

# Investigating the Interplay between Teachers' Beliefs and Practice in Reading Strategy Use: A Case of Bahir Dar Town Secondary Schools EFL Teachers

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**Abstract:**-The study aims to explore the status of Bahir Dar town EFL teachers' reading strategy use and reading instruction while teaching reading. In relation to this, teachers' perception towards strategy training and their classroom practices were investigated. All English teachers of eight secondary schools in Bahir Dar that amount a total of 45, and 256 grades 9 and 10 students were taken as participants of the study. The students were randomly selected from those aforementioned schools. Questionnaire and classroom observation were used as data gathering instruments. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods were employed. The statistical data analysis was descriptive and inferential. Accordingly, Percentage and mean scores were used to describe the frequency of occurrence of each item. One sample t-test was computed to see if the difference between the mean scores were statistically significant. To compare the EFL teachers' classroom practice between the private and government secondary schools, independent sample t-test was employed. Data obtained from the classroom observation was also qualitatively analyzed. It was found that teachers tend to believe that promoting reading strategy training is crucial in empowering learners to become efficient readers, but they do not train their students to use the strategies properly. Relatively speaking, teachers try to use few pre-reading strategies; however, most of the while-reading and post-reading strategies are not appeared to be employed. Though it was not statistically significant, the practice of teachers working at government schools had slightly higher mean score(128.20) in helping their students use reading strategies than teachers working at private schools(124.63).Finally, some recommendations were made based on the findings.

**Keywords:** - reading strategy, private and government schools

## 1. Introduction

Many scholars argue that learners of a foreign language are rarely efficient readers in the foreign language. This has to do not only with deficiencies in linguistic knowledge, but also with the strategies employed in reading. In this regard, Parrott (2003) points out many learners of foreign language appear to be handicapped in their reading with their poor reading strategy use; and this poor reading hinders their broader studies and inevitably limits their academic performance. Similarly, some researches reveal that most Ethiopian students do not master reading adequately. Atkins et al (1996) ascertain that many Ethiopian high school students lack reading proficiency in English, which exhibits itself in slow and difficult reading and poor comprehension. This ineffective reading hinders their broader studies and inevitably limits their academic performance. Ambatchew (2003:86) also emphasizes, "Ironically, reading in English has the most pivotal role in secondary school education, yet students are not trained to read effectively. This lack of sufficient comprehension,

evaluation, and synthesis has repercussions for the whole educational system". Abiy(2005) on his part, based on the statistics of June 2002 9th grade examinations of Fasilo secondary school in Bahir Dar, also hypothesizes more than 25% were made to repeat and this could be attributed to their reading ability in English more than other causes which could contribute to their failure

Hence, as Unrau (2004) points out, the reading lesson should aim to build learners' ability to engage in purposeful reading to adopt a range of reading strategies necessary for interacting successfully with texts and to develop critical reading. In doing so, several studies have emphasized the importance of providing explicit training in when, where, and how to use various reading strategies .Taking this for granted, Yurdaisk (2008) argues the teachers' role should be to provide the learners with the strategies that would allow them to become effective and autonomous readers. Abiy (2005) also claimed that the teacher's mediation is a very decisive factor to make students use appropriate strategies and perform better.

Unlike the previous researches, this study is subjected to see the status of teachers' reading strategy awareness and use while they are teaching reading in Bahir Dar secondary schools. In doing so, the researcher conducted a study with the purpose of finding out information regarding the use of reading strategies in developing students' reading competency among high school teachers in Bahir Dar. In light of the goal of the study, the following research questions are posed:

1. What do teachers perceive about reading strategy training?
2. Do teachers let students practice different reading strategies while teaching reading?
3. Which reading strategies are favored by the teachers?
4. Is there a difference between private and government secondary school teachers in helping their students to use reading strategies?

## 2. Design of the study

The study is a survey that aims to explore the status of Bahir Dar town EFL teachers' reading strategy use and reading instruction while teaching reading. In relation to this, teachers' perception towards strategy training and their classroom practices were investigated. The study was conducted on four governmental (Tana Haik, Fasilo, Ghion, and Bahir Dar Zuria) and private (Bahir Dar Academy, SOS, Catholic, and Ayelech Degefu Memorial) secondary schools in Bahir Dar. The participants were 45 grades 9 and 10 EFL teachers and 256 students in those schools. Data were gathered through questionnaire and class room observation.

## 3. Findings

**Table 1. Teachers' perception on reading strategy training:**

	N	Mean	Df	T
Observed	45	34.13	44	61.436*
Expected	45	24	44	

\*P<0.05

As shown in table-1, in order to see the teachers' perception in relation to reading strategy training, the mean scores of the 45 teachers' responses were computed. The result revealed that the observed and expected mean scores were found to be 34.13 and 24 respectively. This leads to say that the observed mean scores that was found from the teachers' responses is greater than the expected mean scores; and it seems that teachers have positive attitude towards reading strategy training.

However, in order to assure whether the mean score differences are significant, one sample t-test was employed calculated at the degree of freedom 44 and at

significant level of 0.05; and it was found that the observed mean score was found to be significantly higher than the expected mean of the test value ( $t = 61.436, df = 44, p < 0.05$ ).

It was also the purpose of this study to see the practice of teachers in relation to reading strategy use while teaching reading. In doing so, their overall practice on reading instruction were analyzed and presented in three stages of reading: pre-, while, and post-stages of reading as follows.

**Table 2. Mean score and Standard Deviation on items related to pre-reading strategies:**

Reading strategies	Mean	SD	Grand mean	Expected mean
Setting purpose of reading	4.20	0.842	51.16	39
Telling students to use titles and predict a text	4.36	0.743		
Asking students to look at illustrations/pictures and guess how this relate to the text	4.02	0.839		
Making use of students' background knowledge	4.31	0.763		
Setting a context before students begin reading	4.16	0.824		
Using instructional aids when necessary	3.11	1.153		
Getting students look over the text before reading	3.47	1.079		
Asking students some brain storming activities related to the text	4.27	0.809		
Encouraging students to relate the text to their experience	4.31	0.701		
Providing some predicting activities for the reading text	4.13	0.661		
Encouraging students to generate their own list of questions	3.24	1.190		
Teaching few key vocabularies	3.62	1.134		
Encouraging students to anticipate what they are to find in the text	3.96	0.767		

Table-2 shows the responses given by EFL teachers about strategies they encourage in their reading lessons during the pre-reading stage. According to result of the teachers' self-report, it can be assumed that the teachers with different level of performance employ instruction in pre-reading strategies. In line with this, mean score and standard deviation of each item was computed to investigate the teachers' practice over the pre-reading strategies. The result revealed that teachers encourage pre-reading strategies with varying degrees.

Among the pre-reading strategies, the majority of teachers give higher values to telling students to use titles and predict a text with a mean score of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.743 followed by making use of students back ground knowledge and encouraging them to relate to the text with mean score and standard deviation of 4.31 and 4.31, 0.763 and 0.701 respectively. Keeping to the same path, asking students some brain storming activities related to the text (M = 4.27, SD = 0.809) setting purpose of reading (M = 4.20, SD = 0.842) setting a context before students begin reading (M = 4.16, SD = 0.824) providing some predicting activities for reading text (M = 4.13, SD = 0.661) and asking students to look at illustrations/pictures and relate to the text (M = 4.02, SD = 0.839) were practiced by the teachers accordingly. Other strategies like encouraging students to anticipate what they are to find in the text (M = 3.96, SD = 0.767) teaching few vocabularies (M = 3.62, SD = 1.134) getting students look over the text quickly before reading (M = 3.47, SD = 1.079) encouraging students to generate their lists of questions to which the text will answer (M = 3.24, SD = 1.190)

and using instructional aids when necessary (M = 3.11, SD = 1.153) were rated by the teachers as relatively least values.

Moreover, the observed mean score and the expected mean score were found to be 51.16 and 39 respectively. It seems that the observed mean score is higher than the expected mean score. The one sample t-test also revealed that there is a significant difference between the two mean scores ( $t = 62.845, df = 44, p < 0.05$ ). This, in turn, leads to say teachers make use of pre-reading strategies but the use of these strategies are not frequent and the teachers do not fully utilize these pre-reading strategies in teaching the students.

The results of the classroom observation almost consistent with teachers' self-report that many of the pre-reading strategies were employed in the reading lessons at varying degree of frequency. However, there is a discrepancy between the teachers' responses with classroom observation in giving priority to which items frequently practiced. According to, the lesson observation, pre-reading strategies such as teaching few vocabularies, telling students to use titles, and predict what a text is going to deal about, asking some brain storming questions presented in a text, making use of students' back ground knowledge and encourage them to relate the text with their experience were found to be the most common practice by the majority of the teachers during pre-reading stage.

On the other hand, strategies like setting a purpose of reading, getting students look over the text before reading, setting a context before students begin reading,

providing some predicting activities for the reading text and asking students to look at illustrations/ pictures and relate to the text were observed apparently a low frequency of application.

However, some pre-reading strategies such as encouraging students to generate their lists of questions

which the text will answer, encouraging students to anticipate what they are to find in the text, and using instructional aids when necessary were proved to be neglected in the reading instruction.

**Table. Mean score, standard deviation on items related to while reading strategies:**

Reading strategies	Mean	SD	Grand mean	Expected mean
Getting students read the text before discussion	3.31	1.345	91.96	72
Teaching students to guess the meaning of unknown words	4.22	0.876		
Encouraging students to guess the meaning of unknown words	4.58	0.543		
Advising students to skip few difficult words	3.67	1.044		
Encouraging students to read aloud	2.60	1.195		
Assisting students to skim a text for general information	4.20	0.869		
Encouraging students to scan a text for specific information	4.51	0.626		
Limiting time for skimming and scanning activities	4.31	0.848		
Motivating students to take notes while reading	2.91	1.203		
Getting students to read carefully and slowly for intensive reading	4.11	0.982		
Encouraging students to read silently	4.44	0.755		
Emphasizing comprehending the whole text rather than each word	4.27	0.837		
Encouraging students to re-read a text	3.84	0.852		
Telling students to visualize what they read	4.11	0.804		
Encouraging students to make predictions about up-coming information	4.02	0.783		
Encouraging students to read the first and the last paragraphs more carefully	3.16	1.147		
Encouraging students to find the topic sentence of a paragraph	3.98	0.917		
Telling students to analyze the text organization	3.20	1.100		
Getting students to use of syntactic, logical and cultural clues to infer the text	3.64	0.908		
Setting a time limit for reading a given passage	3.96	0.999		
Encouraging students to make use of cohesive devices/connectors as clues	4.00	0.798		
Encouraging students to use different techniques of word building	4.31	0.733		
Encouraging students to use dictionary	2.71	1.180		
Asking questions that facilitate overall comprehension	3.89	0.885		

Considering results in table 3, it seems that while-reading strategies are applied in the reading instructions with some strategies being popular than others. The results show that the most frequently practiced reading strategies are encouraging students to guess the meaning of unknown words with a mean score and standard deviation of 4.58, 0.543 respectively followed by encouraging students to scan a text for specific information (M = 4.51, SD = 0.626) limiting time for skimming and scanning activities ( M = 4.31, SD = 0.848) encouraging students to use different techniques of word building (M = 4.31, SD = 0.733), encouraging students to read silently (M = 4.44, SD = 0.755). Some of the reading strategies like emphasizing comprehending the whole text rather than each word (M

= 4.27, SD = 0.837), teaching students to guess the meaning of unknown words (M = 4.22, SD = 0.876), assisting students to skim a text for general information (M = 4.20, SD = 0.869), getting students to read carefully and slowly for intensive reading (M = 4.11, SD = 0.982) and encouraging students to make prediction about up-coming information are rated by the teachers as fairly practiced during while reading. On the other hand, the teachers' self-report revealed that telling students to analyze the text organization (M = 3.20, SD = 1.100), encouraging students to read the first and the last paragraphs (M = 3.16, SD = 1.147), motivating students to take notes while reading (M = 2.92, SD = 1.203), encouraging students to use dictionary (M = 2.71, SD = 1,180), and encouraging students to read aloud (M =

2.60, SD = 1.195) are the list frequently practiced reading strategies. The one sample t-test result also indicates the observed mean score is significantly higher than the expected mean score.

Despite the teachers' self-report, many of the while-reading strategies were not found to be parts of the participants' actual classroom practice. Except in one instance, data collected from the classroom observation prove that much of the practices acknowledged by the respondents were not found to be true. It seems the teachers' trend in teaching reading solely depend on the text book procedures; no sign of additional effort to enhance learners' comprehension is apparent.

In line with this, in almost classroom observation it was seen that teachers follow similar fashion in approaching the while-reading stage. In doing so, except one teacher, others request students to stand and read aloud paragraphs of a comprehension passage in turn. During this time, other students were ordered to listen and follow and teachers constantly interrupt, correcting pronunciation or explaining a word, there by displaying omniscient knowledge. After the comprehension passage was read aloud, teachers once again posed questions from the textbook. The teachers finally gave the correct answer. Here in lies the incentive for students to memorize and reproduce texts without much understanding.

Hence, since students were not allowed to read silently and carefully, the most important skills in reading such as inferring meaning, analyzing text structure, using cohesive devices, connectors, syntactic ,logical and cultural clues to infer, making predictions about up-coming information, visualizing what they read where actively stifled with such an approach. Other important strategies like scanning, skimming, teaching students to use different techniques of word building such as synonyms, antonyms were exercised to the lesser extent when the textbook prescribes to do so.

Moreover, students were not seen motivated to take notes while reading. The classroom observation also indicated teachers do not set time for scanning and skimming activities, and to the whole comprehension passage at large. On the other hand, relatively speaking, some of the while-reading strategies were seen employed better, and students were encouraged to use them. Accordingly, teachers get students read the text before discussion and ask questions that facilitate overall comprehension. Moreover, students were encouraged to guess the meaning of unknown words and focus on the first and the last paragraphs while reacting the comprehension question.

**Table 4. Mean score, Standard Deviation of teachers practice on items related to post reading strategies:**

Reading strategies	Mean	SD	Grand mean	Expected mean
Encouraging students to draw conclusions	3.67	0.826	40.64	39
Asking varied questions that promote discussion	3.40	1.095		
Giving them a chance to comment on the text	2.60	1.136		
Insisting on students to summarize the text (written/ oral)	2.93	0.963		
Giving students a reading quiz	2.71	1.121		
Preparing follow up (extended) activities	3.04	0.878		
Getting students doing tasks using information in a text	3.42	1.033		
Encouraging students to interpret a text	3.04	1.147		
Getting students use their acquired knowledge in similar reading	3.33	1.087		
Getting students integrate their reading skills with other language skills	3.38	1.193		
Making use of key words and structures to summarize a reading text	3.33	1.000		
Telling students to trans code the information in the text to other forms	2.82	0.747		
Encouraging students develop extensive reading	2.96	1.086		

Table 4 presents items relate to post reading strategies. From the result it can be seen that the most widely practiced post-reading strategy is getting students doing

tasks using information in a text (M = 3.42, SD = 1.033) followed by encouraging students to draw conclusion (M = 3.42, SD = 0.82), and asking varied question that



promote discussion (M = 3.40, SD = 1.095). Still some other strategies like getting students integrate their reading skill with other language skills (M = 3.38, SD = 1.193), making use of key words and structures to summarize a reading text (M = 3.33, SD = 1.000) making students to interpret a text (M = 3.04, SD = 1.147) were reported as practiced to the lesser extent. Giving priority to encouraging students develop extensive reading (M = 2.96, SD = 1.086), insisting on students to summarize a reading text, oral/written (M = 2.93, SD = 0.963), telling students to transcode the information in the text to other forms (M = 2.82, SD = 0.747), giving them a chance to comment on a text (M = 2.71, SD = 0.747), giving students a reading quiz (M = 2.60, SD = 1.136) are the least frequently exercised post-reading strategies.

Information gathered from classroom observation confirmed that teachers recurrent practice in applying post-reading strategies is almost consistent with their self-report though discrepancy in giving priority to which items frequently practiced was noticed. Almost all

**Table 5. Mean, std.deviation, and one sample t-test value of teachers practice on pre-, while-, and post-reading strategies.:**

Strategies	Mean	Exp. mean	SD	t-statistic	t-critical
Pre-reading	51.16	39	5.46	62.845	2.021*
While-reading	91.96	72	8.888	69.403	2.021*
Post-reading	40.64	39	6.654	40.974	2.021*

\*P<0.05

Table 5 presents the comparison of teachers' practice on pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading strategies. The result reveals that teachers teach or encourage their students to use the three reading strategies at varying degrees. In line with this, the mean score of while reading strategies (91.96) was found to be the highest followed by the pre-reading with a mean score of (51.96), and post-reading strategies with (40.64) strategies. The result also revealed that all the sub scales mean scores are above the expected mean scores and it seems that there are mean score differences among the subscales of reading strategies.

However, in order to assure whether the mean score differences are significant; one sample t-test was employed. And it indicated that the general rating in the measure of pre-reading strategy subscale was found to

of the post-reading strategies were not given credit by the teachers.

Relatively speaking, strategies such as getting students doing tasks using information in text, asking varied questions that promote discussion, encouraging students to interpret a text and draw a conclusion and getting students their reading skills with other language skills were employed with a low frequency of application. However, some important reading strategies like encouraging students use their acquired knowledge in similar reading, making use of key words and structures to summarize a reading text, insisting students summarize and comment on the text, telling students to transcode the information in the text, encouraging students develop extensive reading, preparing follow up (extended) activities, were not seen in the entire observation. No reading quiz was also noticed given to the students.

be significantly higher than the mean of the test value  $t = 62.845$ , at  $t\text{-critical} = 2.021$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Similarly, the general rating in the measure of while-reading strategy was found to be significantly higher than the mean of test value  $t = 69.403$ , at  $t\text{-critical} = 2.021$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Like wise, the general rating in the measure of post-reading strategy was found to be significantly higher than the mean of test value =  $40.974$ , at  $t\text{-critical} = 2.021$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

Hence, one can infer that teachers mainly use pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading strategies. The result also revealed that there are significant differences among the three reading subscales. Accordingly, it seems that teachers employ while-reading strategies most followed by pre and post reading strategies

**Table 6. Mean score, std .deviation, and independent sample t-test values of government and private secondary school EFL teachers' practice on reading strategy training:**

Variable	School	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Df	t	P
Teachers practice	Government	131	128.20	22.062	154	1.323	0.187
	Private	125	124.63	21.004			

\*P<0.05

Table 6 presents the students' responses about their teachers' reading in instruction in both private and government secondary schools. As observed in table, it was found that the EFL teachers working at government schools had slightly higher mean score in helping their students use reading strategies, which was 128 with a standard deviation of 22.062 than teachers working at private schools with a mean score and standard deviation of 124.63 and 21.004 respectively. Depending on the comparison of the mean scores, it seems that teachers in both school categories have more or less similar practice on reading strategy training.

However, to determine whether there exists statistically mean score differences between government and private secondary schools teachers in the area of reading strategy practice while teaching reading, an independent sample t-test was computed and it was found that schools designated as government and private as to the implementation of fostering reading strategy training have no statistically significant difference as measured by a questionnaire which was designed to investigate EFL teachers' practice on reading strategy training (t = 1.323, df = 154, P > 0.05, P = 0.187).

**Conclusion**

In doing so, from the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire and the classroom observation, the major findings of the study included the following points:

- Based on the teachers' Responses to the questionnaire, it seems that they perceive reading strategies are important in reading comprehension and it is necessary to teach reading strategies in reading classes. In light of this, they tend to believe that promoting reading strategy training is crucial in empowering learners to become efficient readers.
- Teachers make use of pre-reading strategies with different degree of performance, but they are not properly employing the strategies while teaching reading. Teaching few vocabularies before

reading begins, encouraging students to make use of titles and pictures provided in the textbook, making use of students' back ground knowledge are relatively speaking the common practices of the teachers. However, getting students to set purpose for reading, previewing a reading passage, providing students some more predicting activities and setting a context before reading are the least frequently practiced strategies. On the other hand, teachers failed to employ strategies such as encouraging students to generate their lists of questions to which the text will answer and using instructional aids when necessary.

- As for the while-reading strategies, the findings revealed that most of the reading strategies are not appeared to be employed. The teachers' classroom practice seems to depend on getting students stand in turns, and read the comprehension passage aloud and let them do the comprehension questions provided in the text book. As a result, strategies like encouraging students to infer meaning, to analyze the text organization using different clues, to anticipate about up-coming information about up-coming information while reading, and to visualize what they read are not the common practice of the teachers to be found. Teachers do not also set time for scanning and skimming activities and for reading the whole passage at large. However, they tend to employ like getting students scan and skim a text and teaching different word building techniques though it is a low degree of performance.
- Teachers make less use of post-reading strategies. Accordingly, getting students do tasks using information in a text and asking varied questions that facilitate discussion, and making students relate their reading skill with other language skills are the common practice to be found. However, some more effective reading strategies such as encouraging students to interpret a text

and draw on conclusions, comment on texts, summarize a text, making use of key words and structures to facilitate comprehension, telling students to transcode information, encouraging students develop extensive reading and providing follow up(extended )activities are almost neglected.

- The general rating of teachers' practice of strategy use on the three stages of reading indicates that teachers practice on the while- reading stage had a highest mean score followed by pre-reading strategies and the post-reading strategies. The classroom observation, however, witnessed a different result i.e. teachers tend to use more pre-reading strategies followed by while-reading and post-reading strategies. From this we may infer that teachers favor pre-reading strategies than others because of various reasons.
- The findings of the students' responses about their teachers' reading instruction in both private and government secondary schools revealed that the practice of teachers working at government schools had slightly higher mean score(128.20) in helping their students use reading strategies than teachers working at private schools(124.63). However, the difference of the mean scores was not found to be significant while it was computed with the t-test. Hence, it is possible to say that there is no difference of teachers' practice in different school categories.

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