

**THE TEACHING OF READING IN GOVERNMENT
HIGH SCHOOLS IN ADDIS ABABA: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY**

A Thesis

Presented to

the School of Graduate Studies

Addis Ababa University

In Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in TEFL

By

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June, 1996

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

I am greatly indebted to my advisor, Dr. Tilahun Gamta for his helpful suggestions at the initial stage of the study. I am also very grateful to Mr. John Atkins for the valuable materials he provided me with and the invaluable assistance he rendered upto the end of this study .

My special thanks must also go to Dr. Gebremedhin Simon and Ato Nuru Mohammed for their useful comments and encouragement while this study was being carried.

My acknowledgement is also extended to all the teachers and students who participated in the study.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to W/t Fekrte Tulu who carefully typed the final copy of the thesis

ABSTRACT

The study aimed at providing information on how reading lessons are actually conducted in selected government high schools in Addis Ababa. The research procedure followed in the course of the study included observation of sample reading lessons as well as administration of a questionnaire to teachers teaching English in Grade 11 in the sample schools. The study focused on the description of the selected teachers' perceived objectives of a reading lesson and the procedures they actually followed to realize their objectives. In an attempt to find out the relationship that exists between teachers' perceptions of how reading is best taught, on the one hand, and the classroom realization on the other, a questionnaire was administered to 30 teachers to elicit their views concerning reading instruction.

Data obtained both from the observations of lessons and the questionnaire were analyzed. The results of the analysis may be summarized as follows: Reading lessons were mainly used to increase students' knowledge of the topics dealt within the respective passages via extensive vocabulary teaching. Reading aloud with the aim of helping students learn how to sound out words correctly was another outstanding feature of the lessons. Silent reading was practised in only 30% of the lessons observed, and that was not properly done. There was no attempt made to give a purpose for reading the passages. In general,

the reading lessons seemed to be informed by the principle of the bottom-up data driven approach to reading, if there was any principled approach to the teaching or theory behind it at all.

On the basis of the findings, recommendations concerning familiarizing teachers with more appropriate methodologies for teaching reading are stated.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In situations like that of Ethiopia where English is used as a medium of instruction starting from Grade 7, reading is by far the most important of the four skills. It is, actually, the main reason, in addition to listening, why students learn the language. Since all academic materials are written in English, students' success or failure depends highly on their ability to read and comprehend the texts of the different subjects they study. In other words, most of the knowledge they get comes from reading. Moreover, almost all examinations which test students' knowledge are based on their reading and comprehending ability. That is why many scholars assert that reading is the most important skill for second or foreign language learning in academic contexts.

In addition to the need for efficient reading for academic purposes, acquiring this skill is also necessary for practical purposes after school.

This being the fact, however, many government high school students lack reading proficiency which clearly exhibits itself

in their slow and difficult reading and poor comprehension when they study as well as when they do their examinations.

The poor level of reading ability which many students possess has been observed by different M.A. researchers, to cite some: Hailemichael Abera (1984), Tibebe Alemayehu (1987), Molla Jemere (1987), Berhe Kahsay (1989), and Dubale Lawgaw (1990). These, and other researchers who have done studies related to reading, commonly agree upon the crucial role reading plays in the students' language proficiency, and recommend that measures be taken to develop the reading ability of students.

However, this issue, though written and talked about widely, has not received much attention and to the best knowledge of this researcher, no empirical study about reading lessons in an Ethiopian high school context has been done to date.

The level of reading performance of high school students may be attributed (apart from other contextual factors such as socio-cultural ones) to the methods and techniques employed in teaching reading. Therefore in order to identify the current practices of teaching reading, the writer of this paper feels a descriptive study of various reading lesson needs to be done.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the current practices of teaching reading in Ethiopian government high schools, with particular reference to Grade 11. In the light of the different approaches to teaching reading, and the various methods developed, this study will attempt to describe the methods and techniques of teaching reading currently being used in selected Ethiopian high schools.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Several studies have been done on reading with a particular focus on one aspect of it. For example, Molla (1987) investigated the reading speed of Addis Ababa University Freshman students. He found that the average speed of his subjects was 96 w.p.m., which he said is very low. Another study by Abdu (1993) identified the reading preferences of Grade 11 students in Addis Ababa. Abdu identified the top ten areas of reading preference of these students.

However, neither these nor other studies have described the actual process of a reading lesson in the Ethiopian high school context. Thus, it is hoped that the insight derived from this descriptive study of the reading lesson will have some pedagogical significance. In particular they may bring to

light the necessity for thorough re-appraisal of current practices, and they may probably suggest the importance of implementing more effective methods of teaching reading in Ethiopian high schools so that students can be helped to develop their reading abilities.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study was limited to ten selected government high schools in Addis Ababa. Grade 11 was selected because it is the highest grade level with the exception of Grade 12 in secondary education in Ethiopia. Investigating reading lesson at Grade 11 level was hoped to reflect reading instruction in the preceding grades in the high school as well.

Grade 12 was not opted for on the ground that it is not convenient to conduct research there: teachers and students are primarily concerned with the preparation for the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination, and classes end early, i.e. in January.

Focus has been given to government high schools because most students go to these schools and the problem is felt in such schools. Tibebe (1987) after investigating the English proficiency level of government and mission secondary school

leavers using cloze procedure and dictation says, "[the study] suggests that the English language proficiency level of [government secondary school] leavers is generally poor and it is remarkably far less than that of the students who graduate from the [mission secondary schools]" (p.37).

1.5 Limitation of the Study

Several factors may affect the success or failure of any reading instruction programme; the dominant ones according to some researchers are the learner, the teacher, the method and the material. However, for financial and time factors, this study was limited to the description of the procedure and activities performed by the teacher and the students during a reading lesson, i.e. the methodology employed.

CHAPTER TWO

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter investigates very briefly the theoretical assumptions underpinning the reading process as advanced by the three major models of reading, and their implications for reading instruction.

2.1 Conceptions of Reading

Early works on EFL/ESL reading predominantly view reading as a decoding activity. Reading was viewed primarily as a decoding process involving "reconstructing the author's intended meaning via recognizing the printed letters and words, and building up meaning for a text from the smallest textual units at the 'bottom' (letters and words) to larger and larger units at the 'top' (phrases, clauses, inter-sentential linkages)" (Carrell, 1988:2). Meaning is assumed to be in the text itself, "contained in the form of these textual constraints that are hierarchically ordered, and the reader's task is to attend to these constraints to extract the writer's intended meaning" (Gebremedhin, 1993:65). Thus according to this view "failure to comprehend a non-defective written text is always attributed

to language specific deficit, i.e, absence of a word in the reader's vocabulary or misapplication of a rule of grammar" (Carrell op. cit).

Because of its emphasis on lower-level processes such as letter and word recognition in order to extract meaning from text, this procedure is popularly known as bottom-up or data-driven processing.

The bottom-up model of reading, although it has relevance to second or foreign language reading (Carrell, 1988; Eskey & Grabe, 1988) since "some researchers feel that there might be a linguistic threshold for effective reading" Alderson (1984) in (Gebremedhin, 1993:65-66) overreliance on such a model has its limitations. Word-to-word decoding of meaning from print results in a severe limit to the amount of information that the reader is able to receive and this results in poor comprehension (Smith, 1970; Nuttall, 1982).

This model of reading is also criticized for disregarding the reader's contribution to negotiating meaning from within the text. It fails to see that readers utilize their expectations about the text based on their prior knowledge of the content and the language.

The other view which emerged as an antithesis of the bottom-up process is that which takes reading as essentially a top-down

process. This psycholinguistic model for reading, initially proposed by Goodman (1967), takes reading as a "psycholinguistic guessing game in which the reader constructs as best as he can a message encoded by a writer as a graphic display" (Goodman in Carrell (1988:2)). Moreover, according to the psycholinguistic model a text, either written or spoken, does not by itself carry meaning, rather, the text only provides directions for readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning based on their previously acquired knowledge or schema (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1988; Wallace, 1992).

However, the top-down model of reading, though it appreciates the role of the readers' contribution in the reading process, has its limitations; especially it undermines the role of the bottom-up (decoding) skill in beginner second language readers. Eskey (1988) unequivocally argues against an overreliance on the top-down model when he writes:

They [the top-down models] tend to emphasise such higher-level skills as the prediction of meaning by means of contextual clues or certain kinds of background knowledge at the expense of such lower-level skills as the rapid and accurate identification of lexical and grammatical forms. ... The model they promote is an accurate model of the skilful, fluent reader, for whom perception and decoding have become automatic, but for the less proficient, developing reader - like most second language readers - this model does not provide a true picture of the problem such readers must surmount. (p.93)

Currently, it seems that there is a consensus that reading both in L1 and L2 is an interactive process in which the reader employs both bottom-up recognition skills and top-down interpretative strategies. In other words, the idea of one complementing the other in order to be a proficient reader has gained wide recognition in the field. It is now assumed that a good reader uses prior knowledge, and prediction skills (top-down processing) to facilitate the recognition of words, and at the same time uses his/her knowledge of the recognition of words (bottom-up processing) to facilitate higher level interpretation of texts (Eskey, 1988).

2.2 Pedagogical Implication of the Reading Models

2.2.1. As mentioned in Section 2.1 above, the bottom-up model of reading assumes that meaning is found in the text and that the reader has to extract the writer's intended meaning. It is also assumed that problem of reading is attributed to the reader's linguistic deficiency. Thus the teaching of reading which follows this theoretical outline should focus on drilling linguistic elements starting from the smallest textual item and building up to higher textual elements with emphasis given to mastery of letter-sound relationships to help learners develop pronunciation (Rivers, 1968). This model of reading has

influenced the classroom practice of reading in a foreign language enormously. (This will be further discussed below).

A reading lesson is often used for practising pronunciation, writes Nuttall (1982). The correct identification of letter-sound relationships is taken by many teachers to be essential to understand the text, and thus, in many foreign language classrooms, reading texts are read aloud by the teacher and/or the students. The following extract from Greenwood (1981) is an example of such reading instruction programmes:

- T: Turn to page 103. Look at the reading passage.
Maria, start reading.
- Maria: In one nine and four ...
- T: No. Nineteen- oh-four
- Maria: In nineteen - oh-four Mr. Smith...
- T: No. Mrs Smith...
- Maria: Mrs Smith died (p.81)

In addition to the need to recognize letter-sound relationships in order to be able to read, the bottom-up model attributes failure to comprehend a text to language specific deficit, for example, absence of a word in the reader's vocabulary. It may be due to this conception of reading that in many EFL classrooms reading lessons are mainly used for teaching vocabulary (Nuttall, 1982); as a vehicle for vocabulary

enrichment (Been, 1975). Students are made to study the meaning of words selected from the reading passage.

2.2.2 That the top-down model of reading capitalizes on the reader's use of his/her background knowledge to predict information, sample the text and confirm predictions has already been discussed in Section 2.1 of this chapter. Therefore in order to make students effective readers, following this approach to reading, emphasis is given to teaching effective strategies of reading. Gebremedhin (1993) referring to Clarke and Silberstein (1977) describes effective strategies of reading such as "guessing from contexts, defining expectations, making inferences about the text, and skimming ahead to fill in the context" (p.67). Using prereading activities and teaching students word and text attack skills are also suggested as effective ways of developing reading proficiency.

2.2.3 The interactive approach to reading accommodates both top-down and bottom-up assumptions about the reading process. It assumes that reading can be more effective when the reader employs both lower-level automatic identification skills and higher-level interpretation skills (Eskey & Grabe 1988). Classroom practice which follows this theoretical outline will require teachers to teach students how to utilize their background knowledge as well as how to be able to overcome textual constraints.

Reading is a complex process which encompasses a range of skills and strategies. These skills and strategies which a reader employs while reading a text in real life can be best developed gradually by helping learners to go through the process themselves, by making them read (Grabe, 1991).

A proficient reader employs both his decoding skills and his predicting, interpreting and evaluating strategies in order to understand the writer's intentions. In order to develop such competence in EFL students, the currently most popular procedure is the 'three-phase approach' to reading where students will be involved in doing pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading tasks. But this does not mean that all reading lessons should be rigidly broken down into these three phases; it should be borne in mind that there could be some texts which may be better exploited by setting tasks on one or another of the three phases, but not all.

That effective reading is not merely decoding print, but is rather an interaction between text and reader, where the reader brings his prior knowledge in order to relate the textual material to his/her own knowledge (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1988; Wallace, 1992) has been a view that has been in vogue for thirty years now. Thus it is argued that in order for the reader to be able to interact in the reconstruction of meaning, the first task of a good reading teacher should be to help students to develop the skill of predicting by either providing

background knowledge or activating the existing knowledge (Johnson, 1982). To achieve this objective, the teacher should design appropriate pre-reading activities.

The aims of these activities are mainly two: to give the reader a purpose for the reading, thus arousing interest or readiness in him/her and secondly to provide him/her with background knowledge about the text and activate already existing knowledge. The possible gains of pre-reading activities are well summed up by Statman as follows:

The pupils start the reading highly motivated and involved. The questions and discussions which precede the reading of the text are so general and so relevant to the pupils' world that all can participate by calling on some experiences or prior knowledge; no one has the feeling that the subject is entirely new. Pupils also develop expectations of what is to come and thereby obtain a sense of direction and security. Reading becomes a pleasurable game in which the pupils test out predictions (1981:232).

Once the teacher has motivated the students for the reading, he provides them with a variety of 'while reading' activities appropriate to helping them develop the intended skill(s). Since reading is a purposeful activity, classroom practices should also focus on training students to read different materials for the different purposes they may have for reading them.

Reading involves a variety of skills, but in general the main ones, as identified by Munby in Grellet (1981) are the following:

- Recognizing the script of a language
- Deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items
- Understanding explicitly stated information
- Understanding information when not explicitly stated
- Understanding conceptual meaning
- Understanding the communicative value (function) of sentences and utterances
- Understanding relations within the sentence
- Understanding relations between the parts of a text through lexical cohesive devices.
- Understanding cohesion between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
- Interpreting a text by going outside it

In order to develop these skills of reading, several types of exercises can be used. According to Grellet these exercises, broadly speaking, have two functions: to clarify the organisation of the passage, and to clarify the content. In the former, questions about the function, the general organisation, the rhetorical organisation of the passage and the cohesive devices, can be asked. Questions about plain facts, implied facts or deduced meaning can be asked to achieve the latter.

In this approach to reading, emphasis is given to comprehending- the process of struggling to comprehend- rather than to comprehension - the product (Greenwood, 1981). Due to this fact, several writers (for example, Nuttall, 1982; Grellet, 1981; Greenwood, 1981; Grant, 1987) argue that the comprehension questions and other reading tasks (except for the post-reading ones) should be given before the actual reading starts. The rationale for this is to give students a purpose for the reading so that they will adjust their speed and performance of the task accordingly. In fact, as White says, "... it is the ability to switch styles according to purpose which makes for efficient reading" (1981:88).

This approach to reading presupposes a learning-centred classroom situation. In such a learning situation the learners take most of the responsibility for their learning, and thus the teacher maintains a supportive role. In this regard Grabe (1986) in Silberstein (1987:32) remarks, "Briefly, the role of the teacher is to facilitate reading, raise consciousness, show involvement, and demand performance."

To sum up, this chapter has tried to deal with the review of only the salient points which are directly related to the study. An attempt has been made to briefly review the conception and models of reading, and the implications they have for classroom practice. The next chapter describes the methodology of the present study.

CHAPTER THREE

3. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

3.1 Procedure

A preliminary study which involved a visit to different high schools and grade levels was made, during which reading lessons were observed and many teachers were interviewed by the researcher. A questionnaire was also prepared and piloted on twelve Grade 11 teachers. The preliminary classroom observation and the pilot questionnaire were taken as guides to the major study. A revised questionnaire was administered to thirty teachers and the same number of teachers' reading lessons were observed. The data obtained from the questionnaire and the classroom observation was thematically organised, and the findings were analysed and discussed.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Sampling

The random sampling technique was used to select the schools. Ten schools out of the twenty-five government high schools in Addis Ababa were selected by lots (see Table 1). The rationale behind employing the random sampling technique for the present study was the fact that there is no apparent privilege among the government schools in Addis Ababa as regards placement of students, assignment of teachers, supply of teaching materials or class time allocation for English. Three Grade 11 teachers

from each of the ten selected schools were selected for the research on the basis of the suitability for the researcher of the shift they were assigned to.

Table 1: Schools selected for the study

1. Entoto Academic, Technical and Vocational School
2. Menilik II Comprehensive Secondary School
3. Misrak Comprehensive Secondary School
4. Kokebe Tsibah Senior Secondary School
5. Wondirad Senior Secondary School
6. Bole Senior Secondary School
7. Nefasilk Comprehensive Secondary School
8. Higher 4 Senior Secondary School
9. Higher 7 Senior Secondary School
10. Addis Ketema Senior Secondary School

3.2.2 Methods of Data Collection

3.2.2.1 Questionnaire

The classroom observation, the researcher's long experience of teaching English in high schools, and the theoretical background in the review of literature served as material for

the preparation of the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to see if there was any interplay between what teachers think and what they actually do in the classroom.

The questionnaire has three parts. Part I deals with personal information related to educational background and job experience. In Part II respondents were asked to rank the aims of a reading lesson according to the order of priority they give to each purpose. Part III was designed to elicit teachers' agreement or disagreement with some statements about beliefs and practices regarding the teaching of reading.

In preparing the questionnaire, all possible efforts were made to use plain language; technical terms were deliberately avoided.

Each of the thirty teachers was approached by the researcher, and a brief explanation about the content and objective of the questionnaire was given. Respondents were given enough time to be able to read each item and fill in the necessary information reliably.

3.2.2.2 Observation

The reading section of each unit in the English for New Ethiopia textbook for Grade 11 generally requires from two to

three forty-minute class periods. For this study, the first period's reading lesson of one unit conducted by the thirty teachers who responded to the questionnaire, and only seven subsequent reading lessons were observed. The reason for observing only seven subsequent lessons was, in addition to shortage of time, the similarity of the techniques employed and the procedures followed during the first session of the reading lesson.

An observation scheme in a form of a tally sheet was used during the observation in order for the researcher to record the classroom behaviours of both teachers and students while the reading lesson took place. The tally sheet contained a list of possible behaviours which the researcher felt could be observed in a reading lesson. The items include behaviours that the researcher had observed during the pilot study as well as those which the literature suggested. Moreover, whenever unprecedented or unpredicted behaviours were observed, they were added to the list (See Appendix A).

CHAPTER FOUR

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with the analysis and discussion of the outstanding features of the sample lessons under study based on the data obtained from the classroom observations and from the teachers' responses to the questionnaire.

4.1 Beginning of the Reading Lesson

Despite the belief of the majority of the observed 30 teachers' (87%) that introducing the title and drawing out what students already know is an essential strategy in teaching reading, pre-reading activities (3.4) were neglected (87%) in most of the observed lessons (see Table 2). Except for the three teachers who asked students what they already knew about the passage, and the four teachers who highlighted the main topic of the passage, the pre-reading activity in the other 23 classes was limited to informing students of the title of the passage (see Table 3). This was so even though employing pre-reading activities with the aim of arousing interest in the readers and giving a purpose for the reading are generally considered to be vital components of a reading lesson (see Chapter Two), and were considered to be so by these teachers, too.

	2. Reading Strategies high school students should be taught								3. Teacher behaviour in a reading lesson			
Item	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.8	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4
1	21/70	15/50	26/87	30/100	29/97	9/30	26/87	23/77	20/67	20/67	19/63	26/87
2	1/3	5/17	3/10	nil	nil	2/7	4/13	3/10	3/10	nil	2/7	1/3
3	8/27	10/33	1/3	nil	1/3	19/83	nil	4/13	7/23	10/33	9/30	3/10
Total	30/100 percent (number of teachers/percentage)								(number of teachers/percent)			

Table 2: Responses of Teachers to Part III of the questionnaire.

Table 2 depicts the responses of teachers to the last two categories of the questionnaire. The items in the first category (represented by numbers) include (2.1) pronouncing words correctly, (2.2) focusing on details of content, (2.3) understanding the overall meaning of the text (2.4) integrating information, (2.5) guessing word meaning from context, (2.6) paying equal attention to all the words in the text, (2.7) varying reading speed, and (2.8) reading a text silently. The items in the second category include (3.1) reading the text aloud, (3.2) pre-teaching all difficult words, (3.3) explaining content and (3.4) introducing the title and drawing out student background knowledge. The numbers in the first column indicate 1 = agreement, 2 = undecided, and 3 = disagreement

	Teacher and Student Behaviours	Freq.	Percentage
1	T tells Ss or writes the title of the text on the blackboard	30	100
3	T asks Ss what they already know about the text	3	10
8	T teaches all new words selected from the text	17	56
13	T teaches pronunciation of some words selected from the text	6	20
14	T tells briefly what the text is about	4	13
20	T reads the text aloud	21	70
21	T explains sentences and paragraphs as he/she reads aloud	20	67
22	T teaches words other than those listed under the vocabulary section, No.3 above	16	53
23	Ss read part of the text aloud	27	90
24	T corrects wrong pronunciation	14	47
26	T summarizes what the text was about	10	33
27	T asks additional comprehension questions orally	7	23
28	Ss do the vocabulary exercise	21	70
29	Ss read out their answers one at a time	24	80
30	T gives the prepared 'right' answers	24	80
32	Ss read the text silently in order to answer the post-text comprehension questions	9	30
33	Ss discuss their answers in small groups	3	10
37	T tells Ss to read the text at home and do the comprehension questions	21	70

Table 3: Summary of Behaviours Observed

Further analysis of the tallies of teachers' behaviours (Table 2) at the beginning of the observed lessons reveals that (Table 3) 17 teachers (56%) pre-taught all the new words selected from the passages to be learnt in the vocabulary section of the unit (the vocabulary section comes immediately after the passages). One might wonder if this is a pre-reading activity per se. However, the aim of this activity was, to the teachers, to teach the lexical items that were believed likely to hinder comprehension of the text and thus to facilitate students' access to it. In fact, such a practice undermined the role of guessing at word meanings, a strategy employed by efficient readers.

4.2 The Conduct of the Main Part of the Lesson

4.2.1 Reading Aloud

In 27 classes (Table 3) students were made to read part of the text aloud, usually standing, and in 14 of these classes the teachers duly corrected mispronunciations of students. Regarding the teachers, in 21 of the lessons teachers read the text aloud. This finding is consistent with what Meselech (1991) observed during her study concerning the methodology practised by senior high school English teachers. According to her observation, 7% to 11.9% and 11.6% to 18.5% of the class

time for a reading lesson was used for reading aloud by teachers and students, respectively.

The classroom practice teachers follow regarding reading aloud seems to be guided by their perceptions of reading. The data from the teachers' responses shows that 21 teachers (70%) think that students in high schools should be taught to pronounce words correctly (see Table 2). Almost the same number of them, 20 teachers, are also of the opinion that teachers should read the text aloud for the students. When teachers read aloud, they may perhaps have two aims: to give a model reading for the students to imitate, and to explain the content of the text as they read it. (The latter will be discussed in section 4.3).

4.2.2 Silent Reading

The data from the questionnaire (Table 2) shows that 23 teachers (77%) were in favour of teaching students to read silently for meaning. Classroom observation (Table 3), however, reveals that only in 9 of the observed lessons was silent reading practised. Even then it was not used properly i.e. the pre-and while-and post-reading activities deemed essential for giving the reading a genuine purpose were missing. In the remaining 21 lessons, students were simply told to read the passages at home and answer the comprehension questions that follow. Since no specific tasks for reading the

texts were given, except to answer the post-text comprehension questions, and there was no mechanism for teachers to check whether or not students really read the text, it could be said that asking students to read the text at home was only used to the effect of minimizing the amount of class time spent on reading.

From the descriptions given above regarding reading aloud and silent reading, it could be said that teachers seem to believe that both of them are essential components of a reading programme. Reading aloud, said many of the sample teachers when I asked them why they practise it, is essential because they believe that most of the students in the high schools cannot pronounce words correctly, and hence, they are unable to understand the text. For these teachers, it seems, reading is equated with recognizing the connection between sound, print and meaning. Because of this, it is assumed that once the students know how to sound out the words correctly and thereby decode the meaning these words carry, they will then be able to read the text silently in order to comprehend its content. I think it is due to this conception of reading that in the majority of the lessons observed, silent reading had been deferred until reading aloud was practised.

The relevance of reading aloud when the learners are at the stage of sound-symbol association is acknowledged by researchers in FL reading. Thus one can argue that the

rationale for these teachers to employ reading aloud is sound provided that what they claim regarding their students' poor linguistic competence is true. Some teachers even argue that reading aloud has, to some extent, some contribution to EFL students at all levels. For example, Griffin (1992) says that in a survey made in Washington State on ESL teachers of adult instruction, 80% (72 out of 90) who responded indicated that they have their students read aloud in class on a regular basis. These teachers also believe that reading aloud helps students to expand their oral vocabulary, develops awareness of the sounds of the language, facilitates chunking of words in meaningful groups and develops self-confidence.

On the other hand, some writers, for example, Greenwood (1981) are against the use of reading aloud in FL reading lessons. Greenwood argues that reading aloud by FL learners provides a bad model for others to listen to, and the reader is often "... merely mouthing meaningless language..." (p.82).

Perhaps it is possible to strike a balance between reading aloud and silent reading in a FL reading context. It is well understood that in real life we read silently and it is equally known that reading aloud slows down speed and interferes with comprehension, and therefore, should not be employed when the reading is intended for comprehension. On the other hand, an occasional practice of it can have the advantages Griffin above suggested.

4.2.3 Reading Tasks

As mentioned in section 4.1, in 17 of the observed lessons, teachers were observed explaining the meanings of the words and expressions selected from the passage. This was done, in some classes, by simply reading the words with the definitions given in the text book and the sentence(s) provided to demonstrate their usage. An example is given below.

Overt (adj) done or shown openly, publicly

The two nations don't have any overt misunderstandings that can lead them to war.

In some classes teachers explained the words thoroughly by giving additional contextual meanings, and sometimes using vernacular.

When the reading silent or oral, as discussed in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 earlier had been completed, the next task observed in all the lessons was students doing the vocabulary exercise. The vocabulary exercises in the students' text are of three types: matching words in one column with definitions given in another; choosing the meaning of a word as it is used in the passage (contextual meaning) from among several given possible meanings; and using the new words to fill in incomplete sentences - the last one being the predominant exercise type in the textbook. The teachers tended to call upon students one at

a time to read their answer. This was followed by teachers giving out the 'right' answers orally which the students duly copied down into their exercise books.

When the teachers felt that the students had understood the meaning of the words which were supposed to be obstacles to comprehending the texts, they asked students to do the comprehension exercises.

During the study, only 7 teachers were observed asking additional comprehension check questions orally. The majority of the teachers entirely depended on the text-book questions. Reading tasks of the kinds suggested to be essential by reading practitioners and researchers were entirely missing (see Chapter Two for more information).

From the above described activities of the teachers and the students in the sample lessons the following observations may be drawn. To begin with, proper pre-reading activities were not provided. The relevance of these activities which make the reading lesson purposeful and create motivation was totally ignored.

Secondly, the text-book vocabulary and comprehension exercise were originally designed to test students' understanding of the newly learnt lexical items and their comprehension of the content of the text. In other words, the vocabulary exercises

were not designed and could not serve to teach vocabulary building skills, and neither were the comprehension questions intended to be used as a learning device. The position of comprehension questions in the text book makes the reading purposeless because since teachers follow the order of activities in the book slavishly students have no idea of what they will be asked, or for what purpose they are reading, and since they inevitably try to retain all the information, much of which could be irrelevant, they develop a uniform slow pace. There are no post-reading activities in the text book to follow up the reading, such as debating, summary writing or listening to a related text. Since teachers were observed merely following the sequence of activities within the book, without providing any supplementary tasks, the teaching was limited in terms of the learning opportunities it created.

Thirdly, during the feedback session, teachers asked students simply to read their answers, the product. How that answer had been processed is not given any attention. There was no attempt made to find out whether the students had really read the text and processed it or had just copied the answers from somewhere. As Alderson and Urquhart (1994) argue, "A description of what a student has understood of a text is not the same as a description of how he arrives at such an understanding," (p.XVIII). They also claim that the former is essential for testing, and the latter, for teaching.

Finally, since there is no variation between the types of exercise in the different units of the students' textbook, students were observed doing the exercises mechanically, usually copying from one another or from the answers written in their textbooks by former Grade 11 students. The researcher even saw some students who had come to class with vocabulary exercises written out before the reading lesson. This incident, nevertheless, is not claimed to be representative of the sample lessons.

4.2.4 Classroom organization

During the observation, only in three lessons were students observed discussing their answers to the comprehension questions in small groups. In the other classes vocabulary and comprehension exercises were done individually. Pair and/or group discussions are encouraged in a language class because they provide students with the opportunity to use language actively - in most cases the only chance for FL students. They are also used to draw out the strategies each student employs while processing the text in order to answer the question under discussion.

4.3 Aims of a Reading Lesson

Based on the above description of the behaviours of teachers

and students in the observed reading lessons and the questionnaire designed to elicit teachers' perceived aims of a reading lesson in high schools' this section deals with the analysis and discussion of the perceived and realized aims of reading lessons.

AIMS	Rank
To teach students the content of the text	1st
To teach students vocabulary	2nd
To teach students how to tackle different texts	3rd
To teach students pronunciation	4th
To teach students structure	5th

Table 4: Teachers' perceived aims of a reading lesson.

The data from Part II of the questionnaire shows that teachers ranked teaching the content of the text as the main purpose of a reading lesson (see Table 4). The information drawn from Part III of the questionnaire also corroborates this. In their response to Part III of the questionnaire which provides a list of reading strategies from which teachers were asked to tick those they thought should be taught, 20 teachers (67%) agreed with pre-teaching all words which the teacher thinks are likely to make it difficult for students to comprehend the text (3.2),

and 19 teachers (63%) were in favour of explaining the content of the text in detail (3.3) (see Table 2).

The perception of teachers regarding focusing on the content through vocabulary teaching and explaining the content was evidenced in the lessons observed. In 17 lessons, teachers pre-taught the meanings of selected words from the passage (see sections 4.1 and 4.2.3), and 16 teachers (53%) were observed discussing words and expressions other than those selected for vocabulary study. What is more, a significant proportion of the observed teachers, (20 of them (67%)), explained sentences and paragraphs for content as they read the text aloud. In addition to these, the fact that all the observed teachers invariably asked students to read or show the answers to the detailed comprehension questions and at the end provided the prepared 'right' answers strengthens the finding that teachers perceived teaching the content as the main aim of reading lesson.

The reading lesson purpose ranked second by the teachers under study was teaching vocabulary. From this data and from the importance they attached to pre-teaching difficult words (3.2), plus from the number of teachers observed teaching too much vocabulary as discussed above, one may think that it was a vocabulary lesson as such. However, a closer analysis reveals that the lexical items were taught as a means to facilitate comprehension of the text. Thus the focus was not on helping

students to learn strategies for vocabulary building, but on pre-teaching isolated items of vocabulary as means to clearing away obstructions to understanding the text.

The perception and classroom practice of the teachers in the study seem to be guided by the educational objective of the Ministry. The Detailed Outline of English Curriculum 9-12 (1979) states that the content expressed in the language (English) should be ideological and the selection of linguistic items based on suitability and usefulness of content in the promotion of the ideology. No mention of the skills or sub-skills, or how they are going to be implemented, is made.

The purpose of a reading lesson that teachers ranked third was teaching students how to tackle different texts, in other words, teaching students how to develop reading skills. However, the relatively low importance teachers gave to this aim doesn't go in harmony with the strong enthusiasm they showed towards the items which represent some of the reading strategies that may be taken as characteristic of a good reader. The items are: (2.3) understanding the overall meaning of a text, (2.4) integrating information in the text with what is already known, (2.7) varying reading speed according to purpose, and (3.4) introducing the title and drawing out students' background knowledge. Analysis of the teachers' responses to these items shows that 26 teachers (87%), 30 teachers (100%), 26 teachers (87%), and still 26 teachers

agreed with the importance of the above listed items, respectively (See Table 2).

A further mismatch between what teachers recognized ought to be done and what they actually did in class came out glaringly when the data from the observation was analysed. Despite teachers' perceptions in the lessons observed, pre-reading activities were hardly employed (see section 4.1); intensive vocabulary explanation prevailed leaving no room for guessing at word meaning; reading purposes were not provided in order to get students to vary their reading speeds- students read only slowly and laboriously in order to understand everything; and post-reading activities designed to relate the text to what they knew were non-existent. In short it was clear from the data that there was an apparent mismatch between what teachers said and what they actually did in class. A possible explanation for the discrepancy could be either that the teachers had not been honest when they responded to the questionnaire, or that the text book had dictated their teaching methodology.

To sum up, it can be inferred from the analysis and discussion so far that although 87% of the 30 sample teachers perceive that reading involves both bottom-up decoding and top-down interpretation (see Table 2 for a summary of the teachers' responses), their instructional practice is much more highly informed by a bottom-up data-driven approach to reading. The

focus given to "the spelling-to-sound correspondence" (Smith, 1982:233) practice, i.e reading aloud, and the teaching of large number of vocabulary items indicate that teachers, perhaps, believe that meaning is found in the text and it can be extracted only when the reader recognizes and decodes the printed letters and words.

4.4 Background Data Description

The following background data description refers to the total sample of 30 English teachers from 10 selected government high schools in Addis Ababa. This data was basically needed in order to obtain information in regards to whether high school English teachers have training related to teaching reading in high schools or not.

According to the data from the teachers' responses, all the respondents are university graduates - two from Asmara University and the rest from the Addis Ababa University. As far as their experience in teaching English in a high school was concerned, the highest is 27 years, and the lowest, 1 year; most of them have between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience. From this data the researcher felt that those teachers with the experience of 1 to 3 years might have taken methodology courses in TEFL which the Addis Ababa University has been offering since 1991. However, a further

investigation at the Region 14 Education Bureau showed that these teachers came from the non-teaching groups of the Department of Foreign Language and Literature. Moreover, I have found out that fresh graduate teachers from the university are not assigned to teach in Addis Ababa, and that this will continue to be the case for some time to come. Thus the findings are slightly less surprising considering that there is no teacher among the sample teachers with training related to teaching reading in the high schools. All the teachers also answered 'NO' to the questions which refer to whether or not they had taken courses or workshops related to the teaching of reading (see Appendix B). Consequently, all of them said 'yes' to the question regarding the necessity of in-service courses related to teaching reading.

In general it can be inferred from the background data that high school teachers do not seem to have had any training in teaching reading in English. This implies that we are in a situation in which teachers are teaching 'reading' in high schools when they have little knowledge about how it should be taught.

CHAPTER FIVE

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study was carried out with the aim of describing the ways in which reading in the English language is taught in selected government high schools in Addis Ababa. An observation sheet was used to record students' and teachers' behaviours during the lessons. A questionnaire was also used to elicit teachers' views of why and how reading is taught in high schools and to enable the researcher to obtain data on the interplay between what teachers think ought to be done and what they actually do in class. On the basis of the results from the observation and teachers' responses to the questionnaire the following conclusions were drawn.

5.1.1 The primary aim of the reading lessons observed was to increase students knowledge of the content dealt within the text being read via teaching vocabulary, explaining the content in detail and testing comprehension. It follows from this that reading was not taught in its own right. This view of reading was confirmed by teachers' answers to questionnaire items 3.2 and 3.3 (Table 2).

5.1.2 The reading lessons were informed by the bottom-up data-driven model for the teaching of reading if indeed one could

say it was informed by any set of principles, rather than just a slavish following of the text book. The main focus of the lessons was on recognizing sound-letter associations and on decoding words in order to understand the content of the text.

5.1.3 Reading aloud characterized the lessons and silent reading was delayed until reading aloud had been practised. Even during the few occasions silent reading was practised, it was not done properly. In a number of cases students had clearly been expected to read the text silently before hand at home, though it was not clear to what extent this had been done.

5.1.4 No purposes for the reading were specified, and therefore, students read all the texts at the same speed. No pre/while/post reading activities were employed so as to encourage students to vary speed according to purpose. The post-text exercises were limited to carrying out the text book exercises which were there only to test comprehension, not as a reading device.

5.1.5 High school English teachers in Addis Ababa have not had any training in teaching reading in high schools. Perhaps it is because of this that they did not attempt to adapt the existing reading texts and exercises in order for them to teach reading effectively.

5.1.6 The teachers rigidly followed the text book. There was no attempt made to supplement or substitute text book exercises with their own tasks.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the results and conclusions, the following recommendations may be made.

5.2.1 In-service courses or workshops regarding teaching reading must be given to all high school English teachers in Addis Ababa in order to familiarize them with the more appropriate methodologies of teaching reading so that they could even use the existing text in order to teach reading more effectively.

5.2.2 The English language text-books in the high schools should be organized to include a reading section aimed at helping students develop reading skills essential for both academic and real life reading.

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APPENDIX A
CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SHEET

	Teacher and Student Behaviours	L1	L2	L3
1	T tells Ss and/or writes the title of the text on the blackboard			
2	T guides Ss to use the title as a <u>clue</u> to understand the text			
3	T asks Ss what they know about the text			
4	T tells Ss or reads related material			
5	T asks Ss to write some words which they expect to find in the text			
6	T teaches a few key words from the text			
7	T shows Ss pictures and asks Ss about them			
8	T teaches all new words selected from the text			
9	T teaches the structure contextualized in the text			
10	T asks Ss to list some facts they expect to find in the text			
11	T writes some words from the passage and asks Ss to guess what the text is about			
12	T asks Ss to raise some questions which they think they can get answers to in the text			
13	T teaches pronunciation of some words selected from the text			
14	T tells Ss briefly what the text is about			
15	Ss listen to part of a text read by the teacher and make predictions concerning information, opinions, styles and rest of text			
16	Ss read first paragraph of the text or the first lines of each paragraph and formulate questions about rest of text			
17	Ss compare what they have written with others			
18	T sets one or two gist questions			

	Teacher and Student Behaviours	L1	L2	L3
19	Ss read and understand the questions or tasks before they start reading the text			
20	T reads the text aloud			
21	T explains sentences and paragraphs as he/she reads			
22	T teaches other words and expressions than those listed under the vocabulary section			
23	Ss read part of a text aloud			
24	T corrects wrong pronunciation			
25	Ss give a summary of the paragraph they have read aloud			
26	T summarizes what the text is about			
27	T asks comprehension questions orally			
28	Ss do the vocabulary exercises individually in class			
29	Ss read out their answers one at a time			
30	T gives the prepared 'right' answers			
31	Ss read the text silently and quickly in order to answer gist questions			
32	Ss read the text silently in order to answer the post-text questions			
33	Ss discuss their answers in pairs or small groups			
34	T sets his own tasks/questions			
35	Ss fill in incomplete out-lines or make own outlines of selection			
36	Ss add own paragraphs to topic sentences or make up topic sentences for paragraph bodies			

L = Lessons

APPENDIX - B
TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Dear Respondent,

This survey is part of a research project aimed at investigating the teaching of reading in government high schools in Addis Ababa. The value of the survey is directly dependent upon the care and genuineness with which you answer each item. Since your answers will be treated with the strictest confidence, feel free to answer all questions frankly. Please do not omit any of the questions.

Your co-operation will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

PART I: INFORMATION ABOUT YOURSELF

1. Educational status: _____
2. College or university attended _____
3. Year of graduation _____
4. Length of time in teaching English in high schools: _____
years
5. Have you taken any course related to teaching reading in high schools? Put a tick () in the box
Yes / / No / /
6. Have you attended any workshop, seminar or refresher programme related to teaching reading in high schools?
Yes / / No / /
7. If your answer to No 7 is 'yes' please specify the:
 - 8.1 topic: _____
 - 8.2 place: _____
 - 8.3 year: _____
 - 8.4 duration: _____
8. Would you say that seminars, workshops, or refresher course related to teaching reading are necessary for you?
Yes / / No / /

Part II

Instructions:

Following are some statements which express views of English teachers regarding the purpose of a reading lesson in a high school. Rank these statements in the order of their importance for you, i.e give '1' to the most important statement, '2' to the next most important, and so on.

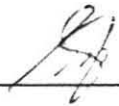
The purpose of a reading lesson in the high schools should be to:

- a) teach students pronunciation
- b) teach students structure
- c) teach students how to tackle different texts
- d) teach students vocabulary
- e) teach students the content of the text

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name: Getachew Asrat

Signature 

Place and date of submission: Institute of Language Studies,
Addis Ababa University. June, 1996.