

What is Missing in the EFL Reading Classroom?

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Abstract. Thirty-nine male and thirty-seven female students attending the reading class (EDFL 222) were asked to complete a questionnaire developed in such a way as to clarify the teachers' activities 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 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 participation in 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.

1. 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 were derived from the syllabi, are:

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 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 only placed on the shoulders of the teacher; 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 others, initial reading of the assigned reading passage outside the classroom, guessing the meaning of the unfamiliar words, connecting the information included in the text to their own experiences and finally doing their assignments.

1.1 The Questions of the Study

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

1. Are EFL students at KFU helped to achieve the objectives set up for them?
2. Do EFL teachers train their students in such a way as to acquire the reading skills necessary for them to achieve these objectives?
3. Do 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 appendix) to shed light on the missing activities in the EFL reading classroom. Furthermore, they constitute the main theme of this paper, which is an attempt to set up better activities and tasks EFL students deem important to develop and enhance their reading skills.

1.2 Review of Related Literature

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 noticed that students were usually engaged in oral and

silent reading for 10-15 minutes during one reading period of 50 minutes. They concluded that reading in a reading class was a missing activity in reading instruction.

It is known that understanding the ideas of the text is the main purpose of reading. To help students achieve that purpose, they are to be taught how to employ their prior knowledge to develop new concepts necessary for the misunderstanding 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 conducted 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 it is sometimes termed by some researchers, 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 investigated the effects of that strategy on the students' reading comprehension improvement. Interestingly enough, the researchers came out with different and sometimes contradictory results. Homan, Klesius and Hite (1993), on the one hand, stated that repeated readings led to significant comprehension improvement. Rasinki (1990) and Dowhower (1987), on the other hand, compared assisted reading with subsequent steps of repeated readings. They concluded that their subjects made significant gains in reading rate and accuracy. Their findings, contrary to those of Homan, Klesinki & Hite (1993), indicated that their subjects did not make a significant comprehension improvement as a result of repeated readings.

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).

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 in-

formation he is being exposed to and his already stored background information and world knowledge (Edwards, 2000; Casper, Cotton, & Westfall, 1998; Widmayer, n.d.).

Most of the literature reviewed so far emphasizes the search for the best instructional strategies and methods of teaching to improve the students' understanding of the text, which is, in essence, the major purpose of any reading course. None of these studies, to the best knowledge of the researcher, attempted to investigate the 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.

1.3 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) with reference to four principles:

- a. Learning actually depends on what we know.
- b. New ideas, once accepted, replace our old ones.
- c. Learning involves investing ideas and accumulating facts.
- d. 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 in focus. This process can take place through the interaction between the students and their teacher, the textbook and their classmates inside and 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 the 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 shed light on the missing activities the students think are necessary for their understanding of the text.

2. The Method

2.1 The Subjects

Thirty-nine male and thirty-seven female students aged 20-22 participated in the study. All the subjects had studied English for two years in the Department of Foreign Languages and recently enrolled in the third reading class, EDFL 222. They have also studied English as a second language in their intermediate and secondary public schools where both male and female students had four classes a week, each of which lasted for 45 minutes.

Female students are separated from male ones in separate buildings. 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. In such a situation, the actual teaching of the female students takes place through closed circuit TV.

2.2 The Instruments

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 (see appendix). It was divided into five parts, each of which was constructed in such a way as to clarify the activities carried out either by the teacher or the students in and outside the classroom. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of six items, all of which discussed the students' socioeconomic environment outside the classroom: this part was developed with two-point scale (*yes or no*). The second part, which consisted of five items, highlighted the students' activities outside the EFL reading classroom, while the third part, which included six items, clarified the teacher's activities inside the classroom. The fourth part consisted of eight items, and it shed light on the students' current reading abilities in an attempt to evaluate them. In the last part of the questionnaire, which consisted of seven items, the students were asked to clarify their needs to develop their reading skills.

2.3 Statistical Analysis

The first part of the questionnaire, which dealt with the students' socioeconomic environment outside the classroom, employed two-point scale, *yes or no*, while

the other parts employed a three-point scale, *always*, *sometimes* or *never*. Since the main purpose of this study was to shed light on the missing activities in the EDFL reading male and female classes, the percentage and the standard deviation statistical techniques were used. They are really simple techniques; however, they were satisfactory for the researcher to achieve his objective. Then the statistical results were analyzed in light of the constructivist theory.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Socioeconomic/sociocultural Environment Outside the Classroom

Table 1 shows the students' socioeconomic status. A glance at that table reveals that female students surpass male students 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 better opportunities to practice this language in informal settings. The mean score of female students who come from homes having 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 owning English tape cassettes, which received a higher mean score by male students, the mean of the rest of the variables was 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 mean	Female mean
Parents know English	1.36	1.76
Family members know English	1.77	1.78
Having English tape cassettes	1.67	1.62
Watching TV programs	1.77	1.95
Reading Saudi English newspapers	1.10	1.41
Reading British/American newspapers	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 students*. These *female students* also show that they react positively to this

supportive environment by spending more time than the male students in reading English newspapers and watching English programs.

3.2 Students' Activities outside the Classroom

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

Table 2. Students' activities outside the classroom.

Variables	Male students					Female students				
	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Male means	SD	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Females means	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	2.21	.52	54.1	35.1	10.8	2.43	.69
Prepare exercises	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	

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 male students said that they never prepared for the reading class against 17.28%.

3.3 Sociocultural Environment in the Classroom

A close examination of the last three tables – the teacher's activities, the students' current abilities and the students' needs – allows the sketching of a general picture concerning the sociocultural environment that engages the students and their teachers in the male and female (EDFL 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 female classes. 74.75% of the male students stated that their teacher *always* reads the text in the class, *always* explains the text in the class, *always* explains unfamiliar words, *always* explains 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 achieved the total mean of 16.28, while this score decreases to 15.76 in the female classes.

Table 3. Teacher's activities in the classroom.

Variables	Male students					Female students				
	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Male means	SD	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Females means	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 in the class	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	Male students					Female students				
	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Male means	SD	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Females means	SD
Knowing the theme before teacher's clarifications	25.6	66.7	7.7	2.18	.56	48.6	51.4	-	2.49	.51
Connecting the theme of the text with topics already known	17.9	48.7	33.3	1.85	.71	37.8	56.8	5.4	2.32	.58
Connecting the new words with ones already known	51.3	30.8	17.9	2.33	.77	51.4	45.9	2.7	2.49	.56
Specifying the main idea in advance	7.7	82.1	10.3	1.97	.43	29.7	62.2	8.1	2.22	.58
Scanning the text	35.9	43.6	20.5	2.15	.74	32.4	59.5	8.1	2.24	.60
Analyzing the structures in the text	15.4	51.3	33.3	1.82	.68	11.4	74.3	14.3	1.97	.51
Guessing the the meaning of the new words	17.9	56.4	25.6	1.92	.66	13.5	70.3	16.2	1.97	.55
Development of reading skill after classroom-explanations	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.

Variables	Male students					Female students				
	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Male means	SD	Always %	Sometimes %	Never %	Females means	SD
Need the teacher to read the text in the classroom	30.8	53.8	15.4	2.15	.67	35.1	56.8	8.1	2.27	.61
Need the teacher's help to understand the text	53.8	38.5	7.7	2.46	.64	51.4	37.8	10.8	2.41	.69
Need the teacher's explanation of unfamiliar words	51.3	43.6	5.1	2.46	.60	35.1	48.6	16.2	2.19	.70
Need the teacher to analyze the structure	48.7	46.2	5.1	2.44	.60	43.2	51.4	5.4	2.38	.59
Need supplementary exercises	43.6	56.4	–	1.44	.50	16.2	48.6	35.1	1.81	.70
Need the teacher's help in understanding the exercises	27.5	62.5	10.0	2.18	.59	5.6	66.7	27.8	1.78	.60
Need general supplementary 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	

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 female classes with that in male classes. The total mean in female classes is lower "15.76" which means that students 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 dropped 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 that 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 greater role in directing the learning experience than do the male students.

The male and female students' activities and participation in the classrooms, 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 teachers 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 needed 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 needed 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 play 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.

3.4 What is Missing in the Reading (EDFL 222) Classes?

So far, the differences between the female and male classes in terms of the various variables included in the questionnaire are made quite clear. Based on the results of the statistical analysis, the missing activities in both classes will be clarified.

1. If we reexamine 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 so high. Table 2 shows that only 35.12% of them stated that they always prepared and carried out reading activities outside the classroom. Within the group of variables there is a critical activity that, if truly and constantly practiced by larger number of students, would certainly lead to a 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 constituted one of the ‘social institutions’ that Morris was 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 and as shown in Table 4, only 13.5% of the female students stated that they always participated in ‘social institutions’ where they discussed the reading passages they were exposed to in the class with their friends. However, the percentage of the students who “never” participated in such collective activities rose to 18.9%. The mean score for this activity proves to be one of the lowest three scores achieved by 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 has potential as well as 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 including learners with varying degrees of reading 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 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. Table 4 shows that their mean 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 11.4%. In fact, it is the lowest percentage achieved by the students concerning their current reading abilities. We can assume that, if the reader of these students adopts the structural analysis of the text as one of his/her main teaching techniques and if he/she requires an accurate analysis to be carried out by the students in the classroom, then he/she will encounter a gap and a relative inactivity in the class since most of the students have shown that they are not al-

ways 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 grammatical analysis; otherwise, the reading class will be altered into a grammar one if the teacher spends more time in teaching the students how to analyze the text structurally.

3. The third missing factor in the female reading classes, as Table 4 shows, 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 (or willing) to guess the meaning of the new words in the text. Their mean score is similarly low, 1.97, and the percentage of those who are always able (or willing) 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 unable or unwilling to do so. The teacher should frequently explain examples of contextual deduction and inferencing so that learners 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 Table 5 of variables – the students' need 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. As shown in Table 5 one of the variables about which the students showed high needs in the one related to their understanding of the reading passages. 51.4% of the students stated that they always needed 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 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 class and the associated activities assigned by the teacher. The solution for this problem is multifaceted. First of all, all of 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 inferring,” 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 in the text if not the text as a whole.

5. The second variable that received high mean and percentage scores by the female reading class is related to their need of having general supplementary exercises on the text. Table 5 demonstrates that 67.6% of the students said that they needed general supplementary exercises and therefore they achieved the 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.

3.4.2 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. Table 2 shows that only 14.32% of them stated that they always prepared the passages, the new words, the exercises and that they read the passage inside the classroom and discussed it with their friends after the class. The percentage of the students who always prepared the passage before the reading class was considerably low, 17.9%. If we look at Table 2, 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 explained the text for them. Whereas 84.6% of the students said that their teacher always explained the unfamiliar words in the class, the statistics show that most of the students themselves did 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 activities. 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 passage 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. Table 2 shows that the percentage of the students who always participate in such activities to discuss the reading passage with friends is significantly low, just 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 (Table 4), we will 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 the given text, 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.

4. 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 was that female students were more active than male students in and outside the classroom in terms of the number of the students who participated in reading-specific activities as well as the frequency of their participation of these activities. It was also concluded that female students played a greater role in enriching the classroom sociocultural environment by assuming a role in running the classroom interactions and in showing some strategic attempts at the tasks that eventually led to autonomy. However, in seeking to compare between the two groups to find the areas of differences and similarities, the gaps and the deficiencies in each single class tend to be overshadowed. The fact that the female students are more active than male students is not to generate the conclusion that these students with their apparent diligence create an ideal environment for the learning/teaching of the different reading skills, an environment that is lacking in male classes. 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 either in or outside the classroom.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Part I

Students' sociocultural status.

N	Statement	Yes	No
1	Do any of your parents know English?		
2	Do any of your family members know English?		
3	Do you have tape cassettes in English?		
4	Do you watch English TV programs?		
5	Do you read Saudi English newspapers or magazines?		
6	Do you read British or American newspapers or magazines?		

Part II

Students' activities outside the classroom.

N	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Do you usually prepare the assigned reading passage?			
2	Do you prepare the unfamiliar words of the text?			
3	Do you prepare the exercises of the text?			
4	Do you read the assigned reading passage in the class?			
5	Do you discuss the reading passage with your friends outside the classroom?			

Part III

Teachers' activities in the classroom.

N	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Does the teacher read the text in the classroom?			
2	Does he explain the text in the classroom?			
3	Does he explain the unfamiliar words?			
4	Does he explain the exercises?			
5	Does he ask before questions?			
6	Does he ask after questions?			

Part IV

Students' current abilities.

N	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Do you know the theme of the reading text before it is clarified by the teacher?			
2	Do you connect the theme of the text with topics you know?			
3	Do you connect the words of the text with words you know?			
4	Are you able to specify the main idea of the text in advance?			
5	Are you able to scan the text to look for specific information?			
6	Can you analyze the structure used in the text?			
7	Can you guess the meaning of the unfamiliar words of the text?			
8	Do you feel that you develop your reading skill after the reading is explained in the classroom?			

Part V

Students' needs to develop their reading skill.

N	Statement	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Do you need the teacher to read the text in the classroom?			
2	Do you need the teacher's help to understand the text?			
3	Do you need the teacher to explain the unfamiliar words?			
4	Do you need the teacher to analyze the structure of the text?			
5	Do you need supplementary exercises on the text?			
6	Do you need the teacher to help you understand the exercises of the text?			
7	Do you need general supplementary exercises on the text?			

ماالذي يفتقر إليه فصل القراءة في اللغة الإنجليزية؟

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المستخلص . لقد شارك تسعة وثلاثون طالباً وسبع وثلاثون طالبة مسجلون في مقرر قراءة (٢٢٢) في هذه الدراسة ، حيث أجابوا على استبانة تم تصميمها بحيث تلقي ضوءاً على نشاطات المدرس في داخل الفصل ونشاطات الطلاب داخل وخارج الفصل ، وذلك في محاولة لتوضيح ماينقص الطلاب من أنشطة يرونها مهمة لتنمية مهارات القراءة لديهم . ولقد أوضحت الدراسة أن الطالبات يتفوقن على الطلاب في جميع الأنشطة داخل وخارج الفصل الدراسي ، ومن ذلك فإن كلا الطلاب والطالبات يحتاج 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 .