

Influence of Pre-reading Activities as Pedagogical Strategies on Reading Comprehension Instructional Practices in Kenyan English Second Language classrooms

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Abstract

Reading is one of the fundamental skills in language learning and all English Second Language (ESL) learners need to acquire it in order to master the language. ESL learners, however, face numerous problems that need effective strategies to overcome so as to improve reading comprehension. Previous studies have shown that pre-reading activities are facilitative pedagogic strategies that activate readers' prior knowledge, hence comprehension of new text. Thus, the purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to establish if there was a significant influence of pre-reading activities as pedagogical strategies on the nature of instructional practices in reading comprehension classrooms in Kenya. The study objectives were to establish differences in teaching and learning processes between pre-teaching vocabulary classrooms and those not exposed to any pre-reading activities; and, examine differences in teaching and learning processes in brainstorming classrooms and those not exposed to any pre-reading activities. The study was underpinned by Reading Comprehension as a Socio-cognitive Processing Model by Ruddell and Ruddell; and Reading Comprehension as Transactional-Socio-Psycholinguistic Model by Goodman. These models respectively propose that through the influence of the language teacher on the readers, and the individual transactions between a reader and the text, meaning is constructed. The study used a quasi-experimental group design. Purposive sampling was used to select 7 schools, 21 ESL classrooms, and 21 teachers of English. Data were collected using pre-teaching sessions and an observation checklist. These data were analyzed using content and deductive thematic analyses. Appropriate themes were generated and presented as narrations in line with the respective objectives of the study. Results of data analysis showed that the differences in instructional practices between vocabulary pre-teaching, brainstorming, and control classrooms were significant. The study concluded that teachers need to use such pedagogic strategies as pre-teaching vocabulary and/or brainstorming before exposing the learners to a reading text to enhance comprehension. The study therefore, recommended that English language teachers, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, language educators, and the Ministry of Education advocate for the use of pre-reading activities as a pedagogic strategy to facilitate reading comprehension.

Keywords: Pre-reading activities, pedagogic strategy, instructional practices, and prior knowledge.

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Introduction

Background information

The pre-reading activities are aimed at activating background knowledge. In essence, using pre-reading activities in ESL classrooms reflects a tacit acceptance of the role of background knowledge and the importance of building and activating a reader's knowledge before reading to learn. This is imperative since ESL learners have several linguistic challenges to surmount and therefore need more assistance in order to achieve the desired linguistic and communicative competence. Such challenges include but are not limited to lack of vocabulary, lack of background knowledge, and lack of reading purpose. This study, therefore, sought to establish the influence of pre-reading activities as pedagogical strategies on reading comprehension instructional practices in Kenyan ESL classrooms.

Pre-reading activities are discussed in this study from a pedagogical standpoint and not a content one. The content areas are based on tasks in intensive and extensive reading (KIE, 2002). Pedagogically, pre-reading activities are used by teachers to stimulate and activate background knowledge with a view to enhancing the comprehension of a text. Pre-reading activities should be integrated into a "classroom ritual" which Wallace (1992) in de Sousa (2012, p.25) describes as a "three-phase-framework" that constitutes activities which "precede the presentation of the text, those that accompany it and those which follow it". These are pre-, while- and post-reading activities respectively. Indeed, a majority of the secondary school English language course books and teachers' guides approved by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in

Kenya has a provision for pre-reading tasks or activities. These activities range from vocabulary items, discussions, passwords, role-plays etcetera. English language teachers should seize this opportunity to motivate and stimulate learners, using pre-reading activities for both intensive and extensive reading.

There are several pre-reading activities available for use by a language teacher in the ESL classroom. However, according to the scope of this study, only two pre-reading activities are assessed: pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming. Wallace (1992) in de Sousa (2012) identifies two types of pre-reading activities: those which consist of questions to which the reader is required to find the answer in the text and, tasks focused on preparing the reader for likely linguistic difficulties in the text. Pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming fall in the latter group since they have been found effective at activating prior or background knowledge. Hence, they enable readers to navigate through likely challenges to comprehending the text.

Pre-teaching vocabulary is one of the English Language Teaching (ELT) strategies that apply the schema theory. Schema Theory states that students process information by making connections to what they already know (Stott, 2001). Citing Laufer and Slim (1985), Srisang and Everatt (2021) note that to successfully comprehend a reading text, several sufficient language components such as vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and background knowledge play vital roles in enhancing reading comprehension especially in a foreign language.

Srisang and Everatt (2021) further reveals that a number of studies have demonstrated a strong relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension test scores. Sutra and Tantra (2020) say that in reading, the readers need to combine information from the text and the background knowledge to get the meaning of the words. The Schema Theory supports the importance of pre-teaching vocabulary by building on what students already know (Stott, 2001).

Another possible way of stimulating reading comprehension is brainstorming. Brainstorming is a pre-reading activity in which the teacher provides the keyword and then the students list or mention concepts and words which have associations with the keyword. Wallace (2003, p.91) notes that "This may take the form of giving the class a particular key word or key concept, or it may be a newspaper headline or book title". Three advantages of brainstorming are identified, thus: it requires little teacher preparation; allows learners considerable freedom to bring their own prior knowledge and opinions to bear on a particular issue and can involve a whole class (Wallace, 2003). Brainstorming can be an effective activity in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Indeed, different scholars argue that brainstorming has utmost importance in the field of English language teaching (Ganji, Sharifi and Mir-Hashemi, 2005; Mandar-Arani and Kikia, 2007). Feather (2004, p.82) posits that "brainstorming provides plenty of materials for making prediction". This strategy also helps the reader to become conscious about what he knows concerning a certain topic in a text before he or she reads it. This scholar further argues thus, "brainstorming enhances the activation of the reader's schema globally; so that they will know in advance about the ideas, vocabulary, culture, grammatical features and genre structures which are most probably met in the text to be read" (Feather, 2004 p. 84). A study by Labiod (2007) concludes that brainstorming activates prior knowledge, which enhances learners' reading comprehension.

According to KIE (2002) now KICD, reading skill is handled as content at the level of reading comprehension or listening comprehension during intensive and/or extensive reading lessons. In view of the revised English syllabus (KIE, 2002), the integrated approach was adopted for the teaching and learning of English in Kenya. Barasa and Omulando (2015) in Syomwene, Nyandusi and Yungungu (2017, p. 210) suggest integration at various levels such as content, methods, planning for instruction, curriculum design and syllabi, and philosophy of teaching. At methodological level, which is reflected in this study, these scholars suggest integration of language teaching methods, techniques, learning activities and teaching resources level, thus promoting eclecticism in ELT. Pre-reading activities were considered in this study as critical sub-skills that perform a facilitative role in teaching reading comprehension. "The secondary school English language recognizes that reading is a complex skill that involves many different sub-skills" [Barasa and Omulando (2015) in Syomwene, Nyandusi and Yungungu, (2017)]. KIE (2006) now KICD recommends that the teaching of reading should be integrated with the teaching of other language skills and grammar.

Some of the numerous reading skills taught in Kenya include use of a dictionary, use of the library and speed reading. The current study took cognizance of these skills. For example, knowledge of how to use the dictionary is critical in pre-teaching vocabulary. Though learners may decipher meanings of words from context, the dictionary is still a necessary guide. Another important skill is use of the library. KIE (2006, p.57) recommends thus, "teachers (should) encourage learners to use the library during their free time but a lesson should also be set aside for this purpose." Then, one of the things speed reading entails is to train learners to "make predictions from title(s), diagram(s), picture(s) and statistics" (KIE, 2006, p.59). They can do so by: a) Asking the learners questions; b) Holding group discussions and debates relevant to the experiences in the text (KIE, 2006, p. 64). On the other hand, extensive reading can be taught

using materials such as newspapers, novels, journals, plays, periodicals, magazines etcetera. This corresponds with the objectives of teaching reading at Form Two, such as “objectives 7.1 (c) - ‘enjoy reading literary and non-literary materials’ and 7.1 (h) – ‘demonstrate awareness of contemporary issues’...” (KIE, 2006, p.68). The teacher may use group discussion to teach extensive reading.

The possibility that learners or teachers in the reading comprehension classroom could inadvertently bring on board many pre-reading activities not envisaged by the study was forestalled. The study adopted guidelines for pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming, and shared them with language teachers to enable them conduct reading lessons in experimental classrooms – where pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming were used

[https://owlcation.com/academia/how-to-preteach-vocabulary-to-english-language-students and https://k12teachstaffdevelopment.com](https://owlcation.com/academia/how-to-preteach-vocabulary-to-english-language-students-and-https://k12teachstaffdevelopment.com)).

Muya in Athiemoolam and Kibui (2012) points out the general outcry by educationists, potential employers and ordinary citizens who contend that most of the secondary school leavers and university graduates are not equipped with the skills in reading and writing in English. Yet, as Sadoski (2004) states, comprehension is pivotal to reading as it occupies the central place on the continuum where input from the print and the reader is in central balance. Srisang and Everatt (2021) suggest that to successfully comprehend a reading text, several sufficient language components such as vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and background knowledge play vital roles in enhancing reading comprehension, particularly in a foreign language. Athiemoolam and Kibui (2012) opine that quite often, comprehension is difficult for second language readers because of cultural factors. Rasinski in Morrow, Linda and Michael (2003, p.10) observes that “the foundation for all instructional practice, regardless of one’s theoretical or pragmatic orientation to reading, is the goal of improving

reading achievement for all students. This study mainly focused on pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming to establish influence of pre-reading activities as pedagogical strategies on instructional practices in Kenyan reading comprehension classrooms.

A study by Karanja (2015, p.54) observes that “English teachers stated that poor academic performance of learners in reading comprehension was a result of poor reading abilities.” For a long time, KNEC reports continuously indicate that learners struggle to improve reading comprehension outcomes in English KCSE examinations. Additionally, reports on candidates’ English performance in Kenya show that the candidates experience problems in questions testing on inference, vocabulary, set texts and generally questions on higher order skills (KNEC, 2015). KNEC (2017) notes that the overall performance in KCSE English examinations still falls short of the ideal mean of 100 (50%), calling for innovation in curriculum implementation. This academic scenario is replicated in Kakamega Central Sub County where the overall performance of students in English has continually fallen below the ideal mean. In an attempt to address this educational concern, this study intended to determine if the use of pre-reading activities as a pedagogical strategy would be useful in reversing this unfortunate trend. This was done by investigating the influence of pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming on performance of Kenyan secondary school learners in reading comprehension tests.

Statement of the problem

According to Chandran and Shah (2019), reading is one of the critical skills in language learning that must be grasped to enable English Second Language (ESL) learners master the language. Nurmaharaeni et al. (2022) note that if students have excellent reading comprehension skills they will be able to deal with comprehension challenges. To achieve reading comprehension, the ESL learners need to employ effective strategies to surmount such problems as lack of motivation; lack of background

knowledge arising from non-exposure to life-related topics; lack of vocabulary; lack of reading purpose – not knowing the real reason for reading; and, lack of strategies related to reading skills (Chandran & Shah, 2019; Nanda, 2020). The stated problems undermine students' learning achievement, and inhibits their problem-solving skills, future studies and careers (Nanda, 2020). Precisely, the said problems curtail the ESL learners' success in reading comprehension.

The knowledge of strategies and techniques is quite useful when engaging learners in reading; and so, teachers should teach learners to select strategies appropriate for different reading activities to facilitate reading comprehension (Maingi, 2015). Further research has established that a statistically significant relationship exists between interactive reading strategies and achievement of reading skills. In addition, McNamara (2009) in Unal (2017) notes that overcoming reading problems and becoming a better reader and comprehender, strategies are essential. Unal (2017) agrees that improvement of reading skills, which is vital, is possible with the help of effective reading strategies. Athiemoolam and Kibui (2012), however, note that in spite of the efforts put in teaching reading skills to improve achievement for learners, reading comprehension is a persistent challenge for ESL learners in Kenya. This view is corroborated by Karanja (2015, p.54) who states that "... poor academic performance was a result of poor reading abilities."

This study, therefore, established a knowledge gap that exists between the practice of teaching the reading skill as provided for in the secondary school language syllabus in Kenya, and the persistent challenge experienced by learners in their effort to master the reading skill. To address this gap, a number of studies that indicate pre-reading activities as effective strategies of activating background knowledge and comprehension of a text were previewed (Srisang & Everatt, 2021; Unal, 2017; Sutra & Tantra, 2020; Meylana, 2019). The study therefore sought to establish if the use of vocabulary pre-teaching and brainstorming as pre-reading pedagogical strategies had a

significant influence on the reading comprehension instructional practices in Kenyan ESL classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Two models of the schema theory were used in this study. Both Reading Comprehension as a Socio-Cognitive Processing model (Ruddell & Ruddell, 1994), and Reading Comprehension as a Transactional Psycholinguistic model (Goodman, 1994), take a constructivist view of reading comprehension. In a nutshell, the former model posits that reading comprehension is a practice of constructing meaning through negotiation between readers, text and the social context (language classroom). Since the teacher is knowledgeable about teaching and learning strategies as well as the world, s/he orchestrates the instructional setting (language classroom). The latter model was also applicable in this study because Goodman (1994) proposes that interaction between knowledge from previous experiences (prior knowledge) and encountered text or discourse is necessary for constructing meaning. The model suggests that authors construct texts to be comprehended by readers. Meaning of the text resides in the author, while the classroom avails the social setting in which interactions amongst learners or between learners and teachers or reading materials is affected to realise reading comprehension.

In view of the philosophical foundations of this study, the study proposes a pedagogical strategy that emphasizes the need for the reading teacher to consciously trigger the reader's past experiences using appropriate schema-activating pre-reading activities, such as pre-teaching vocabulary, brainstorming et cetera, for comprehension to be readily achieved during the encounter between the reader and a text.

Methodology

The schema theory and its attendant models had a bearing on the ontological and epistemological position taken by the study. This study took a relativist ontological perspective in view of the

theory and established findings. In this perspective, the reality is constructed within the human mind such that no one 'true' reality exists; instead, the reality is relative to how individuals experience it at any given time and place. There were differences in ESL language classroom contexts, and individual differences among learners and teachers that might have resulted in the differences in performance between the two experimental groups on the one hand, and between the experimental and control groups on the other hand. In terms of the epistemological perspective, this study applied the constructionist view. Crotty (2003, p. 42) says that constructionist epistemology is "the view that all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality as such is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context". This view holds that 'truth' or meaning arises in and outside our engagement with the realities of our world. This helped the study to generate contextual understanding of the study problem and to ensure that the kinds of knowledge generated were adequate and legitimate.

This study applied the quasi-experimental research design. The researcher selected two experimental groups and one control group from each participating school. A treatment by way of vocabulary pre-teaching and brainstorming activities was administered to the experimental groups. Kakamega Central Sub County had a total of 28 secondary schools at the time of data collection: 23 were public and 5 were private. This comprised the target population. The 23 public schools constituted the sampling frame for this study and comprised a variety of schools that represented almost all the categories of public schools in Kenya. The sample was derived from these public schools for purposes of homogeneity. The unit of analysis in this study was Form Two level secondary school students in Kenya. On average, the schools in the study area had 45 students in each class (stream), according to statistics at the office of the County Director of Education (CDE), Kakamega. The study area had categories of public schools that represented the various types of schools in the country. Table 1 shows the type and number of schools in the study area. There were no schools in the extra county category within Kakamega Central Sub County at the time of data collection.

Table 1: Classification of schools in Kakamega Central Sub County

Classification by Gender				
Classification by Status	Boys	Girls	Mixed	Total
National	1	0	0	1
Extra County	0	0	0	0
County	1	3	0	4
Sub County	0	3	15	18
Private	0	1	4	5
Total	2	7	19	28

Source: Kakamega County Education Office (2019)

This study used purposive sampling technique. The study focused on students in the 23 public secondary schools in the study area for the purpose of homogeneity. Borg and Gall (2003) suggest that 30 % of the total population constitutes a representative sample. So, the study purposively selected 7 schools being

approximately 30% of all the public secondary schools in the study area; three (3) classrooms per school, being two experimental and one control group. Wanjohi (2014) says that the main objective of purposive sampling is to arrive at a sample that can adequately answer the research objectives. The sample was proportionately

assigned into three groups: boys', girls' and mixed schools. As shown in Table 1, one (1) boy, two (2) girls, and four (4) mixed schools were purposively selected by way of proportional allocation (Kothari, 2003). The study therefore purposively sampled a total of 7 schools, 21 English language teachers and 21 ESL classrooms.

Data was collected by triangulating tools. Bryman (2001) says that triangulation is a critical concept in research, education and life. He says it "refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the ensuing findings" (Bryman, 2001, p.1). The purpose of using a variety of tools was to compare and validate data from the different sources. Bowen (2009) observes that the purpose of triangulating (instruments) is to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility. The study used pre-teaching sessions and a semi-structured observation schedule to collect data. The pre-teaching sessions involved two different pre-reading activities, namely: pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming. The researcher adopted guidelines for pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming. These guidelines were provided to teachers for the purposes of reducing possible variations in their pedagogical practices during the reading comprehension lessons.

The guidelines for pre-teaching sessions formed the basis for developing the observation schedule which was then used to record data from observations in vocabulary pre-teaching and brainstorming classrooms. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2010) say that the observation method involves the researcher in watching, recording and analysing events of interest. It is further observed that "observation is (also) useful in social sciences where people and their activities are studied" (Walliman, 2011, p.101). Observation is also considered as the "systematic description of events, behaviours, and artifacts in social setting chosen for the study" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p.79). Demunck and Sobo (1998) add that observation allows for the collection of richly detailed data and provides opportunities for viewing or participating in unscheduled events.

In this study, both the experimental and control groups were observed by the researcher to analyze and discuss the differences in pre-teaching sessions in language classrooms where either pre-teaching vocabulary, brainstorming or no pre-reading activities were used. A discussion of the nature of teaching and learning processes mainly included aspects of ESL teacher manipulation of pre-reading, and individual differences among teachers and learners. Some specific details on teacher manipulation of pre-reading activity that were observed included: time that is taken to conduct each specified pre-reading activity in the experimental classrooms, as opposed to classrooms where no pre-reading activities were used; adherence to the guidelines of pre-teaching vocabulary such as selection of key vocabulary: pre-testing of vocabulary, presentation of each word, teaching words explicitly etcetera.; adherence to brainstorming guidelines such as generation of a question or topic, encouraging the discussions, setting a time limit, teacher facilitation of session etcetera. Aspects of individual differences that were observed during the pre-teaching sessions included learning and teaching styles evident in the ESL reading classroom; instructional strategies; learner motivation and other affective factors; and, the influence of gender and type of school.

Validity and reliability of data collection instruments

The study conducted a pilot to test validity of the instruments. This helped to minimize threats to validity by addressing Hawthorne effect during data collection; choosing appropriate methodology, selecting appropriate sample and instruments at the design stage; avoiding selective use of data, as well as Type I and Type II errors during data analysis; and, making claims that could be sustained by the data during reporting stage (Cohen et al, 2018). After the pilot study, a need was established for reviewing and changing some of the test items. The effect of these changes was an improved content validity with an even

number of questions, suitable for achieving an enhanced value for Cronbach Alpha coefficient.

Reliability is essentially a synonym for dependability, consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents (Cohen et al, 2007). A reliable study must demonstrate that if it were to be carried out on a similar group of respondents in a similar context (however defined), then similar results would be found. There are three principle types of reliability: stability, equivalence and internal consistency. Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) say that reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results after repeated trials. This study was

concerned more with stability, which means that a reliable instrument for a piece of research would yield similar data from similar respondents over time. The study achieved this reliability through a split-half method during the pilot study, “which involves splitting the test in half (odds and evens) and correlating scores on one half of the test with scores on the other half of the test. The correlation between the two sets of scores is used to estimate the reliability of the instrument” (Wanjohi, 2014, p.85). Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient was computed and the correlation coefficient between forms (the two halves) was .838 as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Part 1	Value	.708
		N of Items	5 ^a
	Part 2	Value	.700
		N of Items	5 ^b
	Total N of Items		10
Correlation Between Forms			.838
Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Equal Length		.912
	Unequal Length		.912
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.910

Source: SPSS Computation

Note:

a. The items are: QTN1, QTN3, QTN5, QTN7, and QTN9.

b. The items are: QTN2, QTN4, QTN6, QTN8, and QTN10.

The closer Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is to 1.0 the greater the reliability of items in the instrument. George and Mallery in Wanjohi (2014, p. 85) propose the following rule of thumb: “ $\geq .9$ – Excellent; $\geq .8$ – Good; $\geq .7$ - Acceptable; $\geq .6$ - Questionable; $\geq .5$ - Poor, and $\leq .5$ -Unacceptable.” So with a computed Cronbach Alpha of .838, the test was determined to be a good and reliable tool for this study

Data analysis

Ader and Mellenberg (2018) says that data analysis is a process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming and modelling data with the goal of underlining essential information, suggesting conclusions, and supporting decision making. This process follows soon after data collection.

Data derived from discussions and field notes on the classroom observation schedules was subjected to qualitative content analysis. Weber (1990) in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p. 475) posits that qualitative “content analysis is a process by which the ‘many words of texts are classified into much fewer categories’... derived from theoretical constructs or areas of interest devised in advance of the analysis...” It entails examination and verification of written data.

Krippendorp (2004) in Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) define it as a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. In this case, texts are defined as any written communicative materials which are intended to be read,

interpreted and understood by people other than the analysts (Krippendorp in Cohen et al (2007). Therefore, the researcher carefully scrutinized the test content paying attention to aspects of knowledge and comprehension appropriate for the Form Two level as provided for in the Secondary English language syllabus in Kenya. Qualitative content analysis was also used to itemize aspects to be observed during the pre-teaching sessions, to correspond with the guidelines for vocabulary pre-teaching and brainstorming.

Data were then analysed using thematic analysis (TA). Braun and Clarke (2012) say that TA may be inductive (bottom-up) or deductive (top-down). This study used the deductive approach since the researcher brought to the data a list of preconceived themes that were derived from guidelines for pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming. Having designed an observation schedule with constructs extracted from the guidelines, the researcher then reported the semantic meanings (explicit content) of the data, and not the implied (latent) meanings. The themes were aligned to the stated study objectives. Stake (1999) says that data coding in Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) is done in order to reduce a large volume of raw data into homogeneous groups (themes) to get meaningful relationships.

Findings

The findings of this study were about the nature of instructional practices in the language classrooms where vocabulary pre-teaching and brainstorming sessions were used. The researcher selected three ESL classrooms in each of the seven schools in the sample. Students in each of these classrooms were respectively earmarked for pre-teaching vocabulary sessions, brainstorming sessions and no pre-reading activities at all (Classroom without treatment). The researcher observed the teaching and learning activities in the three groups using an observation checklist. The findings were used to determine the differences in the nature of teaching and learning, and addressed the two

qualitative objectives of the study. The language activities were pre-determined. The language teachers were provided with appropriate guidelines on how to conduct the sessions. However, the teachers in respective experimental classrooms from each school had the discretion to choose vocabulary and/or prepare brainstorming questions that were deemed necessary for learners' comprehension of the reading text.

The first objective of this study was to *establish the differences in the nature of teaching and learning processes in classrooms exposed to pre-teaching vocabulary and those that were not exposed to any pre-reading activities.*

The findings would address the question: In which ways do the teaching and learning processes in classrooms exposed to pre-teaching vocabulary and those that are not exposed to any pre-reading activities differ? The researcher used an observation checklist to verify activities across the seven (7) experimental classrooms where teachers selected and taught vocabulary. In the checklist, teaching activities included but were not limited to the pedagogic plan that included a conscious three-phase framework; setting objectives for the pre-reading session; managing time during the session; evaluation of the session; as well as adherence to the set guidelines for pre-teaching vocabulary, thus, selection of difficult words; pre-testing selected words; choosing a mode of presenting the words; explicit teaching of the words, et cetera. The researcher observed how and whether or not the language teachers executed the activities set out for the teacher in the checklist.

In the observation checklist, the researcher also recorded learning processes in vocabulary pre-teaching classrooms. This was done to distinguish between the things learners do in the vocabulary pre-teaching classroom and in the control group. According to the guidelines for pre-teaching vocabulary, aspects of learning processes observed during the session included but were not limited to practising the taught vocabulary; learning styles; motivation for learning; reading and answering comprehension questions (test).

Table 3 gives a summary of the findings on the differences in instructional practices between the

Pre-teaching Vocabulary and the Control (No-Pre-reading Activity) Classrooms.

Table 3: Differences between pre-teaching vocabulary and control classrooms

Teaching and Learning Processes/Activities	Pre-teaching Vocabulary	Control (without pre-reading Activities)
Teaching Processes	Observed (%)	Observed (%)
i. Clarifying objectives of session	71.4%	0
ii. Timing the session	100%	0
iii. Pre testing new words	100%	0
iv. Presenting the new words	100%	0
v. Explicit teaching of words	100%	0
vi. Providing opportunity to practice	71.4%	0
vii. Post testing new words	71.4%	0
viii. Creating learner motivation	85.7%	0
ix. Developing vocabulary maps	85.7%	0
x. Teaching styles	100%	0
xi. Differentiating instruction	42.9%	0
xii. Use of teaching resources	100%	0
xiii. Eliciting background knowledge	100%	0
xiv. Use of a 3-phase framework	100%	0
xv. Evaluating the session	100%	0
Learning Processes/Activities		
xvi. Practicing new words	71.4%	0
xvii. Doing a comprehension test	100%	100%
xviii. Learning styles	100%	0
xix. Learning motivation	100%	0
xx. Participation in spite of gender/school	100%	0

Effect at $p < .05$ value ($F(2, 849) = 11.94, p = .000$)

The findings in Table 3 show that there was a clear difference between the Pre-teaching vocabulary and No-Pre-reading Activity (control) classrooms. The activities observed in the experimental group were clearly unexecuted in the control group, except for a common reading comprehension test. This explains why there was a significant difference in the scores of classes that used Pre-teaching vocabulary and No-pre-reading activity classroom at $p < .05$ value ($F(2, 849) = 11.94, p = .000$). The learners who were exposed to pre-teaching vocabulary performed better than those that were not exposed to any pre-reading activities.

The second objective of this study was to *examine differences in the nature of teaching and learning processes in classrooms exposed to brainstorming and those that were not exposed to any pre-reading activities*. According to the checklist for brainstorming sessions, the teaching and learning activities that were observed during the sessions included aspects of the pedagogic plan such as clarifying the objective(s) for the activity; deliberate building of brainstorming session into a three-phase framework of teaching the reading skills; time management during the brainstorming session; evaluating the session; and, working along the set indicators (guidelines) for a brainstorming session such as generating

discussion questions or topics; encouraging the discussion; facilitating the brainstorming session by the ESL teacher; enhancing learner motivation; eliciting prior knowledge; use of teaching resources; adopting appropriate teaching styles; differentiating instruction; recording ideas; identification of relevant ideas; attempting a comprehension test; use of relevant learning styles; developing learning motivation et cetera. The findings of this study would address the question: What differences are evidenced in the teaching and learning processes between classrooms that use brainstorming and those that do not use any pre-reading activities?

The instructional practices in the brainstorming classroom were derived from the

learner activities in the guidelines for brainstorming and observation checklist. These activities included but were not limited to learner(s) writing down ideas raised during the brainstorming session; evaluating the relevance of their ideas before presenting them to the entire class; attempting a written reading comprehension test; learning styles; learning motivation; and learner participation based on extraneous variables such as gender and type of school. Table 4 gives a summary of the findings on the differences between the Brainstorming and the No-Pre-reading Activity (control) Classrooms.

Table 4: Differences between brainstorming and control classrooms

Teaching and Learning Processes		Brainstorming	Control (Without pre-reading activities)
Teaching Processes		Observed (%)	Observed (%)
i.	Clarifying objectives of activity	71.4%	0
ii.	Timing the session	100%	0
iii.	Generating questions/topics	100%	0
iv.	Encouraging	100%	0
v.	Facilitating the session	100%	0
vi.	Differentiating instruction	71.4%	0
vii.	Use of relevant teaching resources	100%	0
viii.	Effective teaching styles	100%	0
ix.	Integration of a 3-phase framework	100%	0
x.	Evaluation of the session	100%	0
Learning Processes/Activities			
i.	Compiling ideas	100%	0
ii.	Ensuring relevance of the ideas	100%	0
iii.	Doing a comprehension test	100%	100%
iv.	Adoption of relevant learning styles	100%	0
v.	Maintaining learning motivation	100%	0
vi.	Participation in spite of gender/school	100%	0

Effect at $p < .05$ level ($F(2, 849) = 11.94, P = .044$)

The findings in Table 4 show that the teaching and learning processes or activities that were conducted in a brainstorming classroom were not executed in the No-Pre-reading Activity classroom, except of course for the common reading comprehension test that the two groups

were subjected to. The study found a significant difference in the scores between brainstorming and No-pre-reading activity classroom at $p < .05$ value ($F(2, 849) = 11.94, p = .044$) attributable to the differences in the activities executed in the two classrooms.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of pre-reading activities as pedagogical strategies on reading comprehension instructional practices in Kenyan ESL classrooms during vocabulary pre-teaching and brainstorming sessions. The study employed pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming to exemplify other pre-reading activities available to language teachers as pedagogical strategies.

To start with, this study intended to establish differences in the nature of instructional practices in ESL classrooms exposed to pre-teaching vocabulary and those that were not exposed to any pre-reading activities. The researcher used an observation checklist to record findings in seven language classrooms where vocabulary pre-teaching sessions were conducted prior to reading a comprehension text by the ESL learners. The checklist contained the activities intended for a vocabulary pre-teaching session as specified in a guideline shared with the language teachers prior to the session. The control classrooms in each school were also observed. In these classrooms, learners were not exposed to any pre-reading activities, rather, they only read and attempted the same reading comprehension test as the experimental groups.

Regarding the nature of teaching and learning during vocabulary pre-teaching sessions, the findings generally revealed that a majority of teachers followed the guidelines set out for pre-teaching vocabulary. The difference in the nature of teaching and learning between the experimental classrooms and control classrooms was significant, and suggestive of the need for teachers in ESL classrooms to embrace vocabulary pre-teaching as a pedagogical strategy. This agrees with Morrow (2003) who asserts that an effective comprehension and instructional program includes vocabulary instruction, for if readers cannot understand the individual words in a text, they will not be able to understand the complex relationships specified by words in sentences, paragraphs and passages. Even Laufer and Slim (1985) in Srisang and Everatt (2021) aver that to successfully

comprehend a reading text, several sufficient language components such as vocabulary, grammar knowledge, and background knowledge play vital roles in enhancing reading comprehension, particularly in a foreign language. In fact, studies have found that vocabulary knowledge was related to reading comprehension more strongly than grammatical knowledge (Srisang & Everatt, 2021).

All the teachers who used vocabulary pre-teaching as a way of introducing the reading lesson, integrated this activity into a three-phase framework. This supports the suggestion by Wallace in de Sousa (2012, p.25) that pre-reading activities should be integrated into a “classroom ritual” known as “three-phase-framework” constituting activities which “precede presentation of the text, those that accompany it and those which follow it”. In addition, teachers used learning resources such as dictionaries and learners themselves to explicitly teach unfamiliar words. Explicit formal instruction for vocabulary in second language learning is advocated for by Athiemoolam and Kibui (2012) because it allows learners to deal effectively with less frequent vocabulary than they encounter in context. To enhance learners’ grasp of the taught vocabulary, a majority of teachers (85.7 %) in this study applied vocabulary maps, one of the numerous vocabulary pre-teaching strategies suggested by McCollin, et al. (2010). For instance, teachers made use of synonyms and antonyms to teach new words identified in the text.

The teachers carefully selected and taught words that jogged and refreshed learners’ memory on events in the reading text, purposely to elicit learners’ background knowledge. This agrees with views of Somayyeh and Hossein (2018) that pre-vocabulary instruction in language reading classrooms gives a brief summary of the content of the passage before the reading and helps the learners to activate the background knowledge to interact with the text successfully. In addition, Langer and Johnson in Yusuf (2011) say that pre-reading activities, inclusive of pre-teaching vocabulary, have the facilitative effects of activating the reader’s prior knowledge, making the reading easier by

connecting the new concept more meaningfully to prior knowledge. The schema theory also supports the importance of pre-teaching vocabulary by building on what students already know. Sutra and Tantra (2020) state that in reading, the readers need to combine information from the text and the background knowledge to get the meaning of the words (vocabulary).

Teachers in the vocabulary pre-teaching classrooms motivated learners through a combination of strategies such as cooperative learning in small groups, autonomy-supporting instruction and positive feedback. AEE (2004b) similarly argues that a cooperative reading environment is a factor that increases motivation to read because it promotes discussion and socialization with classmates. Citing Babbit (2002), Unal (2017) also acknowledges cooperative learning as one of the effective reading strategies. Teachers predominantly used interactive style in this experimental group. This, to an extent agrees with Morrow et al. (2003) that exemplary teachers provide opportunities to work individually and in collaboration with peers. Further, exemplary teachers provide instruction to meet individual needs; and, use a variety of structures to meet individual needs when teaching such as whole group, small group and one-on-one instruction (Morrow et al, 2003). However, it was observed that only 42.9% of the teachers in vocabulary pre-teaching classrooms differentiated instruction. Otherwise, a majority of ESL teachers never paid attention to learners' unique language needs. This was inconsistent with Mukwa in Mwaka, Nabwire and Musamas (2014) who observes thus, "teachers must know their learners well and build on existing knowledge and abilities."

As for the nature of learning during vocabulary pre-teaching sessions, it was observed that in five sessions, being 71.4%, learners made an attempt to construct novel sentences containing the newly learned vocabulary in an effort to practise and retain the new words. This seemed to highlight an observation in a study by Piper, Sitabkhan, Mejja and Betts (2018) whereby a Kenyan teacher

noted that it is not very easy to make a sentence using given words for the meaning to come out since some of the words are hard. Unlike the present study in which teachers planned for pre-teaching vocabulary before the lesson, Piper et al (2018) found that pre-reading activities were least explicitly scripted in the Kenyan teachers' guides (lesson plans). This study, therefore, reiterates that pre-reading activities should be incorporated in the three-phase-framework of teaching reading comprehension, with a clear plan on how to undertake it in the reading lesson. The framework constitutes pre-reading; while reading, and post-reading.

The study revealed that a majority of the learners, constituting 57.1%, were not motivated to learn new vocabulary. Despite that 85.7% of teachers employed numerous strategies to motivate the learners during the vocabulary pre-teaching sessions, they seemed not stimulated enough to learn unfamiliar words. This seems to disapprove studies by Yeeding (2007) and Taglieber, Johnson and Yarbrough (1988) which found that the use of pre-reading activities made learners highly motivated and enthusiastic to read. This could imply that ESL learners are not as motivated to read when pre-reading activities are used as their L1 counterparts. The study also found out that in five sessions (71.4%) involving boys' girls' & mixed schools, classified either as County or Sub-County, the learners were generally active. This finding reveals that considerations such as the status of school and/or gender of learners have no significant influence on learners' level of participation in vocabulary pre-teaching sessions.

Next, the study also examined differences in the nature of instructional practices in classrooms exposed to brainstorming and those that were not exposed to any pre-reading activities. As is the case of vocabulary teaching sessions discussed above, the researcher similarly used an observation schedule to record findings in seven experimental ESL classrooms where learners brainstormed key topics or questions based on a given text, prior to reading the text itself. The schedule specified the kind of activities intended

for the brainstorming sessions. The study separately recorded observations made in the control classroom and the brainstorming ESL classrooms with the aim of determining differences in the instructional practices between the two groups.

The findings on the nature of teaching and learning in brainstorming ESL classrooms generally revealed that the teachers in ESL brainstorming classrooms followed the guidelines provided for brainstorming. Therefore, a significant difference was observed between the experimental group and the control group. The brainstorming session was distinct since, as Wallace (2003, p. 91) puts it, it “may take the form of giving the class a particular keyword or key concept, or it may be a newspaper headline or book title”, unlike a classroom without brainstorming sessions or any other pre-reading activities. With regard to teaching, the pedagogical plan was closely followed in the experimental group, whereby teachers clarified the session objectives to the learners; a time limit for brainstorming was set, knowing that the session was merely a preamble for the main reading comprehension lesson; integration of the brainstorming session into the three-phase framework was observed; teachers also evaluated the session through questions posed to the learners during and after presentations. This finding contradicted the finding by Piper, Sitabkhan, Mejia and Betts (2018) that teachers found some activities difficult to teach.

To ascertain if brainstorming guidelines were adhered to for an effective session, the study found that in all (100%) of the ESL brainstorming sessions, teachers encouraged learners to come up and discuss as many ideas as possible by clarifying that the discussion was not a contest to determine winners or losers; facilitating or moderating the session by overseeing the groups’ activities; motivating learners to actively engage in the session through co-operative learning, autonomy-supporting instruction and even giving positive feedback; individualizing and differentiating instruction to meet learners varied language needs. These findings corroborate Ghabanchi and

Behrooznia’s (2014) view that brainstorming can be an effective strategy in teaching English as a foreign language (FL) since it can motivate a group of learners to generate a large number of ideas.

To enhance discussions during the session, the study found that in all seven brainstorming sessions (100%) teachers almost exclusively used resources such as the chalkboard, on which discussion questions were written; and learners, who were used for peer teaching. In terms of teaching style, teachers in a majority of the sessions (57.1%) mainly used the interactive mode. Additionally, a majority of teachers (71.4%) prepared brainstorming topics that were geared towards enabling learners to tap into their experiences or background knowledge to better understand events in the text to be read. In fact, Labiod (2007) concludes that brainstorming activates prior knowledge, which enhances learners’ reading comprehension. It has been suggested that one of the main benefits of brainstorming is the activation of readers’ prior knowledge (Ghabanchi & Behrooznia, 2014)

With regard to learning during the ESL brainstorming sessions, the study found that in all seven sessions (100%) teachers would apply a variety of learning styles such as auditory, visual, tactile, and kinaesthetic in a single session. In addition, learners were highly motivated. The study attributed this to impactful strategies such as co-operative learning in small groups, autonomy-supporting instruction and positive feedback by teachers. This finding agrees with Mongeau and Morr (1999, p. 14) who say that brainstorming is a “method of ideation” in which a group of learners are motivated to generate a large number of ideas. As for the case of vocabulary pre-teaching ESL classrooms, the study found that in a majority of the brainstorming sessions (71.4%) that included County boys’, girls’ and even Sub-County mixed institutions, learners were generally active. This finding, therefore, implies that the status of a school or gender of learners are variables that do not significantly influence participation in ESL brainstorming sessions.

Conclusions and recommendations

Regarding the nature of instructional practices in vocabulary pre-teaching and brainstorming classrooms, this study made several conclusions. Teachers specified the objective and duration for pre-teaching sessions to avoid spending the entire reading lesson on the pre-reading activity alone. They also pre-tested and post-tested the selected vocabulary to determine if learners had gained the required understanding of the taught vocabulary. They prepared questions or topics for brainstorming to help learners generate ideas. The teachers also used strategies such as cooperative learning in small groups, autonomy-supporting instruction and positive feedback to enhance learner motivation. Similarly, the teachers' use of learner-centred teaching style, as well as removing the feeling of winners and losers during brainstorming also provided motivation for learners. In addition, teachers made use of appropriate teaching resources such as dictionaries, learners themselves (peer teaching), textbooks, and chalkboards to facilitate the pre-teaching sessions. Teachers were unable to explicitly differentiate instruction during the pre-teaching session. They only attempted to individualize attention for some learners but failed to apply other mechanisms for differentiated instruction provided for in guidelines shared with them, such as differentiating lists of words or questions for learners; differentiating techniques or methods for pre-teaching; differentiating group activities. Finally, teachers carefully selected vocabulary for pre-teaching or topics for brainstorming to help learners reflect on the events in the text to be read, and elicit their background knowledge.

The study also concluded that on their part, learners seized the opportunity to generate their own sentences for the purposes of practicing taught vocabulary. Similarly, they wrote down and presented relevant ideas, which they could clarify whenever asked to in the classroom. They also used a variety of learning styles such as graphic, auditory, and social (use of

groups) to learn new vocabulary. These strategies fairly motivated a majority of them to learn vocabulary. Then, the study concluded that all learners were capable of engaging in the instructional activities, notwithstanding their school type or gender, as long as learner-centred teaching strategies were applied.

The findings of this study have implications on teaching and learning the reading skill in Kenyan ESL classrooms; language syllabus and curriculum development; teacher training and development as well as the ministerial policy on language teaching. The study therefore recommended that language teachers should use pre-reading activities as pedagogic strategies. Then, the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) needs to adopt and further develop the guidelines for pre-teaching vocabulary and brainstorming proposed in this study; and, incorporate pre-reading into the new coding syllabus adopted by KICD for digital literacy. In addition, universities should encourage more research on pre-reading as a strategy for achieving reading comprehension. Finally, the Ministry of Education may need to consider the value of pre-reading presented in the findings of this study on literacy instruction in the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC).

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