



Exploring the Perception and Practice of Teaching Reading Skills in Secondary Schools in Ethiopia

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Introduction

The international demand for learning English has dramatically increased during the last several decades (Reimer, 2012). The main reason is that English is the world's most widely used foreign or second language. In our country, Ethiopia, the role of English is quite important as it is in many other countries. It has occupied a prominent position in the country because it is being used in education. It serves as the medium of instruction in schools and universities; the English language is also studied as a subject starting from grade one. The implication is that it is an invaluable language to learn. Among other language skills, the reading skill is one of the major skills. Scholars, such as Brown (2001), contend that reading has been one of the most emphasized skills among the basic skills of the English language in English as a foreign language (EFL) context.

Reading enhances not only language proficiency, but also other content related to learning, and it helps to gain an understanding of the world, enabling the students to think about and react to what they read (Huang et al., 2009; Lien, 2011). The reading skill also plays a significant role, not only in the academic world, but also in real lifelong learning settings (Sadiku, 2015). It forms the basis for the learning process. It has a paramount importance in English as a foreign language contexts where students have limited access to learn the language. In addition to this, it helps to gain an understanding of the world, enabling the students to think about and react to what they read (Huang et al., 2009; Lien, 2011).

Teachers' perceptions play an important role in the teaching process since they are the ones who make decisions in the classroom and beyond. Teachers' perceptions include what works best in language education, knowledge of the subject, appropriate instructional methods, and knowledge of the curriculum (Farrell, 2015; Richards & Farrell, 2005). Teachers' knowledge of teaching English, and specifically reading, enable them to facilitate their students' reading comprehension by way of defining and refining their reading processes.

Given the central role of language and literacy in the new common standards, the linguistic needs represented by English Language Learners (ELLs) of different backgrounds, and the lack of current



preparation most teachers have received for this population, there is clearly a need to bolster mainstream teachers' knowledge about language (Roberts, 2016). Empowering language educators has a positive effect on their professionalism since educators perceive the formative worth and ground-breaking potential in intelligent exercises (Farrell, 2018). Since reading forms the basis for all other areas of learning, it is necessary to ensure that English teachers at the secondary school education level need to be equipped with the methods of teaching reading skills, and thus, employ the techniques appropriately in their reading skills classroom instruction. Accordingly, it is indicated that teachers should develop positive perceptions to promote the students' reading skills (Nuttal, 2005).

Fruitful studies in EFL appear to utilize more worldwide methodologies and would in general help understanding systems (Iyitoglu & Aydin, 2015). Many studies reveal that reading skills are not being taught properly at secondary schools (Akinbote, Kolawole, & Kolawole, 2007). Similarly, it is also observed that students have poor reading skills. Research reports indicate that too many students have a limited ability to understand reading texts (Birhanu, 2004; Eshetie, 2010). Based on such reports, it can be noted that despite many years of English being taught as a subject at primary and secondary schools, students have continued to fail in their academics in every level, especially in reading, which implies an urgent need to improve their reading proficiency.

It is indicated that there is a correlation between teachers' perceptions and their practices (Cekiso, 2017; Kuzborska, 2011; Rahman et al., 2018). As a result, this study was conducted to assess English as a Foreign Language teachers' perceptions about the methods of teaching reading skills, their actual classroom practice in light of the procedures proposed for teaching reading skills, and implementation problems with particular reference to some selected secondary schools. Hence, this research attempted to answer the following research questions.

1. What perceptions do English as Foreign Language teachers have about the methods of teaching reading skills?
2. How do EFL teachers implement the procedures proposed for teaching reading skills?

Research Methods

Research Design

A descriptive survey design involving a quantitative research approach was employed. This design is helpful to identify present conditions and point to present needs. Accordingly, the research was conducted on three Motta Town General Secondary Schools, Motta, Ayer Marefia and Enesie. In these schools, there were only fifteen English teachers who taught Grade Nine. Every teacher was teaching up to four sections. Thus, the researchers took six Grade Nine English teachers in the sample schools as subjects of the study.

The study included 195 Grade Nine students from a total of 2,794 students. They were taken from 15 different sections, one from every teacher randomly. Thirteen students from each section, in which those teachers were assigned to teach English, were chosen by systematic random sampling technique.

Instruments

Data was collected through questionnaires and observations. Classroom observation, which gives firsthand accounts of the situation under study combined with the other data gathering tools, such as surveys and questionnaires, allows for a holistic interpretation of the situations which are being studied. The collected data were analyzed through descriptive statistics including percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and through narration.

Findings and Discussions

Items 1, 2, and 3 in Table 1 observed mean results of 1.06 with $SD = 0.236$, 1.72, $SD = 0.895$ and 1.94, $SD = 0.636$, which indicate that the teachers did not involve students in setting a purpose for reading. They did not ask the learners to read the title and predict what the text would be about, and they did not ask learners to look at illustrations and try to guess how they relate to the text in this stage. Likewise, the observed means of 1.44, $SD = 0.705$, 1.06, $SD = 0.236$; and 2.22, $SD = 1.003$ in items 4, 6, and 8 indicate that the engagement of learners in discussions at this stage was not practiced by teachers; teachers did not generate questions about the topic, and semantic mapping was not practiced.

TABLE 1

Observation Result on the Practice of Teachers on the Use of Pre-reading Stages

No	Items	1		2		3		4		Total		Mean	SD
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Purpose for reading	17	94.4	1	5.6	---	---	---	---	18	100	1.06	.236
2	Read the title and predict	10	55.6	3	16.7	5	27.8	---	---	18	100	1.72	.895
3	Look at illustrations and try to guess	4	22.2	11	61.1	3	16.7	---	---	18	100	1.94	.639
4	Engaging students in group discussions	12	66.7	4	22.2	2	11.1	---	---	18	100	1.44	.705
5	Asking questions on heading	8	44.4	2	11.1	8	44.4	---	---	18	100	2.00	.970
6	Generate questions about the topic	17	94.4	1	5.6	---	---	---	---	18	100	1.06	.236
7	Preview of structural organizers used in the text	1	5.6	13	72.2	4	22.2	---	---	18	100	2.17	.514
8	Semantic mapping	5	27.8	6	33.3	5	27.8	2	11.1	18	100	2.22	1.003
9	Provision of reconciled reading lesson	6	33.3	10	55.6	1	5.6	1	5.6	18	100	1.83	.786
10	Describing the strategy	17	94.4	0	0.0	1	5.6	---	---	18	100	1.11	.471
11	Modeling its use in reading	3	16.7	11	61.1	4	22.2	---	---	18	100	2.06	.639
12	Explanations on use of strategies	7	38.9	10	55.6	1	5.6	---	---	18	100	1.67	.594

The mean value of 1.11 and $SD = 0.471$ for item 10 shows that the teacher describing the reading stage for the learner and providing explicit information on the stage for learners was very low. Moreover, the mean results of items 11 and 12, which were 2.06 ($SD = 0.639$) and 1.67 ($SD = 0.594$) respectively, indicate that teachers' practice of modelling and explaining the use of this stage in reading was low.

TABLE 2

Observation Result on the Teachers' Practice of While-reading Stages

No	Items	1		2		3		4		Total		Mean	SD
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Identify the main idea of the reading passage	10	55.6	2	11.1	5	27.8	1	5.6	18	100	1.83	1.043
2	Create mental images	2	11.1	10	55.6	6	33.3	--	--	18	100	2.22	.647
3	Telling students to guess	13	72.2	1	5.6	4	22.2	--	--	18	100	1.50	.857
4	Check comprehension of the learner	--	--	2	11.1	9	50.0	7	38.9	18	100	3.28	.669
5	Clarifying students understanding	--	--	6	33.3	11	61.1	1	5.6	18	100	2.72	.575
6	Engaging learners in group work	2	11.1	10	55.6	5	27.8	1	5.6	18	100	2.28	.752
7	Guess the meaning of unknown words	--	--	9	50.0	9	50.0	--	--	18	100	2.50	.514
8	Confirm, revise or reject predictions	16	88.9	--	--	2	11.1	--	--	18	100	1.22	.647
9	Drawing inferences	17	94.4	--	--	1	5.6	--	--	18	100	1.11	.471
10	Students connect to self & other texts	17	94.4	--	--	1	5.6	--	--	18	100	1.11	.471
11	Providing clues, giving feedback	--	--	12	66.7	5	27.8	1	5.6	18	100	2.39	.608

Item 1 shows that the majority (55.6%) of teachers did not demonstrate the practice of asking learners to identify the main idea of the reading passage. The observed mean of this stage was 1.83 ($SD = 1.043$). The mean result 2.22 ($SD = 0.647$) for item 2 shows that the practice of teachers using this stage was low. The observed mean result 3.28 ($SD = 0.669$) for item 4 indicates that the practice of teachers asking questions to check comprehension of the learner was medium. The mean value (1.50, $SD = 0.857$) for item 3 of the observed practice of teachers using this stage revealed that prompting or telling students to make guesses about up-coming information was rare. The mean result of item 6 was 2.28 with $SD = 0.752$. The observation of practicing this stage shows that the engagement of learners in group work was low. The majority (61.1%) of observed teachers verified and clarified students understanding satisfactorily in both items 5 and 7, 2.75 ($SD = 0.575$) and 2.50 ($SD = 0.514$), respectively.

The mean result of item 8, (1.22, $SD = 0.647$) showed that confirming, revising or rejecting predictions was practiced satisfactorily by very few (11.1%) teachers. The mean result of both items 9 and 10 was 1.11, $SD = 0.471$, showing that the incidence of teachers encouraging students to draw inferences or connect themselves to the text or connect the text to other texts was very low. From the observations, the mean result for item 10 was 2.39, $SD = 0.608$ showing that the teachers' practice of monitoring, providing clues, and giving feedback on texts was low.

TABLE 3
Observation Result on their Teachers Use of Post-reading Stages

No	Items	1		2		3		4		Total		Mean	SD
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	discuss the text after reading	--	--	1	5.6	11	61.1	6	33.3	18	100	3.28	.575
2	retell the main aspects	13	72.2	2	11.1	2	11.1	1	5.6	18	100	1.50	.924
3	outline the main ideas	3	16.7	11	61.1	3	16.7	1	5.6	18	100	2.11	.758
4	draw conclusions	13	72.2	2	11.1	3	16.7	--	--	18	100	1.44	.784
5	summarize the text	14	77.8	4	22.2	0	0.0	--	--	18	100	1.22	.428
6	quiz about the text	12	66.7	1	5.6	5	27.8	--	--	18	100	1.61	.916
7	follow up activities	--	--	--	--	13	72.2	5	27.8	18	100	3.28	.461
8	tasks to do using the information in the text	--	--	--	--	10	55.6	8	44.4	18	100	3.44	.511
9	complete a given task	2	11.1	1	5.6	7	38.9	8	44.4	18	100	3.17	.985
10	role play	16	88.9	2	11.1	--	--	--	--	18	100	1.11	.323
11	read related material & demonstrate use of their own strategy	15	83.3	3	16.7	--	--	--	--	18	100	1.17	.383
12	providing feedback	1	5.6	11	61.1	6	33.3	--	--	18	100	2.28	.575

The mean value of the observed result for item 7 was 3.28 ($SD = 0.575$). This indicated that the practice of teachers asking students to discuss the text after reading was medium. The practice of item 2, retelling the main aspects of the text, from observed teachers was 1.50 ($SD = 0.924$).

The practice of the stage outlining the main ideas (item 3) was 2.11 ($SD = 0.758$). The mean value of observed practice of the item 4, 1.44 ($SD = 0.784$), revealed that the practice of asking students to draw conclusions about the text they have read was very low. The mean value of the observed practice of using this the stage of summarizing the text (item 5) was 1.22 ($SD = 0.428$). From the observation findings, the mean value of item 7, follow up activities was 3.28 ($SD = 0.461$). In the same way, the mean result of the observation of tasks to do using the information in the text (item 8) was 3.44 ($SD = 0.511$). Further the mean value 3.17 ($SD = 0.985$) for item 9, the practice of asking students to complete a given task by teachers was satisfactory. In the same way, the mean value 1.11 ($SD = 0.323$) of item 10 indicated that the practice of asking students to role play by teachers was very low. The mean value (2.28 with $SD = 0.575$) of item 12 revealed that the practice of providing feedback to learners was low.

TABLE 4
Response of Students on their Preparation for Reading Class

No	Items	Yes		Sometimes		No		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	understand the expected of reading lesson	23	11.8	70	35.9	102	52.3	195	100
2	read passages in class	17	8.7	82	42.1	96	49.2	195	100
3	attempt to do the comprehension questions before class	18	9.2	53	27.2	124	63.6	195	100

As presented in Table 4, the majority of students, 102 (52.3%), reported they did not understand what is expected of them in reading lessons while a few, 23 (11.8%), learners understood. The finding showed that the majority 96 (49.2%) pointed out that they did not read passages in class. Further, the majority 124 (63.6%) of the respondents replied that they did not attempt to do the comprehension questions before class. In general, the finding shows that there was poor preparation of learners for reading class.

TABLE 5
Response of Students on Evaluation of their Teacher and Instruction in the Reading Lesson

Items	1		2		3		4		5		Total		Mean	SD
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1 Well prepared.	89	45.6	71	36.4	170/	8.7	--	--	18	9.2	195	100	1.91	1.172
2 Explains the material clearly.	72	36.9	53	27.2	52	26.7	--	--	18	9.2	195	100	2.17	1.202
3 Answers comprehension questions well.	106	54.4	54	27.7	--	--	17	8.7	18	9.2	195	100	1.91	1.313
4 Shows genuine concern and the quality of teaching.	107	54.9	71	36.4	17	8.7	--	--	--	--	195	100	1.54	0.652
5 Effectively directs and stimulates participation.	107	54.9	18	9.2	52	26.7	0	0.0	18	9.2	195	100	1.99	1.286
6 Adjusts the pace of the class to students' level of understanding.	54	27.7	88	45.1	36	18.5	17	8.7	0	0.0	195	100	2.08	0.899
7 Method of teaching reading is interesting	142	72.8	18	9.2	17	8.7	0	0.0	18	9.2	195	100	1.64	1.233
8 Gives feedback	89	45.6	71	36.4	17	8.7	18	9.2	0	0.0	195	100	1.82	0.940

Table 5 shows the mean value of the response for item 1 regarding the teachers' preparedness was 1.91 ($SD = 1.172$). The mean result (2.17, $SD = 1.202$) of the response to item 2 revealed that the explanation of materials clearly by English teachers was low. The mean value (1.91, $SD = 1.313$) revealed that the practice of teachers in answering comprehension questions was low (item 3). The mean result 1.54 ($SD = 0.652$) of item 4 indicates that teachers showing genuine concern for student learning and the quality of teaching was low.

Additionally, the mean values of 1.99 ($SD = 1.286$) and 2.08 ($SD = 0.899$) for items 6 and 7 revealed that teachers' effectiveness in directing and stimulating participation and their adjustment of the pace of the class to students' level of understanding were low. The mean values of items 7 and 8, 1.64 ($SD = 1.233$) and 1.82 ($SD=0.940$), respectively, revealed that the teachers' methods of teaching reading being interesting and giving feedback to students' exercise were low.

Discussion

This study indicated that learners' comprehension of reading experiences was not aided. This was contrary to Nuttall's (2005) views that the use of visuals made it possible for learners to think creatively and critically, both of which help the learner interact with the text. Pre-reading is a very important stage in which the topic and type of text are introduced first. In this phase, the teacher can use various techniques in order to make the reading activity easier: using pictures or any visual aid that can help the learner to make predictions; asking questions related to the topic; preparing the learner for the content of the text and thinking of some of the vocabulary items that might appear in the text. Although a number of pre-reading strategies are necessary and important, they were not employed by teachers to prepare the learner for reading. Findings showed that few teachers made use of it.

Furthermore, the findings point out that the engagement of learners in discussions either in pairs or in groups was not a popular practice by teachers. This strategy is useful in that it helps to get learners to share what they think the reading selection is about. This required information to ascertain whether

teachers organized learners to discuss briefly so that the teacher can gauge general schema that learners possess in order to help them develop and refine appropriate schema in preparation for the comprehension of new information in the selected text. The teachers who used reconciled reading had developed pre-reading questions that appeared at the end of a reading passage and this helped the teachers engage learners in interactive and reflective activities. The findings indicate that telling students to make guesses about upcoming information in the text was not that much practiced by observed teachers.

Teachers should provide the necessary background information to the reader, which in turn facilitates better understanding. Teachers also described the strategies that were relevant to the reading selection by providing explicit information on when it was necessary for use, how it could be used, and why it was necessary, but the actual the practice was different. The results indicated that teachers' practice of modeling its use in reading was low. In the same way, the practice of providing explanations on procedures and the use of stages by the teachers was limited.

The findings show that few teachers used pre-reading strategies which are asking learners to read the title, illustrations, and make predictions, learners' generation of questions, and previewing the text by reading topic sentences. Pre-reading strategies that were least used included the provision of reconciled reading, pre-teaching vocabulary, and engaging learners in pair/group discussion and writing gist sentences, but teachers' practice of describing the stage for the learner and providing explicit information on the stage for learners was very low.

The discrepancy between theory and practice display that teaching reading is a complex process where teachers need to have a clear procedural knowledge in order to merge theory into their classroom practices. This imbalance was noted by Block, Gambrell, and Pressley (2002) who observed teaching reading strategies as part of comprehension instruction; teachers seemed not to merge what they perceived to work well and what they actually did. Teachers continued to use strategies without clear knowledge of when and how they should be used. Further, Singhall (2001) and Pang, Muaka, Bernhardt, and Kamil, (2003) contend that there should be concerted efforts in the development of reading teachers and comprehension instruction because new teachers still enter schools with the understanding of how to teach comprehension based on how they were taught to read.

There was a lack of the preparation of learners to separate main parts from supporting details and distinguish the relevant points from irrelevant ones with regard to the topic given. The absence of good preparation in how to use the strategy is likely to impact negatively on the learners' ability to summarize reasonably large pieces of writing. However, the results revealed that teachers' practice of asking learners to identify the main idea of the reading passage was very low. Observation on the use of this technique only sought to find out if teachers assisted learners in recalling and exhibiting their understanding.

In general, the findings show that there was poor preparation of learners and teachers for reading class. Teachers did not show genuine concern for student learning and the quality of teaching. The effectiveness in directing and stimulating participation and their adjustment to the pace of the class to students' level of understanding was low. Teachers' method of teaching reading is not interesting and did not show that they gave feedback satisfactorily to students.

Conclusion

An emphasis on reading skills and application of various reading strategies would help students to capitalize on the language input they receive. It also enables them to achieve success in their language learning and academic careers where a foreign language functions as a medium of instruction. It is concluded that EFL teachers did not clearly reflect teaching reading strategies in their classroom practices. Teachers are aware of the theoretical concept of reading strategies and importance of reading instruction, although the majority of them did not implement it. This implies that being familiar with theory is not a guarantee to put into practice. Teachers did not teach as the theory suggests.

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