Exploring the practices of Extensive Reading in South Omo Secondary Schools. Selected Secondary Schools in focus

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to explore the practice of extensive reading in six secondary schools in the South Omo zone. To achieve the objective of the research, a mixed research design was used. In line with this, questionnaires, interviews and observation were the main data collection tools through which English language teachers, librarians and students participated. Likewise, the analysis of the collected data was made through simple descriptive statistics (i.e., mean, Standard deviation and frequency). The finding of the study shows that students mainly were dependent on the school library. It was also found that students read for academic gain than for their pleasure time. This is found to be out of the extensive reading principles. It was also found that English teachers were using and promoting the extensive reading approach in their language classes. It is recommended that schools and public libraries should prepare reading materials that are at the level of the student's reading competencies. Furthermore, English language teachers should plan a free reading program along with their school curriculum which is designed and appropriate for extensive reading.

Keywords: Extensive Reading, reading fluency, Challenges, teacher's role,

1. INTRODUCTION

Though we use our five sense organs to collect, receive and observe critically, read something important or less important. In the academic arena, reading is the fundamental language skill to which students are exposed, following the listening skill.

Unlike listening skill which is natural and everybody can do without going to school, teachers mainly make their maximum effort to enable their students to practice. To develop and master this skill, children are taught to learn to read through reading. A baby practices walking by walking, a swimmer practices swimming by swimming: and one practice learning by doing something. The practice needs to be continued repeatedly, making different motivating factors such as reading for enjoyment, for information gathering and other personal cases (Yamashita, 2013)

Moreover, effective reading is crucial for success in learning a second language. Consequently, reading instruction is an essential component of every second-language curriculum. In Ethiopia, English, which is considered the most dominant foreign language, reading has a vital role because students acquire much of their knowledge by reading written materials. The success and failure of students' academic achievement can be mainly affected by not understanding the instruction written in English and students' comprehension skills. According to Rattanavich (2001) (cited in Tamrackitkun 2010), students have more opportunities to read in English than to use that language in spoken communication.

In line with this, extensive reading for language teaching becomes a valuable, almost anticipated means to achieve learning objectives. Extensive reading is thought to lead to considerable learning gains in the areas of reading, writing, vocabulary learning, and overall proficiency while also increasing motivation (Day and Bamford 1998). According to Jeremy Harmer (2004), extensive reading is reading lengthy texts, often for pleasure, in a leisurely way whereas intensive reading is less relaxed and often dedicated not too much for pleasure. Therefore, supporting learners to be involved in their foreign language through extensive reading provides the opportunity of learning the language.

A comparative Study conducted by Al-Homoud and Schmitt（2009 on the effectiveness of extensive reading and intensive reading in boosting comprehension, vocabulary gains, reading speed and motivation to read, etc. confirmed that extensive reading produces identifiable benefits in terms of language acquisition in settings where resource constraints prevail. According to Ambatchew（2005, students were busy and dealing with reading assignments. He added that calls have been made to introduce a supplementary reading program to primary schools in the country. Ambachew's work–confirmed that there were reading problems resulting from intensive approach shortcomings Having identified the above weaknesses in Ethiopia's school systems, Ambatchew recommends extensive reading as an effective strategy. Among the suggestions put forward is the proposal to allow students to select the type of readers they want to use in class.

In the development and cultivation of the reading culture, the role of a classroom teacher is among the key determinant for the failure or success of the students' reading competency. In his study of teacher modeling and its impact on the extensive reading program, (Kok & Loh, 2009) has suggests that the "frequency with which students read within and outside the school depends upon the priority classroom teachers give to independent reading".(p.95) Extensive reading is believed to have considerable benefits for learners both in terms of learning gains and motivation and seems to be becoming ever more popular in the ELT world. So far, however, there seems to be almost no integration of extensive reading and textbooks (Brown, 2008).

Recently, there have been many complaints about students' lack of independent reading at the primary, secondary and even university levels. Students do not seem to have developed the habit of reading. While the researchers taught English as a subject in secondary school during school placement as a higher diploma program candidate, they observed this problem. For this reason, this research was aimed at studying the practice of using an Extensive approach taking the teachers' and students' roles in the application of the extensive reading approach in English language classes; specifically, it was aimed at

- Describing the roles of the English language in promoting the use of extensive reading
- Describing the practices of extensive reading through students' engagements.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

This research aimed to describe the practice of the Extensive reading approach to language teaching in English language classrooms of South-Omo Secondary schools, and hence, a descriptive survey design was applied. The design helped the researcher to describe the practices of Extensive reading based on the principles of extensive reading approach applications.

2.2. Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Techniques

The target population of this study was high school English language teachers who taught grade nine English and the students who followed their education in the same grade level. English teachers of the schools who taught English at grade nine high school levels were taken using convenience sampling since the sample size should be helpful to make plausible findings and conclusions. Accordingly, schools were taken conveniently from four woredas to keep the validity of the collected research information. 42 English language teachers were taken for the questionnaire. In connection to this, Williams (2008) suggests that when the research site is convenient for the researcher, it affects determining the quality of the final findings. As a result, Jinka Secondary School from Jinka Town, Goh Secondary School from Bako Gazer, Dimeka Secondary School from Hamer, and Bena Tsemay secondary schools from Bena Tsemay woreda were incorporated in the study, for each school confined to different woredas. Therefore, the researchers took 200 grade nine students using a simple random sampling technique for the questionnaire.

2.3 Instruments for Data Collection

Questionnaires were the ideal data-gathering instruments for this study. It was used to collect information on the application of the principles of using the extensive reading approach in enhancing the students' reading skills. questionnaire focuses on the role of English language teachers in promoting the use of an extensive reading approach. Thus, teachers were asked to fill out a questionnaire that contains 9 items of which all focused on the teachers' roles in the utilization of an extensive approach. These questionnaires were adapted from Day and Bamford's (2004) ten principles of extensive reading. The

questionnaires were prepared with the frequency of five-point Likert scale items which vary from always to never.

The second questionnaire was prepared a closed-ended questionnaire that asks the students about the application of some reading techniques and styles. Specifically, the Questionnaire items are categorized based on the themed focus of the research data. Hence, based on the variables of the study, questionnaires were categorized as the one which focuses on the sources of the reading materials, student's Reading Material Selection techniques, those focus on the student's reading preferences, and finally those focusing on the obstacles to the practice of extensive reading on the plain.

2.4 Procedures of Data Collection

The desired data for the study was collected using the following data-gathering procedure. First of all, relevant literature was reviewed to obtain sufficient information to develop the questionnaire and interview items. Next, the researchers prepared questionnaire items and the reliability of the items was tested using the data collected from none sample respondents (50 students in one South Omo High School) and reliability analysis was employed by using either Cronbach's alpha methods. The Cronbach alpha for the item was .763.

Based on the pilot study and staff members' comments, the researchers made the necessary modifications. Before actual data gathering, the researchers gave short training to the data collectors on how they should gather data on each side of the studies. Then, data collectors distributed questionnaires to the sample teachers of each site.

3.5. Methods of Data Analysis

The data generated with the questionnaire were tallied and categorized based on the theme of the objective made. Then, a descriptive statistical analysis such as frequency and percentage were calculated to order the rank for the potential sources of the students reading materials and to identify which reading materials the students prefer mostly. In addition, four reasons for reading the external reading materials were presented and the students preferred their priority of interest to readers. Finally, five variables were presented for the students as the challenges of reading for pleasure, and the students selected ranked these challenges from the most challenging to the least challenging.

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3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Teachers' Role in Promoting the Extensive Reading Approach

Table 1. The description of Teachers' use of ER

Statement	No.	Always	Often	sometimes	Rare	Never	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have Extensive reading programs for my students	42	0	0	3	17	22	1.5	.6
Before providing the students with reading materials, I identify and recognize the level of each student in my class.	42	0	0	0	22	20	1.5	.5
I provide a variety of reading materials for the students to read in their extra time.	42	0	0	8	21	13	1.8	.7
Before ordering the student to read the book or other reading material I read myself and understand its message.	42	0	0	0	27	15	1.6	.48
It is me who selects and provides the reading materials for the students to read.	42	0	0	0	6	36	1.14	.35
I Support Students to find the reading materials for their level	42	0	0	0	13	29	1.3	.467
Informing interesting reading materials to students	42	0	0	0	19	23	1.45	.5
I collect feedback from the students about the book they read	42	0	0	0	18	24	1.428	.5
I Reward the best readers.	42	0	0	0	28	14	1.6	.477
Valid N (listwise)	42							

Cronbach Alpha= .763

Key: Al= Always, Of= Often, Sth=Sometimes

In table 1., all nine items are used to measure the frequency of teacher's use of extensive approaches in their reading classes. These nine items are prepared based on the ten principles of using extensive reading approaches (Bamford & Day, 2004). According to this free reading principle, students are autonomous readers while teachers are the facilitators. Therefore, the above statements demonstrate the function of teachers as facilitators. The Likert scale measurement in Table 1.1 shows that teachers were not using extensive reading approaches either within their classrooms or at their extra time. For instance, they have no special reading program (ER) which enables the students to accelerate their reading fluency. Similarly, the above data is evident that teachers do not provide different reading materials based that can fit the student's interests. The frequency of sharing the best books they read to their students and sharing information about what to read is uncommon among all the teacher respondents. Moreover, the data in Table 1.1 shows that teachers by themselves are not the best reader of their students. It shows that teachers do not have interaction regardless of promoting extensive reading by making themselves the best readers or models for their students.

All the statements presented in Table 1.1 are interdependent for they all measure the teacher's uses and practices of extensive reading approaches in their language classes. This is why all the results were found to be similar. Likewise, teachers never inform guide their students to select the books of their reading competency level, but in rare cases, some may do these practices. In connection with this, the absence of presenting and providing what to be read resulted in the absence of collecting feedback(talk show) on the books that students read at their home. Therefore, the best readers (students) could not get a chance to be rewarded after they accomplish reading books and other reading materials prepared in the English Language. All in all, the frequency results of extensive reading application by English language teachers are found to be un existed. All the nine items that are designed to measure the teacher's role in promoting the extensive reading approach according to (Bamford & Day, 2004) are not applied by the English language teachers. Finally, the application of these Extensive principles is triangulated through interviews with some English teachers and the elaborated description is presented under the interview section.

3.2 Sources of Extensive Reading Reading Materials

Table 2: Sources for ER

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Online	7	8.8	8.8	8.8
Friends	22	27.5	27.5	36.3
school library	38	47.5	47.5	83.8
public library	11	13.8	13.8	97.5
bookstore	2	2.5	2.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Source: Current study

As we can see in Table 2, half of the respondents are dependent on the school libraries to access their reading materials a place where they access what they want to read. Thus, from the total of eighty respondents, 38 (47.5%) of them responded that their prior source of reading material is their school library. Next to the school library, the second-best sources of reading material for the school students were friends who owned what is supposed to be read. Likewise, 22(27.5%) of the total respondent reacted as they get what they read from near friends or classmates. The public library was the third choice for the students to access reading material in the study area. Accordingly, 11 students which account for 13.8% of the total respondents were dependent on the public library to get reading materials or borrow a kind of book they want to read. Out of 80 sample students, only 2 in numbers (2.5%) responded as they could access the reading material from bookstore. This is the least percentage compared to other sources of reading materials listed above. Other than these students are rarely dependent on the electronic devices by which they can read soft materials or from internet sources. Information from Table 2 revealed that only 8.8% of the total sample uses the Internet to access information through reading.

3.3. Student's Reading Material Selection Technique

Table 3: Reading Material Selection/Preference Technique in Library

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Suggestion from other	14	17.5	17.5	17.5
by cover	2	2.5	2.5	20.0
by the amount of page	5	6.3	6.3	26.3
by genre	9	11.3	11.3	37.5
by title	45	56.3	56.3	93.8
by author	5	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Student's interest to access any reading materials varies based on their experience to read different reading materials. Accordingly, information regarding their reading material preference shows that more than half 45(56.3%) of the sample responded as they search the reading material by title. Other than this 14 (17.5%) responded that they find the reading material based on suggestions they get from their friends in the classroom. However, they rarely prefer finding the reading materials based on the amount of book's page, the name of the authors, or the cover of the books 5(6.3%) and 2(2.5%) respectively. However, finding the reading materials by genre has accounted for more frequency 9 (11.3%) finding based on the color of the cover page, amount of book's pages based on the name of the author.

3.4. Reasons for the Students' Extensive Reading (ER)

For the practical existence of ER, readers can be attracted by different internal and external factors. The following variables can be labeled as the reasons for extensive reading and intensive reading of which reading to grasp information is the main manifestation of ER, while the rest are reading based on external pushes like reading to improve the knowledge of the English language, to upgrade the knowledge or reading to accomplish assignments given by the teachers. Such kind of reading activities which are imposed because of external

factors are intensive reading in nature. Let us refer to the following table to see the degree of Extensive Reading (ER) and intensive reading (IR) in terms of purpose.

Table 4.: The degree of ER in terms of Purpose

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
For information	5	6.3	6.3	6.3
To Improve my English	16	20.0	20.0	26.3
For pleasure	25	31.3	31.3	57.5
to do assignments or home works	34	42.5	42.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

For extensive reading practical's existence, readers can be motivated by different internal and external factors. From the above four motivating factors of reading, students mostly read the reference materials to easily accomplish homework and assignments. Information in Table 4. reveals that 34 out of 80 students reacted that they used to read textbooks when they accomplish their homework and assignments. This number accounted 42.5% of the total sample taken for the research. This means the majority of the students are not reading for pleasure, one of the main purposes of extensive reading. From the total sample taken, only 25 (31.3) students reacted as they read to get general knowledge. This number can be accounted for extensive reading practices that can be reading for none academic purpose. However, in context reading for general knowledge was taken as reading all subjects' guides, and references books to have a general understanding of all subjects.

Nevertheless, indirectly students read to score good marks or to be competent in all subjects. Another purpose of reading presented in this study was for students reading all materials presented in the English language to be accurate and fluent in understanding the English language. This can be made by studying new words and vocabulary in a text they read. In their daily reading, the student's vocabulary power develops gradually. In this study, only 16 students from the total of 80 respondents (20%) reacted as they read to improve their English language competence. Lastly, only 5 students responded as they read to get information written in English. This purpose is one of the main purposes of extensive

reading. Here, it revealed that only 6% of the total respondents read for pleasure. One of the principles of extensive reading is reading to get updated information through which students focus on their purpose rather than worrying about the difficulty of the language they read through.

3.5 Discussion of Results and Findings

One of the specific objectives through which we can assess the practice of extensive reading is examining the role of English language teachers in using the extensive reading approach as the alternative to the intensive reading approach. Results from the teachers' questionnaires and interviews show that teachers did not use an extensive reading approach to accelerate the students' reading skills. The result of the student's questionnaire and their interview confirmed that the extensive reading approach is not in use.

In this study, the students were asked how they access the extensive reading materials, and more than 50% of the respondents confirmed that they get the reading books from the school library and their friends. It was also found that students read few academic references to accomplish home-works and their assignments or when their teacher gave those works to be done at home. Therefore, it can be inferred that students frequently read to pass exams or score good marks. Though they can read books in such a way this is not the aim and nature of extensive reading. According to the principles of extensive reading, students should not worry about the topic they are reading, and there must not be an association of reading to the coming test or exam or rewards given based on their reading comprehension. Day and Bamford (2002), confirmed this idea by saying that the purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding and reading is its reward.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions

The very beginning of this research was started from a question of why high school students are unable to read fluently these days. The problem of reading and understanding the message from a large text is widely being observed at higher academic institutions, and this problem is directly connected back to the background of the students. Therefore, the problem of students who cannot read and understand at the university level is rooted back to

their high school and elementary life. As a result, the current study focused on finding a gap in the practices of extensive reading approach at the high school level specifically selecting students from four high schools in the South-Omo zone.

The research focused on an extensive reading approach taking some reasons as starting arguments. Firstly, the nature of this approach is to enable learners to learn the language explicitly with a little effort from both teachers and students. Secondly, the students read implicitly, only for classroom instructions and to pass the exam, there is little intrinsic motivation from the students, and this directly can affect the overall students' language proficiency development.

Three specific objectives were the guiding road for finalizing the works connected to this study. Hence, there were questions about identifying the potential sources of the reading materials for the students, students' reading material selection and preference techniques, grading motivational factors for the students to read and finally describing and grading challenging factors to the practices of extensive reading are the pinpointing focuses of this study.

4.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research study, researchers have drawn the following demonstrative recommendations. To solve the problems associated with extensive reading and to boost an exemplary reading culture:

- Students should not read only for the reading assignment, for this purpose has little effect on the language acquisition of the learners.
- The current schools and public libraries must be equipped with up-to-date wide varieties of reading materials for the betterment of extensive reading in practice.

- Both school administrators and school teachers should prepare the supplementing reading special program for the students to overcome the student's reading skills and cultivate a reading culture among the school students.
- There must be training prepared for the language teachers concerned with the awareness creation sessions about the roles and impacts of extensive reading approach in the student's language development.

- Students must be encouraged to read different varieties of reading materials developed by the English language, for it helps them to be fluent readers and rich in vocabulary.

Conflict of interest:

We declare that there is no conflict of interest for this research work.

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