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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE NEED FOR LITERACY IMPROVEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ETHIOPIA

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#### ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the use of literacy input to improve language literacy skills of primary school students in Ethiopia. It envisaged the effort of primary school English language teachers to improve the learners' English language literacy, and to introduce the strategies of improving literacy skills that promote achievement of the country's development goals. The study was conducted in two primary schools in the South Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' region of Ethiopia. The subjects of this study were 40 grade five learners and 6 English language teachers in two primary schools. Both Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the study. Questionnaire and interview were used for data collection. The findings of this study show that the primary school teachers in the study did not practice literacy instruction effectively and students spent little time both at school and at their homes on literacy learning activities. The major contributing factors for this were lack of appropriate textbook companions and other instructional materials. In addition, monitoring students' literacy progress was limited to poorly designed tests and the teachers do not use the assessment information to remedy student errors or to construct learning opportunities for students who learn at a different pace. There are English language literacy barriers in the school and at home environment and these seem to be major problems in reading development of many learners. Finally, some recommendations were given to different stakeholders on how to act on the identified obstacles of the students' English language literacy improvement.

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## INTRODUCTION

**Background and Justification to the study:** The National learning assessment (NLA) program investigated the quality of reading skills for Grade 4 students of Ethiopia since 2000. The assessment result indicated that primary school students have very low reading ability (MOE and USAID (2008). The result indicates that Ethiopian government has to do a lot to overturn this low student reading ability. This is because reading skill is crucial and a dominant means of learning at any level of learning. Sellers (2000), as cited in Wu (2011), states that students are required to read carefully to integrate information. Moreover, various reading skills are employed in different situations. From this perspective, the nature of reading is complex. In addition to the complex nature of reading, the reading process is cognitively demanding because learners need to coordinate attention, perception, memory, and comprehension. Because learners have to read in English which is a foreign language to them, the situation is even more challenging (Carrell and Grabe, 2002).

Therefore, motivation for investigating this topic is also related to low student ability in English language. Education policy affects innovation in a number of ways and literacy level of a nation is highly linked to the development of that particular nation (OECD, 2013). In any occupation whether, it is agriculture, industry, economics, education and the like, it needs good literacy skill to get information from materials such as newspapers, manuals, researches, innovations etc. Thus, it calls for governments to improve literacy skills of their citizens to enhance the development activity of their countries. Then, it will be easier for them to easily access resources produced internationally and adopt some technological innovations. Therefore, in the context of Ethiopia, a continuous literacy development is essential to improve the demand in an agriculture sector, which is the backbone of economy in the country. Securing this increases productivity and environmentally enhancing technologies and practices. According to Ethiopian education policy, learners are instructed in a language chosen by the learners themselves or by their parents/guardians particularly in the early grades of primary school. This choice prescribes this mother tongue or another language as the medium of instruction for a child's education.

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Due to this, all content knowledge or subjects taught in classroom (except English language subject) and all communication between the teacher – student and student-student is carried out only in English. The knowledge, skills and values will be thought/understood mainly through this medium. Therefore, the learner's competence and performance in classroom will not be dependent on ability of the medium of instruction, but will mainly fall on information processing ability.

However, public schools offer education in a particular language or medium of instruction chosen only in the first cycle primary school (1-4). During these early years, English is taught as one of the subjects in the curriculum. English takes over as the medium of instruction from grade five at the primary school level and continues to secondary and tertiary levels. Beginning from grade five, the medium changes to English language. This is because of two reasons: English is regarded as an international language and a very important language and most educational resources and terminologies are available in English medium. Learners have to be prepared for international compatibility in sharing knowledge and communication. As a result, most learners feel that it is crucial for the learner to develop the ability to read, write, listen to and speak English in order to develop their potential. The new Education and Training Policy (1994) of Ethiopia recognizes English to be offered as a subject starting from grade 1 and to be used as a language of instruction in secondary and tertiary levels of education. Recently however, in SNNPR, all subjects are offered through English medium. Nevertheless, as the learners join second cycle of primary school (grade 5), they begin to combat with the challenge from English medium instruction. This is because they don't have English language competence required for the level. Due to this, they find it difficult to speak, listen, read and write. Especially reading and writing skills are needed more to cop up with text books. Moreover, teachers of this school level also face with the challenge of finding ways of employing a variety of strategies in the instruction and teaching of different skills to enable learners to become strategic and effective readers, writers, listeners and speakers.

Clearly, this is not an easy task, especially for learners in Ethiopia where English is learnt as a second language, although it is used across the curriculum as the language of learning and instruction in second cycle primary, secondary and tertiary levels. This is the exact situation at South Nations and Nationalities Region particularly in Sidamma Zone where English is taught as second language and it is also used as the language of learning and instruction starting from grade five. Similarly, quality of English language learning, which refers to the learners' progress in using the language, has not shown improvement. In SNNPR, English is medium of instruction in upper primary school to tertiary level. However, students in the levels do not have the capacity to understand both English and other content subjects taught in English (Daniel, 2008). Therefore, it is important to investigate what lies behind poor English language ability of students. Another study was carried out by Teach English for Life Learning (TELL) Program on Ethiopian students at grades 2, 3, and 4. The purpose of this study was to describe the current state of mother tongue and English literacy instruction in primary schools in Ethiopia. The results showed that about two thirds of the students tested were not able to demonstrate the knowledge and skills expected of the curriculum's minimum learning competencies for each

grade. This suggests that English literacy is at least as poor as mother tongue literacy throughout Ethiopia (Coming, Smith, and Stone, 2012).

However, children need to practice the components of reading, and need to use those skills to accomplish tasks. The tasks and the texts should be ones that challenge them to improve their reading. Also the tasks should not be too difficult for them to read successfully, and are interesting and enjoyable for them. The component skills should be taught by starting with easy, simple skills and then slowly introducing more difficult or complex skills. Also good readers must efficiently integrate multiple component skills in order to make meaning from print (Adams, 1990). These components are phonological awareness, decoding and word recognition, vocabulary knowledge, oral reading fluency, and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Together, these components enable readers to make meaning from text. The *phonological awareness* is the ability to recognize the different sound segments of spoken words such as syllables, onset-rimes, and phonemes (Snow *et al.*, 1998). Recognizing smaller units such as phonemes is more difficult than recognizing larger units such as syllables, but phonemic awareness is crucial to word recognition in alphabetic scripts (Schatschneider, Francis, Foorman, Fletcher, & Mehta, 1999). Thus, identifying the root cause of low English language literacy is very important because working on this area is a key step not only for improving the quality of all subjects offered in English medium but also for students' day to day communication. Particular interest of this study is then to see the extent to which primary school English teachers use literacy input to improve English language proficiency of grade 5 students. The description and analysis will be made on both the teachers' classroom practice and the curriculum they were trained based on principles and standards of language teaching and curriculum design respectively. In this regard, as it is suggested in (Karsou, 2005), mechanisms will be forwarded as an input for the education and language policy framework. Also the standards will be introduced in the teacher education framework. Later, the indicators can be used by the teacher educators and the teacher education institutions for self-assessment and a guiding document for external assessors or accrediting agencies. Part of the motivation for investigating these issues emanates from here.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Education is central to the sustainable development of a country. This calls for governments to provide both access and quality education (Soubotina, 2004:43). The main goal of educating the population of that specific country has to be to prepare them to be creative, self educators, problem identifiers and use their knowledge and experience to solve problems they face in their daily lives. Apart from the formal professional trainings, the people need to have adequate literacy skill to combat their life challenges. In line with the above reason, the ability to read and write in English is crucial for success both at school and outside school. At school, literacy is the key to academic success (August and Shanahan 2006). Once learners are able to read and write in English, learning in other contents in this medium can be attained. Thus, the primary school learners should acquire English literacy skills before they move on to using English to learn academic content. Examinations at starting from this level emphasis on paper and pencil tests. All test items are written in English except those

for Mother tongues. During examinations learners need to be able to write and express themselves in English, just as they need to read the written language at a reasonable rate with some good understanding of what is written. Learners need to explore and make clearer their own ideas and feelings through writing. Failure to read and write will prevent learners from proceeding to secondary education and severely limit their chances of finding employment and becoming useful and productive citizens in the country.

However, The use of English as medium of instruction in Ethiopian context especially in primary school level is affecting learners' negatively in their education as they lack the required English language competence at level. Due to this, the quality of education and learners' achievement in other subjects is not satisfactory. They can't read and understand ideas in their textbooks and composing their notes. This affects learning of the subjects of the entire curriculum. Consequently, it leads to drop out of school or fail to promote to the next grade level. The researcher has observed/ experienced the problem as both secondary school teacher and university instructor. Therefore, it is important to see alternative strategies of teaching English to improve the proficiency of the learners. Adversely, the teaching of reading in primary school English classes in Ethiopia needs more attention in this regard. As indicated in the background of this study, the primary school learners in the country possess a very low reading ability (MOE & USAID, 2008:3; CDC & RTI, 2010). This means that the English teachers had contributed in one way or another to the failure of the learners in respect of their reading ability. Thus, I was motivated to assess the primary EFL teacher trainee teachers' level of preparation in the knowledge and skills of EFL teaching. In sum, it is important to give due attention to the students' improvement of literacy skills. On this premise, it calls for the EFL teacher educators to build the capacity of the trainee teachers so that they can develop their learners' reading competence. More specifically, teacher education institutes are responsible to educate English language teachers to have a thorough understanding of the reading process. This research tries to see the extent to which primary school English teachers use literacy input to improve English language proficiency of grade 5 students.

## Objectives

**General Objective:** This study sought to explore the how the primary school English language teachers in Ethiopia are supporting the literacy development achievement of the country. It is aimed at investigating the extent to which primary school English teachers use literacy input to improve English language proficiency of the students. In general, the research sought to understand the alignment between the development policy and classroom instruction, by examining the Millennium development goal (MDG) of the country with respect to literacy in the primary school level and how teachers make sense of goals in their classroom instruction.

## Specific Objectives

- To determine perception of primary school EFL teachers on use of supplementary literacy input in English language classroom
- To find out the extent to which English teachers use literacy input in their lessons to improve English language reading and writing skills of students.

- To find the existing strengths and gaps in the current practices being used for teaching literacy and language instruction

**Significance of the Research:** This research is important as it identifies the learners' perception of English language as medium of instruction, describes the current level of primary school learners' English language proficiency, and introduces strategies of improving English language proficiency to promote learning in general. The research findings can influence curriculum designers and teacher trainers in some way. It also helps motivates researchers to carry out researches in the area.

**Limitations of the study:** This research shares the limitations of the selected research design and methods of this study. A qualitative approach by its nature limits the inclusion of a large number of participants. Due to this, the study was done on limited number of students and teachers that also limits from making generalizations to the whole population of schools where the study was conducted. However, the judgments of the qualitative data were made based on the researchers' close eyes and ears. The data from the interviews and questioners were interpreted with great attention but had it been an experimental study supported by numerical data, the findings could have been even more reliable. Due to financial and time limitations, the study was confined to two primary schools in Sidama Zone.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Description of Area:** The research area is found in South Nations Nationalities and Peoples' Region, Sidama Zone. Yirgalem and Tula primary schools were selected for the study.

**Research Design:** This study is descriptive survey. It is preferred because the research is intended to see the extent to which additional materials are used to improve students' reading and writing skills.

**Subjects and Sample Size:** The samples of this study were 40 grade five learners and 6 English language teachers in two primary schools in Sidama zone: Yirgalem and Tula primary schools. This schools were preferred because these schools represent both town and rural schools. The findings may show the average literacy environment of the zone.

**Procedure:** The study focused on grade five learners. Quota sampling was used to select sample students among the selected schools. A total of forty students; twenty students from Yirgalem primary school and the remaining twenty were selected from Tula primary school. Among these sample learners, twenty {ten from each school} of them are females. This was done purposively to have gender representative samples. The samples delegated for each school were subdivided to the existing sections of fifth grade. To select the sample learners, lottery method was used to pick for each gender category. Six English language teachers from selected primary schools were selected as samples. Among these, three English language teachers from Tula school and three teachers from Yirgalem were selected and were interviewed. They are selected in purposive sampling method, to have both the selected grade English teachers and experienced teachers in teaching English at 5th grade.

**The Research Tools:** Both Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the study. The results of quantitative research can be regarded as reliable as it is more measurable to make generalizations about them. Teachers perception on the use of literacy materials in English instruction were explored through attitude scales which made it qualitative in this regard. In this study, a questionnaire and interview were used for data collection. Questionnaires were prepared for the learners. The questionnaire has four parts. The first part is about the school and students' background information. The second part deals with literacy related to home. the third part is about classroom environment of teaching literacy skills. the last part talks about the availability of resources. All of the questions are close-ended type seeking information on areas of the use of literacy improving materials. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the sample teachers because interview is a very good way of accessing peoples' perceptions and practices in detail. Also it was used to add triangulation of the data obtained from the students questionnaire responses.

**Data Management and Analysis:** Data gathered from questionnaire were used to determine the teachers and learners' attitude and practice of the use of additional English language literacy materials. The interview data were analyzed thematically. Different Measures of data were used to arrive at conclusions.

**Data presentation and Analysis:** This section presents the data collected through the two data collection tools, the questionnaire and interview.

### Native Language of Sample Learners

Language	N	%
Sidama	28	70
Amharic	7	17
Others	5	13
Total	40	100

In terms of gender, the sample students consisted of equal proportion, 50% male and 50% female. This was purposefully done during sampling in order to equal representation in terms of gender. In terms of native languages of the sample students, 70 % of the students' mother tongue is Sidama language and another significant proportion (17%) of the respondents indicated that Amharic is their mother language. The rest 13 % speak other languages. The figures show that the most dominant native language of the students is Sidama language which is the language of the local community. However, the learners have diversified language, and social and cultural exposure. This may bring differences in students' literacy exposure. This implies that the learners have varied literacy environment at their home and different preferences of literacy resources due to this.

### Facility at students' home

Availability of Facility at Students' Home	Response					
	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
English literacy printed materials	5	12	35	88	40	100
Electricity	27	67	13	33	40	100
Watch TV/movies	14	35	26	65	40	100
Listen to Radio	32	80	8	18	40	100
Use Computer	2	5	38	95	40	100

Availability of Stories at home can promote reading because literacy experiences can prepare students for future literacy development. About 88 % of the sample students responded that they do not have access to English story books at their home. The availability of books and reading materials is a key factor in the development of a reading habit and provides opportunities for learners to read. The data indicates that students do not have supportive reading environment at home. In addition to this, most of the learners (74%) responded that their parents are not adequately literate in English. This number shows that most students do not get support at home when they have unclear questions in their home works. The majority of learners (67%) have electricity at home. If they do not have electricity, it might negatively affect the students' reading practice at home. However, still significant number of students (33%) do not have electricity at home. This implies that the absence of adequate lighting for this group of students created unfavorable reading environment at home which can hinder literacy development. The table shows that the majority of the learners listen to radio (80%) and 35% them watch television. In relation to this, mass media has been described in many studies as excessive use of these media affects learners' literacy development. The learners who spend most of the time on mass media do not have time to read. Particularly, study conducted by IEA found out that listening to radio and watching television occupies much of learners' time and that those who often do this tend to score at lower levels (Elley 1992: xiii). Only (5%) of the respondents indicated that they have a computer at home. For computers can support reading behavior, absence of this important device might have contributed to less reading ability of students. The implications to the Ethiopian situation where home environment provides minimal support to most of the children particularly for those in rural areas and English is used as a medium of instruction beginning from second cycle primary level, giving due emphasis on English literacy development is crucial to assist children possess the required reading proficiency before they transit to secondary school.

### Language Preferences of Reading Materials

Home literacy environment	Response	
	N	%
English	9	22
Mother Tongue	31	78
Total	40	100

78 % of respondents preferred to read in their mother tongue and only 22% preferred to read English language reading materials. This could be the result of early grade reading habit as they learned in the lower primary grades in mother tongue medium. Some of the learners justified that they believe reading in English is a difficult task as compared to the native language. Due to this they had developed less preference on English reading materials.

### Focus area of literacy skills in classroom

Response	Focus Areas of Reading							
	Pronunciation		spelling		Vocabulary		comprehension	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
YES	9	23	26	65	32	80	13	32
NO	31	77	14	35	8	20	27	68
TOTAL	40	100	40	100	40	100	40	100

Literacy is a covers a wide range of skills that together build understanding of the language user.

Some of these include Phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, the explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, meaningful writing experiences, the development of fluent reading, opportunities for both guided and independent reading and wide-range of reading materials (Scammaca *et al.*, 2007; Kennedy *et al.*, 2012). To the students, most of the reading resources were used for teaching vocabulary. Most (80 %) of the students responded that their English language teachers focus on vocabulary teaching. The teachers' interview also shows that they did better in vocabulary meaning than pronunciation and phonemic awareness. The teachers reasoned out that they did this because the students do not have good performance in fluency. The respondent teachers also said that they focus on translating vocabulary meaning in Sidama and Amharic languages. Students learning English as a second language, however, should not learn only the meaning but should understand the relationship between letters of the alphabet and their sounds to learn to read effectively. Due to this, students were not likely to have heard or spoken the sounds before as meaningful units of speech. Students should have detected, isolated component sounds, recognized, and substituted the sounds that make up words. Therefore, the primary school English teachers needed to teach the relationship between the alphabet letters and their sounds.

The second most practiced area of literacy was spelling. About 65% of the learners said that they had spelling lessons. This might be important together with the meaning. Thirdly, the other most important component, reading comprehension, was not addressed adequately. Only 32% of the learners said that they practiced comprehension. Without understanding of sentences, knowledge of spelling and meaning is not as such relevant to the learners' literacy development. Therefore, reading comprehension should be treated to bring sustainable improvement in the children's later education. In line to this, The National Learning Assessment (NLA) program investigated the quality of reading skills for Grade 4 students of Ethiopia since 2000. The assessment result indicated that primary school students have very low reading ability (MOE and USAID (2008). The result indicates that Ethiopian government has to do a lot to overturn this low student reading ability. This is because reading skill is crucial and a dominant means of learning at any level of learning. Sellers (2000), as cited in Wu (2011), states that students are required to read carefully to integrate information. Moreover, various reading skills are employed in different situations. From this perspective, the nature of reading is complex. In addition to the complex nature of reading, the reading process is cognitively demanding because learners need to coordinate attention, perception, memory, and comprehension. Because learners have to read in English which is a foreign language to them, the situation is even more challenging (Carrell and Grabe, 2002). Therefore, motivation for investigating this topic is also related to low student ability in English language.

The least practiced area of literacy was pronunciation. To help the learners read words correctly, teachers need to give them phonic awareness of the language. It is suggested that the structured and systematic teaching of phonics is most important to develop the phonic as well as the pronunciation of words (Torgesen *et al.*, 2006). There are two approaches of teaching phonics. These are synthetic and analytic approaches. The synthetic approach emphasizes on the segmenting and blending of sounds, while the analytical approach takes the whole word and break it down into segments (McGuiness,

1997. As it was shown in the table above, only 23% of the respondents witnessed they learned pronunciation during classroom reading. This may be for one reason; for the teachers, to teach letter and sound combination of English, where there is sometimes mismatch between letter sound combinations, the teachers themselves needed to understand the system of speech sounds that make up English. This was a big challenge since all the teachers were not familiar with the concept of literacy and sounds letters combination pattern. In an interview one teacher actually confessed that he had problems in pronouncing some words from the text book. Teachers in the study didn't emphasize on pronunciation and phonetic areas of literacy because they themselves were not clear about the sound-letter relationships in English. The teachers' and learners' language background is very different from the English language. Also the Teachers' Guide of the text book (MOE., 2012) *English for Ethiopia Grade 5, the teacher's guide of grade 5 English* doesn't explain the pattern of teaching the sounds of the alphabet letters. Even if the sounds of letters were to be used with learners, primary schools have no access to tape recorders and cassettes which teachers could have used to practice native English language speakers based activities. In the absence of audio equipment and tape recorders in schools, teachers did not have models to listen to.

#### Availability of Literacy Resources in school

In behaviorism theories, children learn through their own pace and actions and thus, they should be responsible to their own learning (Dereboy, 2008). Thus the children's interaction with their environment calls for English language teachers to equip their school/classroom with teaching resources and encourage the children to develop their cognition and then the language (Cameron, 2001). Availability and Access to books is important in increasing motivation to read. The school has to be the main source of books to read. The number of books in the school library and the use can be an indicator of how much the learners are exposed to reading material. However, almost all the respondents said that they do not have access to borrow additional books from school library. Similarly, according to the interviewed teachers, the biggest challenge was shortage of books and other reading materials in the sample schools. The shortage of teaching and learning materials has already been discussed in the preceding chapter.

However it is necessary to mention here that lack of reading materials made it difficult to create an effective teaching and learning environment. The sample schools did not have enough text-books in classroom. As a result, learners worked in groups in order to share a book. The groups that were formed were big about six students to a book. The scarcity of books was problematic since learners learn to read through reading and it was practically difficult for learners to read through sharing one book. Related to this was lack of storage facilities in schools. In the absence of storage facilities one would have thought that teachers could still use classrooms to hang some charts for pupils to read. In addition, in order for pupils to be exposed to different genres, schools should have a variety of reading materials such as newspaper articles, magazines and songs. In relation to this, the IEA surveys (Elley 1992) show a clear link between reading ability and the size of school libraries.

### Challenges of Literacy Improvement

Challenges	Yes		No		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Poor reading background .	28	70	12	30	40	100
Lack of time	21	52	19	48	40	100
Lack of reading materials	26	65	14	35	40	100
Less help from teachers	24	60	16	40	40	100
Less help from parents	21	53	19	47	40	100

Almost all the predicted challenges are confirmed by more than 50% in each case. The highest percentage (70%) of learners said that they have poor reading background as the reason for poor reading skill. This is quite serious and this issue needs to be addressed. The second biggest challenge (65%) is lack of reading materials. If there is no access to reading materials, then reading cannot take place. Some respondents (52%) indicated that they do not have enough time to read. At homes, students are engaged with activities such as helping parents, listening to radio, and other games. These chores of activities after school diminish the amount of free time available for reading. Also significant number of students said that they did not get enough help from neither their teachers nor their parents. The major problems to the interviewed teachers were large classes, absenteeism, the difference between the language spoken at home and the language spoken at school and shortage of teaching and learning materials. Also large classes were mentioned as a barrier which affected the teaching of literacy in the sample schools. In addition classes had large numbers of students taught by one teacher. It was impossible for teachers in the study to teach using small group instruction, especially faced with the problem of inadequate teaching and learning resources. In addition to the above problems, absenteeism of students affected the progress of teaching literacy. The interview indicated that schools had high level of absenteeism in the sample schools. In this situation, the teacher in the absentees' class had to decide either to repeat the lessons that some learners had missed or to proceed in teaching the literacy skills. If he decides to keep on proceeding to a new lesson noticing that some learners were absent for a number of weeks, he decides to make progress with the students that were regularly present. However, most of the students do not come regularly. This shows that the absentees will not have full package lessons and as a result will not achieve the expected literacy skill at that grade level.

### Literacy knowledge and training level of teachers

To improve literacy skills of learners, ordinary class teaching is not enough and supplementary interventions are required (Brooks, 2007; Singleton, 2009). To do this, the teachers themselves have to be well equipped with the literacy development strategies. However, the interviewed teachers said that they were not well trained to teach learners English literacy skill. During teachers' training, teachers were not fully taught English phonemes during the courses they take at diploma level. Now, they had to read about this from their textbook. The result was that teachers could not teach sounds of the letters competently. They did not have clear understanding of the distinctions among the various sounds of the alphabet letters. They were also not able to pronounce unfamiliar sounds of words. In such a case teachers could not teach the sound system of English competently. So teachers and learners were not able to achieve the target of the course.

**Teachers Use of Additional literacy materials:** Teachers' interviews revealed that the teachers in both schools had problems to get materials with additional literacy activities. Teachers' interview indicated that they do not have access of library. This is disappointing, as the schools were in urban areas, so public libraries are usually accessible. Also, if available, public libraries could play a much bigger role in providing reading materials to develop a reading skill of students and to promote the teaching of literacy by providing additional activities for teachers.

**Parents' role in helping the students' to improve their literacy skills:** Some studies, for example, Pretorius & Naude, (2002), reflected that children inadequately exposed to reading and writing experiences due to poor parental involvement, were ill-prepared for reading and writing were not able to read and write at the expected level. This may be one of the root causes of the current situation in Ethiopia, the inability of learners to read and write at their expected levels. In connection with the parent-school partnership, the interview revealed that some parents have made less effort to improve their children's reading skill; most have made little effort. Teachers indicated that some parents are to some extent involved in their children's education and reading, but non-involvement of parents was the most common reason given as an aspect of the home environment that hindered the development of reading. Teachers blamed the parents rather than taking responsibility themselves for students' reading problems. Research has shown that continuity between literacy developments in school and at home is an issue that helps in learners' development of literacy skills at school. Parents should also be involved in the literacy development process of their children by reading to them and encouraging them to read. Tann (1991:146) claims that children to whom stories are read at home develop positive attitudes and motivation towards reading. In addition, listening to stories helps children learn how to read, and to become independent and confident readers (Czerniewska, 1996:103-107). Most of this research on literacy development has been carried out with children from homes, where parent-child interactions provide experiences similar to that of the classroom. Through parents' involvement in their children's literacy development at school, the children are encouraged and motivated. In such environment, children learn to read even before they start to go to school. In this study, however, the scenario was the opposite of the ideal situation. There was no connection between literacy development in school and at home. Learners learnt to read at school only. Most of the parents were peasant farmers who could not afford to buy books for their children to read at home. Also most of them were not in a position to help their children to read even if the books were available.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Conclusions

The findings of this study show that teachers did not use literacy instruction effectively and students spent little time at school on literacy learning activities. The major contributing factors at classroom were lack of appropriate textbook companions and other instructional materials. Even the textbooks are often not in the right reading levels for students and little improvement was made in provision of textbooks and reading materials. Little efforts have been made to meet teachers' pedagogical needs. Also teachers are not well

informed about language policies or well trained to teach literacy through English as a second language. Monitoring students' literacy progress was limited to poorly designed tests and teachers do not know how to use the information to remedy student errors or to construct learning opportunities for students who learn at a different pace. Primary school English teachers do not work together with other English teachers teaching at the same grade level. This has limited opportunities to share experience and learn from each other to develop lessons and instructional materials. Although some parents are to some extent involved in their children's education and reading, non-involvement of parents was the most common reason given as an aspect of the home environment that hindered the development of reading. The unavailability of resources was considered as the major constraint in the teaching and learning environment in the primary schools. There are English language literacy barriers in the school and at home environment and these seem to be a major problems in reading development of many learners and mother tongue has got preference over English for reading. Large classes and absenteeism were mentioned as a barrier which affected the teaching of literacy in the sample schools.

### Recommendations

- Knowledge and pedagogical skills of primary school English teachers need to be improved in order to be effective in teaching English literacy at lower and upper primary school grade levels.
- The responsible Regional, Zonal and woreda level education officers should offer training to primary school English teachers that enables them:
  - Know language literacy well and be able to prepare lesson plans and teach all literacy sub-skills across the syllabus of the grade level.
  - Know how children learn languages. They need to know and understand how children learn English as another language. They need to be able to use appropriate methods and materials to teach English literacy skills in the curriculum in primary school grades; as well as, teaching English both as a subject to be taught and as the means for learning other
  - Know about reading as a cognitive process and how to introduce writing and reading to beginners English as the language of learning across the curriculum at that level.
  - Know how to manage learning in the classroom: how to prepare teaching plans and lesson notes, how to use the blackboard and textbooks effectively, how to monitor children's written work in their exercise books, how to assess progress and take remedial actions, how to organize learning tasks for individuals, in pairs or in groups, how to prepare appropriate re-usable instructional aids.
  - Know how to work collaboratively with other teachers in the school and with parents.
  - Know how to reflect on their own teaching practice and the impact it has on children's learning and be able to bring about a change in their teaching to respond to learners' needs.
  - The problems that hinder the development of reading habit should be alleviated and those that hinder the development of independent reading should be avoided.

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