

Some Activities are Missing in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract. Thirty-nine male and 37 female students attending the reading class (EDFL 222) were asked to complete a questionnaire developed in such a way to clarify the teachers' and the students' activities in and outside the classroom in order to shed light, from the students' perspective, on the missing activities the students deem important to develop their reading skills. The findings indicate that the female students are more active than the male students in and outside the classroom in terms of the number of the students who participate in reading-specific activities as well as the frequency of their implementation of these activities. However, both male and female students proved to lack some of the variables under investigation. For example, they do not prepare the text in advance, do not try to guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words, and do not connect the new ideas of the text to their already stored information. They also need the teacher to explain the text, the structure and the new words to them. In a word, they lack autonomy.

Introduction

It is said that reading is not taught; rather, it is learned. One learns reading through reading (Harmer, 1991). However, five courses of the EFL program in the Department of Foreign Languages at King Faisal University (KFU) were specified for the teaching of reading. The objectives of these courses as they are derived from the syllabus are as follows:

1. Demonstrate comprehension by answering direct questions on a variety of passages.
2. Answer inference questions about such passages.
3. Judge the validity of statements made about such passages.
4. Define unfamiliar words in the context of each passage.

These objectives, in essence, are compatible with the psycholinguistic models of teaching reading summarized by Mei-Yen (1989). For the teacher to help his EFL students achieve these objectives is not an easy task, since reading is a complex process which involves various issues such as

comprehension—the main purpose of reading instruction—structure, vocabulary, prediction, scanning, culture, and the poetic aspect of the reading text. The burden of the teaching and learning in such reading courses is not placed on the shoulders of the teachers only; it is the responsibility of the students as well. They have to carry out specific activities in and outside the classroom. These activities include, among other things, initial reading of the assigned reading passages outside the classroom, guessing the meaning of the unfamiliar words, connecting the information included in the text to their own experiences and finally doing whatever assignments given to them by the teacher.

The Questions of the Study

The questions raised in this study involve the different activities carried out by the teachers and the students in and outside the EFL reading classroom. These questions are:

1. Are EFL students helped to achieve the objectives set up for them?

2. Do EFL teachers train their students in such a way to acquire the reading skills necessary for them to achieve these objectives?
3. Do the EFL students carry out the various tasks in and outside the classroom assigned to them in order to develop their reading skills?
4. Since female students are separated from male ones, what are the differences between them in terms of the above questions.

These questions, then, were translated into a questionnaire (see Author) to shed some light on the missing activities in the EFL reading classroom. Furthermore, they constitute the main theme of this paper.

Literature review

A substantial number of studies have been carried out in order to develop better instructional methods and strategies of teaching reading. Most, if not all, of these studies deal with observing the different activities and tasks carried out in the classroom either by teachers or students. Thrulow, Graden and Alogzzin (1984), for example, employed an observational technique to investigate the extent to which second-grade students actually read during a typical reading instructional period. They have noticed that students are usually engaged in oral and silent reading for 10 to 15 minutes during one period of 50 minutes. They have concluded that reading in a reading class is a missing activity in reading instruction.

It is known that understanding the ideas of the text is the main purpose of reading. To help them achieve that purpose, students are to be taught how to employ their prior knowledge to develop new concepts they think they are necessary for the understanding of the text (Caverly, Peterson and Nicholson, 1995; Linden and Wittrock, 1981; Wittrock, 1981).

Retelling is one of the strategies used by teachers to enhance their students' understanding of the text. It is actually used as an assessment task in reading research. Different studies were constructed to investigate the relationship between retelling strategies and understanding (see Gambrell, Pfeiffer and Wilson, 1985; Johnson, 1983; Marshal, 1983; Taylor, 1982). The basic assumption among these researchers is that retelling or recalling, as sometimes termed, indicates something about the readers' assimilation and reconstruction of the text information and, therefore, reflects comprehension.

Repeated reading is another strategy employed by teachers to develop their students' reading comprehension. Various studies have been carried out to investigate the effects of that strategy on improving the students' reading comprehension. Interestingly enough, the researchers have come out with different and sometimes contradictory results. Homan, Klesius and Hite (1993), on the one hand, state that repeated readings have led to significant reading comprehension improvement. Rasinki (1990) and Dowhower (1987), on the other hand, have compared assisted reading with subsequent steps of repeated readings. They have concluded that their subjects made significant gains in reading rate and accuracy. Their findings, contrary to those of Homan *et al.* (1993), indicate that their subjects did not make a significant comprehension improvement as a result of repeated reading.

It has been considered a rooted assumption in the literature that "word guessing" is one of the central reading strategies that are necessary to enhance reading comprehension and overcome comprehension failure (Readingmatrix, 2000). This means that the lack of knowledge of the words, especially the ones that are considered to be 'key' to the text in general, will result in a lack of comprehension, a slowed-down reading process and frustration on the part of the students. Furthermore, in employing the "contextualization and inferencing reading strategy, the students will be able to acquire new words and consequently expand their English lexical repertoire" (Brown, 1993).

Recently, there is a trend to combine the four language skills in the reading classroom (McCarthy, 2007). He suggests that students can be divided into small groups where they can discuss the different reading aspects of the text, and in the same time develop their other skills such as listening and speaking. The teacher has an important role in such a learning/teaching situation. He has to move from one group into another helping his students to solve any problem they may encounter.

The successful processing of any reading material, it is suggested, largely depends on the degree of metacognitive awareness the learner brings to bear to the ongoing activity as well as on his ability to establish links between the new information he is being exposed to and his already stored background information and world knowledge (Edwards, 2000; Casper *et al.*, 1998; Widmayer, n.d.).

Most of the literature reviewed so far intends to search for the best instructional strategies and methods of teaching to improve the students' understanding of the text, which is, in essence, the main purpose of any reading course. None of these studies have attempted to investigate the EFL teachers' and learners' activities in and outside the classroom from the students' perspective in order to clarify the missing activities in the EFL reading classroom the students deem important to enhance their different reading skills, which, in turn, will improve their comprehension of the text. This paper intends to do so. To shed light on these missing activities in the EFL reading classroom from the students' perspective, a questionnaire was developed and distributed among the students. The collected data were analyzed on the basis of the constructivist theory. The following chapter deals briefly with this theory.

The constructivist theory

The constructivist learning and teaching theory is based on the assumption that knowledge cannot simply be given by the teacher to his students in the classroom. On the contrary, it is to be constructed by learners through an active mental process of development (Candy, 1991). The constructivist theory, which is based on the developmental work of Piaget (1977) and Kelly (1991), is defined by Twomey (1989) by reference to the following four principles:

1. Learning actually depends on what we know.
2. New ideas, once accepted, replace our old ones.
3. Learning involves investing ideas and accumulating facts.
4. Meaningful learning takes place when old ideas are investigated and as a result new ideas appear and replace the old ones.

These principles can be applied in the reading classroom, where students study the new text and come out with new ideas about it. To comprehend the ideas presented in the new text, the students have to investigate their old ideas and replace them, if possible, by the new ones they have extracted from the text on focus. This process can take place through the interaction between the students and their teacher, the textbook and their classmates outside the classroom. Once again, these principles of the constructivist theory are used as the basis for analyzing the data of this study.

According to the constructivist theory, the teacher

plays the role of a facilitator of the teaching and learning process. So, the teacher in such a constructivist classroom provides his students with experiences that will help them hypothesize, predict, manipulate objects, pose questions, research, investigate, imagine and invent. In light of these general assumptions of the constructivist theory, the teacher's and the students' activities in and outside the classroom will be evaluated in order to clarify the missing activities the students think are necessary for their understanding of the text.

The Method

The subjects

Thirty-nine male and 37 female students at the age of 20-22 years participated in the study. All the subjects have studied English for two years in the Department of Foreign Languages and recently enrolled in the third reading course, EDFL 222. They have also studied English as a foreign language in their preparatory and secondary public schools where both male and female students have four classes a week, each of which lasts for 45 minutes.

Female students are separated from male ones in a separate building where they have their own female teachers. However, due to staff shortage, a male teacher can, as is the case in this reading class, teach both male and female students.

The instrument

To specify the missing activities in the EFL reading classroom from the perspective of the students, a questionnaire with three-point scale (always, sometimes and never) was developed. It was divided into five parts, each of which was constructed in such a way to clarify the activities carried out either by the teacher or the students in and outside the classroom. The first part of the questionnaire consists of six items, all of which discuss the students' socioeconomic environment outside the classroom; this part was only developed with two-point scale (yes or no). The second part, which consists of five items, highlights the students' activities outside the EFL reading classroom, while the third part, which includes six items, attempts to investigate the teacher's activities inside the classroom. The fourth part consists of eight items, and it clarifies the students' current reading abilities in an attempt to evaluate them. In the last part of the questionnaire,

which consists of seven items, the students are asked to clarify their needs to develop their reading skills.

Statistical analysis

The first part of the questionnaire, which deals with the students' socioeconomic environment outside the classroom, employs two-point scale (yes or no), while the other parts employ a three-point scale (always, sometimes or never). Therefore, the percentage and the standard deviation statistical techniques were used.

Results and Discussion

The students' socioeconomic/sociocultural environment

Table 1 shows the students' socioeconomic status. A close look at that table reveals that female students surpass male ones with respect to both the mean scores of the individual variables as well as the total mean scores. Female students come from a sociocultural environment which is richer with speakers of the English language, perhaps richer with opportunities to practice this language in informal settings. The mean score of the female students who come from homes including English-speaking parents and relatives is 3.54. This score drops to 3.13 when it comes to male students. The table also shows that female students have at their disposal greater resources that can be exploited for the development of their English. Except for owing English tape cassettes, which received a higher mean score from male students, the mean of the rest of the variables is

in favor of the female students. Female students watch more English TV programs and read more Saudi English and British/American newspapers. The total mean score achieved by female students for these three variables is 4.63, whereas in the case of male students this score decreases to 3.97.

Table 1. Sociocultural environment of the male and female students outside the classroom

Variables	Male 222 (mean)	Female 222 (mean)
Parents know English	1.36	1.76
Family members know Engl	1.77	1.78
Having English tape cassette	1.67	1.62
Watching TV programs	1.77	1.95
Reading Saudi English new	1.10	1.27
Reading ritish/American newspaper	1.10	1.27
Total	8.77	9.79

The mean scores in this table allow us to conclude that the female students have more supportive sociocultural environments outside the classroom than the male ones. These students show that they react positively to this supportive environment by spending more time than the male students do in reading English newspapers and watching English TV programs.

Students' activities outside the classroom

Table 2 shows that, to a great extent, the female students accomplish more activities outside the classroom than male students. Female students are remarkably more active. 35.12% of them *constantly* prepare for their reading classes, whereas only 14.32%

Table 2. Students activities outside the classroom

Variables	222 Male students					222 Female students				
	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Mean	SD	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Mean	SD
Prepare passage	17.9	82.1	-	2.18	.39	45.9	48.6	5.4	2.41	.60
Prepare words	25.6	69.2	5.1	2.22	.52	54.1	35.1	10.8	2.43	.69
Prepare exercise	17.9	69.2	12.8	2.05	.56	37.8	51.4	10.8	2.27	.65
Read passage in the class	5.1	48.7	46.2	1.59	.59	24.3	35.1	40.5	1.84	.80
Discuss passage	5.1	38.5	56.4	1.49	.60	13.5	67.6	18.9	1.95	.57
Total	14.32	61.54	24.1	9.52		35.12	47.56	17.28	10.9	

Table 3. Teachers' activities in the classroom

Variables	222 Male students					222 Female students				
	Always %	Sometime %	Never %	Mean	SD	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Mean %	SD
Teacher reads the text in the class	89.5	10.5	-	2.89	.31	48.6	40.5	10.8	2.38	.68
Teacher explains the text	94.9	5.1	-	2.95	.22	83.8	10.8	5.4	2.78	.53
Teacher explains unfamiliar words	84.6	15.4	-	2.85	.37	70.3	29.7	-	2.70	.46
Teacher explains exercises	66.7	30.8	2.6	2.64	.54	67.6	32.4	-	2.68	.47
Teacher asks before questions	69.2	28.2	2.6	2.67	.53	56.8	27.0	16.2	2.41	.76
Teacher asks after questions	43.6	41.0	15.4	2.28	.72	81.1	18.9	-	2.81	.40
Total	74.75	21.83	3.4	16.28		68.03	26.55	5.4	15.76	

Table 4. Students' current abilities

Variables	222 Male students					222 Female students				
	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Mean %	SD	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Mean %	SD
Knowing the theme	25.6	66.7	7.7	2.18	.56	48.6	51.4	-	2.49	.51
Connect the theme with known topics	17.9	48.7	33.3	1.85	.71	37.8	56.8	5.4	2.32	.58
Specify the main idea	7.7	82.1	10.3	1.97	.43	29.7	62.2	8.1	2.22	.58
Scan the text	35.9	43.6	20.5	2.15	.74	32.4	59.5	8.1	2.24	.60
Analyze the structure	15.4	51.3	33.3	1.82	.68	11.4	74.3	14.3	1.97	.51
Guess the meaning of the new words	17.9	56.4	25.6	1.92	.66	13.5	70.3	16.2	1.97	.55
Connect the new words with known ones	51.3	30.8	17.9	2.33	.77	51.4	45.9	2.7	2.49	.56
Develop reading skills	59.0	28.2	12.8	2.46	.72	61.0	31.7	7.3	2.54	.47
Total	28.83	50.97	20.17	16.68		35.72	56.51	7.7	18.24	

Table 5. Students' needs to develop their reading skills

Variable	222 Male students					222 Female students				
	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Mean %	SD	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Mean %	SD
Teacher reads the text in the class	20.8	53.8	15.4	2.15	.67	35.1	56.8	8.1	2.27	.61
Teacher help to understand the text	53.8	38.5	7.7	2.46	.64	51.4	37.8	10.8	2.41	.69
Teacher explains words	51.3	43.6	5.1	2.46	.60	35.1	48.6	16.2	2.19	.70
Teacher analyzes structure	48.7	46.2	5.1	2.44	.60	43.2	51.4	5.4	2.48	.59
Need supplementary exercises	43.6	56.4	-	1.44	.50	16.2	48.6	35.1	1.81	.70
Teacher helps understand the exercises	27.5	62.5	10.0	2.18	.59	5.6	66.7	27.8	1.78	.60
Need more exercises	38.5	56.4	5.1	2.33	.58	67.6	32.4	-	2.68	.55
Total	42.02	51.05	6.91	15.46		36.31	48.9	14.77	15.52	

of male students do so. The mean scores also show this difference between the two groups where the female students achieved the mean of 10.9 and the male students achieved that of 9.52. The percentages of the option "never" also show the difference between males and females where 24.1% of the male students said that they never prepare for the reading class, whereas the percentage of female students who never do so proves to be lower, just 17.28%.

Sociocultural environment in the classroom

A close examination of the last three tables—the teacher's activities, the students' current abilities and the students' need—allows the sketching of a general picture concerning the sociocultural environment that engages the students and their teachers in the male and female (222) reading classes.

In the male classes, it can be argued that the environment is more teacher-dominated than it is in the female classes. That is, the teacher assumes further responsibility and carries out more tasks than he does in the female classes. 74.75% of the male students stated that their teacher *always* reads the text

in the class, *always* explains the text, *always* explains the unfamiliar words, *always* explains the exercises and *always* asks before—and after—questions. This percentage drops to 68% when it comes to the female students. The total mean scores also show the variance that the teachers' activities undergo in male versus female classes. The teacher's activities in the male classes achieve the total mean of 16.28, while this score decreases to 15.76 in the female classes.

The counterpart argument that could be advanced is that female classes are more learner-centered. This becomes quite clear once one compares the total mean score of the teacher's activities in the female classes with that in the male ones. The total mean score in the female classes is lower, just "15.76" which means that they assume some of the responsibility of the learning/teaching process. Their prior preparation to the class helps them in doing so. Likewise, the mean scores and percentages of the students' activities in the classroom lead to the same conclusion. 35.72% of the female students stated that they always know the theme of the text before the teacher clarifies it, that they always connect the new

words with ones already known, that they always specify the main idea in advance, that they always scan the text for specific information, that they always analyze the structures in the text, that they always guess the meaning of the new words and finally that they always feel that they can develop their reading skills after the teacher's explanation. The percentage of the male students who stated the same thing drops to only 28.83%.

Female students seem to be more active not only outside the classroom, but also inside it as the statistics show. More of them participate in the learning/teaching process in the classroom and more of them take charge of the development of their reading skills outside the classroom by carrying out prior preparation and extra activities. What follows from this is that the sociocultural environment in the female classes is more learner-centered. That is, although certainly guided and directed by the teacher, the patterns of interactions in the classroom allow a better role for the female students than is the case of male students. Their abilities in carrying out classroom tasks and activities are more salient, which means that female students do play a role in directing their learning experience; this role is larger than that of the male students.

The male and female students' activities and participations in the classroom, no matter how intensive and precise they are, do not preclude the teacher's crucial role, however. The total mean scores of both males and females show approximately the same degree of reliance on the teacher for carrying out reading tasks. But, the percentages of the option "always" show that the male students constantly rely, for a greater degree, on their teacher for the understanding of the reading text, the understanding of the new words, the understanding of the exercises and for the carrying out of structural analysis of the text. 42.02% of male students stated that they always need the teacher's help, while 36.31% of female students said the same thing. Also, the option "never" spells out this variance more clearly as only 6.91% of the male students stated that they never need the teacher's help in carrying out the reading tasks, while the percentage rises to 14.77% when it comes to the female students. This seems to be consistent with the previous argument that the male class socioculture is more teacher-dominated than is the one involving female students. In order to meet the male students' needs for support and help in carrying out the different task demands of the lesson, the teachers find

themselves required to take greater roles in the classroom and therefore obliged to allow for only a minor role for the students. On the other hand, although the female students show a similar degree of reliance on their teachers, this reliance is not as "constant" as that of the male students. Female students do need help with the tasks they are required to accomplish, but they seem to be trying to achieve relative autonomy from their teachers in various ways. First, they are more active outside the classroom, carrying out some reading activities that would help them in the reading classes. Second, they are more active inside the classroom too, taking part in the teacher-learner interactions and supportive collaborations for the accomplishment of the different classroom tasks. The burden is not completely placed on the teacher's shoulders alone in the female class.

What is missing in the 222 reading classes

Based on the results of the statistical analysis, the missing activities in both classes will be clarified.

Female students reading classes

1. If we re-examine the four groups of variables with the intention to concentrate on the females' achievements exclusively with no regard to that of their male counterparts, we will be readily able to locate the areas of deficiencies. First of all, the percentage of the female students who constantly prepare for the reading classes is not as high as it is supposed to be. Only 35.12% of them stated that they always prepare and carry out reading activities outside the classroom. Within this group of variables there is a critical activity that, if truly and constantly practiced by larger numbers of students, would certainly lead to better sociocultural learning settings which would eventually lead to an increase in the students' abilities and active participation in the classroom. This activity is the collective discussion of the reading passages after the reading classes. It is widely postulated within the framework of the constructivist theory that the development of the individual emerges from and originates in the "activities practiced in the social institutions of the culture in which the individual was immersed" (Morris, 2001). In other words, the birth and the development of the required reading skills and abilities in individuals are the products of

socially and collectively constructed activities that are jointly created and practiced by the individuals in the society. In this society, collaborative learning and guided instruction take place where more capable individuals assist those in need for help through goal-directed interactions. Learners' groupings, whether they were formal inside the classroom or informal outside it, constitute one of the social institutions that Morris is referring to. The collaborative task-specific interactions that originate in these social settings among the learners are essential, if not causative, to the development of the reading skills we are seeking to promote. If such institutions and consequently their related collaborative interactions are lacking or missing from the student's learning experience, it can be assumed that the development of the student will suffer from a degree of shortage and deficiency. In our case, only 13.5% of the female students stated that they always participate in 'social institutions' where they discuss the reading passages they have been exposed to in the class with their friends. However, the percentage of the students who "never" participate in such collective activities rises to 18.9%. The mean score for this activity proves to be one of the lowest three scores achieved by the female students, 1.95. All these numbers show that one of the factors that are missing from the females' learning experience is a socially constructed activity that is practiced by the learners themselves outside the classroom, an activity that requires interactions between the learners and that shows each and every one of them her potential as well as her points of weakness that need remedial work. In such an activity, the more advanced learners would coach the less developed ones through the assigned reading tasks and together they reach a joint solution for the problem at hand. Students should be shown the value of such an activity and should be encouraged to practice it outside the classroom. Students can be given the freedom to choose their own preferred grouping patterns or they can be assigned by the teacher to be located in certain groups each of which includes learners with varying degrees of linguistic proficiency. In this way, as the

constructivist theory teaches, the teacher will guarantee that each group contains some advanced learners who can act as teachers for those who are less advanced and who need more help in solving the problems at hand.

2. Another aspect whose absence from the female reading classes is believed to create a degree of deficiency is related to the students' current abilities. As has been mentioned earlier, the female students have displayed greater abilities than the male students. But, for some of the individual variables, female students achieved a quite low mean score in the ability to analyze the reading text structurally. Their mean score is only 1.97. The percentage of the students who are always able to analyze the structures in the reading text is very low too, just 11.45. In fact, it is the lowest percentage achieved by the students concerning their current reading abilities. We can assume that if the teacher of these students adopts the structural analysis of the text as one of his main teaching techniques and if he requires an accurate analysis to be carried out by the students in the classroom, then he will encounter a gap and a relative inactivity in the class since most of the students have shown that they are not always able to carry out the required analysis. Thus, in response to this issue, we can argue that a less analytical or grammar-based approach to the teaching of reading is believed to be more appropriate for these students. The focus would then be more devotedly exerted to the teaching of the various reading strategies, skills and techniques, with less concentration on structural analysis; otherwise, the reading class will be altered into a structure one if the teacher spends more time in teaching the students how to analyze the text in terms of structure.
3. The third missing factor in the female reading classes is related to their ability of guessing the meaning of the unfamiliar words in the text. Similar to the ability of analyzing the reading text structurally, the students have shown that they are not always able to guess the meaning of the new words is low too, 13.5%. The students in the reading classes who do not carry out this activity will lose a great deal of the intended meaning in the text and therefore

will find themselves paralyzed while trying to carry out any subsequent task or exercise. It is paramount that the students are taught and encouraged to carry out such vocabulary strategies—inference, guessing and/or contextualization—if they are unable or unwilling to do so. The teacher should frequently explain examples of contextual deduction and inferencing so that learners can come in contact with the importance and efficiency of such strategies. The teacher should also prepare tasks and exercises that require from the students the constant practice of these strategies.

4. When it comes to the examination of the fourth table of variables—the students' needs to develop their reading skills—to pinpoint the missing features from the reading classes, we will logically look for the mean scores and the "always" percentages that proved to be higher than the others. The high mean score will show us the area where the intensity of the students' needs is centralized. Where the needs increase, a point of deficiency intuitively exists. One of the variables about which the students showed high needs is the one related to their understanding of the passages. A relatively large percentage, 51.4%, of the students stated that they always need the teacher's help to understand the reading texts. The mean score for this variable, 2.41, is the second highest score achieved in relation to what the students need from their teachers. As a matter of fact, this need is expected given the students' inability to carry out one of the most important reading strategies, "vocabulary guessing". Large numbers of the learners seem to rely on the teacher in order to understand the text in focus. We can assume, therefore, that more than half of the students remain silent and inactive until the teacher disambiguates the text for them. Only the elite students, those who achieved 10.8% in the 'never' option, seem to be able to participate in the class when it comes to the discussion of the reading text and the associated activities assigned by the teacher. The solution for this problem is multifaceted. First, all the students should be required to rely on themselves for the understanding of the text. This can be achieved partly through the prior preparation of the text

before coming to the class. Second, the implementation of the different reading strategies including "contextualization and inferencing," is of paramount importance for the students to understand the text without much external assistance from the teacher. Third, the teacher can adopt group-work activities in which the students work together to explain to each other the most important points of the text, if not the text as a whole.

5. The second variable that received high mean and percentage scores from the female reading class is related to their need of having general supplementary exercises on the text. 67.6% of the students said that they need general supplementary exercises and therefore they achieved a mean score of 2.86. For that reason, it is suggested that the teacher provides more exercises and activities for the students on the text they are dealing with.

Male students reading class

1. As we have seen earlier, the male students in their majority do not appear to be accustomed to preparing for the reading classes. Only 14.32% of them stated that they always prepare the passages, the new words and the exercises of the text, and that they read the passage inside the classroom and discuss it with their friends after the class. The percentage of the students who always prepare the passage before the reading class is considerably low, 17.9%. If we look at Table 3, which deals with the teacher's activities in the classroom, we will see that 89.5% of the students stated that their teacher always reads the text in the class and 94.9% of them said that the teacher always explains the text for them. Whereas 84.6% of the students said that their teacher always explains the unfamiliar words in the class, the statistics show that most of the students themselves do not bother to carry out the same activity before coming to the class as only 25% of them said that they always do so. This means that there is a serious inequality of role distribution in the classroom. Most of the students appear to exert little and sometimes no—as the 'never' percentages show—effort to develop their reading skills, while the entire burden of the learning experience is

placed on the shoulders of the teacher. As an appeal to our main issue concerning the missing factors from the reading classes, it would be quite important to argue that one of the most influential missing features from the male students' reading class is that they lack autonomy and sense of responsibility concerning their learning duties. They should be required to take the charge of the learning experience by prior preparation and practice inside the classroom and by constant execution of classroom activities that ensure, with the passing of time, their autonomy from their teacher and their independent functioning and performance.

2. Akin to the case of the female students, male students too suffer from a lack of sociocultural settings where they can collaborate together in self-motivated and goal-directed activities to solve some problems or to jointly practice certain exercises and tasks. The percentage of the students who always participate in such activities to discuss the reading passage with friends is significantly low, only 5.1%. The percentage of those who never carry out this activity surprisingly rises to 56.4%. The mean score of this activity is the lowest score achieved by the male students concerning the outside-classroom activities they accomplish. This means that the male students do not only suffer from playing insignificant roles in the classroom, but they are also unable or 'unwilling' to compensate for this mismatch by pursuing supplementary activities outside the classroom. The male students need to be more active in and outside the classroom by being assigned extra activities to carry out individually or more importantly collectively with each other. As has been recommended in the female case, the teacher may adopt group-activities to motivate his students to work together.
3. When it comes to the students' current abilities, we encounter a number of low mean and percentage scores. First of all, the students who are able to connect the theme of the new reading passage to their background knowledge are quite few. Those who are always able to do so constituted the percentage of 17.9%, while the percentage of

those who are never able to do so rises to 33.3%. The mean score is the second lowest score achieved by the male students concerning their current abilities, just 1.85. Now that the male students have shown their inability to connect the theme of the text they are reading to topics they already know, we can assume that most of the male students are unable to fully comprehend and successfully process the reading material. Furthermore, most of them cannot assimilate the new information to their stored information and experiences. As a result, the students will not be able to carry out successfully tasks and activities that require predictive skills. That is, the learners will be unable or unsuccessful in predicting new information from given information, an activity that is central in every classroom or real-world reading experience. In response to this deficiency, the teacher can think aloud to show the students the best methods of connecting the new information exerted from the new reading text with one's background information and knowledge and through this process how the new information is best processed and interpreted.

Pedagogical Implication

Teaching reading is not an easy task. Teachers have been aware of their students' needs and interests. Based on the findings of this study, students are to be taught how to manage collaborative work in and outside the classroom, and to be motivated to do so. Teachers are to be encouraged to divide their students into groups and assigned specific tasks to be carried outside the classroom. It is time for modern technology—computers, radios, TV and videos—to visit the EFL classroom to help students get used to authentic language. Moreover, students, as groups, can be asked to prepare some articles outside the classroom in order to be discussed inside the classroom. In a word, teachers can help their students improve their reading skills through concentrating on the activities they lack. More importantly, students can be helped to be more independent through the concentration on the different reading activities in order to achieve autonomy, which is one of the most important factors that help improve the students' reading skills.

Conclusion

Logically, in comparing the reading skills of the male and female students, we relied on the examination of two groups of data, which allowed us to see how the two genders differ in terms of their sociocultural environments in and outside the classroom and in terms of the associated types of activities, abilities and needs in each of the classes involved. The conclusion we drew is that female students are more active than male students in and outside the classroom in terms of the number of the students who participate in reading-specific activities as well as the frequency of their implementation of these activities. It was also concluded that female students take a greater role in enriching the classroom sociocultural environment by assuming a role in running out the classroom interactions and in showing some strategic attempts at the tasks that eventually lead to some kind of autonomy. However, in seeking to compare between the two groups to find the areas of differences and similarities, the gaps and differences in each single class tend to be overshadowed. The fact that the female students are more active is not to generate the conclusion that these students with their seeming diligence create an ideal environment for the learning/teaching of the different reading skills, an environment that is lacking in male students. On the contrary, both male

and female classes proved to lack some or others of the variables under investigation. For example, both genders lack autonomy; they need their teacher to explain the reading text, to explain the unfamiliar words, and to analyze the structure of the reading passage to them. Furthermore, most of the students, both males and females, do not read the text in advance, do not participate in the classroom discussion, do not connect the new ideas and words to their stored ones, and finally do not work together neither in nor outside the classroom.

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ما الذي يفتقده طلاب فصل القراءة

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(قدم للنشر في ١١/٩/١٤٢٧هـ؛ وقبل للنشر في ٢٧/٥/١٤٢٨هـ)

ملخص البحث. شارك ٣٩ طالباً و ٣٧ طالبة مسجلون في فصل القراءة (٢٢٢) في هذه الدراسة ، حيث أجابوا على استبانة تم تصميمها بحيث تلقي ضوءاً على نشاطات المدرس والطلاب داخل وخارج الفصل وذلك في محاولة لتوضيح ما ينقص الطلاب من أنشطة يرونها مهمة لتنمية مهارات القراءة لديهم. ولقد أوضحت نتائج الدراسة أن الطالبات يتفوقن على الطلاب في جميع الأنشطة داخل وخارج الفصل الدراسي ، ومع ذلك فإن كلا الطلاب والطالبات يحتاجون إلى معظم الأنشطة التي شملتها الاستبانة. فعلى سبيل المثال أشار الطلاب والطالبات إلى حاجتهم لمساعدة المدرس في شرح النص وكلماته وقواعده. أي أن الطلبة بجنسهما يفتقدون إلى الاستقلالية في عملية التعلم.