assess their understanding of what has been taught.

Well-thought-out activities from the learners' perspective are very crucial in enhancing such learners' interest in reading. This is in line with Harmer (2007) who suggests that students should be involved in creating their own comprehension tasks. These must be carefully selected because the learners love taking part in them and they stimulate their minds to understand what they read.

The learners are as important as the text in the reading activity and so thinking about them or involving them in the selection of the reading texts and activities will improve their reading experiences and participation in the reading comprehension activities in the class. Reading comprehension activities are an integral part of EFL classes, as they help learners develop language skills, vocabulary, and critical thinking abilities. By incorporating these activities into their lessons, educators can create a stimulating and effective learning environment,

fostering language development and overall comprehension for their students.

In conclusion, the use of reading activities was minimal in the EFL classrooms observed. The activities were used in a few of the classes observed and pre-reading activities were mainly used. While-reading and post-reading activities were the least used. This study therefore concludes that teachers lack adequate knowledge of the use of reading activities and those who possess such knowledge do not use it as expected. The study recommends the use of reading comprehension activities at all stages of the lessons (pre-, while and post-reading stages) to the improvement of the learners' reading comprehension abilities. The study further recommends that selection of the activities should take into consideration the learners' interests and their input in order to ensure that meaningful activities are selected and used in the classes.

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