Pre-reading Activities: University ESL/EFL Teachers' Practices and Views[1]

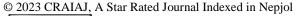Bal Ram Adhikari & Kumar Narayan Shrestha

Abstract

The literature on reading pedagogy has recognized the pivotal role of pre-reading activities in preparing students as readers for the actual act of reading. In this regard, the current paper aimed to investigate University ESL/EFL teachers' use of pre-reading activities in teaching B.Ed. English major reading courses at a constituent campus of Tribhuvan University. To this end, a case study design was adopted comprising classroom observation and semi-structured interview methods to collect data from four purposively selected English teachers. The findings show personalization of the topic, contextualization of the topic, digging into the title, pre-teaching key vocabulary items, and knowing the author as the most frequently used pre-reading activities. Despite this, students were found to be inadequately engaged in the pre-reading stage for want of variety in pre-reading activities and students' poor participation. Moreover, coursebook pre-reading activities did not form part of reading lessons for several reasons. Finally, implications are considered for the integration of pre-reading activities for effective reading pedagogy.

***Keywords*:** Pre-reading activities, Pre-reading stage, Reading performance, Schema, Schema theory

Introduction

The literature abounds with the studies that have documented the centrality of reading in students' overall academic development and performance (Carrell & Grabe,

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2002; Grabe, 2002; Krashen, 2004; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Rai 2015; Rahman, 2018; Chaudhry & Al-Adwani, 2019). Reading has morphed into a survival skill in the present literacy-prioritized and information-hungry society, pervading and affecting all walks of life, including daily chores, education, politics, and employment. One's ability (or inability) to read affects not only their everyday life but also determines their access to knowledge, financial success, and social mobility as well as imagination and creativity. Reading and writing skills provide better life chances and opportunities and are highly valued for their transformative and emancipatory functions, as they have been seen as responsible for the reduction of poverty, crime rate, and people's morality (National Literacy Trust, 2011; Gregory, 2013; Watkins, 2017).

Studies have reported multifaceted benefits of reading (see, Bridges, 2014; Krashen, 2004). Drawing insights from various studies, Krashen (2004) concludes that reading is the only way to develop literacy, and free volunteer reading in particular has a dramatic effect on language acquisition. Krashen further asserts that reading contributes to cognitive development, and provides motivation, inspiration, language, content, and style for writing. Krashen's assertion resonates with the finding of the U.S. Department of Education (as cited in Bridges, 2014) that recognizes avid, independent reading as a "precursor to better skills acquisition, superior grades, desirable liferelated to income, profession, employment and other attributes" (p. 45). Likewise, Brozo et al. (2008) and Guthrie (2012) associate students' academic achievement with their reading habits by stating that those who read widely are higher achievers than those who read rarely and narrowly.

Reading, unlike listening and speaking, is a learned skill. It calls for formal instruction not only in the second language but also in the first language (Adhikari & Poudel, 2020). In academic contexts, students read not only to comprehend a text but also to synthesize, interpret, evaluate, and transfer information from the text to other skills such as reading and writing (Grabe, 2009). Students' ability to perform multiple and complex tasks on a written text is largely subject to the quality of reading instruction adopted by teachers. Hence, the issue of whether and to what extent and how reading instruction helps students develop reading skills by providing space and opportunities for them to engage with texts merits exploration. In this context, the current paper reports the findings from our study that aimed to explore practices of teaching reading at the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) level. Herein, we present only the findings concerning

pre-reading activities that teachers used to orient and initiate students to and prepare them for actual reading activities. To be specific, the paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How and to what extent do university ESL/EFL teachers engage students in pre-reading activities?
2. How do teachers treat pre-reading activities and why?

To answer these questions, we first present the theoretical framework for the study followed by a review of the literature. Then, we delineate the methodology before presenting and discussing findings under different thematic headings. Finally, the paper ends with a conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

The schema theory serves as a theoretical framework for the current paper, as this model allows an understanding of the importance and role of pre-reading activities in optimizing students' interaction with texts. The schema theory of reading foregrounds the reader's prior knowledge in text-reader interaction (Duke et al. 2011; Hedge, 2000; Wallace, 2001). Following Duke et al., (2011), this theory is noted for its capacity to instigate a virtuous cycle driving the productive reading process: readers bring knowledge and experience to the comprehension process, and that knowledge and experience shape their comprehension. Comprehension equips them with new information that changes their knowledge, which serves as a basis for later comprehension. In this virtuous cycle, knowledge engenders comprehension, which engenders knowledge, and so on (Duke et al. 2011). According to Anderson (2013), "a reader's schema, or organized knowledge of the world, provides much of the basis for comprehending, learning, and remembering the ideas in stories and texts" (p.767). Readers' declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge forms are assumed to be stored in knowledge structures known as schemata, and readers have to activate their schemata in order to comprehend the message or events in the text (Anderson, 2013; Ruddell & Unrau, 2013). Rundell and Unrau (2013) value schemata for their important meaning-construction functions, as they support memory searches, serve as a base for inference-making, allow readers to reorganize and reconstruct text content and help them to better summarize the content. Anderson (2013) has proposed six functions of schema: a) a schema provides ideational scaffolding for assimilating text information; b) a schema facilitates selective allocation of attention; c) a schema enables inferential elaboration; d)

a schema allows orderly searches of memory; e) a schema facilitates editing and summarizing; and f) a schema permits inferential reconstruction.

The reading methodology informed by the schema theory focuses on the reader and adopts the top-down approach that emphasizes experiences, values and background knowledge that readers bring to reading (Wallace, 2001). The model assumes that the reader is guided by a specific purpose for reading and begins from expectations and predictions of the content of the text and reads the text to confirm their expectations and predictions. This process of reading is principally backed by the reader's extralinguistic knowledge bases, including background knowledge, awareness of the context and knowledge of discourse structures (Watkins, 2017). The top-down model brings to the fore the reader's expectations, the purpose of reading, background knowledge, values and ability to monitor the comprehension process strategically. The top-down perspective of reading positions the reader as an active agent in the extraction or generation of meaning from the text and spotlights the dynamic interaction between the text and the reader's inference, background knowledge, expectations and reading goals or purposes (Ruddell &Unrau, 2013; Wallace, 2001). In teaching reading, students' schematic knowledge is activated mainly in the pre-reading phase of reading (Adhikari, 2013; Hashemi et al., 2016; Hedge, 2000).

Literature Review

It has been standard practice for textbook writers, teachers, trainers and researchers to structure reading tasks and activities in the three-phase procedure: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. Termed variously anticipation (Crawford et al, 2005), engaging (Harmer, 2007), and motivating (Ren & Wang, 2018), the pre-reading stage is valued for its role in preparing students for an actual encounter with reading texts. The pre-reading stage aims to tap students' experiences, knowledge and language resources, assess informally what they already know, including misconceptions (Crawford et al., 2005), and provide a context for understanding new ideas. Some commonly used activities in this stage are pre-teaching key vocabulary items, previewing the topic, predicting content from pictures, freewriting, brainstorming, answering journalistic questions and asking signpost questions about the topic (Hedge, 2000; Gardner, 2005; Lazar, 2009; Watkins, 2017).

Several studies have reported the positive impact of pre-reading activities on students' reading performance and emphasized the need for incorporating the pre-reading

stage in reading methodology (e.g., Azizifar et al., 2015; Hashemi et al., 2016; Karakas, 2005; Watkins, 2017). Karakas (2005) carried out an exploratory quasi-experimental study to investigate the effect of pre-reading activities on ELT trainee teachers' reading comprehension of short stories. The experimental group that received the treatment of previewing activities comprehended short stories far better than the control group that was not engaged in such pre-reading activities. The study concluded that previewing activities activated students' content schemata that helped them digest new text content more effectively. De Sousa's (2012) experimental study also engaged experimental and control groups of eighth graders in reading an English short story. Situated in the Netherlands, this study introduced pre-questioning and vocabulary pre-teaching as the intervention and found that the reading lessons with these pre-teaching activities produced better results than those without them. In a similar vein, Azizifar et al.'s (2015) experimental study with grade ten students compared the students' reading comprehension before and after the implementation of intervention that comprised two pre-reading activities: guessing reading content from asking pre-reading questions and vocabulary definitions. As reported in the study, the group that received pre-reading activities performed better in the post-test and activity-wise comparison showed that the group that practiced guessing content from pre-reading questions outperformed the group that was engaged only in vocabulary definition activity. Likewise, Hashemi et al. (2016) studied the effectiveness of three pre-reading activities, namely brainstorming, KWL (know, want to know and learned) and pre-questioning on the reading performance of high school students in Iran. The study comprised one control group and three experimental groups, each being exposed to one pre-reading activity, and reported that experimental groups performed better than the control group in reading comprehension. The comparison between experimental groups showed that the KWL group exceeded the brainstorming and pre-reading questions groups. Hong and Nguyen' (2019) study explored teacher beliefs and practices of questioning to scaffold students' reading comprehension at the pre-reading stage. Drawing on the data collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with lower secondary Vietnamese ESL/EFL lower secondary teachers, the findings reported teachers' strong beliefs about the effectiveness of pre-reading questions. As reported, the teachers valued questioning at the pre-reading stage because it can activate students' prior knowledge related to the text, help familiarize students with text content, and arouse their

curiosity about the text, which together contributed to a better understanding of the text. Collectively, these studies highlight that the pre-reading stage forms an integral part of a reading lesson and the role of pre-reading activities cannot be overrated in facilitating students' interaction with texts.

Methodology

A case study design was followed to investigate university English teachers' practice of teaching reading more holistically and comprehensively (Creswell, 2009; Duff, 2018; Riazi, 2016). A constituent campus of Tribhuvan University located in the capital city of Kathmandu was selected as a research site, where the principal author has been teaching for more than two decades. The participants included four ESL/EFL university teachers from the selected campus teaching B.Ed. English reading courses: General English (first year), Expanding Horizons in English (second year), Critical Readings in English (third year), and Literature for Language Development (fourth year). The data were collected through a combination of two qualitative methods: classroom observation and semi-structured interview to explore "more fully, the richness and complexity" of teaching reading by "studying it from more than one standpoint" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 141). A semi-structured observation scheme was developed to observe teacher participants' lessons. Altogether 24 lessons, six lessons of each teacher, were observed, audio-recorded and supplemented by narrative field notes and reflections (Dornyei, 2007; Nunan 2010; Riazi, 2016). After the observation of three lessons, each teacher was interviewed to further probe into their practice of teaching reading. Each interview was audio-recorded with the participants' consent and was transcribed later. The transcribed interviews and lessons, and field notes were coded and analyzed thematically (Riazi, 2016). The participating teachers were coded as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 to protect their privacy.

Findings and Discussion

From the analysis of classroom observation and teacher interview emerged the following themes related to the pre-reading stage: (im)personalization of the topic, (de)contextualization of the topic, digging into the title, teaching key vocabulary items, knowing the author, the relegation of pre-reading activities.

(Im)personalization of the topic

Personalization herein is used to mean relating the topic or the issue with students' personal feelings or experiences. To personalize a topic is to connect it to

individual students' experiential backgrounds, personal interests and points of view (Keefe, 2007). This activity was found to be frequently used by Teacher1 and Teacher 4 to begin the lesson. In Teacher 1's and Teacher 4's lessons, personalization took on different forms: question-based personalization, evocative personalization, and dialogic personalization, the following classroom excerpt exemplifies the question-based personalization of the topic:

> Teacher 1showed on a slide the title of the story (i.e., How the Flamingos Got their Stockings) and a picture of a flamingo and asked the class in Nepali:
> T: *yestocaradekhnubhaekochha*? (Have you seen this type of bird?)
> Ss: Yes, but only in photos.
> T: Write two sentences mentioning what you like about this bird.

The students looked at the picture and scribbled some sentences about the bird and three of them read out their sentences to the class.With that, the teacher asked the students to think about and name a bird that looked similar to the one in the picture.

> Evocative personalization involved the teacher's attempt to evoke students' emotions and fire their imagination so as to connect the topic to their imaginative world. For example, Teacher 1 in teaching the poem 'Words are Birds' by Francisco X. Alarcon asked students to close their eyes and think about a bird of their choice and its name, color, and sound and then he asked them to imagine the language it speaks and its 'nationality'. As a response to this task, each of the students, after closing their eyes for about thirty seconds to visualize the bird of their choice, noted down the features of the bird and shared them with their friends in the group.

> The teacher further asked the class- Can the birds they have chosen fly across national borders? To this question, students responded in the affirmative. Building on this information elicited from the class, the teacher explained that words are like birds; they are in multiple colors and both can fly across borders.

> Dialogic personalization, i.e., the teacher's endeavor to help students, personalize the topic through dialogue was evident in Teacher 4's lessons. In a lesson 'The Bhagavadgita, by John Canning, he wrote the topic on the board and initiated a dialogue with the whole class as:

> T (Teacher): Have you read the Gita?
> [No answer]
> T: No one?! It's okay. But you have at least heard about it. Right?

Ss (Students): Yes.
T: What is it about?
S (Student): About Krishna and Arjun.
T: Do you like Krishna?
Ss: Yes.
T: Why?
S1: Because He is God.
S2: He supported Arjun in the war.

Here, inviting students to participate in dialogic interaction, the teacher leveraged their existing knowledge and language resources before engaging them in the actual act of reading in the while-reading phase. This pre-reading dialogic interaction is characteristically collective, reciprocal, supportive and purposeful (Alexander, 2005; Basturkmen, 2016). That said, both teachers demonstrated their inclination towardsthe explanation of the subject matter that minimized students' contribution to learning.

Teacher 2 and Teacher 3, on the contrary, did not involve their students in any form of personalization activity, totally ignoring the pedagogical value of students' existing knowledge in reading performance. Consequently, their lessons were impersonalized, overtly disengaging and further characterized by abrupt beginning. For want of personalization of the topic, teacher-student interaction was virtually absent and students' failure to associate the topic with their personal experiential zone was conspicuously visible in the classroom. These teachers began the lesson straight away by writing on the board the topic and key points. This sort of seemingly abrupt beginning of the lesson created confusion and disengagement among students. As a result, some students were seen murmuring with each other, while some of them were looking at the board vacantly and others took to copying the points from the board mechanically. In the after-class interview, Teacher 3 cited two reasons for beginning the lesson straight away without inviting students to share what they already knew about the topic. The first reason, according to him, is the lack of sufficient time for engaging students in such activities, "I must finish one chapter a day and there is no time for this type of open-discussion activities" (Teacher 3). The second reason was guided by his assumption on teaching, that is, he opined that when students get key points about the topic and listen to the teacher's explanation, they can relate the lesson content to their lives themselves later.

(De)contextualization of the topic

In most of the lessons, two of the teachers (Teacher 1 and Teacher 4) contextualized topics before dealing with reading texts. As in the case of personalization, three forms of contextualization were discerned in their lessons: contextualization through factual questions, contextualization through opinion-based group discussion, and contextualization through teacher-initiated dialogic interaction.

Teacher 1 endeavored to connect the topic to students' context by posing some fact-seeking questions as in the following:

> T: The author has a transnational identity. Let me give an example. The Nepalis who have American or Canadian citizenships are transnationals. Do you know any transnational writers from Nepal?
>
> Ss: [No response]

As no response came from the class, the teacher himself supplied the information by mentioning two of the abroad-based Nepali writers. The teacher asking a question about Nepali writerswriting from abroadassisted students in understanding the transnational identity of the poet Francisco X. Alarcon. Although this teacher appeared to be fully aware of the importance of contextualizing the lesson content into students' real-world setting (Bonganciso, 2016), his long lecture on transnational Nepali writers appeared monotonous and less engaging.

Teacher1 and Teacher 4 were found frequently contextualizing the topic through opinion-based group discussion. For example, in teaching 'The Necessity of Religion', Teacher 4, before writing the topic on the board, asked the class- In your opinion, why do we need religion? Is religion good for society? These questions were followed by the following instruction:

> ⌡ Discuss your view in the group, and note it down. You need to share it with the class later.

This pre-reading activity inspired students to express their personal views on the issue, integrated speaking with writing and more importantly encouraged the collaborative construction of knowledge through discussion. All these micro-activities seem to activate their knowledge schema further serving as a cognitive framework for the reading text (Anderson, 2013; McGrath et al. 1992; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Ruddell & Unrau, 2013)

All teachers (except Teacher 3) invited the whole class to join in the conversation on the issue centered on the topic. Teacher 2, for instance, introduced the satirical essay 'A Solution to Housework' and its author Judy Brady and initiated dialogue with the class as:

> T: What is gender?
> Ss: Male and female
> T: Who defines gender?
> S: Society.
> T: Can you tell me the difference between sex and gender?
> S: Sex is defined biologically. Gender socially. Culturally.
> T: Are gender roles questionable?
> Ss: Yes.

Then, the teacher related this conversation to the central theme of the essay by posing a presumptive statement in Nepali-English translanguaged form: bhujnuhunchhaniharmro society ma female-le kegarnuparcha. [I suppose you understand what women are supposed to do in our society].

In principle, dialogic contextualization of the topic or issue availed students of collaborative engagement opportunities (Kathard et al. 2015). It is more open-ended, liberal, participatory and engaging than other forms of contextualization. Despite this, this activity did not work so effectively in Teacher 2's lesson for two reasons. First, only few students showed their willingness to participate in the conversation. The reluctant students responded to the teacher's questions mostly in one or two-word phrases, making little contribution to the issue from their end. Second, the teacher not only initiated but also dominated the exchanges by elaborate explanations. Moreover, she failed to appreciate, comment and build on the responses elicited from students. Most of the time, the teacher moved to another question without acknowledging the students' response to the issue. Notwithstanding these limitations, her posing questions signposted students to the gender issue, assessed their existing knowledge on the issue, and helped them relate the issue raised by the author in a different (Western) context to their social context. Contextualization, in whatever form, is argued to enhance the transfer of learning and improve the retention of the subject matter, which in turn contributes to learning outcomes (Pern, 2011).

Digging into the title

In most of the lessons, Teacher 4 spent a good deal of time prompting students to dig into titles individually, in pairs, or in groups of three. To this end, the teacher first asked students to read the title of the text (story, essay, story, or poem) individually and discuss with their friends what it meant. Then he asked them to underline the keywords in the title and work out their literal meanings (alternatively, he sometimes specified the keywords and instructed the students to underline them). If they did not know the meanings, they were asked to look up the words in mobile dictionaries and share their understandings with each other. In some lessons, students translated titles into Nepali and predicted what authors in those particular texts were going to discuss. Let us take an example of the academic essay 'Who is Ethnic?' by Werner Sollers. After writing the title on the board and telling students to turn to the chapter, Teacher 4 asked them to underline the word 'ethnic' and had them write its Nepali translation next to it and shareit with the whole class. 'Janajati' was the only translation that came from their end and the teacher gave them other possible translations as 'jati' and 'alpasankyaksamudaya'. To lead students deeper into the title, he further asked probing questions such as: Who do you think is ethnic? Are you ethnic or non-ethnic? Could you name some ethnic groups in Nepal? Asking these topic-related questions, the teacher initiated a whole class discussion, elicited responses from them, acknowledged their contribution by writing them on the board and used them to help students probe into the title.

When asked about the reason for prompting students to dig into the title, Teacher 4 stated that it helped students understand the gist of the text. According to him, the deeper the students dig into the title, the better and wider they understand the text content later. Although Teacher 2 also occasionally engaged students in probing questions to dig into the title, student engagement was poor because of the teacher's lengthy explanation and lack of supportive feedback on their responses. Unlike these two teachers, Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 did not engage students in any activities that encourage students to discuss issues or perform tasks relating to the title or to predict the lesson content from the title (Gardner, 2005; Ibrakhimovna, 2016).

Pre-teaching vocabulary

Identification of key vocabulary items in the text and their explicit teaching formed the dominant mode of instruction in Teacher 2's and 4's reading lessons. These teachers employed this activity in dealing with academic and critical readings such as

'Frequently Asked Questions about Multiple Intelligences' by Gardner and 'Who is Ethnic' by Sollers. In teaching 'Frequently Asked Questions about Multiple Intelligences', for example, Teacher 2, wrote silently on the board the title and some words 'multiple intelligences', 'biopsychological potential', 'style', 'creativity', and 'psychological construct'. Then, she told the class that these were the key terms that they must know to understand the gist of Gardner's text and had the students copy them. With that, the teacher explained each term elaborately and also monotonously, dominating the class and monopolizing classroom time. Most of the classroom time was spent on the elaboration of these and other vocabulary items that she thought were central to the understanding of the text. In the after-class interview, she revealed her strong belief in concept teaching. In her view, advanced-level teaching should focus on explaining key concepts to students. To quote her own words,

> At this level, students should understand key concepts of the reading text. For this, I select certain words that students must know to understand the central message of the text and explain in details before they read the text. If they understand the concepts, they can read the text later and answer the questions themselves. (Teacher 2)

Her view echoes a common argument that teaching through key concepts helps develop students' understanding, contributes to powerful learning and helps connect learning (Cambridge Assessment International Education Teaching and Learning Team). Contrary to her explanation of key concepts which lacked efficacy due to students' disengagement, Teacher 4's use of this activity was more effective. Unlike Teacher 2 who selected the key vocabulary items herself, Teacher 4 asked the students to scan through the lesson (i.e. Who is Ethnic), locate and underline the keywords, and share the underlined words with their friends next to them. After that, the teacher requested the students to share the words and wrote them on the board. The teacher spent about 10 minutes to explain their meanings by inviting students to share their understandings of these words. Whatever, both teachers underscored the efficacy of teaching vocabulary in the pre-reading phase, which has also been empirically substantiated by previous studies (e.g. Mousavian, 2018; De Sousa, 2012). Drawing on the finding, Mousavian (2018), for example, concludes that teaching vocabulary before engaging students with the text is effective provided that the words are directly taken from the text. Given its efficacy, pre-teaching new vocabulary has been deemed essential in preparing students for reading (Ur, 2022).

Knowing the author

Teacher participants differed in their approach to the role of author information before the reading text. Two of the teachers (Teacher 2 and Teacher 3) either completely ignored or perfunctorily mentioned the authors of the texts they were going to teach. That is to say, reading about or discussing the author was not treated as an activity integral to their lessons. Their relegation of the author contradicted Lazar's (2009) view that knowing the author may deepen students' understanding of the themes of the text. After writing on the board key points about the essay 'Five Dimensions of Education', Teacher3, for instance, introduced its author Osho in a sentence and took to explaining the lesson. He did not bother asking what students know about the author nor did he see the necessity of talking about or prompting students to explore the author. Likewise, Teacher 2, after writing the title and author's name and key points about the topic started lecturing on each point. In her view, college students should research themselves the author' background and writing style. For this, they can google themselves and note down the necessary information, she opined. Her view that students should research themselves seems justifiable. However, she did not tell students whether and why they needed to know about the author and how such information could help them understand the text better. Nor did she tell them to research and read about the author in any classes we observed. Unlike these teachers, Teacher 1treated author information as an important part of lessons. In his view,

> I teach literature. Knowing the author is immensely important to better understand the text. It gives context to readers. It becomes easy for readers to find out what type of text they are going to read.

Accordingly, this teacher spent some five minutes introducing the author in every lesson. For this, he presented on the slide(s) some points about the author (mostly summarized from the chapter in the book) and explained each point to the class. The explanation was accompanied by a few short comprehension-checking oral questions to which students either did not respond or responded in monosyllables. Teacher 4 adopted a more interactive and engaging approach to familiarizing the author to students. After writing the title and the name of the author on the board, he asked the class what they knew about the author and if they had read any story, poem or essay by him. He elicited some information from the class and told them where the author is from (nationality), what he/she is famous for and some of his/her notable works. Then, he instructed the students

to search for the author on Google or Wikipedia for additional information. The teachers valued background information about the author in teaching literary texts more than non-literary texts, which means that the nature of the reading text also determines whether author information is deemed important to students.

Relegation of pre-reading stage

The pre-reading activities used by teacher participants were not so varied, not so frequent and intensive. In 24 observed lessons, the teachers engaged students only in a limited number of pre-reading activities such as topic personalization and contextualization, digging into the title, and pre-teaching key vocabulary items. The teachers failed to exploit a reservoir of pre-reading activities available in the reading literature such as pre-questioning, guessing reading content, brainstorming, KWL, previewing the text by its vocabulary, previewing the text by role-play, predicting from pictures, (Azizifar et al.2015; Hashemi et al.; 2016; Karakas 2005; Watkins, 2017). Their failure to activate students' pre-existing and emerging knowledge and language resources and capitalize on the same through a variety of pre-reading activities rendered the lessons less engaging and participatory with students' minimum contribution to learning. On top of that, the pre-reading phase was mostly eclipsed by teachers' lecturing. In most of the lessons, the teachers adopted a traditional lecture-centered instructional approach giving fewer opportunities for students to contribute to the lesson, which in turn limited their roles as inactive recipients of information from teachers. Teacher 2 is a case in point, who after writing key terms on the board kept explaining each term in detail with little involvement from the students' side. Likewise, Teacher 1 was found lecturing on the authors referring to the points on slides he prepared in advance. In all lessons, it was evident that the teachers could not resist the temptation to lecture as in the traditional class and failed to create student-centered classrooms and discard their typical conventional roles, for example, as the source of knowledge or information (Richards & Rogers, 2001).Williams (1986) suggests that students should be encouraged and given an opportunity to make predictions about the text, to express doubts and uncertainties and subsequently clarify them and share their views with other students so that reading becomes not only active but also interactive.

The relegation of the pre-reading stage was even more conspicuous in teachers' avoidance of pre-reading activities given at the beginning of reading texts. Reading chapters in the coursebooks 'Readings for New Horizons', 'New Directions', and

'Critical Readings in English' begin with pre-reading activities such as signposting, before your read, journal writing, previewing the topic, and agreeing and disagreeing. However, none of the teachers used any of these pre-reading activities given in the coursebooks. In all observed lessons, the pre-reading activities featured in the coursebooks were completely ignored. A question arises here- Does it mean that the teachers were unaware of the importance of these pre-reading activities? Regarding this, the teachers were asked whether they valued coursebook pre-reading activities and if yes, what were the reasons for skipping these activities? All teachers said that they were aware of the importance of these activities in assisting students' reading performance (Teacher 1), motivating students to read (Teacher 1 & Teacher 4), preparing students for reading (TeacherT2 and Teacher 3) and exploiting students' existing knowledge resources (Teacher 4). Teacher 1 highlighted the importance of pre-reading activities as:

> I know that pre-reading activities are crucial for comprehension of the text. They help connect the new with the old. Pre-reading activities set the background for the text and arouse students' interest in the text and make their reading engaging later.

Other teachers also held a similar view about pre-reading activities and stressed that the activities given in the books should be used. On this, Teacher 2 said:

> As the course demands, these activities are necessary for students. I also think that they should be engaged in them, because these activities help them comprehend the text better.

Teachers mentioned three factors that prevented them from engaging students in coursebook pre-reading activities: students without books in the classroom, lengthy courses and limited class time, and examination. All teachers complained that most of their students do not bring books to the class, which prevents them from engaging the students in pre-reading activities. Teacher 2 remarked:

> The reason is that most of them (students) don't bring books. Then, how can I make them do these activities? You also saw very few of them had books with them.

Her complaint was substantiated during class observation, as very few students (not more than 5 or so out of 30 in her class) had books lying open on their desks. Teacher 1 also said that engaging students in classroom reading was practically impossible when the majority of them had no coursebooks. Lengthy courses were another reason for skipping

Full text can be downloaded: https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/craiaj & http://www.craiaj.info/

pre-reading activities. As they recounted, they were always under pressure to complete the courses before the examination schedule comes out. In one teacher's experience, he skipped pre-reading activities given in the book because of limited class time. Finally, the examination was cited as a factor that led to the relegation of pre-reading activities. The teachers said that since no questions were asked in the examination from the pre-reading section, students paid little or no attention to these activities in the classroom. As a result, pre-reading activities were relegated to a redundant status and the teachers invested the time saved from pre-reading activities in explaining text content and engaging students in while-reading activities.

Conclusion

The study found that university ESL/EFL teachers did not adequately prepares students for reading, and the activities they used lacked variety, depth and recurrence. Altogether, the study reports five major pre-reading activities used by teachers to initiate and orient their students to upcoming reading texts: namely personalization of the topic, contextualization of the topic, digging into the title, pre-teaching key vocabulary items, and knowing the author. In several lessons, teachers were found to begin reading lessons straight away without contextualizing and personalizing topics, which devalued the role of schema activation in reading performance. The used activities appeared to have low efficacy because of the dominance of teacher explanation over student participation in and contribution to learning. Another significant finding to emerge from this study is that despite recognizing the pedagogical value of pre-reading activities, university teachers relegated such activities specifically those given in coursebooks for multiple reasons, namely students without coursebooks in the classroom, lengthy courses and limited time, and examination. The findings of this study suggest that teacher explanation should be kept to the minimum and student participation should be maximized for the efficacy of pre-reading activities. In the case of course-based teaching reading like that of B.Ed. English reading courses reported in this study, students need to be oriented to the importance of coursebooks and to be equipped with the same. This study also has an implication for course designing in that course designers should consider carefully the number of teaching hours while deciding on the number of reading texts for an academic year. Moreover, the pre-reading stage needs to be treated as an integral to rather than a mere appendage of a reading lesson. Since this study was limited to the exploration of teachers' use of pre-reading activities, further studies should investigate the impact of the

activities used by teachers on students' reading performance. Likewise, further work needs to be conducted to find out students' perceptions of and views on the role of pre-reading activities in their reading performance.

Acknowledgments

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