An Assessment of Students' Reading Ability in Higher Institution:
A Case Study of Asela College of Teacher Education, Asela, Oromia, Ethiopia

Motuma Hirpassa

College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of English Language and Literature, Ambo University, P.O.Box 19, Ambo, Ethiopia
E-mail: maldamercy@yahoo.com

Abstract

Prompted by increased concern about the problems of education quality, this study was carried out to investigate the reading ability of English major students of Asela College of Teacher Education (ACTE). To achieve this objective, third year English major students of the College were purposively selected. Both quantitative and qualitative data were obtained from the respondents through Reading Achievement Tests, Strategies and Reading Ability Questionnaire and Structured Retrospective Interview. The study mainly focused on the students' ability to identify the main ideas and details, explicitly stated and implied information, the purpose and the tone of authors in five different reading genres: dialogues, directions, article, essays, and poems. The overall result of the study showed that 91.3% of ACTE students were "frustrational readers" and exclusively limited to bottom-up approaches to reading. In other words they answered the test questions below 70% correctly in reading comprehension tests. Moreover, almost half of the students could not answer above 50% in the comprehension questions. Therefore, the prescriptions for the solution to the problem lies in bringing about improvement in the students' reading ability to identify the main ideas and details, explicitly stated and implied information, the purpose and the tone of authors in different reading genres: dialogues, articles, essays, directions and poem.

Keywords: Reading ability, Strategies, Accuracy, Automaticity, and Reading Speed

Introduction

In this age of globalization the acquisition of reading ability in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a priority for millions of learners around the world because many students of EFL need to use the language in their day-to-day lives in order to access the wealth of information recorded exclusively in English (Williams, et al. 2011; Grabe, 2004; Flowers, 2007; Piper, 2010). Reading is perhaps one of the most fascinating and, therefore, one of the well-researched areas in language teaching. However, researchers like Desrochers and Glickman (2009) in Canada, Kondo-Brown (2009) in Japan, Flowers (2007) in Chinese and Korean, and Ambachew (2003) in Ethiopia, have claimed that reading

still remains one of the researchable areas in Higher Institutions.

"Reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts and requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information through the dynamic interaction among: (1) the reader's existing knowledge; (2) the information suggested by the text being read; and (3) the context of the reading situation" (Anderson, 2009; NARAP, 2006). Kondo-Brown (2005) defines reading as a means of language acquisition, of communication, and of sharing information and ideas. These definitions imply that reading is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. It is also a complex interaction between the text and the reader which is shaped by the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, attitude, and language community which is culturally and socially situated (Grabe, 2009; Pressley, 2006). Most educators would agree that the major purpose of reading should be the construction of meaning, comprehending and actively responding to what is read (Takase, 2007; Grabe, 2009 and Pressley, 2006).

Reading ability is the end result of the reading process **when** all of the components (loud reading and comprehension, as well as reading speed and accuracy) interact successfully (Martinez and Grisalena, 2005**)**. The text presents letters, words, sentences, and paragraphs that encode meaning. The reader uses knowledge, skills, and strategies to determine the meaning of a given text from the writer's point of views. According to Martinez and Grisalena (2005) and Strebel (2009), both have reported that a fluent reader is expected to understand most of the information stated both explicitly and implicitly in a given text within a reasonable time limit. Also the reader should be able to summarize, interpret, and accept or reject printed information (Pressley, 2006).

Reading process synthesizes and discusses the general reading models assuming a purpose for academic reading comprehension ability (Grabe, 2009; Pressley, 2006). For the sake of simplicity, these explanations have been divided into two parts: lower-level processes and higher-level processes because reading ability is best understood by considering both lower-level (bottom-up) and higher level (top-down) components of reading ability**.** Reading is activated by print; therefore, the reader must be able to translate the written words into meaningful language. However, if the reader is unable to attach meaning to the word, then he or she has not read the text, since reading must end in meaning construction. For this reason, several scholars (Nash-Dozel, 2010; Lam, 2009 and Strebel, 2009) suggest that reading ability should encompass the ability to identify the main ideas and details, directly stated and implied information, the author's purpose and the tone of a given text.

The most fundamental requirement for fluent reading comprehension is rapid and automatic word recognition (lower-level process), which refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. In addition, a fluent reader should be able to take in and store words together so that basic grammatical information can be extracted (a process known as **syntactic parsing**) to support clause-level meaning (Grabe, 2009). Syntactic parsing helps to disambiguate the meanings of words that have multiple meanings out of context (e.g. bank, cut, drop). Moreover, it helps a reader determine what pronouns and definite articles are referring to in prior text.

Added to these lower-level processes is a set of higher-level comprehension processes that more closely represent what readers typically think of as reading comprehension. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text in which top-down readers typically make use of background knowledge and experience with text to help them understand written text (Takase, 2007; Pressley, 2006). Beyond understanding and interpreting the ideas represented by the text, they establish purposes for reading, combine reading strategies as needed, make inferences of many types, draw extensively on background knowledge, monitor comprehension, form attitudes about the text and author, adjust goals as appropriate, and critically evaluate the information being read.

Reading purpose determines the appropriate approach and the level of reading comprehension (Grabe, 2009). Daniel, et al. (2008) claims that reading is an activity with a purpose. Hence, a person reading an academic text and scientific article reads to support or reject an opinion, know the vocabulary used by the author, understand the facts and cause-effect sequences and to recognize ideas that are given and presented as hypotheses in the text. For a reader to be able to read in academic reading, a multi-step process is necessary including at least two activities: word identification and comprehension (Chard, et al., 2009). Moreover, this reading process requires continuous practices, development, and refinement (Phakiti, 2005).

Academic reading purpose helps the readers to synthesise information from multiple reading sources, or from prose texts and poems. Although such reading is quite different from non-academic readings, it usually involves searching, skimming, or reading for general comprehension (Grabe, 2009). However, in these circumstances, a more critical set of goals must be established for an effective synthesis: the reader needs to remember points of comparison or opposition, assess the relative importance of the information, and construct a framework in which the information will be organised (Torgenson, 2002 and USAID, 2011).

According to Singhal (2001) and Strebel (2009), highly skilled readers use specific reading strategies before, during, and after reading to aid in their comprehension and understanding of the text being read. These reading strategies include: previewing (reviewing titles, section headings, and photo captions to get a sense of the structure and content of a reading selection); predicting (using knowledge of the subject matter to make predictions about content and vocabulary and check comprehension, using knowledge of the text type and purpose to make predictions about discourse structure, using knowledge about the author to make predictions about writing style, vocabulary, and content); Skimming and scanning (using a quick survey of the text to get the main idea, identify text structure, confirm or question predictions); guessing from context (using prior knowledge of the subject and the ideas in the text as clues to the meanings of unknown words, instead of stopping to look them up) and paraphrasing **(**stopping at the end of a section to check comprehension by restating the information and ideas in the text) (Cubukcu, 2008; Dinner 2009; Kondo-Brown, 2006).

In a second language study, Bell (2001); Grabe (2004); Cubukcu, (2008); Dinner (2009) and Grabe (2009) used a think-aloud procedure and Wiggins (2005); Wang (2009) and Sharon (2006) used a triangulated data gathering approach to investigate the reading ability of the students and to identify relations between certain types of reading strategies and successful or unsuccessful second language reading. The successful reader, for example, kept the meaning of the passage in mind while reading in broad phrases, skipped unimportant or less important parts of a text, and had a positive self-concept as a reader. The unsuccessful reader, on the other hand, lost the meaning of the sentences when decoded, read in short phrases, pondered over inconsequential texts, seldom skipped parts of texts as unimportant, and had a negative self-concept (Kitao, Kenji and Miyamoto, 2001)

Statement of the Problem

The core of the problem was the deterioration of the quality of teaching English as a foreign language both in college and primary school levels (Teshome, 2001). Recent studies indicated that the first year students of Ethiopian Higher Institutions were unable to understand both explicitly and implicitly stated information (Ambachew, 2003; Alemu, 2009). Specifically, primary school teachers in the region were being blamed by the respective stakeholders (students and colleagues) for the poor language teaching (Piper, 2010).The assumption was that the current status of primary school teachers' reading ability could not support their students to learn and develop their fundamental reading ability. As a result, according to an

Ethiopian early grade reading assessment (EGRA), more than 50% of the students were unable to answer a single simple reading comprehension questions and 30% of the students were illiterate in Oromia, after attending school for three or four years (Piper, 2010).

Moreover, a Quality Assurance Test (QAT) report made by Oromia Education Bureau (OEB, 2011) indicates that the achievement of the English major students of ACTE is decreasing from year to year. For example, the average score of the third year ELT students, who graduated in June 2011, was below that of their counterparts, who had graduated in 2007 in both the Instructors' Assessments (IA) of the college and QAT. The result of QAT shows that about 8 (3.5%) of students scored less than 50% in 2007, whereas 11 (25%) of the students scored less than 50% in 2011 in the test. Moreover, the very least point of the college EFT students' result is 16 points out of 100 in the test in 2011. The result also indicates that the students, who graduated in 2011, scored an average of 56 out of 100 points in a reading test, two points less than in 2007 and four points below the 2009, an average of 60. Further more, in a conference organized by the OBE in October 2011, the quality issues were also raised by concerned instructors especially the reading ability and comprehension of students as its affect their overall performance in learning other subjects. However, being in this serious and urgent problem, no research has been conducted to investigate the students reading ability at graduating level in the country. For this reasons, the need for the investigation of reading ability of ACTE students is clear.

Basic Research Questions

The research attempted to answer the following basic questions:

1. Do the students recognize the main ideas and details presented in a given text?

2. Do the students understand directly stated and implied information in a given text?

3. Do the students identify the author's purpose and the tone of the text?

4. What type of reading strategies do the students use to understand a given text?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research can help educators have a better view of students' reading ability; the study will suggest some mechanisms and strategies to improve the students' interactive reading ability, which will in turn helps the teacher to design suitable reading materials based on the curriculum for classroom assessment. The college students' development and progress in their reading ability can thus be measured. Besides, the findings will help other researchers who would want to study

the problem in a wider scope as a reference.

Research Objectives

The general objective of this study was to investigate the reading ability of English major third year regular student of ACTE Specifically, the study was intended to investigated whether the students were able to recognize the main ideas and details, the directly stated and implied information, purpose and the tone of a given text.

Methodology of the Study

The study unit

Asela College of Teacher Education is one of the ten government colleges in Oromia Regional State. It has 13 linear departments for diploma program, which are organized into four streams: Languages, Natural Science and Mathematics, Social Science and Aesthetics. English language is taught as a major course with other two local languages: Afan Oromo and Amharic. During the study time, there are 46 (31 male and 15 female) English major third-year regular students who were studying for their diploma program.

Subjects and sampling techniques

The purposive sampling technique was employed since the target population for the study is known.

The sampled population was stratified into successful and unsuccessful groups. In addition, to make the interview manageable and the sample as representative as possible for the population, eight students (equal number of highly successful and unsuccessful groups) were purposely determined from the reading comprehension test performance for the loud reading tests and for the retrospective interview.

Data Gathering Instruments

A "Triangulated Data gathering" approach was used in this study to adequately assess the data and determine the reading ability of the students from various perspectives: test, questionnaire, interview and observation (Perlez and Linday, 2003; Sharon, 2006; Daniel, et al., 2008; Williams, et al., 2011). Hence, this study employed three main data gathering instruments: 1) A Reading Comprehension Achievement Test, 2) Strategies and Reading Ability Questionnaire and 3) Structural Retrospective Interview Questions for their good concurrent validity.

Reading comprehension test

To investigate the students' English reading ability, two consecutive tests were conducted at different times (one month interval) following Sharon (2006) procedure to minimize the test fatigues and estimate the reliability and validity of the test using the

correlation between the scores of the two tests which was divided into two major categories: silent and loud reading tests. Moreover, in order to enhance the reliability of the tests and to ensure one correct response to each question Williams, et al. (2011) and Daniel, et al (2008), methods were adopted in order to enhance the reliability of the tests and to ensure one correct response to each question. Three English language instructors were invited in the construction and administration processes of the tests. The first test was given on 24/11/ 2011 and the second test was administered on 20/12/ 2011 with a completion time of 2:30 hours.

Each comprehension test had five sections/genres: dialogues, directions, article, essays, and poems because the genres help the researcher to align the test questions with the course objectives of the diploma program. Based on Sharon (2006), 10 multiple choice questions were asked from each of the five genres with each question carrying a point value of 2 (i.e. 5x10 x 2 = 100). To make the passages reasonably challenging for the college students and fit them to the students' background and the objectives of the reading courses, all the reading passages contained three to five new words and ordinary/ familiar contents for most of the college students. In other words, the reading passages did not require the students' special technical skills to understand them. The difficulty level and the discriminating power of the tests were similar, ranging respectively from 41 – 60% and 0. 30 - 0.50**,** which means that the questions are average and good items as of the standard**.** All the test questions set were thematically sorted into one of the variables of reading ability (Hudson, 2007): the ability to identify the main ideas, specific fact or details, references, inferences, the researcher's purpose and the tone of writing in all the genres.

Similarly, two loud reading tests with 10 questions each, that is 10x2 = 20 questions were developed and administered to eight of the students who had participated in the reading comprehension tests to see their reading accuracy, automaticity, speed and to cross-check the ability of the students against their results in the reading comprehension tests. The number of words in the passages for both tests was 360 and 372. Reading speed for every student was calculated by counting the number of words read correctly per minute (WPM). Similarly, the degree of the students' reading accuracy was also calculated by counting the errors the students made while reading and the number of questions correctly answered in a given text.

Chard et al. (2009) and USAID-AED/IQPEP (2010) parameters and interpretation guidelines were adapted and used to categorized the college students.ie 90 -100% = highly successful/ independent reader; 75 – 89% = Successful/Instructional reader; 65 – 74% = Good/Frustrational reader and 50 – 64% =

Unsuccessful/Frustrational reader while below 50% is considered poor/ Frustrational reader.

Strategies and reading ability questionnaire

The researcher adapted a three- page questionnaire with 48 open-ended and 5 close–ended items from Sharon (2006) and Williams, et al., (2011) to measure the students' use of cognitive reading strategies (e.g. the ability to predict, preview, scan, skim, paraphrase, infer and refer information; guessing and skipping over the unfamiliar words etc) to understand a given text and to cross-check the students' confidence with their achievements in the tests. The first parts of the questionnaire included a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (Never), 2 (sometimes), 3 (often), 4 (usually) and 5 (always). In the second part of the questionnaire, each student was asked to rate whether he/she had done the tests with 'quite easily=3', 'with some difficulty=2' or 'with great difficulty=1'. The questionnaire was pre-tested (using the polite testing process) and all ambiguous statements were detected and improved on the final questionnaire administered.

Structured retrospective interview

A structured retrospective interview was used to supplement the test and the questionnaire. The interview helped the researcher to further explain the nature and type of the reading strategies the students used during the reading comprehension test and the extent to which the individual test takers differed from one another in this respect. The retrospective interview was conducted with eight test takers.

The structured retrospective interview and the loud reading tests were simultaneously administered con-secutively two days after the comprehension test to eight selected students (four each from successful and unsuccessful group). This help the researcher to further asses the students reading ability and explain the type of reading strategies they had adopted while answering the reading comprehension tests. Finally, on the day of the last test, the questionnaire was administered to all the students in the afternoon to know the nature and type of the reading strategies the students used during the reading comprehension tests.

All the eight students selected for the retrospective interview were coded as A–H to keep their results confidential. The first four of them (A–D) were the top achievers, and the other four ((E-H) were from the lower achiever in the comprehension tests. Then, the interview questions were first presented and then, the loud reading tests were administered. The students were individually asked to read the passage aloud. A video camera was used to record their voices in order to detect errors in accuracy, automaticity and speed. The maximum time given

for each student to complete the interview and the loud reading test was an hour. The interview and the loud reading test lasted for eight hours.

Methods of Data Analysis

The descriptive statistic tools such as percentages, mode, median, range, mean were employed to quantitatively describe and explain the students' reading ability. Moreover, the data obtained through interview and loud reading tests were qualitatively analysed and finding was used for triangulating the quantitative data.

Results and Discussion

Reading comprehension test

The results of the students' reading comprehension tests are presented in figure1. The number of students was converted into percentage for clarity. The result reveals that only 4(22.58%) of students scored 75-79% points. Similarly, 10 (21.74%) and 12 (26.09%) of the students have scored respectively 65-74% and 50-64% points. However, 20(43.48%) of the students have scored below 50% in the test. Moreover, no student has scored greater than 79% in the test. These result shows that most of the students were poor reader. This is in agreement with the findings of Martinez and Grisalena, (2005) and Chard et al. (2009) who both had reported that most of their students are frustrational readers and very few of them are good readers.
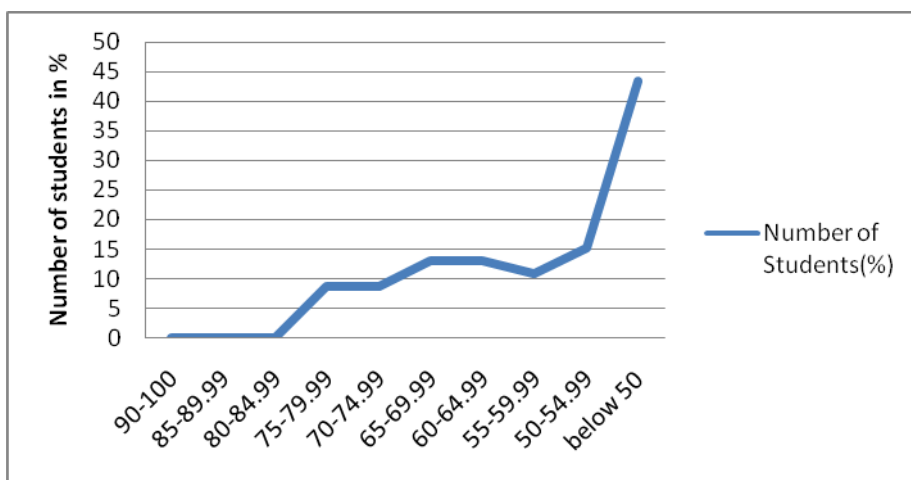

Figure 1: Reading Comprehension Test Results by Percentage

This means that almost half, 20(43.48) of the college students could not understand a given text as the module objectives had expected.. However, 12 (26. 09%) of the students were judged to be fair readers, 10 (21.74%) as good readers whereas only 4 (8.7%) of the students were found to be very good readers. Therefore, 91.3% of the English major third year regular students of ACTE are classified as "frustrational readers" based on the criteria as developed by Chard et al (2009) and USAID-AED/IQPEP (2010).

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students who scored above and/or below 50% and compared the students' performance based on the five genres. Most, 38(81.61%), of the students have scored above 50% in essay questions while 34(73.91%) have scored below 50% in poems. Dialogues was next as, 35(76.1%) of the students scored above 50%. In contrast, newspaper article questions were difficult for the students with only 21(45.65%) scored above 50% in the test. However, directions seem to present the average level of difficulty in students' test results, as of only 24(52.17%) of the students scored above 50% of the test.
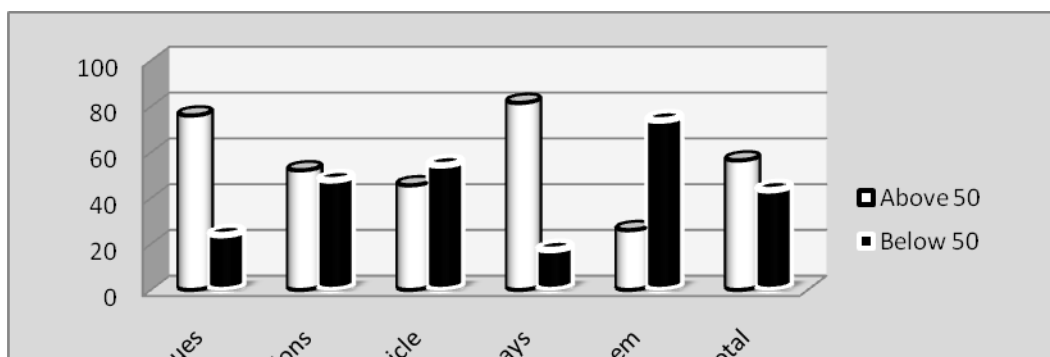

Figure 2:   Reading Comprehension Test Results by Genres

Though equal time was allotted to each genre, the students' results were highly varied. The results indicated that students were able to read and answer questions in the essay better than dialogue, direction and newspaper article in such order, and the least in poem.

The reading comprehension test variation result by genre is presented in Table 1. The results indicated that the reading ability of the college students varied a great deal according to genres. For example, the college students' total mean scores were higher for essays (15.8/20) and dialogue (14.2/20) when compared to others in the test. However, poem recorded the lowest value (7.3/20) in the tests.

Table 1: Reading Comprehension Test performance by genre

Sections/ Genres	First Test				Second Test				Total FT+ST			
	Mode	Median	Mean	SD	Mode	Media	Mean	SD	Mode	Med1an	Mean	SD
1. Dialogu e	6	7	7	4.3	7	7.2	7.2	4.4	13	14.2	14.2	4.5
2. Direction	5	6	5.9	3.8	5	5.7	5.6	1.2	10	11.7	11.7	4.0
3. Articles	4	5	4.5	3.2	5	5.3	5.2	1.5	9	10.3	9.8	2.8
4. Essay	8	7.5	7.5	4.7	8	8.7	8.3	1.8	16	16.2	15.8	1.9
5. Poem	4	3.5	3.5	1.8	4	4	3.8	0.67	8	7.5	7.3	1.1
Overall	27	29	28.7	3.7	29	30.9	30.1	2.98	56	59.9	58.8	2.8

The distributions of the two test results are very similar because the mode (27, 29), median (29, 30.9) and the mean (28.7, 30.1) scores respectively for the first and the second tests were almost the same (see table 1). The results also shows that the difference between the overall mean score of the first test (28.7) and that of the second (30.1) is 1.4, which signifies that the two tests are consistent and reliable to describe the students' reading ability. This result is consistent with the claims by Grabe (2004); Flowers (2007) and Williams et al. (2011) all of which had reported that the results of students in the tests are correlated and consistent to explain the problems of the students in their respective studies. This means the distributions of the results of the tests that are given at different time interval must be similar to generalize the variation of the students reading ability on the bases of the reading genres. Therefore, the results of this study shows that the students are skillful in reading some particular genres but not in others for some reasons which might be related to teaching qualities and/or components of the teaching modules.

 The further analysis of the reading comprehension test result into five sections based on the purposes of the questions: 1) the main ideas, 2) details/specific facts, 3) reference/directly stated information, 4) inference/implied information and 5) purpose and the tone of the author in a given text showed that the college students scored 58.8% on average, and the highest score of the students was 79% and 28% being the least point scored (fig 3).
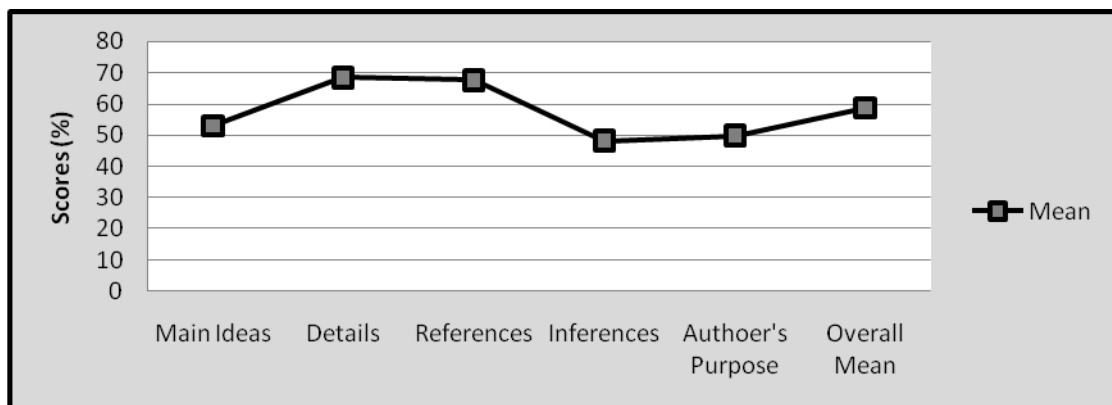
Figure 3: The Reading Comprehension Test Results by Reading Variable

Figure 3 also shows that the students received a higher 68.62% mean score was recorded for questions that require students to identify detailed questions followed by reference questions with 67.62% and the author's purpose recording 50% right answers in the test. However, inference and main idea questions recorded 48.21% and 53.13% respectively. This indicated that students were unable to guess the meaning of new words based on clues and contexts and unable to use their background knowledge and generalize the contents of a given reading text.

These findings are closely consistent with that of Pressley (2006); Takase (2007); Anderson (2009) and Grabe (2009) in which they have claimed that students in their respective studies are using more lower level reading (bottom-up) strategies that the higher level (top-down) strategies.. According to Cubukcu (2008); Dinner (2009) and Kondo-Brown (2006),

higher level reading strategies include: previewing, predicting Skimming and scanning guessing new words and paraphrasing information. Singhal (2001) and Strebel (2009) also claim that poor readers cannot use specific reading strategies before, during, and after reading to aid in their comprehension and understanding of the text being read. The findings in this study also showed that students were not able to take in higher-level comprehension processes that more closely represent what readers typically think of as reading comprehension

These also imply that the reading ability of the students is best expressed by the lower- level reading or bottom up reading approach, which focuses on a mechanical pattern in which the students create a piece-by-piece mental translation of the information in the text, with little interference from the students' own background knowledge. This is because the students answered

relatively more specific facts, details and reference questions than general/main ideas, implied, author's purpose and tone of the writing questions in the tests.

Interview and loud reading tests

The result shows that reading speed average (136 wpm) of the students was painfully slow when compared to the standard (300wpm) average for college students (Desrochers and Glickman, 2009). This reading speed of the students could affect not only their reading comprehension but also their study skills in other subject areas. Accordingly, the overall reading accuracy mean score was (49.4%) which is very low as of the standard is 70% correct, and the mean score of reading accuracy level was 73.75% for the better performing (achiever) students but 25% for the unsuccessful students with a low degree of automaticity. This indicates that the students were frustrational readers. In general, the results of the individual students' reading fluency show that the students were unable to read a text with accuracy, reasonable speed, natural automaticity and expression. They read much less smoothly and quickly.

The inability associated with not being able to read well has some negative consequences both academically and socially. Academically, students may have difficulty in assignment completion and have less access to information. As future prospective elementary school teachers, they may also have low participation in school extracurricular and other activities. Socially, their ineffective reading ability may also limit them from better alternative employment opportunities and be exposed to a greater likelihood of living in poverty.

As it is indicated above, though some of the students recognized words, they could not construct meaning from the recognized words. That means, they could not do both tasks at the same time.

As a result, the students were unable to score better than 85% in the test. In other words, most of the college students were poor in reading because they could not score better than 1 and ½ out of 3 or (30-45%) in the test. Several researchers clam that English major senior college students are expected to read a given text fluently and answer most of the loud reading test questions correctly (Lam, 2009 and Cubukcu, 2008). However, the present study reveals that there were students who could answer only 1/3 or less (below 30%) in the test questions.

The results of the retrospective interview show that the successful students used more reading strategies more frequently than the unsuccessful students used in different reading strategies at different rate. Unlike the unsuccessful, successful students were able to answer questions that require them to employ context clues, attempt to relate important points in text to the

whole, use prior knowledge to interpret text, attempt to infer information from the text and so forth. The present study shows similar results with the findings identified by several scholars (Bell (2001); Grabe (2004); Cubukcu, (2008); Dinner (2009) and Grabe (2009) and Wiggins (2005); Wang (2009) and Sharon (2006) by which they have identified the relationships between the types of reading strategies the successful or unsuccessful students used and their readers ability in their respective studies. Kitao, Kenji and Miyamoto (2001) also claim the same finding that the unsuccessful reader lost the meaning of the sentences when decoded, read in short phrases, pondered over inconsequential words, seldom skipped words as unimportant, and had a negative self-concept.

Students' Self-rating

Table 2 shows the students self-rating on a 3-point reading ability rating scale.

Table 2: Students Self-rating on Reading Ability Scale

No	Statements (N=46)	1(GD)		2(SD)		3(QE)		Mean
		f	%	f	%	F	%	
1	I put my best effort to perform every	16	34.78	22	47.83	8	17.39	1.83
2	I read and understand the words in the texts and in the questions easily	28	60.87	16	34.78	2	4.35	1.44
3	I got the meaning of the unknown	25	54.35	17	36.96	4	8.7	1.54
4	I understood specific facts in the text	12	26.07	16	34.78	18	39.13	2.13
5	I understood the implied information in	28	60.87	12	26.07	6	13.04	1.52
6	I recognized the purpose of the writer of the text easily.	29	63.01	11	23.91	6	13.04	1.50
7	I used my background knowledge about the topics and the language items in the texts	28	60.13	12	26.07	6	13.39	1.52
Weighted Mean								**1.64**

The weighted mean of the students' self-rating was 1.68, which means the majority of students read and answered the test questions with "some difficulty." However, the great majority of students reported that they "had great difficulty" to understand new words (1.44), to elicit the implied information (1.52), and to use their background knowledge (1.52) and topics (1.59) in the texts. However, they were able to answer the specific facts quite easily (2.28) and the directly stated information in the texts using scanning techniques than other questions.

Therefore, this result indicated that the students reading approach primarily focused on the recognition of specific language aspects of the texts with little interferences from their own background knowledge. The key point here was that the

students were fundamentally bottom-up orientated because they considerably depended on what they already know about the texts in the topic.

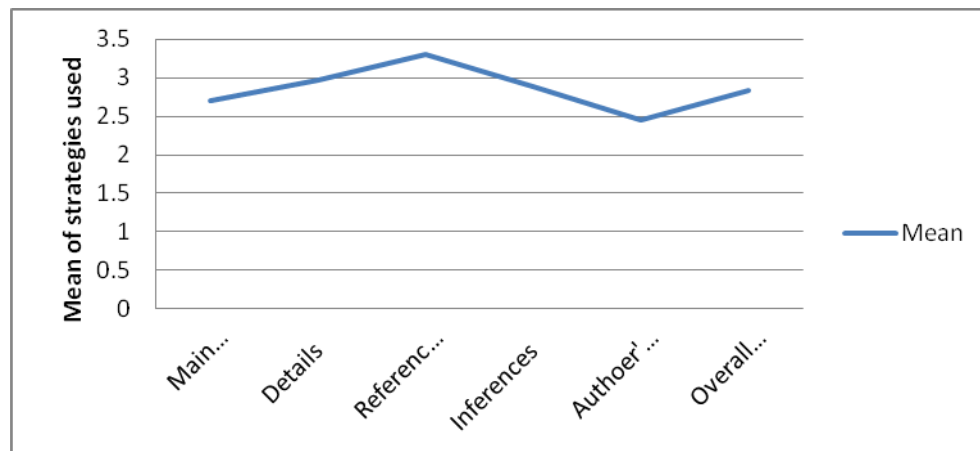**The Strategies the Students Used to Understand the Texts**

Figure 4: The Students' Responses to the Reading Strategy

As indicated in figure 4, the overall average mean of the frequency of reading strategies used by the students in general was 2.83. This shows that only 50% of the students used the strategies only "*sometimes*" (2.83) while they were answering the test questions. Specifically, the weighted mean (2.76) of the frequency of reading strategies used by the student to identify the main ideas of the texts was below the overall average mean of the computed data. Similarly, the weighted mean of the students' strategies to identify the inferences/ implied information in the reading tests was relatively low (2.80)

next to that of author's purpose (2.45) and main ideas respectively (2.76). However, the weighted mean scores of the strategies the students used to identify the directly stated information and the references are above the average, respectively 2.96 and 3.3. Therefore, it was not easy for the students to elicit the main ideas, the implied information and the author's purpose and the tone of written text. Figure 5 summarizes the relations of the students' comprehension test results and their responses to the reading strategy questionnaire.
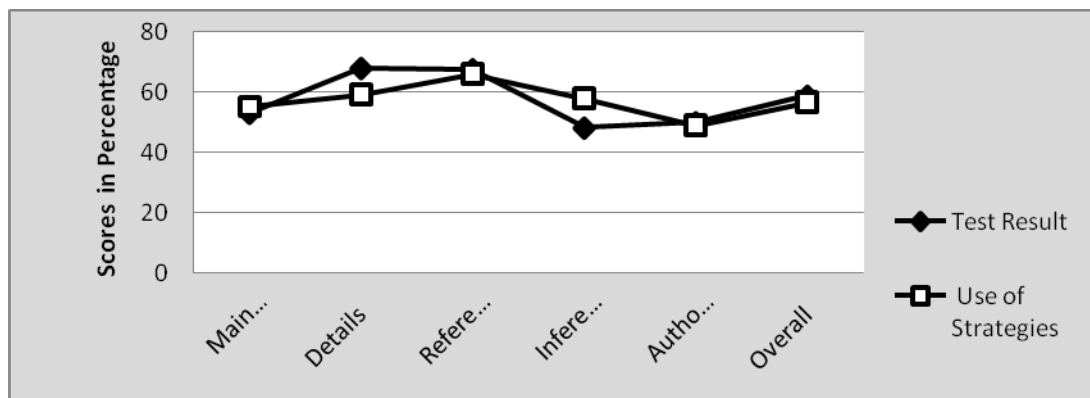
*

Figure 5: the Relationship between the test Results and use of strategies

The result as shown in fig 5 indicates that the strategies most of the college students used frequently helped them to understand the reference and specific facts in the texts. *To make the date in figure 5, the mean of the reading strategies is converted to its percentage so as to compare the result with the students' reading comprehension achievement test results.* Hence, the students' ability to identify the main ideas (37.5%), implied information (46.43%) and author's purpose (50%) was less than their ability to identify details (65.2%) and references (62%) in the texts. In the same token, the student reported that the frequency of the strategies they used to understand the main ideas (55.2%); implied information (57.8%) and author's purpose (49%) was less than to identify details (59.2%) and references (66%).

This results showed that the English major third year students of ACTE were unable to comprehend the meaning of the text because they seek one or more pieces of information in the text.

While they concentrated more on specific facts, they failed to find the main ideas from the whole content and therefore were unable to make inferences to develop ideas or images based on what is read in the text but not stated. Normally, the result of the test depends on the strategies the students use to understand a given text and answer the test questions (Soonandehfar, 2011). Anderson, (2009); Nash-Dizel (2009) and Lam (2009) have all reported a positive relationship between the results of the reading ability test and the strategies readers use to identify the variables of reading ability.

Moreover, the data also show that they were not able to generalize the information and to determine the relationship between single events and the larger situation or other events. As a result, they failed to evaluate and identify the tone/mood of the text: the author's feeling which he/she wanted to convey across to the reader. In other words, they were

unable to see the "big picture" or abstract idea and characterization in a given text.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

As reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately, whatever the genre is, ACTE English major senior students could not read and understand a given text at college level. Evidently, almost all (91.3%) of the English major third year regular students of ACTE students were "frustrational/poor readers". Besides, the reading ability of the students varied a great deal according to the reading genres and variables. The students could read and understand essays and dialogues better than poems and articles. Similarly, most of the students were able to identify the detailed or specific facts than the main ideas, implied information, purpose of the author and the tone of a given text because they entirely focus on a mechanical pattern to create a piece-by-piece mental translation of the information in the text. Therefore the reading ability of the students was best expressed by the lower- level reading or bottom up reading approach.

The results of the study show positive relationships between the comprehension test results of the students and the types of reading strategies they used to understand a given text. In other words, the results claimed that the successful readers use various strategies more frequently than unsuccessful students, and correspondingly, the results of the reading comprehension test of the students were lower in the main ideas, the implied information and the author's purpose and the tone of writing than in others.

Recommendations

Improving reading ability and enhancing reading skills of English Major College students must remain a top priority for the stakeholders. Therefore, Ministry of education and Oromia Education Bureau should work on the effectiveness of the curriculum of the college of teacher education in general. Specifically, elementary school English language teacher-educators (managements and instructors of the college) should play their roles to evaluate and improve the components, authenticity and appropriateness of the teaching materials being used to incorporated poems and articles. In addition to this, they need to set appropriate assessment tools and thereby use them to plan and properly implement the remedial classes for the students at risk of reading failure to improve their reading ability in the college in general.

The English language instructors should give emphases to the reading strategies and skills that help the students identify the main ideas, implied information, author's purpose and the tone of the text. Moreover,

they should effectively work to link the appropriate reading assessment tools and methods to the reading instruction or remediation as specifies in the objectives of the course. Besides, they must provide students with opportunities to practice the collaborative learning strategies they have been taught through direct strategy-instruction and modelling. Students must also determine their strengths and weaknesses in terms of strategy use to improve their reading ability. They ought to practice to understand the meaning of a given text. In short, the students must use all the opportunities to practice the reading strategies they have learnt. They should also work to develop the culture of collaborative learning strategies to improve their overall reading competence.

References

Afflerbach J., pearson T. & paris F. 2008. Research on reading. *Modern Language Journal, 75*(4), 460-472.

Ambachew M. D. 2003. A Review of the Ethiopian Related Literature on Reading Ability. University of Pretoria ltd, (pp.312-4610

Anderson, N. J. 1991. Individual Differences in Strategy Use in Second Language Reading and Testing, *Modern Language Journal, 75*(4), 460-472.

Anderson, N. J. 2009 An Investigation of Reading Abilities in Advance level French Students. *Modern Language Journal, 75*(4), 460-472.

Alemu Hailu. 2009. Ill-designed Reading Activities: The Case of a Unit in Grade 11 English Textbook, *The Ethiopian Journal of Education,* Vol. XXIX (2): (34-59),

Bell Timothy. 2001. Extensive Reading: Speed and Comprehension**.** *The Reading Matrix* Vol 1 No. 1

Chard, D.J., Ketterlin-Geller, L.R., Baker, S.K., Doabler, C., & Apichatabutra, C. 2009. Repeated reading interventions for students with learning disabilities: Status of the evidence. *Exceptional Children 75*(3): 263–281.

Cubukcu, F. 2008. How to Enhance Reading Comprehension through Metacognitive Strategies, *The Journal of International Social Research, 1*(2): 83-93.

Daniel J. Acheson J. B. W, and Maryellen C. M. 2008**.** New and Updated Tests of Print Exposure and Reading Abilities in College Students, *University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, (Pp.278-289)*

Desrochers, A., and Glickman, V. 2009. Criteria for the Evaluation of Reading Assessment Tools, *Encyclopaedia of Language and Literacy Development* (pp. 1-9). London, In: Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network. Retrieved on 01/08/2011 from http://literacyencyclopedia.ca/pdfs/topic.php?topId=280

Dinner, L. R. 2009. "Analysis of the Metacognitive and Affective Components of Learning on Reading: Achievement of Striving Readers with and without a Reading Disability". PhD Thesis, University of Kansas.

Flowers A. L. 2007. *Recommendations for Research to Improve Reading Achievement for African American Students.* Clemson University: South Carolina, USA. 178pp

Grabe W. 2004. Research on Teaching Reading. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics 24*: 44–69.

Grabe, W. 2009. Research on Teaching Reading. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 44–69

Hudson, T. 2007. *Teaching Second Language Reading*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Kitao K. and Miyamoto H. 2001. *Japanese College Students' English Reading Ability: A Study Based on Testing,* ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 381 766.

Kondo-Brown, K. (2009). Heritage Background, Motivation, and Reading Ability of Upper-level Postsecondary Students of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, *Journal of Reading in a Foreign Language,* Volume 21(2): 179–197

Kondo-Brown K 2006. Affective Factors and Japanese L2 Reading Ability. *Reading in Foreign Language Journal*, *(18)*: 55–70.

Kondo-Brown K. 2005. Differences in Language Skills: Heritage Language Learner Subgroups and Foreign Language Learners. *The Modern Language Journal*, *89*, 563–581.

Lam W. 2009. Examining the Effects of Metacognitive Strategy Instruction on ESL Group

Discussions: A Synthesis of Approaches. *Language Teaching Research, 13* (2), 129-150.

Martinez, P. and Grisalena, J. 2005. *Reading Ability at 15 Years of Age - PISA Scales*. ISEI-IVEI: Australia.(13): 172-203.

Nash-Ditzel, S. 2010. Metacognitive Reading Strategies Can Improve Self-Regulation. *Journal of College Reading and Learning, 40*(2): 45.

National Accessible Reading Assessment Projects (NARAP) (2006). *Defining Reading Proficiency for Accessible Large scale Assessments: Some Guiding Principles and Issues,* Minneapolis, MN: Author.

Perlesz, A. and Lindsay, T. 2003. Methodological Triangulation in research families: *Making Sense of Dissonant, International Journey of Social Research Methodology*, 6, 25-40.

Phakiti, A. 2005. A Close Look at the Relationship of Cognitive and Meta-cognitive use to EFL reading Achievement Test performance.

Piper, Benjamin, 2010. Ethiopian Early Grade Reading Assessment, *Data Analysis Report: Language and Learning*. Ed Data II, Task order 7&9, USAID/Ethiopia.

Pressley, M., Gaskins, I., & Fingeret, L. 2006. Instruction and development of reading fluency in struggling readers. In: Samuels, S. J. & Farstrup A. E. (Eds.), What *research has to say about fluency instruction.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association. pp.47–69).

Sharon, Switzer (2006). *A Triangulated Data Approach to Assessing Academic Reading English of English Language Learners, East Stroudsburg University*: Pan African Association of Linguistics.

Siam, E. N. and Soozandehfar, S. M. 2011 Metacognitive Awareness of Reading Strategies and Reading Comprehension, *California Linguistic Notes,* Volume XXXVI No. 1

Singhal M. 2001. Reading Proficiency, Reading Strategies, Metacognitive Awareness and L2 Readers. *The Reading Matrix*, Vol. 1, No. 1.

Strebel, C. S. (2009). "An Investigation of Linguistic, Cognitive, and Affective Factors that Impact. English Language Learners' Performance on a State Standardized Reading Achievement Test". PhD Dissertation, University of Central Florida.

Takase, A. 2007. Japanese High School Students' Motivation for Extensive L2 Reading. *Reading in a Foreign Language*, *19:* 1–18.

Teshome Demisse. 2001..Assessment of Pupils' Achievements in the Teaching of English: Training and Practice in Focus, *The Ethiopian Journal of Education,* Vol. XXI (1): (34-79).

Torgenson, J.K. 2002. The prevention of reading difficulties. *Journal of School Psychology, 40*: 7–26.

Vacca, J. and Vacca, L. 1989. *Content Area Reading*, Third Edition, Scott: London. 148pp

United States Agency for International Development. 2010. Improving Quality Education Program : *Continuous Assessment and How to Use it: Teachers Module 3.AED*: (pp.20-43).

United States Agency for International Development , (2011). Proceedings on National Workshop on Quality Education and Future Directions in Ethiopia. A.A, Ethiopia, PP,26-86, 113.

Wang, M. 2009. *Effects of Metacognitive Reading Strategy Instruction on EFL High School Students' Reading Comprehension, Reading Strategies Awareness and Reading Motivation*. PhD Dissertation, University of Florida. Pp.19-34.

Wiggins, G. And McTigle J. 2005. *Understanding by Design*, (2nd Ed.). ASCD: Washington DC. 239Pp.

William, R. S., Omer A. & Santamaria C. N. 2011. "Measuring College Students' Reading Comprehension Ability Using Cloze Tests," *Journal of Research in Reading* 34 (2): 215-231.