

An Insight into the Practice of Teaching Early Reading in Ethiopian Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study was conducted with the objective of investigating the practice of teaching early reading comprehension. The study was carried out in sixty-six Grade 2 government primary schools found in SNNPR State in Gedeo zone, Ethiopia, in the academic year 2015. Sixty-six English language teachers were subjects of the study. The study employed mixed method, specifically QUANT-QUAL one. Data were collected using questionnaires, observation and interview. Sixty-six of the teachers (one teacher from each selected school) who were teaching English in Grade 2 completed the questionnaire. Ten of the teachers were observed while they were teaching reading to see how they were teaching reading and six of the teachers were interviewed. Data from questionnaires, classroom observations and interview were categorized and descriptively analyzed using frequency and percentage. The data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings revealed that teachers failed to implement the teaching of early reading according to the theories and principles of teaching early reading. Teachers were seen using inappropriate reading techniques and procedures in the mentioned grade level. The study also revealed that teachers are deficiently trained in phonological awareness, phonics instruction, comprehension, fluency and vocabulary.

Key words: early reading, practice of teaching early reading, poor readers, techniques and procedures, theories and principles

Introduction

The ability to read is a key factor in living a healthy, happy, and productive life. In fact, the ability to read recently has been declared the “new civil right” on the Web site of the National Right to Read Foundation (2001). Without the ability to read, a child cannot fully access his or her democratic rights. Non readers and poor readers cannot fully consider political positions and issues; they cannot take complete advantage of available societal or governmental institutions for themselves or their children or thoroughly access their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

To clearly understand the full impact that reading failure has upon the life of an individual, Fielding, Kerr, and Rosier (1998) offer the following quote from The 90% Reading Goal:

The most expensive burden we place on society is those students we have failed to teach to read well. The silent army of low readers who move through our schools, siphoning off the lion's share of administrative resources, emerge into society as adults lacking the single prerequisite for managing their lives and acquiring additional training. They are chronically unemployed, underemployed, or unemployable. They form the single largest identifiable group of those whom we incarcerate, and to whom we provide assistance, housing, medical care, and other social services. They perpetuate and enlarge the problem by creating another generation of poor readers” (pp. 6–7).

Other scholars have also stated that children who are not reading successfully in class will progressively disengage from instruction, disrupt their peers, and fall further behind in reading, establishing a “pattern of reading failure” (Shinn, Shinn, Hamilton, & Clarke, 2002, p. 113).

Dangers around early disadvantage in reading are eloquently illustrated by the Matthew Effect (Stanovich, 1986). According to the Matthew Effect, the rich become richer and the poor comparatively poorer, such that: For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath (Matthew 25:29).

Applied to reading, the Matthew Effect is the idea that children who have lesser reading skill earlier fall further behind over time because they read more slowly and have less exposure to learning opportunities.

The term reading has been used for many years in a narrow sense to refer to a set of print-based decoding and thinking skills necessary to understand text (Harris & Hodges, 1981). Snow, Burns, and Griffin contend that “Reading is a complex developmental challenge that we know to be intertwined with many other developmental accomplishments: attention, memory, language, and motivation, for example. Reading is not only a cognitive psycholinguistic activity but also a social activity” (1998, p. 15).

Nowadays our understanding of the act of reading has been broadened to include the visual and thinking skills necessary to acquire information from digital video, handheld data assistants, computers, or other technological learning environments (Hobbs, 2005). Add to this broadened definition of reading the idea that the visual and thinking skills needed for acquiring information today are situated in and shaped by increasingly diverse social or cultural settings found in schools, homes, communities, or ethnic groups (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). As a result, the term reading is currently interpreted far more broadly and encompasses the learning of a complex set of skills and knowledge that allows individuals to understand visual and print-based information. The goal of reading instruction, then, is to empower readers to learn, grow, and participate in a vibrant and quickly changing information-based world.

As children begin the process of learning to read, they need to acquire a set of skills and strategies that will help them reach the ultimate goal associated with learning to read: comprehending what they read whether in traditional print forms or more technology-based formats. On the way to the goal of reading comprehension—that is, understanding the author’s message—children must acquire a set of early reading skills or tools that include the following.

- Hearing individual sounds in spoken words (known as phonemic awareness)
- Recognizing and identifying letters
- Understanding concepts about how printed language looks and works
- Increasing oral language (speaking) vocabularies
- Understanding that sounds in spoken language “map” onto letters in written language
- Decoding words with accuracy, speed, and expression

Shanahan (2006) has indicated that the desire and ability to learn to read often grow out of a child’s initial curiosity about how to write letters and words. Consequently, writing very often represents not only the beginning point in many a young child’s journey to learn to read but the finish line as well. At first, young children become aware of letters and words in the world around them. Eventually they may ask how to write their name or spell some other personally significant word or concept (e.g., their pet’s name or the name of a relative).

When children are able to write letters and words, a “cognitive footprint” or memory trace left in the brain is deep and long lasting—much longer-lasting than that engendered by mere letter or word recognition alone. Similarly, when children can string words together to construct meaning such as that found in a story, they have “comprehended” text at a deeper and longer-lasting level. In a very real sense, children’s understanding of what they read is deepened and cemented when they can write about it.

Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1985, p. 85) reported that the teacher's knowledge about effective reading instruction makes the single greatest difference in whether or not every child will have an equal and effective opportunity to learn to read successfully in elementary school! Each characteristic of exemplary reading instruction is stated in terms of what highly effective reading teachers must know and be able to do to provide effective commission members concluded that teacher knowledge, skill, and competence is absolutely essential in helping all learners become strong readers.

Research findings indicated that teachers' general instructional ability and knowledge are strongly related to student achievement (Greenwald, Hedges, & Laine, 1996). And an increasing number of studies now show a strong link between what teachers know about the teaching of reading and their students' achievement in reading (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). In fact, research also suggests that teachers influence student academic growth more than any other single factor, including families, neighborhoods, and the schools' students attend (Sanders & Rivers, 1996).

Highly effective reading teachers know how to adapt instruction to meet the needs of learners with special needs. Meeting every student's needs in learning to read in today's increasingly diverse classroom environments can be complex and challenging. Children's ability to flourish from reading instruction can be influenced by any number of factors, including physical, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities; differences between the language of instruction and students' primary language, as with English Language Learners (ELL); access to print materials in the home; parenting styles; previous schooling experiences; cultural differences; economic strata; and more. Unfortunately, there is an increasing tendency in some schools to engage in a "one-size-fits-all" reading curriculum that will not address the learning needs of all children (Tyner, 2004). However, the only way to provide solid instruction that meets the needs of learners having special needs in today's classrooms is to pursue what is called "differentiating instruction" (Gregory & Chapman, 2002). Excellent teachers provide instruction that is responsive to the *specific* needs of every child based on ongoing assessment findings.

Reading instruction should include both direct teaching of component skills and practice with reading and writing. The component skills are phonological awareness, the ability to recognize the different sounds or phonemes of spoken words; decoding, the ability to connect phonemes to letters to "sound out" unknown words; vocabulary knowledge, the understanding of the meanings of words and their uses in varying contexts; oral reading fluency, reading with speed and accuracy, as well as with the correct stress, intonation, and emphasis; and comprehension, actively working to make sense of a text by constantly integrating what is being learned in the text with what is known from experience and accumulated knowledge. These components are at the heart of teaching early reading. In order to help students' learn these components teachers should have a clear understanding of the methods and procedures such as language experience approach, literature based approach, alphabetic method, sentence method and TPR storytelling method.

Research findings in Ethiopian context with regard to the ability of students to read simple words and phrases are shocking. Piper (2010) found that the quality of reading outcomes in Ethiopia is declining slightly. The low achievement in reading comprehension is very concerning, the gap, is in children's ability to read, decode, and comprehend written text (Piper, 2010).EGRA'S finding clearly indicate that little reading instruction is happening in many schools and large numbers of students are not learning to read (Piper, 2010). Most critically, these findings show that reading achievement is very low in Ethiopia. When asked to read a simple passage at a Grade 2 level, many regions had more than 30% of Grade 2 and 20% of

Grade 3 unable to do so successful. When it comes to reading comprehension, scores are extremely low, with more than 50% of the children in most regions are unable to answer a single simple comprehension question. Gove, A. and P.Cvelich (2011) also conclude that more than 95% of grade 2 students in Ethiopia are performing below the benchmark for fluency in any language.

Piper (2010) shows that in Grade 2, between 10.1% (Addis Ababa) and 69.2% (SNNP) of the children 'in 8 regions could not read one word in Grade 2. The larger regions of Tigray (29.7%), Amhara (27.5%), Oromiya (41.2%), and Sidama (69.2%) had the highest percentages of children unable to read at all at the end of Grade 2. The scores for Oromiya and SNNP in particular were concerning, more so when we note that 54.0% of SNNP and 20.6% of Oromiya children were unable to read anything, even at the end of Grade 3. The region with the fewest zero scores was Addis Ababa, and Harari had the next fewest at both Grade 2 and Grade 3. Thus this study focuses on the teachers' understanding of the theories and principles of teaching early reading, practice of teaching early reading and the quality of training they received.

Methodology

A mixed method, specifically QUANT-QUAL design was chosen for this study due to the nature of the research problem and the researcher's fundamental beliefs about the role of research. Dorneyi (2007) has indicated that in mixed methods study, it is common and even advisable to use an embedded model of data collection where one form of data (either qualitative or quantitative) predominates.

Participants

The target population of the study was a sample of sixty six (30%) grade two English language teachers randomly selected from 219 grade two English teachers in Gedeo zone. According to the information obtained from Education Department of Gedeo zone, 219 schools are currently offering grade two academic subjects in line with the new educational and training policy. Each school has one English teacher. Therefore, out of the total six districts and two town administrations in this zone, four were randomly selected by casting lots. All government elementary schools of these selected districts and town were included in the study. The districts and towns included in this study were: Dilla town, Cheffe district, Wonago district, and Kochore district.

The rationale for using the simple random sampling technique for this study is that there is no obvious disparity regarding the students' placement, teachers' allocation, course book distribution, and English language period allotment among the government schools in Gedeo zone. What is more, various researchers contend that random sampling reduces sampling bias.

Data gathering instruments

Three research instruments were employed to obtain the relevant information for the study. These were questionnaire, classroom observation, and interview. They were used to triangulate the information and increase the credibility of the study.

The theoretical background in the review of literature was used as material for the preparation of the questionnaire. The purpose was to explore teacher's application and awareness of teaching early reading; and what they actually do in the classroom. Since the students are 7-8 years old, we do not expect them to fill in a questionnaire, so the questionnaire was only filled by the teachers. To gather data from the sample teachers closed type questionnaires were set both in English and Amharic. It comprises four sections. The first section was about teachers'

background. The second section dealt with components of teaching early reading .The third section was about the practice of teaching approaches and methods for teaching early reading lesson presentation .The last section was devised to gather information about teachers’ actual teaching technique which they employ in the real classroom. The items in this section were of five point Liker-Scale ranging from ‘always’ to ‘Never’.

The major aim of the classroom observation was to collect data on what actually was happening in the classrooms during the teaching of early reading. The researcher selected ten of the teachers randomly and observed each of them four times using structured observation checklist. The researcher made a total of 40 observations when the teaching of reading skills was going on in the classrooms. This checklist was intended to investigate grade 2 English language teachers reading lessons practice in relation to the theories and principles of language teaching. These practices were recorded in the category of Yes/ No on the basis of whether they happened in the classrooms. Semi-structured interview was conducted with six teachers in Amharic (The national language) in order to crosscheck the data gathered through the questionnaire. It was also employed in order to help interviewees give critical and descriptive reflections on the issue. The widely used interview technique in qualitative interviewing is the semi-structured interview with sufficiently open-ended schedules to make the contents gathered in order and to undertake further probing on the issue.

Procedures

First the questionnaires were prepared and piloted on four grade 2 English language teachers. The response obtained from this study were analyzed and interpreted for modification of certain items in order to avoid inconsistencies, correct ambiguous items and eliminate questions that do not yield appropriate information for the study and then the revised questionnaires were administered to sixty-six English language teachers. Second, ten English language teachers' reading lessons were observed four times using the observation checklist. Finally, interview was conducted with six randomly selected teachers. The data collected from teachers’ through questionnaires, observation, and interview were first gathered, tallied and finally analyzed. Then, descriptive analysis was made for each report and percentages.

Results

Table 1. General Features of the Teachers who responded to the Questionnaire

Qualification				Subjects												College of training											
10+3		10+2		English		Language cluster		Amharic		H.P.E		Geography		Mathematics		civics		Gedeuffa		science		Hawassa		Dilla		St.mar y	
NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%	NO	%
6	9	1	1.	1	2	2	3	2	3	4	6	2	3	6	9	6	9	2	3	4	6	4	6	2	3	1	1.
5	8.		5	6	4	4	6															4	6	1	2		5
	5				2		4															7					

The background questionnaire was intended to find out information from teachers about their qualification and the training they had attended. According to the result, from the whole population, 65(98.5%) of the teachers have Diploma. From this total population, only 16(24.2%) was covered by English graduate teachers. 50(75.8%) of the population was covered by other fields of study. These are, Diploma in language clusters, Diploma in Amharic (National language), Diploma in Health and Physical Education, Diploma in Geography, Diploma in civics, Diploma in Gedeuffa (students' mother tongue), and Diploma in Science. Out of these teachers 24(36.4%) didn't have related field of education to teach English. It seems that these schools didn't give much emphasis on teaching early reading. When conducting the interview the researcher found out that grade 2 English teachers were recruited from different field of specializations. The only thing the schools expect from them to assign as English teachers is to have a good command of English. The result indicated that the teachers were not equipped with the required knowledge and skills to teach early reading.

Table 2. In- service training teachers received

Whether teacher get chance of in-service training		Type of in-service training										Whether the training is Satisfactory or not for teaching			
		Response		Summer		Workshop		Seminar		Conference		Response			
Yes	No											Yes	No		
N	%	NO	%	N	%	N	%	NO	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
40	60.6	26	39.4	24	36.4	18	27.3	1	1.5	-		26	39.4	40	60.6

Teachers were also asked about whether they received any short term training and the types of trainings they attended. The result indicated that 40(60.6%) of the teachers got in-service training and the rest 26(39.9%) didn't get any in-service training. It was also showed that only 43(65.2) of teachers got summer course, work shop, and seminar. The data from interview also confirmed this response. This data implies that majority of the teachers didn't have any kind of in-service training.

Teachers were also asked about whether the in-service training gave them sufficient knowledge and skills to teach early reading. As can be observed above, 26 (39.4%) of the teachers said that the training they received is satisfactory to teach early reading. On the other hand, 40(60.6%) of the teachers said that the training they received is not satisfactory to teach early reading. The data from classroom observation and interview indicated that teachers had no awareness to teach the five components of reading. It also showed that from 40 observed lessons in 20 (50%) teachers had inadequate preparation to teach early reading. According to the information gathered during interview, the drawback of the trainings was lack of sustainability, trainer's lack of expertise and the dominance of theoretical aspect. It seems that the reason for the lack of appropriate teaching methods for reading was lack of training and lack of the teachers' opportunity to be introduced to the current language teaching method. To conclude, all the data implies that all the in-service training for the teachers was not satisfactory.

In the interview session, among the 6 interviewed teachers only one of the teachers mentioned that she received diploma in teaching English. Two of them trained in science stream, and the rest three are from social science stream. These teachers said that they are made to teach English without any training on what and how to teach early reading and other language skills. One of the teachers, T3 said that “It is really wrong to let me teach English without attending any training on how to teach language skills. Again it is wrong to expect effective teaching and effective assessment from me to help my students’ progress in the right direction.” The second teacher, T6 also complained that no one is helping her to teach early reading effectively and what she does is just teaching what is in the textbook.

Table3. Teachers Training concerning five Components of reading in College

Type of training	Responses				Total
	Yes		No		
	f	%	f	%	
Phonological awareness	8	12.1	58	87.9	66
Phonics instruction	10	15.2	56	84.9	66
Comprehension	24	36.4	42	63.6	66
Fluency	6	9	60	90.9	66
Vocabulary	18	27.3	48	72.7	66

Table 3, was intended to find out information from teachers as to whether they got skills to teach the five components of early reading from college training. The teachers' responses to this question indicated that 8 (12.1%) of them said that they were trained in phonological awareness in the college. Concerning phonics instruction, only 10(15.2%) said that they were trained in phonics instruction in teacher training college. Regarding comprehension skill, 24 (36.4%) said that they were trained in the comprehension skill in the college. For fluency skill, only 6(9%) of them got training in the college. With regard to vocabulary skill, 18(27.3%) of them reported that they got methodological training to teach vocabulary in the college.

The result indicated that teacher training Colleges are not giving adequate training on Phonological awareness, Phonics, and fluency skills for elementary English teachers. In class observation the researcher also saw that almost all observed teachers are not teaching these three skills, however, some teachers are observed teaching comprehension and vocabulary. As a result, grade 2 teachers have no awareness to teach Phonological awareness, Phonics instruction, and fluency skills. During the interview session, teachers reflected that the training they received in teacher training college was not sufficient to help them teach the early reading skills successfully.

The interview result revealed that there was complete mismatch between the background of the teachers and what they are teaching in the school. One of the teachers, T1 said that “I do not understand the technical terms and phrases you are asking me. I do not know what phonological awareness, phonics instruction and fluency are. What I do is help the kids to write different letters, words and pronounce them.” With regard to the problems kids face during teaching early reading, all the teachers said that students cannot read well. They do not differentiate the English letters. Another interviewee said that he wastes most of his time by teaching alphabets than teaching reading. When talking about students’ ability in reading

comprehension, majority of the teachers confirmed that their students neither read nor understand the message.

Regarding reasons for the low achievement of students in reading, all of them said that lack of alphabetic knowledge is the main reason. They said that most students didn't attend kindergarten school. Another reason one of the teacher mentioned is that the Latin letters that students use when they are learning the local language (mother tongue) is confusing students while they are reading in English.

Table 4. Teachers' Responses regarding teaching components of early reading

I t e m s	Questionnaire items	Responses										
		Always		Usually		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
1	How often do you teach Phonological awareness	12	18.2	22	33.3	8	12.1	12	18.2	12	18.2	66
2	How often do you use Phonics instruction	10	15.2	18	27.3	14	21.2	12	18.2	12	18.2	66
3	How often do you teach reading for Comprehension	16	24.2	20	30.3	14	21.2	12	18.2	4	6	66
4	How often do you teach reading for Fluency	20	30.3	14	21.2	12	18.2	6	9	14	21.2	66
5	How often do you teach Vocabulary for reading	20	30.3	14	21.2	8	12.1	14	21.2	10	15.2	66

Table 4 presents 5 items which describe implementing five components of reading. Very specifically, item 1 focuses on the practice of teaching phonological awareness. Among 66 respondents, 12(18.2%) of teachers reported that they do this always and 22(33.3%) of them said that they do so usually. Moreover, 8(12.1) % of the respondents disclosed that they use the strategy only sometimes. But, 12(18.2%) teachers reported that they do use the strategy rarely and 12(18.2%) teachers reported that they do not use it at all. The data found from the observations showed that the teachers were not seen using this activity in all observed sessions. As indicated earlier, 58(87.9%) of teachers said that they did not receive training on phonological awareness skill in colleges. This implies that grade 2 English teachers have no awareness about teaching phonological awareness skill.

In item 2, the teachers were asked whether they implement the phonics instruction in teaching early reading. The data indicated that 10(15.2%) and 18(27.3%) respectively reported that they always and usually implement the phonics instruction in teaching early reading. Of the remaining 14(21.2%) and 12(18.2%) said that they implement sometimes and rarely respectively.

While 12(18.2%) disclosed they do not do it at all. The data found from the observations showed that the teachers were not seen using this activity in the observed sessions. As indicated in table 3, 56 (84.9%) of teachers said that they did not receive training on phonics skill in colleges. This implies that teachers have no awareness about teaching phonics skill.

The teachers' responses to item 3 indicated that, 16(24.2%) teachers teach comprehension skill always and 20(30.3%) of them do so usually. Moreover, 14(21.2) % of the respondents disclosed that they use the strategy only sometimes. But, 12(18.2%) and 4(6%) teachers reported that they use the strategy rarely and never respectively. When it comes to the classroom observation, in 8(20%) and 8(20%) of the lessons teachers sometimes and rarely use reading for comprehension strategy. However, in 24(60%) of the actual lesson presentation they never do so at all. Though more than half i.e. 36 (54.5%) of the teachers claimed that they always and usually teach comprehension skill, the data from the classroom observation and content analysis seem to disprove the teachers claim because they were found teaching comprehension skill sometimes, rarely or never at all.

With regard to teaching fluency, for item 4, 20(30.3%) teachers stated that they always teach fluency skill. In addition, 14(21.2%) and 12(18.2%) respondents exploit this strategy usually and sometimes respectively. On the other hand, 6(9%) and 14(21.2%) teachers use this strategy rarely and never respectively. The data found from the observations showed that the teachers were not seen using this activity in forty of observation sessions. As indicated in table 3, 60 (90.9%) of teachers said that they did not receive training on fluency skills in colleges. This implies that teachers are not teaching fluency because they have no awareness about it.

Item 5 assesses the teachers' practice on teaching vocabulary for reading. According to the respondents, 20(30.3%) teachers use it always and 14(21.2%) of them do so usually. Moreover, 8(12.1) % of the respondents disclosed that they use the strategy only sometimes. But, 14(21.2%) teachers use the strategy rarely and 10(15.2%) teachers do not use it at all. The classroom observation; however, revealed that in 4(10%) and 12(30%) of the observed lessons, the teachers teach vocabulary for reading always and usually respectively. In 16(40%) of the observed lessons they sometimes teach vocabulary. However, in 8(20%) of the actual lesson presentation they rarely do it. The data from classroom observation indicated that less than half of the teachers teach vocabulary for reading always and usually. This implies that the rest, more than half teachers are not giving attention to teach vocabulary for reading.

Table 5. Teachers' use of classroom procedures of teaching early reading

Items	Questionnaire items	Responses										
		Always		Usually		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		Total
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
	Teaching approach											
6	How often do you use language experience approach to teach reading	16	24.2	26	39.4	6	9	8	12.1	10	15.2	66

7	How often do you use literature based approach for teaching reading	8	12.1	26	39.4	10	15.2	12	18.2	10	15.2	66
	Teaching methods											
8	How often do you use whole language method for teaching reading	12	18.2	24	36.4	4	6	22	33.3	4	6	66
9	How often do you use the alphabetic methods of teaching reading	18	27.3	26	39.4	10	15.2	8	12.1	4	6	66
10	How often do you use sentence method for teaching reading	26	39.4	10	15.2	8	12.1	8	12.1	14	21.2	66
11	How often do you implement TPR Storytelling method for teaching reading	16	24.2	14	21.2	8	12.1	14	21.2	14	21.2	66

Items 6-11 were intended to elicit information as to whether the teachers are using different approaches of reading. In item 6 the teachers were asked if they use language experience approach to teach reading for teaching reading. The responses to this item revealed that, 16(24.2%) teachers use the approach always and 26(39.4%) of them do so usually. Moreover, 6(9) % of the respondents disclosed that they use the approach only sometimes. But, 8(12.1%) teachers use the approach rarely and 10(15.2%) teachers do not use it at all. The data found from the observations showed that the teachers were not seen using this activity in forty of observation sessions. Though majority of the teachers i.e. 42 (63.6%) claimed that they always and usually teach language experience approach, the data from the classroom observation and interview seem to disprove the teachers claim because they were never seen using language experience approach.

As to the use of literature based approach for item 7, 8(12.1%) teachers use the literature based approach always and 26(39.4%) of them do so usually. Moreover, 10(15.2) % of the respondents disclosed that they use the approach only sometimes. But, 12(18.2%) teachers use the approach rarely and 10(15.2%) teachers do not use it at all. The classroom observation; however, revealed that in 12(30%) and 16(40%) of the observed lessons, the teachers use literature based approach always and usually respectively. In 12(30%) of the observed lessons they sometimes use it.

The data from the teachers and classroom observation indicated that more than half of the teachers use the literature based approach always and usually. This implies that a significant numbers of teachers are not giving attention to use the literature based approach.

Moreover, the teachers' responses to item 8, indicated that only 12(18.1%) of the teachers always use whole language method for teaching reading while 24(36.4%) of them use it usually. The remaining, 4(6%) and 22(33.3%) use it sometimes and rarely respectively. While the rest 4(6%) of them declared that they never use it for teaching reading. When it comes to the classroom observation, in 12(30%) of the lessons teachers sometimes use whole language method for teaching reading. However, in 28(70%) of the actual lesson presentation they never do so at all.

Though more than half of the teachers i.e. 36 (54.5%) of the teachers claimed that they always and usually use whole language method for teaching reading, the data from the classroom observation and interview seem to disprove the teachers claim because they were found using whole language method sometimes and never at all for teaching reading.

The teachers' responses to item 9, indicated that 18 (27.3%) of them always Use the alphabetic methods of teaching reading. while 26(39.4%) said they usually teach it. Of the remaining, 10(15.2%) reported that they sometimes use it and the rest 8(12.1%) and 4(6%) use it rarely and never respectively for teaching reading.

The classroom observation; however, revealed that in 16(40%) and 8(20%) of the observed lessons, the teachers use alphabetic method always and usually respectively. In 8(20%) of the observed lessons they sometimes use it. However, in 8(20%) of the actual lesson presentation they rarely do it. As can be seen from the teachers' and classroom observation, it appears logical to conclude that majority of the teachers always and usually engage their students in teaching alphabetic methods of teaching reading.

In item 10, the teachers were asked whether they implement the sentence method in teaching early reading. The teachers' responses as can be seen from Table 10 indicate that, 26(39.4%) teachers always use the sentence method strategy and 10(15.2%) of them do so usually. Moreover, 8(12.1) % of the respondents disclosed that they use the strategy only sometimes. But, 8(12.1%) teachers use the strategy rarely and 14(21.2%) teachers do not use it at all. The classroom observation; however, revealed that in 12(30%) of the observed lessons, the teachers use alphabetic method always. In 16(40%) of the observed lessons they usually use it. However, in 12(30%) of the actual lesson presentation they sometimes do it.

As can be seen from the table, more than half teachers i.e. 36(54.5) claimed that they implement the sentence method in teaching early reading always and usually. Classroom observation also confirmed that majority of the teachers implement the sentence method in teaching early reading. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that most teachers are implementing the sentence method in teaching early reading.

In item 11, the teachers were asked if they use the TPR Storytelling method for teaching reading. The responses to this item revealed that 16(24.2%) teachers use the strategy always and 14(21.2%) of them do so usually. Moreover, 8(12.1) % of the respondents disclosed that they use the strategy only sometimes. But, 14(21.2%) teachers use the strategy rarely and 14(21.2%) teachers do not use story telling method at all. The data found from the observations showed that the teachers were not seen using this activity in forty of the observed sessions.

As can be seen from the table, majority of the teachers are not using TPR story telling method for teaching reading. Classroom observation also confirmed that majority of the teachers never use TPR story telling method for teaching reading in early reading. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that almost all grade 2 teachers are not using the TPR story telling method in teaching early reading.

The interview result also showed that five of the six teachers use only loud reading technique. This implies that grade 2 English teachers are not using experience approach, literature

approach, whole language method, alphabetic method, and sentence method. There is a daunting problem in equipping teachers to teach early reading effectively.

Discussion

Majority of the teachers teaching early reading did not have appropriate educational background. They are from language stream, social sciences stream, sport science and mother tongue. In principle, people who did not take training in the science of language acquisition, applied linguistics, anthropology of childhood education, child psychology, psycho- linguistics, methodology of language teaching cannot teach early reading and other language skills. However, the subject teachers who teach early reading are the ones who did not take courses in the aforementioned disciplines. Hence, it seems that the teachers are ill- trained and deficient in the knowledge and skills of teaching English.

These teachers are not professional teachers and they do not know what to teach and how to teach reading skills. They are quite strange to the concept of components of teaching early reading. This will definitely result in producing poor readers who will be academically unsuccessful. This is because quality of early reading has significant impact on students' success in their later life. Research findings also indicated that teachers should have sufficient knowledge of phonology or structure of English language in order to teach phonemic awareness (Gillon, 2004).

Moreover, in most of the observed classes teachers did not teach reading and writing at the same time. It seems that all this is the result of the teachers' lack of in-service training. However, literacy – specifically, learning to read and write - must be central to the primary education curriculum. Teachers must be trained specifically to teach reading and writing, along with the other language skills of speaking and listening. The time allotted to reading and writing instruction in the curriculum must reflect this priority. Children's reading and writing abilities develop together (Tierney & Shannan, 1991).

The literature asserted that early grade "teachers can facilitate language and literacy development through play-based literacy instruction. Child should feel as though s/he is playing while learning" (Snow et al., 1998). But in most of the classes observed, teachers did not accomplish this in their classrooms. It seems to me that all this is the result of the teachers who did not have training in teaching English in general and teaching reading using five components of reading in particular.

This study clearly showed that most teachers use teacher centered method during teaching early reading. However, children who engage in daily discussions about what they read are more likely to become critical readers and learners. Expert readers have strategies that they use to construct meaning before, during, and after reading (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991).

Teachers' interview proved that teachers assume reading aloud as the best way of teaching reading. The professional knowledge that they have in implementing other techniques and strategies such as TPR storytelling, language based, whole language, sentence based, literature based are very limited.

Conclusion

The current study focused on the practice of teaching reading English at 1st cycle primary schools with a special focus on grade 2 students in sixty-six selected schools in Gedeo zone. The major objective of this study was to find out how grade 2 teachers teach the early reading lessons incorporated based on theories and principles of teaching early reading. It tried to see if their

teaching practices match the teaching techniques and procedures suggested in SLA research. Based on the findings, the following conclusions are made:

Most teachers' field of study and qualification are far from what is required of them. They are assigned to teach English at grade 2 without having appropriate training for teaching English language in general and teaching reading in particular. Employment of teachers in government schools takes place without considering required qualification to the field. This resulted in poor instruction of teaching early reading.

Early reading teachers have poor understanding of the principles and practice of teaching early reading. They are not aware of implementing five components of reading for teaching early reading such as phonological awareness, phonics instruction, teaching for fluency, teaching for comprehension and teaching vocabulary for reading. Moreover, they are not aware of practices and methods of teaching early reading such as language experience approach, literature based approach, whole language method, alphabetic method, sentence method and TPR storytelling method.

Teachers teaching in grade 2 are not professional teachers and they do not know what to teach and how to teach reading skills. Literacy – specifically, learning to read and write - must be central to the primary education curriculum. Teachers must be trained specifically to teach reading and writing, along with the other language skills of speaking and listening. The time allotted to reading and writing instruction in the curriculum must reflect this priority. Children's reading and writing abilities develop together.

The result of this study showed that most teachers are not giving attention for oral language. However, Oral language is the foundation of learning to read. Reading builds on an oral language. Reading program should be designed to build early reading skills have to offer help for and connections to an oral vocabulary in a spoken language.

The study also revealed that most teachers are not using print awareness in the actual classroom. Print awareness refers to activities relating elements of alphabet knowledge, concepts about print, and early decoding. Examples of materials for children to access and use that support print awareness include writing supplies; magnetic letters; alphabet books, boards and cards; class books; board games; manipulative and activities to sort, match, and classify related to shapes and symbols.

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