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Challenges of Teaching Reading: A Case of University English Reading Courses

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Abstract

The centrality of reading in students' academic performance has been well-established in the literature. As a learned skill, reading is acquired in an instructional setting and students' ability to comprehend and interact with texts is largely shaped by reading instruction. The efficacy of reading instruction is subject to varied factors that stand as challenges to be overcome. This study aimed to explore the challenges experienced by university teachers in teaching reading to B.Ed. English major students. To this end, the study adopted a case study design that comprised purposively selected four university English teachers teaching English reading courses at a constituent campus of Tribhuvan University, and eight B.Ed. English majors from the same campus. The data were collected through a combination of three qualitative methods: classroom observation, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion. The findings revealed students having no coursebooks and relying on other substandard reading materials, students' poor reading habits, students' limited vocabulary knowledge, strategically untrained students, and the length of courses and texts as major challenges faced by teachers in teaching the prescribed reading courses. Drawing on these findings, implications for reading pedagogy are considered.

Keywords: Teaching reading, reading instruction, reading courses, challenges, academic reading

Introduction

The ability to read and write has been well recognized as a core competency responsible for lifelong learning and sustainable development, providing individuals with better life chances and opportunities (Gregory, 2013; National Literacy Trust, 2011; Trundell, 2012; Watkins, 2017). Reading in particular has been identified as probably the single most important force contributing to an individual's academic and professional success (Bridges, 2014; Grabe, 2009). Its role is even more crucial in the formal education system where students' academic achievement is determined by their skills in dealing with academic texts. Since students specifically at the advanced level are required to read a large number of texts for academic

purposes, the centrality of academic reading in higher education cannot be overrated (Moore, Morton & Price, 2012; Trudell, 2012).

There is no alternative to reading in English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) educational context where English is not the sole medium of instruction, where English does not serve as the dominant medium of oral interaction within and out of the classroom and where students' access to spoken English is limited. In such a context, written texts not only serve as the dominant source of language input for students but also compensate for their limited exposure to spoken English (Adhikari, 2019). If we accept the validity of Krashen's (2004) hypothesis of comprehensive input, the role of "linguistically comprehensible written texts" (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 273) as a valid means of language acquisition is irrefutable. Recognizing reading as an essential force in students' language acquisition, knowledge enhancement and their overall academic achievement and performance, Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Master of Education (M.Ed.) English curricula within the Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University have prioritized reading-focused courses to engage students in intensive and extensive reading of authentic English texts. The English Language Education Subject Committee has prescribed five reading-focused courses for English majors in the four-year B.Ed. program. The reading courses, which make up 23% of the 22 courses included in the B.Ed. English programs are *General English* (B. Ed. 1st year), *Reading, Writing and Critical Thinking* (B. Ed. 1st year), *Expanding Horizons in English* (B. Ed. 2nd year), *Critical Readings in English* (B. Ed. 3rd year) and *Literature for Language Development* (B.Ed. 4th year). All things considered, these reading courses are underpinned by the following theoretical assumptions about reading: a) reading is an interactive process, b) reading is a purpose-driven activity; c) reading requires criticality on the part of a reader, and d) extensive reading is a prerequisite for reading proficiency (Hedge, 2000). The courses are essentially interdisciplinary in that they draw reading texts from varied disciplines such as humanities, sociology, literature, science and technology, mass media, and entertainment. As to the instructional approach, the courses adopt "a content-based approach to the development of reading, writing, and critical thinking abilities" (Gardner, 2005, p.v) and stress the integration of language and content (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2015). Integration of language and content implies that learning English with relevant content areas leads to deeper processing and hence ensures better output (Adhikari, 2013).

Since reading is a learned skill mostly acquired in a formal instructional setting, students' ability to perform multiple and complex tasks on a written text is largely subject to the quality of reading instruction adopted by teachers. Duke, Pearson, Strachan, and Billman (2011) conceive learning to read effectively as a journey toward an ever-increasing ability to comprehend texts and teachers as tour guides whose duty is to guide students through the journey. Guiding students through this journey is fraught with challenges of various sorts. However, the challenges teachers encounter while guiding students in this journey of text exploration have been least explored specifically in Nepal's higher education context. To address this research gap, the current study aimed to explore the challenges encountered by university ESL/EFL teachers in teaching reading courses at the B.Ed. level, while focusing on one constituent campus of Tribhuvan University.

Literature Review

Teaching reading is entangled in several theoretical dilemmas and practical challenges. Some of the dilemmas as identified by Grabe (2002) are: a) how to devise effective reading instruction for varied ESL/EFL contexts; (b) how to integrate text structure awareness as a consistent component of reading instruction; (c) how to develop students' vocabulary to enhance their reading ability; (d) how to train students in the effective use of reading strategies; and (e) how to recognize extensive reading as an integral part and natural extension of classroom reading. In Grabe's view, these dilemmas become acute, specifically in the context of teaching L2 reading. Other factors that have complicated reading pedagogy are: a) conventional relegation of reading as a receptive skill in contrast with writing as a productive skill; (b) treatment of the reader as a passive recipient of information encoded in the text; and (c) lack of integration of reading into other productive skills such as speaking and writing (Ren & Wang, 2018; Thornbury, 2017). These dilemmas and factors together stand as challenges for effective reading instruction. In what follows, we review some of the global and local studies on the challenges of teaching reading in ESL/EFL contexts.

Anderson (2015) explored American universities' academic reading expectations and challenges faced by international students. The study, which collected data from 157 students representing 114 university departments across five majors, reported that university students across different disciplines were expected, among others, to understand course content, prepare for lectures, engage in critical thinking, synthesize information, understand genre-specific information, learn/use vocabulary, demonstrate knowledge through writing, understand research, adopt strategic reading, and use text as a resource. Furthermore, the study reported fifteen different reading challenges, including students' lack of ability to read discipline-specific genres, lack of motivation, poor strategic reading, lack of adequate time to complete the reading, difficulty in understanding key vocabulary, lack of academic preparation, and lack of critical thinking skills. The first three of them i.e. the students' lack of ability to read discipline-specific genres, their lack of motivation and their inability to read strategically were identified as the major challenges that students experienced in negotiating academic reading texts at university. Building on and expanding Anderson's (2015) study, Hartshorn, Evans, Egbert, and Johnson (2017) investigated discipline-specific reading expectations and challenges for ESL learners in US universities. They collected data from university teachers teaching five majors, including psychology, biology, and business. Almost similar to those in Anderson (2015), their findings showed that students encountered different challenges that could be categorized into two broad types. The first type of challenge was associated with inadequate language skills that included ESL-related issues, vocabulary, and understanding discipline content, whereas the second category of challenges resulted from students' lack of strategic approaches to reading. The second category subsumed the lack of strategic reading, lack of critical thinking skills, lack of reading to learn, poor comprehension, poor academic preparation, difficulty in reading graphs, lack of motivation and lack of time for reading.

In a similar vein, Shehu's (2015) survey with Albanian high school students reported unfamiliar vocabulary in texts, students' inability to hold text information in working memory during reading, absence of extensive reading and text type, and inadequate background knowledge as key factors that posed difficulty for students in comprehending a text. In another study, Liu and Read (2020) explored students' and teachers' perceived needs and challenges

in university academic reading through a qualitative approach. Situated in a New Zealand university context, their study found that students and teachers perceived linguistic and discourse knowledge, comprehension skills, reading strategies and efficiency, critical reading and information reconstruction skills, and motivation and attention/concentration as important academic reading skills. As reported in their study, students and teachers nominated several factors that posed challenges for students in the effective reading of academic texts. Some of them were unfamiliar words, difficult language and material, the writing style of the author, lack of background knowledge, limited reading experiences, time constraints, insufficient exposure to English, dense information, students' poor reading habits, and length or number of texts. Drawing on their findings, Liu and Read suggested that teachers and students should pay attention to the development of processing academic words, prioritize expeditious reading skills, including skimming and information searching, developing the ability to critically evaluate textual information and training on reading skills and strategies.

Regarding the challenges of teaching reading at the tertiary level in Nepal, Adhikari's (2013) survey of the B. Ed. reading courses and interaction with university teachers in the workshop identified linguistic, cultural and intellectual barriers, and insufficient orientation to and training in teaching reading as key challenges faced by teachers in the effective implementation of reading courses. Likewise, Regmi (2018) conducted a survey with B.Ed. and M.Ed. teachers to find out the problems of using texts for interdisciplinary readings. The identified problems, as reported, were unfamiliar content, students' limited proficiency in reading, and difficulty in connecting ideas from different disciplines. The study further revealed that dictation of key points was the preferred mode of teaching reading. Recently, Tiwari (2022) explored the challenges faced by B.Ed. English majors in reading the coursebook *Readings for the New Horizons*. The study reported that students found the coursebook challenging because of unfamiliar words, lengthy reading texts, complex sentence structures, culturally unfamiliar content, the number of texts included in the coursebook, and their own low English proficiency and poor reading habits. Tiwari's (2022) study sees the necessity of assisting students in overcoming these challenges by engaging them in guided intensive reading and developing their reading habits.

Methods and Procedures

We adopted a case study design to explore challenges faced by university English teachers in teaching B.Ed. reading courses more holistically and comprehensively (Creswell, 2009; Duff, 2018; Riazi, 2016). As a research site, we purposively selected a constituent campus of Tribhuvan University located in the capital city of Kathmandu, where the principal author has been a faculty member for more than two decades. Four ESL/EFL university teachers teaching B.Ed. English reading courses at different academic years and eight B.Ed. English students, two from each academic year, were selected purposively as study participants. Three qualitative methods, viz. classroom observation, semi-structuredinterview and focus group discussion were employed to explore the challenges of teaching English reading courses from "more than one standpoint" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 141). A semi-structured observationscheme was developed to observe the challenges faced by teachers. I (the principal author) observed 28 lessons in total, seven lessons of each teacher. The lessons were audio-recorded and supplemented by narrative field notes and reflections (Dornyei, 2007; Nunan 2010; Riazi, 2016). Each teacher was interviewed twice to further explore the

challenges they faced in the execution of the reading course they were teaching. Additionally, I held a focus group discussion (FGD) with the selected students to understand their experiences with the reading courses. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded, and transcribed later. The lessons, interviews, discussion and field notes were coded and analyzed thematically by both authors (Riazi, 2016). To ensure their privacy, teacher participants were coded as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3 and Teacher 4.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of classroom observation, teacher interview and focus group discussion revealed varied challenges encountered by participating reading teachers. Given the limited space, we present and discuss only five of them: inadequately- and ill-equipped students, strategically untrained readers, poor reading habits, lengthy courses and texts, and poor vocabulary knowledge.

Inadequately- and Ill-equipped Students

The theme of students being inadequately and poorly equipped with the basic classroom reading material(s) emerged recurrently in observation, interview and focus group discussion data. Classroom observation showed that students as readers were inadequately equipped or ill-equipped with primary reading resources and all teachers pointed out this inadequacy as a major hurdle in the effective execution of reading courses in the classroom. As observed, few students had coursebooks with them and that too went unused in most of the lessons. All teachers reiterated that they had to give or dictate notes, lecture, and skip reading activities given in the coursebooks mainly because the majority of students were without the prescribed coursebooks. In the views of Teacher 1 and Teacher 2, in particular, it is due to this reason that they failed to guide students through key stages of reading by engaging them in reading activities provisioned in the coursebooks. As one teacher put it:

> The main problem is that they (students) don't bring the prescribed reading books. How can I teach them when they are without the basic reading material? I don't know how they are going to pass the exam. (Teacher 3)

Like other teachers, Teacher 3 stated that it was impossible to engage students in classroom reading when the majority of them had no coursebooks. Each B.Ed. reading course has prescribed a specific coursebook with pre-, while- and post-reading activities to engage students with texts. Accordingly, the coursebooks were perceived and treated as a key meditating artifact or tool incorporated into and constitutive of teaching reading as activity (Lantolf& Thorne, 2006). Given this fact, students are expected to be equipped with the coursebook and teachers are supposed to guide and support them to read through the prescribed texts and carry out given pre-, while- and post-reading activities. However, it seemed that students did not understand the role of the coursebook as a pivotal teaching-learning facilitating tool, or the teachers failed to communicate to their students its centrality in reading activity.

Some of the students were found carrying substandard reading materials such as guides and guess papers, called 'bazaar notes' in a derogative sense. Such reading materials consist of summaries of the prescribed readings, answers to the questions featured in reading coursebooks, answers to the old questions asked in previous examinations, and answers to the possible questions for examinations. Mostly written anonymously or under pseudonyms, these so-called 'guides' are produced by novice writers solely for money-making purposes without maintaining a minimum of academic standards. Either lifted directly from websites

or poorly rewritten, these materials are used by students as a replacement for the readings prescribed in the coursebook. Expressing his concern over students' use of low-standard bazaar notes, Teacher 1 said:

> These bazaar notes are poorly written by incompetent people. I often tell my students to read the prescribed coursebook itself and avoid such low-quality materials. I repeatedly tell them these are of no use to them and not to bring them into the classroom.

Another teacher (Teacher 4) wondered how students could improve their English by reading such low-quality materials. In his observation, these so-called guides misguide students, distancing them from authentic reading materials and feeding them with poor language and content input. Echoing this concern, Teacher (3) stated these materials serve as a cheap shortcut to examination and these ill-equipped students' only concern is how to scrape through exams rather than how to expand their language and knowledge.

The students in FGD also admitted that they either did not have coursebooks or did not bring them to the class. Instead, they read teachers' notes and summaries and consult bazaar guides and guess papers. Regarding the use of guides and bazaar notes, one of the students said that the teacher's notes and lectures are not sufficient for her to answer reading questions. Therefore, she buys the guides that contain answers to the questions given in coursebooks.

Strategically Untrained Readers

A common view among participating teachers was that their students do not read or they are unwilling to read. All teachers reiterated that students' poor engagement or their unwillingness to engage with texts posed a serious challenge for them to teach the coursebook as intended by the course of study. The observation data also confirmed these teachers' concern, as very few or none of the students were found to be engaged in reading activities such as previewing the title, scanning, skimming, inferencing meaning from context, predicting, making connections, visualizing, summarizing, questioning, and note taking. Instead, they were listening to the teachers' lectures rather passively and responding to their ritualistic comprehension-checking questions in monosyllables. Teacher 3 commented on their passivity:

> They (students) don't have the habit of taking notes while listening to lectures. They should also know how to read critically and make notes and summary. How can they improve their English by reading teachers' notes and summaries only?

Teacher 3 expected her students to take notes while listening to her lecture and reading the text. She lamented her students' failure to listen and read strategically. In fact, she was making a valid point, as it was commonsensical that B.Ed. students should demonstrate their ability to take notes while reading a text or listening to a lecture. However, further probing into the reason for students' failure to read strategically revealed the other side of the picture. The teacher was further asked if she had ever taught her students how to take notes and demonstrated doing so in the class, her reply was clear 'No'. To the question- have you ever trained them how to take notes while listening to the lecture or while reading the text? she replied rather surprisingly:

> Training?! No. Time and again I tell them to note down when I am explaining. But only a few of them take notes. Most of them just listen to my lecture. They are university students. They must know it. (Teacher 3)

Teacher 4 was the only teacher who sometimes oriented the students to some of the reading strategies such as working out the literal and connotative meanings of the titles, locating the key point in the paragraph, and highlighting extracts. Like him, Teacher 1 acknowledged the importance of reading strategies and stressed that students should be trained in how to read strategically. Despite this awareness, he was not found engaging his students actively in strategic reading in class. He ascribed students' unstrategic reading to reading courses themselves. In his view, none of the B.Ed. reading courses have given space for strategic training to students. He further added that these courses are principally guided by the teacher-centered traditional transmission-oriented model of reading rather than teaching as strategy training (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The former limits the reader's role as the recipient of information served in the text or provided by the teacher (Grabe & Stoller, 2011), whereas teaching as strategy training aims to equip students with relevant strategies that help them learn how to learn, self-direct their own reading, which eventually promotes learner autonomy (Harmer, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Kumaravadivelu maintains that promoting learner autonomy through strategy training has the potential to transform the traditional transmissive model of teaching into postmodern pedagogy.

Studies have reported a positive correlation between reading strategy training and students' reading comprehension (Cantrell et. al., 2010; Khaki, 2014; Prichard, 2014; Hosseinpur, 2016). Contrary to what studies have reported, strategy training for students does not find any space in the current B.Ed. reading courses. For want of orientation to and training in reading strategies, most of the students lacked confidence in reading and were inordinately dependent on their teachers, which together led to ineffective reading instruction.

The students participating in FGD stated unanimously that they did not read much on their own not because they did not want to read but mainly because they did not know how to read effectively. A girl student shared her predicament as:

> I want to read better. I want to read faster and remember the points. But the problem is how to do so. Our teachers tell us to read but don't tell us how to read. They repeatedly say- 'You don't understand what is taught in the classroom because you don't read'. But the reality is I don't understand these difficult texts even if I read two-three times.

The teachers seemed to preach 'You should read approach' without supporting students' development of effective reading strategies, leaving them stranded in linguistically and cognitively challenging texts. Another student had a similar experience to share:

> I read the lesson but don't know how to answer the questions. I feel lost while reading the long chapters. I don't know exactly how to find the answers in the passages.

Hence, it seems counterintuitive for teachers to expect their students to read the texts themselves without training them how to read effectively. All the students felt poorly equipped with reading strategies and lacking confidence in reading the prescribed texts, which in turn posed a challenge for teachers in the effective delivery of reading lessons.

Students' Poor Reading Habits

Students' poor reading habits were another reported challenge that affected the effective execution of reading courses. All teachers concluded their students as poor or reluctant readers with limited exposure to authentic readings. They lamented the decline of students'

reading habits and its adverse effect on their academic performance. Teacher 4's remark represents this concern:

> Tell you the truth, the majority of these students do not read prescribed reading texts. They come to the class to listen to the teacher's lecture and get notes. I am tired of telling them to read.

Other teachers also noted that their students showed little interest in reading prescribed texts, let alone other additional materials and expected the teachers to read for them and provide them with lesson notes and summaries. The teachers further asserted that contrary to the nature of reading courses they were compelled to adopt the lecture method mainly because students neither read at home nor in the classroom. Teacher 1 attributed students' poor reading habits to the tendency of exam-focused teaching and learning. In his view, students' only concern is how to pass the examination, rather than expanding their horizons and improving their English. To this end, all they want is readymade notes and summaries from teachers and memorize them for the examination. A similar finding is reported from Namibia's higher education context where most university students were found to adopt rote learning to pass the reading courses (Liswaniso & Mubanga, 2019). Liswaniso and Mubanga's (2019) study documented a correspondence between students' poor reading habits and the quality of their overall academic performance. Regardless of country, reading only to prepare for examinations has been reported as a common tendency among school and university students (Gallagher, 2009). Gallagher, however, sees no problem in exam-focused reading so long as such reading engages students in deep interaction with texts. Conflicting with this view, the participating teachers reported their students' apathy or indifference to reading the prescribed materials and their inclination to read either teachers' notes and summaries, and readymade answers served in substandard guides.

Resonating with what teachers remarked, the students in FGD admitted that they preferred teachers' lectures and notes over reading the texts themselves. University students' poor reading habits was also reported in Tiwari's (2022) study that most of the B.Ed. English students self-reported themselves as poor readers, as some of them never read the coursebooks, while others read only some chapters, particularly those that they thought were important from the examination viewpoint.

Lengthy Courses and Texts

The length of reading courses and texts included therein was perceived as a daunting challenge that impacted almost all dimensions of classroom pedagogy, including teaching approaches and activities, students' engagement with texts and classroom interaction. All teachers except for Teacher 2 complained about the length of reading courses as well as the length of some of the prescribed texts. In their view, the course of study contains unrealistically a high number of readings compared to the number of class periods (i.e.150 lessons, each with 45/50 minutes). Teacher 1 was critical of the length of 'Literature for Language Development', the course he was teaching. Divided into five broad sections, the course contains a history of English literature, pedagogy of literature, children's literature, literary criticism, and readings in English literature. The section 'Readings in English Literature' alone contains 45 readings in poetry, essay, short story and one-act play, and two novels. Overwhelmed by the number of readings he had to cover in one academic year, he questioned,

> How can they (the subject committee) expect us to complete such a lengthy course in 150 periods? They have crammed so many things into a single course: history, pedagogy, criticism, and reading texts. In every session, my only concern is how to complete the course before the students' examination schedule comes out.

His experience represents those of other teachers too, who always felt being under the gun to cover all course contents within the given time frame, compromising the quality of teaching and learning. As a result, they adopted a sprinting-through-the-coursebook approach sacrificing deep, rich reading experience (Gallagher, 2009). They found some of the prescribed texts unreasonably lengthy for 45-minute-long periods. Referring to the coursebook 'Readings for the Expanding Horizons in English', Teacher 4 criticized the subject committee for setting unrealistically ambitious goals, ignoring ground realities concerning prescribed teaching hours, students' English proficiencies and their reading habits. In his view, the experts involved in designing the course and selecting the texts seemed to have focused on the quantity of texts rather than the quality of teaching and learning. Teacher 3, who was teaching 'General English', also felt encumbered with a lengthy course,

> The course prescribes three books to teach in one academic session. If we teach the course thoroughly and by engaging students in class activities, we cannot finish even half of the course. The reading coursebook, which carries 60 percent of weightage, alone contains 60 texts under eleven themes.

Like other teachers, he also felt in a rush to complete the course. The challenge posed by the length of texts was felt more acutely by Teacher 1 and Teacher 4. Relating his experience of teaching some of the long texts, Teacher 4 said,

> Some texts are so long and complex even teachers have to spend not less than 2/3 hours to read them. Some such texts are Intimate Alienation: Immigrants' Fiction and Translation, Literary Colonialism: Books in the Third World, and The Boy Who Lived.

He recounted that these and other texts included in 'Expanding Horizons in English' are not only long, but they are also complex in terms of cultural distance, cognitively challenging content, and jargon and complex sentences. When even teachers cannot understand these texts without multiple rounds of reading, expecting students to read them by themselves is out of the question. If these long texts were to be taught by engaging students in pre- while- and post- reading activities, each text normally requires two lessons at the least, Teacher 4 remarked. This finding was also reported by Tiwari (2022) that all student participants complained about the number and length of the texts included in the course 'Expanding Horizons in English'. Liu and Read's (2020) study also reports that the length or amount of reading materials could pose different kinds of reading problems for students, such as requiring students to spend a large amount of time on reading, missing a deadline to complete reading assignments, poor concentration on reading, and demotivation for reading.

As the teachers' views and experiences indicate, the number and the length of reading texts have at least three implications for reading pedagogy: a) Teachers adopted the lecture method to explain the text content because it was quick, straightforward and time-saving (Thornbury, 1999). b) Given the limited class time, teachers did not engage students in most of the reading activities given in coursebooks, which rendered their teaching shallow. c) Students were prompted to buy guidebooks and guess papers which are cheaper than

coursebooks, which minimized students' exposure to prescribed authentic texts (Tiwari, 2022). Requiring students to read a large number of texts in a limited time might cause what Gallagher (2009) calls 'readicide', the systematic killing of the love of reading. Students might feel overwhelmed by the number of reading texts and might feel apprehensive about reading, which in the long run might develop apathy towards books. Gallagher further cautions that too many texts to be covered in a limited time drives shallow teaching and reading, as experienced and voiced by the teachers in the present study.

Students' Poor Vocabulary Knowledge

Students' poor vocabulary knowledge was identified as one of the key factors fundamentally affecting the efficacy of reading instruction. All teachers expressed grave concern that the majority of their students had limited vocabulary below the expected level which directly affected their reading confidence and performance (Ma & Lin, 2015). Teacher 3 remarked as:

> The main problem is that our students don't understand even simple words, although they are advanced-level students. You might have also noticed in the class their hesitation in reading.

Teacher 3 attributed students' lack of confidence and willingness in reading to their poor vocabulary knowledge. By the phrase 'you have also noticed in the class', she was referring me (First Author) to three students who she had asked to read out in turn some paragraphs from the essay 'I want a wife'. Each of them was stumbling over two or three words in every sentence, which rendered their reading slow and effortful. Teacher 4 was also seriously concerned about his students' limited vocabulary knowledge that impaired their reading performance:

> Most of the student's vocabulary knowledge is below standard. This is B.Ed. level but there are many students in my class who cannot understand the meanings of common words such as myth, eternity, attire, and mortal. Because of this, engaging them in reading activities in the classroom becomes almost impossible.

He further mentioned that limited vocabulary was responsible for students' dependency on teachers. Likewise, Teacher 3 noted that his students rarely did home reading mainly because they did not have adequate vocabulary to understand the prescribed texts. He stressed that students should possess a good vocabulary for success in reading, as poor vocabulary has been cited as the biggest hurdle in students' reading performance (Masrai 2019). The teachers' view that B.Ed. English students possess limited vocabulary accords with earlier studies related to the reading performance of Nepal's university students (Luitel,2012; Shrestha, 2015). Luitel's (2012) study, for example, reported that B.Ed. students failed to comprehend secondary-level school vocabulary which adversely affected their ability to comprehend the prescribed texts.

According to Teacher 4, the majority of the students failed to comprehend implied or contextual meanings of the words used in the texts. As a result, the students found it difficult to penetrate the texts even if they knew the dictionary (denotative) meanings of the words. A similar finding has emerged from Luitel (2016) that first-year B.Ed. students from the same university had difficulty in grasping implied or inferential meanings of the texts.

The teachers further mentioned students' poor vocabulary as one of the factors that prompted text explanation at the cost of text exploration (Adhikari & Poudel, 2020). It seems that there was a circular causality between students' poor vocabulary knowledge and teachers' adoption of the text explanation approach. The teachers explained text content to students and provided them with notes and summaries because students with poor vocabulary could not read the texts themselves, which minimized reader-text interaction opportunities. This lack of classroom opportunities to encounter texts further weakened the students' reading skills and language proficiency, including vocabulary. The students were also aware of their limited vocabulary and its impact on reading performance. A girl who called herself a regular student shared her difficulty as:

> I am a regular student. I find most of the lessons difficult because I don't understand most of the words. Our teacher does not teach difficult words before starting lessons.

Even the highest-scoring student regretted not having the rich vocabulary required to comprehend the prescribed readings:

> My main problem is words. I need to consult dictionaries again and again to understand the meanings of the words used in the text. Therefore, my reading is slow. In reading, vocabulary is more important than grammar. So I think the teacher should give some time to teach difficult words too.

These representative voices suggest that limited vocabulary corresponds to reading difficulty. Both of the students emphasized that vocabulary teaching should be integral to reading lessons, which was virtually absent from all the lessons observed during the study period. Apart from explaining key concepts and an occasional reference to some words in the lessons, none of the teachers allocated a specific amount of class time to teach vocabulary, nor did they instruct the students on any strategies to improve vocabulary.

Triangulation of students' voices and experiences with those of teachers revealed a contradiction between them. Teachers assumed that advanced-level students should work themselves to expand their vocabulary rather than expecting teachers to teach them. They also said that limited class time did not allow them to engage students in vocabulary learning activities. On the contrary, students reasoned that teaching-learning vocabulary should be recognized as an integral part of reading lessons.

Conclusion

The aim of the current study was to explore the challenges faced by ESL/EFL university teachers in teaching B.Ed. reading courses in a case campus of Tribhuvan University. The findings revealed varied challenges in the effective execution of the courses. The major challenges identified were a) student related: students having no coursebooks and reliance on substandard reading materials, students' poor reading habits, and their poor vocabulary knowledge; b) reading instruction: lack of student training in effective reading; and c) prescribed reading materials: lengthy courses and texts. Altogether, these challenges, as reported by practicing teachers, impacted negatively the effective teaching of reading courses, further creating a gap between course objectives and classroom practices. The finding of this study suggests that since coursebooks occupy a pivotal position in coursebook-based reading instruction and accordingly are perceived as a dominating pedagogical tool, students need to be oriented to the importance of coursebooks and the activities included therein to develop their reading performance under guided classroom instruction. Taken together, these findings

suggest that effective reading calls for students' engagement with quality reading materials, reading strategic training for students, students' improved reading habits, and practically manageable reading courses and texts. This study also has an important implication for the selection of reading texts for coursebooks, that is the number and length of reading texts should be decided considering the number of teaching hours in an academic session and the length of class period. Since this study was limited to the understanding of challenges faced by teachers in teaching of reading courses, further studies should investigate the challenges imposed by these reading courses from students' perspectives.

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