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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ASSESSMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE READING LESSON IMPLEMENTATION IN METTU TOWN: THE CASE OF GRADE TEN ABDI BORI SECONDARY SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted on Grade ten English language reading lesson implementation in Abdi Bori Secondary School in Mettu town. The central intention of this research was to examine the implementation of English language reading lesson in relation to the students' textbook. To attain this objective, descriptive research method was employed. Four Grade ten English language teachers were taken using comprehensive sampling technique. Thirty per cent of the students (240) were randomly selected by lottery method to be the sample of the study. Necessary data were gathered using observation, interview and questionnaires. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The result of the study revealed that most of the teachers rarely implement reading lessons in line with the procedures prescribed in the Teacher's Book. Moreover, English teachers in the school under study were observed sometimes jumping over some reading lessons though they prepared lesson plans. As a result, the three phases of reading lesson presentation procedures suggested in the textbook for teaching reading were rarely, or totally not at all, practiced in grade ten in the school under study.

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INTRODUCTION

Teachers' actual way of reading lesson presentation has a decisive role in bringing about the desired change of learners behavior. Concerning this point, Widdoson (1990) argues that "Designing a syllabus with a textbook and putting it into use does not necessarily bring change in the teachers' classroom practices." Strengthening this idea, Harrison (1996) points out that developing teaching materials alone does not necessarily guarantee the attainment of the objectives unless it is put to practice through appropriate methodology in the classrooms. This shows that the innovation or change in teaching materials does not bring the desired change expected in the language teaching and learning program if not implemented properly. In connection with this view, Nunan (1989) argued that the learners' classroom experiences will be more important than statements of intent in determining learning outcomes. This means classroom practice plays a vital role in the students' success or failure in the learning process. Concerning the significant role of classroom experiences, Allwright and Bailey (1991: xv) report the following: ". . . no matter how much intellectual energy is put into the invention of new methods (or of new approaches to syllabus design and so on), what really matters is what happens when teachers and learners get together in the classrooms."

A similar idea that goes with the above view is forwarded by Widdowson (1990). He proposes that teachers who execute the innovated or revised syllabus should have a good knowledge of how to the specified contents put into practice in line with the approach the teaching materials favor. The 1994 new Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia has given due emphasis to the use of English as a medium of instruction in the secondary and tertiary levels. To this end, the practice of the English language skills is indispensably much important in language education. As language learning is the mainly mastery of the four language skills and reading is one of these skills, it calls for well designed teaching procedures and techniques to enable students at different levels to make use of the target language appropriately. In other words, reading provides effective and adequate ways of learning a language. Therefore, teaching reading, like other skills, needs carefully selected activities, methods and procedures as indicated in grade nine English syllabi. More importantly, the teaching of reading in grade nine is a decisive activity to lay base and to establish the foundation for the secondary and tertiary levels. The reading section in all the units of the Students' Book is divided into two sections: the comprehension and the reading section. The comprehension section comes first in all of the units and contains the text for intensive reading and study. This means, the text in the comprehension section is the main focus for the topic of the unit. It is the basis for the activities in the other sections of the unit. In other words, the passage in this section is meant for intensive study, i.e. for closer and careful

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handling of reading comprehension than the extensive reading text provided for pleasure reading in the reading section at the end of every unit of the textbook. Hence, the reading skills are mainly treated in the comprehension section of the textbook. The comprehension section includes activities such as skimming and scanning, vocabulary extension, oral and written comprehension, oral communication, note taking, interpreting, completing and producing tables and diagrams. Accordingly, the comprehension section of the English textbook accommodates reading strategies like pre-reading discussion questions, skimming and/or scanning, reading and post-reading discussions. To this effect, this particular study focuses on investigating English language teachers' reading lesson presentation with special focus on grade ten in a selected secondary school Mettu town.

Statement of the Problem: The teacher's guide for grade ten suggests pedagogical procedures like introducing the passage, skimming/scanning, reading the passage, discussing the passage, answering comprehension questions and follow-up activities, that English language teachers should follow to implement the comprehension sections in the textbook. However, the teachers can use any alternative techniques that they have found to be effective in presenting the reading lessons. Hence, English language teachers are expected to present the reading lessons following the methods and procedures stated in the teaching materials. Though reading skill in foreign language is unquestionably important and ways of presenting reading lessons are suggested in the teaching materials as indicated above, studies like the PhD dissertation of Gebremedhin(1993), Gessesse(1999) and Taye(1999) indicate the reading ability of Ethiopian secondary and tertiary level students is deteriorating over time. Similarly, there are a number of MA theses conducted on the reading ability of students at the secondary and the second cycle primary schools. However, all these studies focused on the tertiary and secondary level of English reading ability of students and their findings concluded that the English language reading ability of Ethiopian secondary and tertiary students has been declining but say nothing about the cause. Similarly, the researcher has seen students who cannot read and hence fail to understand what the textbook says and do their home work, tests and assignments in wrong way when the researcher was teaching in a high school. Still in the university, the researcher is facing similar problems especially on freshmen students. The researcher doubts that the cause of this problem may be the gap between English language teachers' reading lesson presentation and pedagogical suggestions to present reading.

With regard to research studies conducted on the English teachers' reading lesson presentation, the researcher has not been able to find studies conducted. Thus, the researcher's assumption is that this study might give some sort of clue to the causes of the reading problems which might be lack of well designed methods and techniques of reading lesson presentation. Therefore, the researcher was motivated to assess the English language teachers' reading lesson implementation in Abdi Bori Secondary School in Mettu town.

To this end, the following research questions were formulated

- What are the gaps between the pedagogical suggestions for grade nine reading lesson presentation

in the teachers' guide and the teachers' actual classroom reading lesson practice?

- How do English language teachers present a reading lesson on the basis of English textbook for Grade ten?

Objectives of the Study

Main objective: The main objective of this study was to investigate grade ten English language teachers' reading lesson implementation. Through this main objective, the research attempted to meet the following specific objectives.

Specific objectives

The specific objectives of this study were

- To identify what techniques and procedures of reading lessons implementations are being used in English classroom especially in grade 10.
- To identify whether the techniques and procedures of teachers' reading lesson implementation match or mismatch with what is suggested in the teaching materials.

Significance of the Study: The grade ten English textbook, which was designed recently within the framework of communicative approach to language teaching, is now in use in all secondary schools in the country. Assessing the English language teachers' reading lesson implementation practice in the classroom is important to get a clear picture of how teachers are implementing reading lessons in the English textbook for grade ten currently.

Hence, this study may be used for

- Curriculum designers and policy makers.
- Teacher trainers to identify and bridge English teachers methodology gap.

The Scope of the Study: This study strictly limits itself to assessment of grade ten English language teachers' reading lesson implementation on the basis of English language textbook. In other words, the study focuses on examining whether there is a match or mismatch between the prescribed procedures in the current textbook for presenting reading lessons and teachers' actual reading lesson presentation in grade ten in Mettu town.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The aim of this study was to find out whether grade ten English teachers in Abdi Bori Secondary School implement reading lessons appropriately or not. To this end, the following is description of the method of the study.

Research Design: The study was conducted in Abdi Bori Secondary School which is located in Mettu town. This school was purposely selected because Mettu town is the work place of the researcher.

Participants of the study: The populations of the study were grade ten English language teachers and grade ten students in Abdi bori secondary school.

There were 4 grade ten English teachers and 803 grade ten students in 16 sections. Therefore, out of this total population, all grade ten English teachers of the school were included in the study by using comprehensive sampling method as their number is small enough to be handled. And 240 students (30% of total population of grade 10 students in Abdi Bori secondary school), were taken to fill out the questionnaire. This sample size was equally shared for each section of Grade ten in the school by quota sampling method, i.e. it was first decided to take fifteen students from each section, and lottery method was used in all sections by distributing wrapped pieces of paper bearing chance in it to select students who would be the sample member.

Sampling Technique: Four English teachers were teaching Grade ten English in the school. All the four teachers were included in the study as their number is easy to handle. Eight hundred and three students were attending in grade ten out of which 240 (30%) students were randomly taken by lottery method to be included in the population of the study.

Instruments of data collection: In the study, three kinds of data gathering instruments: observation, questionnaire and interview were used to collect data.

Observation: All grade ten English teachers in the school were taken and their actual reading lesson presentations were observed four times each. An observation checklist with twenty-four items was developed and used during the reading lesson implementation. The checklist was designed to examine grade ten English language teachers' reading lesson presentation practices in relation to the English textbook for grade ten. The checklist contained a list of possible roles and behavioral patterns which the teaching materials for grade ten and the literature suggest. The items in the checklist include roles and practices that the syllabus and the Teacher's Guide suggest for teaching the reading section of the textbook. The observation checklist had five scales: always (4), often (3), sometimes (2), rarely (1), and never (0). Each teacher was observed four times for each role and/or activity. In each single observation, a teacher was assigned under the dichotomous division of yes/no. If a teacher exhibited a role or an activity in each of the four observation of reading lesson presentation, he/she would earn (4) "yes" and would be assigned in the category of always (4). If a teacher failed to manifest a role or an activity in one of the observations, he/she would earn (3) "yes" and (1) "no" and would be assigned in the category of often (3). Similar procedures were used for the other categories to incorporate the information obtained from observation to that of interview and the questionnaires.

Interview for teachers: Structured and Semi-structured interview with thirty- one questions was prepared by the researcher and administered on 4 grade ten English teachers in the school. The first section deals with the respondents' background information about teacher's book. It aims at eliciting information whether the teachers use the procedures suggested for them to teach the reading lessons. The second section, which consists 27 questions, was intended to elicit information from the respondents about their actual classroom reading lesson practices.

Questionnaire for students: The questionnaire was developed by the researcher from review literature and grade ten English

language teaching materials and distributed to only students who were randomly selected by lottery method from each section of grade ten. The questionnaire had 27 questions intended to elicit information from the student about teachers' reading lesson implementations. The questionnaire was distributed for 240 students who were selected for the study. Fortunately, all of them filled out the questionnaire and gave it back to the researcher.

Data gathering procedures: The researcher first accomplished classroom observation and interview and questionnaire followed one after the other. This was done deliberately because teachers might modify their classroom practice behaviour, and the actual classroom practices might be turned to be artificial if interview was conducted first. Data gathered through these tools were analyzed and discussed.

Method of data analysis and discussion: Data gathered by observation was changed to the scales ranged from 'always' to 'never'. Data obtained from observation, interview and questionnaire were tallied, tabulated and summarized for interpretation and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. Data gathered through class observation, interview and questionnaire were analyzed independently and in an intermingled way. Finally, summary, conclusion and recommendation were drawn from the analysis and discussion.

DISCUSSION

All the teachers claimed that they use the Teacher's Book for teaching the reading lessons in the textbook. As to the usefulness of it, they reported that they find the material useful to implement the reading section of the textbook. In addition, the teachers' responses indicate that they all follow the procedures suggested in the Teacher's Book for presenting the lessons. However, what the observation result shows is the contrary of this. Moreover, the teachers' response to the item which is an extension of the question that elicit the above response, indicates only one teacher always follows the procedures while the three said they follow it sometimes. However, as the researcher observed the actual lesson implementation, teachers rarely follow the prescribed procedures in the Teacher's Book contrary to their claims in the interview question. Following, the main findings of the study are discussed.

Pre-reading Phase: A carefully designed check list was used to observe the teaching and learning practices in the English language reading lessons. Accordingly, the four English teachers were observed four times while teaching reading. The performances of each teacher were checked against the items in the check-list which were developed from the teaching materials and the literature. The practices of teaching reading stated in the checklist and checked against the teachers' performance was classified into the three phases of teaching and learning reading. To this end, the first 6 questions referred to the pre-reading phase in the reading practice. The next 7 questions were on while reading and the rest 10 were on post reading phases. What was seen by the observation was that all teachers did not use pre-reading phase activities at all. In other words, students were not made to activate their prior knowledge so as to gain new information. On the other hand, similar questions were provided for teachers as interview and

for students as questionnaire to find out whether teachers would accomplish the pre-reading activities and procedures before reading. The response obtained from both teachers and students indicates that teachers do not accomplish the pre-reading activities as proposed by the syllabus. In general concerning the pre-reading lesson implementation as can be inferred from the data, there is a mismatch between what is suggested in the Teacher's Book and what teachers actually did in the classrooms.

While-Reading Lesson Presentation: The while-reading stage is an important part of reading lesson. The teachers are responsible for helping their students; use every possible strategy to develop efficient reading skills at this stage. Moreover, it is a stage where teachers' close and right kind of guidance enables the learners to comprehend the content and the rhetorical structure of a text (Nuttall, 1982). Therefore, in the observation, the subjects were observed whether the while-reading lesson implementation was in accordance with the procedures suggested in the Teacher's Book. The data gathered from the subjects are presented as follows. The second 7 questions/items/ in the observation check-list were prepared to see the while reading activities of English language teachers' reading lesson implementation. Accordingly, the first item was intended to see whether teachers engaged their students in silent and independent reading. The result shows that almost all teachers never did it.

The next item was intended to check whether the teachers first loudly read the passage for students and let students read it turn by turn. The observation result on this item depicted that the teachers never did this at all. When it comes to the third item, it was intended to see if teachers explain about the reading text to the students. The observation result shows that some teachers always explain the ideas of the reading text while few teachers do not totally do it. The fourth item was intended to see whether teachers let their students read the text at their homes and do the comprehension questions. The result obtained from the observation shows that two of the three observed teachers often assigned students for this activity while one teacher totally did not. Another question was prepared to see if the teachers make students guess the meanings of some new words from the contexts. The result revealed that only one of the three teachers rarely did it while the other two teachers never did. The last three items were prepared to see whether teachers make their students guess the meanings of unfamiliar words using their prior knowledge, draw the attention of students to see relation between different parts of the reading texts using different methods and help students comprehend the text respectively, all teachers never did the activities except for focusing on grammatical patterns.

Teachers' interview and students' questionnaire concerning the while reading: The result obtained from teachers' interview and students' questionnaire concerning the while reading stage of grade ten English language teachers' reading lesson implementation shows that there is a disparity between what the book suggests and what the teachers really do in the actual classroom. For example, the reading class was dominated by loud reading, teachers' explanation, and students were assigned to read the passage at their homes and do the comprehension exercise (which is not recommended). Moreover, teachers sometimes jump the reading lesson though they prepare daily lesson plan accordingly. Silent reading was not properly practiced in the classroom.

Hence, it is possible to conclude from these data that English teachers are not implementing the while reading phase of lesson presentation in line with the suggested way of presenting reading in the materials for grade ten.

Post-reading Phase of Lesson Presentation: The post-reading phase is the last phase of reading lesson presentation. It is the stage at which review of the content of the passage and linguistic elements and other language skills are widely treated (Mera, 1999). In the data collecting tools the subjects were asked whether the post-reading lesson implementation is going on in the actual classroom as prescribed in the teacher's book. The last ten items in the observation check-list were prepared to see whether the post reading phase of reading lesson presentation is going on in line with the suggested way in the teaching-learning materials (teachers' book and textbook). Like that of the pre-reading phase in which all the three teachers failed to perform the activities in almost all items, all teachers failed to perform the activities almost in all four observed times except for the item which was intended to see if teachers engage students in some follow up activities like completing tables and filling charts, in which three of the four teachers appear to perform for three of four observed days. Therefore, it turned out to be impossible to change the "Yes" "No" observation checklist into scale that ranges from "always" to "never" since the practices were not totally taking place in this phase, too. In the teachers' interview and students' questionnaire, 10 questions were intended to see the post-reading phase. Depending up on the obtained information, it seems plausible to conclude that the students hardly develop the skills of analyzing, interpreting and summarizing a text, which they need across the curriculum for academic purposes.

Summary and Conclusion

This study was carried out with the aim of investigating the way English language teachers implement reading lessons in comparison with the textbook for grade ten in a selected government school in Mettu town. To this end, a methodology of conducting the study was designed in which different instruments were employed. Classroom observation was the major instrument followed by teacher's interview and students' questionnaire. The analysis of responses obtained from these sources revealed that English teachers' way of implementing reading lessons is not as prescribed in the teaching materials. As far as pre-reading lesson implementation is concerned, the data obtained from the subjects indicated that the teachers rarely introduce the passage to their students or they even do not do it at all. In addition, they do not engage their students in pair/group discussion on pre-reading questions; they totally jump over the pre-reading activities. In my view this might be due to fixed chairs and desks that likely inhibit to organize pairs and group work easily within the allotted 40 minutes. Moreover, the teachers rarely engage their students in previewing the texts focusing their students' attention on title, subtitles, and/or other visual clues in or around the passage. Furthermore they rarely set purposes and train their students in skimming and scanning strategies to enable their learners become efficient readers in their academic career. By the same indication, concerning the while-reading phase of lesson presentation, the data from the three sources revealed that it was dominated by teachers' loud reading. Silent reading was never practiced in the reading classroom where it should be predominantly expected to be practiced as suggested by the teacher's guide.

In addition, the teachers read orally and explain the content of the passage to the students. This shows that the teaching of reading focuses on content teaching rather than the intended reading skills. Moreover, the students were assigned frequently to read the passage at their homes and come to class with the comprehension exercises copied on to their notebooks to save their class time for comprehension work. Therefore, it was not clear whether the students really read the text at home or they merely come to class simply copying the questions. Furthermore concerning word guessing strategies in reading, teachers never/rarely make their students guess the meanings of new words in the passage using either contextual clues or word building processes. As observed in the classroom, they usually see it as a vocabulary teaching rather than as one part of teaching reading comprehension. As a result they associate it with the vocabulary section of the textbook and may treat it in the vocabulary section. Again the data obtained from students' questionnaire and classroom observation indicated that teachers never draw their students' attention to the relationship between parts of the passage. For example, the classroom observation data yielded that the teachers never engage their students to work through the passage paragraph by paragraph to comprehend the ideas of the text. They also never draw their students' attention on the organizational patterns of the text and help them see the relationship between the different parts of the passage so as to enable them grasp the main ideas of the text.

With regard to the post-reading phase, the data revealed that teachers mostly engage their students in individual writing to respond to the comprehension questions. In other words, this indicates that teachers never engage their students in pair/group work to discuss the comprehension activities in order to come up with various interpretations of the questions. Though individual writing to respond to the text is crucial part of reading lessons, pair/group work, in which students discuss about the text and text-related tasks are also important and required aspect in reading lesson presentation (Williams 1986, p. 42). However, this crucial part of reading lesson was missing in the actual reading classes observed. The data obtained give that teachers never engage their students in pair/group discussion to compare and contrast their answers on the comprehension questions after reading. Therefore, activities and roles related to pair/group work seem rarely or missing in the classroom reading lesson implementation. However, the Teacher's Book explicitly suggests the procedures for the teachers on how to organize their students in pair/group work to compare and contrast their answers on comprehension questions at post-reading lesson presentation.

In addition, the data from this study revealed that teachers rarely and never give their students the general nature and aims of the comprehension activities at all. This means they merely assign the students to work on the task without informing them the purpose of the comprehension activities. Nevertheless, the teacher's guide clearly suggests the teachers to inform their students the general nature and purpose of each comprehension activities. The teachers claimed that they engage the students frequently in follow-up activities such as completing tables, diagrams, writing compositions etc. Nevertheless, the data obtained from the subjects revealed that English teachers never ask their students to summarize and comment on the main idea of the passage. Therefore, English teachers in the school under discussion are not properly training their students in interpreting what they have read from their own viewpoints

either supporting or opposing the ideas treated in the passage. Generally, English language teachers' reading lesson presentation in grade ten in the school under discussion was dominated by loud reading of teachers, content explanation, assigning the students to read at their homes and. As a result, there is a gap between the pedagogical procedures suggested in the Teacher's Book for teaching reading lessons and the teachers' actual classroom reading lesson presentation practices.

Conclusion

On the basis of the results obtained from the classroom observations, interview and questionnaires the following conclusions can be drawn:

- English teachers' way of implementing reading lessons is not as intended in the teaching materials
- While-reading phase of lesson presentation is dominated by teachers' loud reading
- teachers never engage their students in pair/group work to discuss the comprehension activities to come up with various interpretations of the questions
- teachers sometimes jump over some reading lessons regardless of the daily lesson plan they prepare to present the reading lesson

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