

Hindrances Affecting the Improvement of Reading Skills of Grade Nine Students: Hadiya Zone Secondary Schools in Focus.

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Abstract

In this study, the researcher has revealed the issue of hindrances those affect the improvement of reading skills of grade nine students in Hadiya zone, South Nation Nationalities People Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia. It examines the place of reading English texts, and the need to improve students overall reading levels. Mixed research design was employed to analyse the data collected. Forty nine English language teachers who teach English in the selected secondary schools and 160 grade nine students were participated in the study from the zone. To assess teachers' and students' views about problems of teaching and learning reading, an in depth interview and classroom observation were conducted for the study. Causes for students' poor reading comprehension are suggested along with ideas for improvement. It was found out that

the identified problems in teaching reading are that the less applicability of appropriate reading techniques by teachers and students' and lack of regular practice of reading texts. Thus, the study revealed that teachers were unable to provide effective strategies of teaching reading; libraries were not facilitated with reading materials, English textbook reading texts are not designed based on students' culture in order to motivate students towards reading. An important point is to be emphasized is that both teachers and students should play their roles to improve the reading skills in teaching learning process.

Key Terms: Hindrances, Improvement, Reading skills, reading strategies, textbook

1. Introduction

1. 1. Background of the Study

English language plays great roles in today's world. It is the most widely used international language with a variety of significant roles. In Ethiopian Education system, English is a medium of instruction starting from secondary schools and is given as a subject from grade one to higher institutions. It is also a medium of instruction in southern Ethiopia where this study is taking place starting from grade five. Most research works have been conducted in English. English is the dominant language of the media such as newspapers, magazines, radio, Television and the internet in the world. In addition, a number of books are published in English than any other language across the globe. Moreover, English is the most widely used language of diplomacy and international conferences. As a result, it is widely used for international business and banking transactions as well as the main language of the international tourism industry and the official language of the world's airlines.

This clearly proves that teaching and learning English language should get special emphasis due to learners are expected to

improve their language skills of which reading is the one. To use English in their real life, students need to enhance their reading skills since it has advantages. Anderson (1984:1) states "... reading knowledge of foreign language is often important for academic studies, professional success and personal development." Thus, students should develop their reading skills in order to be successful at least in their academic performances and to be competent communicators.

Therefore, this study has the objective of investigating the hindrances that affect students reading skill ability in reading comprehension ability of their students. As it was observed in the researcher's experience, students are not successful in the class room in reading comprehension. Smith (1983) believes that reading influences writing skills because readers unconsciously "read like writers." From this view one can understand that understanding reading lesson helps to understand other skills and subjects in study time. Unless one read and understands a written text, she/he may not succeed her/his good.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The researcher has been teaching English for more than six years and he has observed many problems which are related with understanding of reading comprehension lesson. . The students may have the following problems: According to the researcher's believes those students may use techniques of reading because most of them are slow readers. They consume much time whenever they read any text, may face the problem in interpretation of reference words. Out of the four major language skills, reading is one of the instruments for communication of thoughts from one person to another. It may be through reading newspapers, magazines, books and other sources and learn the current social, economic and political situation of the world. In line with this, Catherine (1992:7) said "... reading serves the wider role of extending our general knowledge of the world."

Furthermore, one can say that reading plays an important role in academic success. Cross and Carney (1950:338) stated "...much of the success of the student in the schools and later life depends upon how can he/she read,

and how well he/she can use the meanings, which he/she has gained from reading.

On the other hand, it is generally believed that students find reading difficult to understand their text books written in English and follow their teachers in secondary schools where this study is taking place. This is also true even in higher institutions. This idea is supported by a number of researchers and educators, to mention one of them Stodard (1986:6) in his report to the Ministry of the Education remarks; the English possessed by the vast majority of students at all levels in secondary school is totally inadequate for the purpose of learning other subjects through it. Students do not possess sufficient English even to understand what they hear from their teachers or read in their text books let alone to participate actively through their own speaking and writing. Therefore, it is important to study the problems and to recommend ways to improve learning to read and comprehend.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1. General Objective

The main objective of this study is investigating the major problems affecting

the improvement of reading skills in secondary school grade 9 students.

1.3.2. Specific Objective

Specifically the study is expected:

- To assess problems that students face during reading comprehension.
- To identify problems, that teachers face while teaching reading skill.
- To identify whether teachers and students give due emphasis to reading.

1.4 Research Questions

This research has questions related the causes of being inefficient in reading comprehension basically emanated from the above objectives. Here the following are the research questions;

- What are problems that students face during reading comprehension?
- What are problems that teachers face while teaching reading skill?
- To what extent do teachers and students give emphasis to improve reading ability?

1.5 Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to three Woreda and Hossana Town Administration of Hadiya Zone government secondary schools. Hadiya zone is located in Southern part of Ethiopia, and it is 232 km far from Addis Ababa the capital of Ethiopia. Hadiya Zone is selected because of two main reasons. The first was that the problems on the students' poor reading ability in secondary schools observed in this zone. The other one is that, the researcher has an experience of teaching English at secondary school. This helps the researcher to easily obtain relevant information. The study also, conceptually delimited to assess the problems those hinder the improvement of students reading comprehension. And grade nine students were the subjects. This grade is chosen because the students were newly joined secondary schools, and many English teachers of grade nine complain that the students have often poor background in reading skills. Thus, it is proper to choose the grade for the study due to time and financial constraints; it is difficult to encompass other schools in this study.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study helps to create awareness about the problems indicating theoretical as well as practical knowledge to improve reading comprehension ability of secondary school students. It will provide the solution for difficulties of reading comprehension lessons for the students. Moreover, it can be helpful for English teachers of secondary schools those who have been teaching English at secondary schools, and it may have relevant contribution for researchers, curriculum developers, book writers and others providing the contents and methods to teach reading skill.

1.7 Limitation of the study

Despite the ample efforts exerted, this reach never be said unchallenged with any problems. The biggest challenged the researcher faced with the pressure from some students to fill and return the questionnaires so in the process of data collection the researcher will persist on incessant follow-up to let the questionnaires back to their original owner,

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

A mixed approach method of quantitative and qualitative design was used to describe the actual experience of teachers and students. Qualitative part of the research enabled the researcher to understand the subjective meaning, action and context of the participants in their natural setting. The second part which is quantitative helped the researcher to collect and display data in numerical rather than narrative form. This method contains self-administered questionnaires which help answer the research questions.

The researcher used descriptive survey method. The nature of the problem and the kind of data which sought forces the method selection. As mentioned earlier, the study is aimed at investigating the problems of improving primary school students reading comprehension skills in Hadiya Zone in SNNP Region. Thus, a descriptive survey method was employed to achieve the objective of the research since it shows the prevailing practices and condition of teaching reading skills in the high schools. Descriptive survey design also allows collecting relevant data from a sample of population via a questionnaire, and it highly minimizes bias and random errors.

2.2 Sources of Data

The source of data which was used in this study was primary source. The primary data source was employed by using the tools such as questionnaire, interview and classroom observation.

Population Sample and Sampling Techniques

The study was conducted in eight high schools of Hadiya Zone. The Hadiya Zone has ten woredas and two town Administrations. From ten Woredas, three Woredas such as Lemo, Ani-Lemo, Misha and Hossana Town Administration were selected purposively, and these Woredas have 16(sixteen) high schools. Each selected Woreda has four high schools. Among the schools, the researcher selected eight of them two from each woredas using lottery system to give equal opportunity for each school. There are 49 English teachers in the sample schools; 27 of them are males and 22 of them are females, all of the total teachers have been selected using purposive sampling technique. Moreover, 160 students 20 from each school have been selected by lottery system.

2.4. Instruments of Data Collection

Multiple instruments of data collection were used in this study. According to Creswell (2003: 220-225), using more than one data collecting techniques has an advantage to combine the strengths and minimize the weakness of data. In the same view, Best et al(1999:39) states that single study can use both qualitative and quantitative tools.

To gather data questionnaires, classroom observation and interview were developed on the basis of literature review.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was both open-ended and close-ended types. Questionnaire was prepared for teachers and students. Both types of questionnaires were prepared in English, and then translated in to Amharic for students with the aim of helping the respondents feel at ease while.

Students' Questionnaire: a set of questionnaire prepared for students was containing fifteen close ended items. All the items required selection of possible responses such as yes/no, agrees/disagree. The items focus on problems of learning to reading comprehension. The questionnaire had only one section. The purpose of the items of the questionnaire was as the

students responses is very helpful in providing the researcher with some more information in addition to the teachers about the problems occur during the teaching learning process of reading. 160 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the sample students and 148 were collected.

Teacher's Questionnaire: another set of questionnaire with twelve items was developed and distributed for grade nine English teachers. The three items were open-ended. Among the closed-ended question six of them require selection of possible answers and the others need a tick mark in a space provided. The questionnaire consisted two sections; the first section was devoted to background information, such as sex, age, qualification, and years of experience. The second section consisted fourteen items. The questionnaire was developed to obtain valuable information on the problems of learning to read and comprehend. Finally, all the copies of the questionnaire distributed were filled out and collected.

Interviews

Interview is an instrument to secure an in depth data. The other instrument for the study was an interview which consist five

semi-structured questions. The questions focused on the issues the researcher needs more explanation and deeper understanding. These interview questions were given to the eight of the teachers who were teaching English for grade nine students. It was conducted just to cross-check how far reliable of the information collected through the questionnaires.

Classroom observation

To get additional first hand information, classroom observation was conducted. The researcher prepared check list to conduct the actual classroom observation. The classroom observation was conducted twice.

Procedure of Data Collection

The process of data collection involves the following procedures. First, the researcher made awareness of the sample population (respondents) to orient the purpose of the study and to create rapport with them. After securing the necessary willingness, the teachers and other respondents were obtained.

Then, the questionnaire was distributed and after completion it was collected.

Consequently, interview was conducted with English teachers.

Tools of data Analysis

Data analysis in a mixed method according to Creswell (2009) occurs both within and between the qualitative and quantitative approaches. On the basis of instruments employed and the nature of questions, both qualitative and quantitative techniques of data analysis were employed in this study.

After organizing collected data, tabulating was carried out. The data obtained through questionnaires, and descriptive statistics of count, percentages and averages. For ordinal variables, a frequency count for each value is very descriptive and the mean is appropriate for describing interval or ratio data.

Finally, the data collected was tabulated, analyzed and interpreted by using frequency and percentages. The interview result was organized by grouping similar types of answers across the respondents.

3. Presentation and Analysis

3.1. Students Responses to the Questionnaire Items

The purpose of this section is to present the data gathered on problems students face to read and comprehend the reading text in grade nine at selected high schools in Hadiya zone. From the total distributed questionnaire papers 148 were returned out of 160. The data gathered through the questionnaires are tallied, tabulated and analyzed.

Table 1: Interest in reading

Item no	Response	Number of Respondents	%
1	Yes	102	68.9
	No	-	-
	Interested in few passages	46	31.1
3	History	-	-
	Dialogue	49	33.1
	Deceive writing	19	12.8
	Fiction	20	13.5
	News paper	-	-
	Bulletin	20	13.5
	Poems	40	27

Table 1: shows the interest of the students in reading English texts. Consequently, for the first item, 68.9% of the respondents replied that they like to read English texts, and 31.1% of them like to read few passages. From these we recognize that most of respondents have interest even though they are poor in reading of various materials.

In item 3, 33.1% of the respondents preferred to read dialogue, 27% of them

preferred to read poems, and 13.5% of them wanted to read bulletins and fiction where as 12.8% wanted to read deceive stories.

From these, one can conclude that reading texts should be prepared from various reading materials/sources to enhance students reading interest and learning to comprehend and to make all students take part in reading as they have interest to read as shown in item 1.

Table 2: Availability of English text books

Item no	Responses	No. of respondents	%
4	Yes	-	-
	No	-	-
	it is given in pairs	148	100 %

Table 2 shows 100% of the respondents replied that English text book given in pairs. This clearly shows that English texts books are not provided sufficiently for them, even though they are interesting to read in table 1.

Table 3: Understanding of English texts

Item no	Responses	No. of respondents	%
7	Yes	20	13.5
	No	89	60.1
	to some extent	39	26.35

As can be seen in table 3, 60.1% of the respondents replied that they fail to understand passages in the text books only 13.5 % of them could understand, and

26.35% of them understand to some extent. The majority of respondents in this table responded that they do not understand the passage.

Table 4: How often English text and other English subjects are read

Item no	Responses	No. of respondents	%
8	at least two hours	8	5.4
	in my learning time	131	88.5
	I don't have time to read at home	9	6.08

From the above table indicates that 88.5% of students read only when they go to school and 5.4% of the respondents spent two hours

per a day for reading, and 6.08% of students are burdened with their home tasks and no time to read.

Table 5: Teachers role and guidance in some pre- and post-reading question

Item no	Responses	No. of respondents	%
9	Yes	111	75
	some times	37	25
	Never	-	-

According to table 5, 75% of the respondents replied yes, and the rest of 25% of students responded sometimes that their English teacher presents them pre- reading

and post- reading and leave them to discuss with each other. As more than half of respondents said teachers perform their role to wards of teaching reading lesson.

Table 6: Grade nine English texts excluded all students’ cultural background

Item no	Responses.	No of response	%
10&14	Agree	35	23.6
	strongly agree	94	63.5
	Disagree	19	12.8

Table 6 shows that 63.5% of the respondents strongly agreed and 23.6% of them agreed that on disregarding of students cultural background of the text. In contrast 12.8% of respondents disagreed with the statement. This implies that most reading hasn’t taken in to account the cultural background of students.

holder. 42 of them are married, and seven of them are unmarried. All of these teachers have been teaching English over five years in high schools. Part two of the questionnaires included multiple choice, short answers, and open-ended interviews. All the questionnaires were distributed to these teachers and all were filled and returned.

3.2. Teachers Responses to the Questionnaire

Here the first part encompasses personal information. All of them had BA degree

3.2.1. Teachers Responses to the Close Ended Questions

Table 7: Inclusion of cultural background on grade nine English books

Item	Responses	No. Respondents
In grade eight reading texts have written by taking into account the cultural background	Strongly agree	45
	Agree	4
	Strongly disagree	0
	Disagree	0

Table 7 shows 45 of the respondents are strongly agreed and the remaining respondent is agreed on due consideration of cultural background of students. This

implies that the cultural background of the students taken into account when grade nine reading texts are prepared.

Table 8: Interest on teaching reading lessons in the text book

Item	Responses	No. of respondents
Are you interested in teaching all reading lessons in the text book	Yes	0
	No	49

As displayed in table 8 of them are not interested to teach all reading lessons in the text book. This implies that, they do teach

part only some reading lesson and some of them will be ignored by teachers

Table 9: Why to teach reading skill

Item	Responses	No. of respondents
Why do you think you teach reading skill	Because it is one of the skill	-
	Because it is included in the text book	-
	To develop real life reading	49

As can be seen in table 9, all of the teachers said they teach reading skills to develop real reading we can understand from the table

that we this claim to have developed real reading.

Table 10: Inclusion of student’s background and knowledge on grade nine books

Item	Responses	No. of respondents
Grade nine texts have been written by taking into account the students background and knowledge	Strongly agree	47
	Agree	2
	Strongly disagree	0
	Disagree	0

As shown in above table 10, all English teachers of this grade agreed, reading materials provided for them is appropriately, designed and prepared in a such a way that paying due attention and considering their

understanding level and background. From these we may say that the linguistic level and the content of the passage are to the level and interest of the student

Table 11 : Students common reading problems

Item	Responses	No. of respondents	
Which of the following problems do your students usually face when they read	a) sub-vocalization	Strongly agree	6
		Agree	43
		Strongly disagree	0
		Disagree	0
	b) Regression and finger printing	Strongly agree	0
		Agree	0
		Strongly disagree	12
		Disagree	37
	c) miss understanding of structural meaning	Strongly agree	49
		Agree	0
		Strongly disagree	0
		Disagree	0
	d) in ability to relate ideas in text	Strongly agree	49
		Agree	0
		Strongly disagree	0
		Disagree	0

e) misreading the written words	Strongly agree	0
	Agree	0
	Strongly disagree	49
	Disagree	0
f) inability to grasp the intellectual content of the text	Strongly agree	44
	Agree	5
	Strongly disagree	0
	Disagree	0
g) lack of familiarity with certain types of writing	Strongly agree	0
	Agree	0
	Strongly disagree	8
	Disagree	41

In table 11 above all teachers merely agreed up on certain problems as usually face during their reading class. As shown in the table problems like lack of understanding in grammatical usage, inability to relate ideas in text (interpretation, analyze in, inferring referring, summarizing etc) and to grasping

the intellectual content of the text are the major problems often face in English class. Whereas they disagreed on the problems like reading loudly, regression, finger pointing and miss reading the written words are not frequently problems but these are only faced rarely face on few students.

Table 12: Use of library

Item	Responses	No. of respondents
I encourage my students to use library for additional reading	Strongly agree	47
	Agree	2
	Strongly disagree	0
	Disagree	0

Table 12 shows that 47 of respondents strongly agree and two teachers agreed that encourage their students to use library for

additional reading. From this we can conclude that all the respondents are

concerned with what the students can do for themselves

3.2.2. Interviewee Teachers Responses

Almost all interviewee teachers believe that the importance of the teaching reading, and most respondents said they need to give attention to develop their students reading skills ability. They replied that to minimize their students reading skills problem, they are required to select, prepare and design reading texts based on students interest. Moreover, they advised their students to read different texts for improving reading skills.

The respondents responded that students are unexpectedly poor in reading skill and in something else listening, speaking and writing. They also answered that language skills are integrated one another. In general, the interviewees said the researcher that the problem around reading is very critical and inevitable, to mention some of them:

- Unmanageable class size
- Lack of concentration on the part of the students
- Insufficient text book
- Limited intelligence

- Oral reading
- Inability to relate ideas
- Lack of experience in reading
- Improper chairs arrangement leads to poor group discussion

3.2.3. Classroom observation

The third data collection instrument which was used to triangulate the data was classroom observation. Two sections were purposively selected for classroom observation based on their experience one is experienced and another one is newly recruited English teachers were teaching the subject, and each of them was observed two times.

The researcher used checklist for observation purpose. The questions focused on the way of delivering the reading lesson, the role of the teacher, the role of the students, the role of the reading text, the classroom arrangement, the class size and the existing challenges in the classroom while the students are learning the reading skills lesson were addressed.

The researcher summarized the actual classroom observation in line with the

checklist. A number of students in a class were 80 to 85. The class size is too large to help every student to improve his or her reading skills. In each classroom, students' seats were fixed, so it was difficult to give group activities to create interaction among students. Most of the students did not actively engaged in reading activities. The way the teachers employed to teaching reading skills was not incorporated with reading strategies.

4. Conclusion

After the analysis of the gathered data the researcher has come up with the following conclusion.

1. Almost all of the teachers are aware of the significance of teaching reading skills, and they encourage students to use library for additional reading. Majority of the teachers tried to activate students' prior knowledge before the students start to read, and teachers invited the students to relate the activity with their real life after the reading passage. Even though, teachers are also clearer with the purpose of

teaching reading skills, all teachers are interested to teach only in some part of reading lesson during their practice.

2. Majority of the students are not good due to their poor background in reading skills even though they are interested in learning to read comprehended. They do not read regularly materials that are printed in English and they are not provided with adequate reading materials from their schools. This shows it is difficult to improve students reading skills without encouraging them to read different reading materials regularly based on their purpose.
3. The problems students were experiencing during learning to read and comprehend are reading loudly, regression finger pointing is rarely occurred to them, and the students were unable to give contextual meaning for new words, lack of understanding on grammatical use, inability to relate ideas in text and grasping the intellectual context of the text are major problems.
4. Teachers pointed out a lot of problems which hinder learning to

read and comprehend such as unmanageable class of size, lack of concentration from the students' part, insufficient text book, limited intelligence of the students, shortage of reading materials which are written in English, lack of internet access and improper chair arrangement can for group discussion are the major problems contributing for students poor reading ability.

4.1. Recommendations

From the conclusion drawn, the researcher recommends the following:

1. Almost majority of the students have interest for learning to read English texts. Having an interest to something plays its role to be fruitful, so teachers should use this opportunity by teaching reading skills based on the principles of enabling learners to use the language in their real life communication. Therefore, students should be given various reading materials to improve their reading skills.
2. There are a number of research findings which revealed various

reading strategies, so teachers should use these strategies when they teach reading skills.

3. Reading is personal activity, and it requires concentration to extract meaning from written text. Therefore, students should be encouraged to develop silent reading habit. Students should be given adequate opportunities to predict and guess the meanings of words and the ideas of sentences. Moreover, the school should provide sufficient reading materials; assign a manageable class size, adjusting library usage and deliver adequate internet access.
4. Teachers should get special attention to assure quality education. To attain this, the ministry of education and other concerned bodies should organize workshops, seminars and in-service training related with the improvements of students' language skills in general reading skills in particular.

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