

Analysis of Oromia Education Bureau Adapted Grades 7 and 8 English Textbooks for Developing Reading Skills

Authors:

Minyashal Alemayehu (minyashal88@gmail.com : Main author)
Addis Ababa University: Department of Foreign Languages and Literature
Addis Ababa; Ethiopia
Alemu Hailu (alemuhalu@gmail.com: Corresponding author)
Addis Ababa University: Department of Foreign Languages and Literature
Addis Ababa; Ethiopia

Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of Oromia Education Bureau adapted English textbooks for Grades seven and eight in developing reading skills among middle school students. Employing a descriptive-evaluative design, the study evaluated the types of reading activities, question types, cognitive demands, and instructional strategies present in the textbooks. For this purpose, the researchers extracted the soft copy of reading activities in the textbooks and recorded them in separate grids. All the reading activities found in 20 reading sections the textbooks were documented for analysis. The researchers used content analysis method to identify the types of types of activity, question types, cognitive level and instructional strategies the activities employ based on the adapted coding sheet. In addition, quantitative content analysis was employed to identify the frequency of the types of types of activity, question types, cognitive level and instructional strategies/approaches the activities employed to supplement in-depth descriptions of the qualitative results. Results indicated that while the textbooks incorporate diverse activities that activate prior knowledge and promote prediction and collaborative learning, there is a notable lack of higher-order thinking questions and vocabulary instruction, particularly in the Grade seven textbook. Besides, questions that foster deep comprehension and critical thinking skills are limited. The findings suggest that a more balanced approach to question types distribution and systematic vocabulary instruction can significantly improves students' engagement and reading skills.

Key Words: Textbook Evaluation, EFL, Reading Skills, Cognitive Demand, Instructional Strategies, Middle School

1. Introduction

For students in middle school, mastering reading skills in English becomes a crucial stepping-stone towards academic and professional success. Given that, reading serves as a foundational skill for

acquiring other language competencies, such as writing, speaking, and listening, the effective development of reading comprehension is critical within the educational framework.

For middle school students in Ethiopia who transit to a high school education where English serves as medium of instruction, reading skills is very important. Having good knowledge and experience of various reading strategies benefits comprehension and helps for academic success. At middle school level a strong foundation in reading is essential as it equips students to engage with variety of reading texts and activities. Consequently, the design and effectiveness of English textbooks used in middle education permit careful inspection, particularly regarding the reading activities they incorporate.

The use of effective instructional materials, specifically textbooks tailored to EFL learners, plays a pivotal role in shaping students' reading experiences. Textbooks must present linguistic content and incorporate diverse strategies that engage learners in active learning processes. In connection to this, a research by Ellis (2002) highlights that well-structured reading materials include a variety of tasks and activities which encourage students to create mental connections between new information and their existing knowledge base. In this regard, OEB-adapted textbooks for grades seven and eight aim to provide comprehensive reading activities that develop both text-based and situation-based comprehension strategies.

Thus, the researchers believe that types of reading activities embedded in English textbooks play a pivotal role in shaping students' reading skills. Research illustrates that varied activities, such as guided reading, collaborative learning, and differentiated task, lead to improved comprehension and engagement (Guthrie & McShane, 2020). Recent studies also underline the importance of incorporating diverse activity types that include collaborative features to maintain student interest and enhance motivation (González et al., 2021). Additionally, the attention given to text types by textbooks developers is vital, as different text types require the use of different reading approach and influence how students engage with the material (Duke & Pearson, 2020). Thus, the study claims that reading activities in the 2022 OEB-adapted English textbooks for grades seven and eight need to organize reading activities in the way they support students' reading skills development.

Effective English textbooks incorporate reading activities that promote the development of a variety of reading strategies, such as predicting, activating background knowledge, referencing, inferencing, identifying main ideas and details, summarizing, and making connections. Textbooks, through the activities they incorporate, that expose students to tasks that engage students in the use of these strategies, would produce efficient readers. In this relation, Davis (2021) asserts that direct instruction in these strategies leads to significant gains in students' ability to comprehend texts

Reading comprehension encompasses the processes by which individuals understand, interpret, and derive meaning from text. It is a multifaceted skill requiring more than just decoding words; it necessitates the activation of various cognitive processes. Theoretical frameworks, such as the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986), suggest that reading comprehension is the product of both decoding and linguistic comprehension. Thus, instructional materials must engage students in both dimensions to foster an integrated understanding of the texts.

Textbooks that incorporate various question types, literal, inferential and critical, within reading activities significantly impact students' comprehension levels. Literal questions assess basic understanding, while inferential questions require deeper processing and critical questions challenge students to evaluate and analyze content. Recent research by Boon et al. (2020) emphasizes that the distribution of question types can influence cognitive engagement and depth of thought, with a balance favoring inferential and critical questions fostering higher levels of comprehension and critical thinking.

Moreover, the cognitive demand of reading activities in these textbooks significantly influences students' engagement with texts. Research on cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) suggests that instructional activities should maintain a balance between challenge and skill level to optimize learning. Activities that promote higher-order thinking, such as inference-making, evaluating, and synthesizing information, are essential for equipping students with the tools they need to navigate texts and real-world information.

Textbooks should use a variety of formats such as graphic organizers, visuals and collaborative tasks to engage students (Frey & Fisher, 2019). Research by Hattie (2021) highlights the effectiveness of varied instructional approaches in supporting reading comprehension. Thus, it is important to investigate how

the inspirational approaches employed by the textbooks to foster the development various reading skills among students.

As middle school students are at a crucial stage of language acquisition, it becomes imperative to investigate how effectively the 2022 OEB-adapted textbooks nurture their reading skills through various types of reading activities, question formats, and instructional strategies. Such an investigation provides understandings into the efficacy of existing curricular materials and informs the development of future instructional resources that align with cognitive and educational theories.

In conclusion, this study evaluated 2022 OEB-adapted English textbooks used in grades seven and eight in Oromia region, Ethiopia, with a focus on their reading instruction components. By analyzing the effectiveness of the incorporated reading activities and instructional strategies, this research attempted to contribute to the discourse on how EFL materials can be enhanced to nurture students' reading proficiency and ultimately prepare them for the demands of high school education and beyond.

Statement of the Problem

The ability to read effectively in a second language is a crucial skill that significantly impacts students' overall academic success and future learning opportunities. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, particularly at the middle school level, the role of textbooks as primary instructional materials cannot be overstated. They serve as the backbone of the learning process, providing structured content, activities, and pedagogical strategies that aim to enhance students' reading skills. However, there is growing concern regarding the pedagogical adequacy of OEB-adapted EFL textbooks utilized in Grades seven and eight.

Preliminary observations and feedback from teachers indicate that these textbooks may not sufficiently cater to the diverse cognitive needs of middle school learners, particularly in promoting higher-order thinking skills through reading activities. Specifically, there is a lack of activities that encourage critical thinking, inference-making, and evaluative reasoning, which are essential components in developing proficient reading capabilities. The predominance of lower-order reading activities and factual recall

questions raises questions about the effectiveness of these resources in fostering deep comprehension and analytical skills among students.

Additionally, the limited incorporation of explicit vocabulary instruction within pre-reading activities, especially in the Grade seven textbook, appears to inhibit students' ability to engage with complex text. Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental for reading comprehension; thus, a deficit in this area may pose significant challenges for learners as they navigate academic texts in EFL contexts. The reliance on visual aids and discussions without adequate vocabulary support may not be sufficient for empowering students to become confident and competent readers.

The overall lack of well-structured activities that promote self-regulated learning, peer collaboration, and critical engagement with texts further exacerbates the challenge faced by educators and students alike. Therefore, there is an urgent need to evaluate and enhance the comprehensiveness and efficacy of the OEB-adapted middle school EFL textbooks in facilitating reading skill development. This study aimed to elucidate the specific strengths and weaknesses of these textbooks, providing evidence-based recommendations for educators, textbook authors, and curriculum developers to ensure that EFL learners are equipped with the necessary skills and strategies for effective reading in English.

Ultimately, understanding these dynamics is vital not only for educational policy and materials development but also for fostering a generation of culturally sensitive and analytically minded individuals who can navigate the complexities of both academic and real-world settings. Through this research, the researchers seek to contribute valuable insights into how EFL instructional materials can be improved to better serve the learning needs of middle school students in their journey toward language proficiency.

In the Ethiopian context, research findings indicated that EFL students have low reading comprehension facilities required of their academic levels. One of the factors that result in such a problem is the absence of engaging students into different pre-reading tasks essential to enhance their comprehension abilities. Additionally, other domestic research findings showed that several secondary school students do not have the experience of using different cognitive reading strategies in EFL classes, and they are not consciously aware of the strategies while reading texts. Such problems are among the factors that impeded

their comprehension abilities. To the best of the present researchers' knowledge, no study was conducted with this regard

Thus, this study was conducted to make a comprehensive evaluation of the OEB-adapted English textbooks for grades seven and eight, specifically to understand their effectiveness in enhancing reading skills among students. The objectives were:

1. To identify the types and frequency of reading activities incorporated in the textbooks,
2. To analyze the distribution of question types and their alignment with cognitive demand levels and
3. To evaluate the instructional strategies included in the reading activities and their implications for student engagement.

Research Questions

Based on the claims made in the background and statements of the problem sections above, the following research questions were formulated and addressed by the study.

1. What types of reading activities are featured in the OEB-adapted English textbooks for grades seven and eight?
2. How are the different types of questions distributed across the reading activities, and what is their effect on cognitive demand?
3. What instructional strategies are employed within the reading activities, and how do they facilitate the development of reading skills among students?

2. Literature Review

A constructivist theory, mainly influenced by theorists like Vygotsky (1978), posits that learners actively construct knowledge through interactions and experiences. In the context of reading instruction, this theory emphasizes the importance of engaging students in meaningful and relevant activities that foster comprehension. Similarly, Bruner (1966) stresses the importance of providing students supportive structures that contribute for students' engagement and understanding of texts. Providing students

supportive structures is crucial when designing reading activities to encourage collaboration, discussion, and active participation among middle school learners.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory underscores the significant role of social context and culture in learning processes. It suggests that language learning, including reading, cannot be separated from the social interactions within cultural contexts (Lantolf, 2000). Effective reading instruction should, therefore, integrate collaborative strategies that connect students' backgrounds with reading texts.

Transactional theory asserts that reading is a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text, where meaning is co-constructed through engagement. This view aligns with the idea that comprehension involves more than just decoding; it requires a complex process of interpretation. Research supports this transactional approach, indicating that activities encouraging personal reflection on texts can enhance comprehension and critical thinking (Alderson, 2000).

Textbooks serve as foundational tools in the language learning process, providing structured content and pedagogical frameworks for acquiring new skills. Graves (2000) and Hijazi (2018) note that textbooks influence not only the content students learn but also the learning experience itself. The choice of activities, types of questions, and the cognitive demands of materials directly impact student engagement and comprehension. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), effective textbooks should align with best practices, fostering communicative competence and critical thinking (Tomlinson, 2011).

Reading comprehension is a complex cognitive process requiring more than word recognition. It involves integrating background knowledge, text information, and critical analysis (McNamara et al., 2010). Educational materials must balance lower-order and higher-order thinking tasks to foster deeper understanding (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Lower-order activities, like rote memorization, build foundational knowledge, but higher-order tasks—such as application, analysis, and synthesis—are essential for engaging with more complex texts (Duffy & Roehler, 1986). Without these higher-order activities, students may only engage in surface-level learning, hindering their ability to tackle academic challenges (Facione, 2015).

Vocabulary knowledge is crucial for reading proficiency, particularly in second language contexts. Studies consistently highlight the link between vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; National Reading Panel, 2000). Without robust vocabulary instruction, students may struggle with comprehension. Explicit vocabulary teaching, especially during pre-reading activities, is a proven strategy for improving understanding (Graves, 2006). Biemiller and Slonim (2001) found that students who receive pre-teaching of vocabulary perform better in reading comprehension tasks. EFL textbooks that omit such strategies may limit students' ability to engage with complex texts.

The types of questions embedded in reading tasks are pivotal in guiding students' cognitive engagement. Effective questioning strategies can significantly boost critical thinking and comprehension (Donnelly & Roe, 2020). Questions can be categorized as factual, inferential, and evaluative. Factual questions focus on surface-level understanding, inferential questions encourage deeper analysis, and evaluative questions prompt learners to critique and synthesize information (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). However, many EFL textbooks overemphasize factual questions, limiting opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983).

Engagement strategies are essential for language acquisition, promoting collaboration and critical thinking (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). Group discussions, peer analysis, and collaborative learning activities have been shown to improve comprehension and communication skills (Hattie, 2012). Effective textbooks should incorporate varied instructional strategies that encourage student interaction and foster a sense of community in the classroom (Vygotsky, 1978). However, the integration of reflective practices, which support personal engagement and metacognitive skills, is often limited in traditional EFL textbooks (Zimmerman, 2002).

Despite extensive research on the effectiveness of EFL materials, gaps remain, particularly regarding OEB-adapted textbooks for middle school students. Most existing studies focus on upper-grade levels leaving a need for research specifically targeted at Grades seven and eight. Comparative analyses across cultures or educational systems could offer additional insights into pedagogical effectiveness. Therefore,

more focused evaluations of the instructional practices, cognitive demands, and reader engagement strategies in middle school EFL textbooks are necessary.

In conclusion, textbooks play a critical role in developing students' reading skills and overall language proficiency. Effective EFL textbooks should balance cognitive demands, employ a range of question types, and incorporate diverse instructional strategies to nurture critical thinking and engagement. This study addresses gaps in the literature by analyzing OEB-adapted EFL textbooks for Grades seven and eight, providing insights that could inform textbook developers in enhancing reading instruction in middle school EFL contexts.

3. Methodology

The main objective of this study was analyzing the effectiveness of English textbooks in enhancing reading skills among students by examining the type of reading activities, question types and instructional approaches employed by the textbooks. Thus, the study utilized a mixed-methods descriptive-evaluative research design to assess the effectiveness of OEB-adapted middle school English as Foreign Language textbooks in fostering reading skills. This approach, which integrates both qualitative and quantitative data, is well-established for examining complex educational phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Specifically, the study sought to reveal the nuances of reading activities within the textbooks, combining detailed content analysis with frequency analysis to provide a comprehensive view of instructional practices (Dörnyei, 2007; Krippendorff, 2018).

The qualitative component involved a thorough content analysis and coding of reading tasks designed to capture the techniques employed in the textbooks. This method is widely used in textbook evaluation (Sheldon, 1988; Tomlinson, 2012), as it enables an in-depth examination of activity types, cognitive levels and instructional strategies embedded within the reading sections. The evaluative aspect of the study offers insights into the implications of these findings for teachers and textbook developers aiming to enhance instructional materials for middle school EFL students (Schulz, 2008).

The focus was on Grades 7 and 8 EFL textbooks, selected for their role in developing critical text-based and situation-based reading comprehension skills; skills crucial for students transitioning to high school (Richards, 2001). A census sampling technique was employed to ensure that all 101 reading activities within the textbooks were systematically analyzed, guaranteeing comprehensive coverage of the instructional material (Patton, 2002; Bryman, 2016).

To capture the breadth of reading instructional practices, the researchers developed a detailed coding sheet based on the existing empirical and theoretical literature (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The coding sheet was made to include categories like activity types, question types, cognitive levels and instructional strategies. The coding sheet was used for both qualitative descriptions and quantitative frequency analysis of each category. This approach has been successfully employed in previous studies on textbook evaluation to systematically analyze instructional content (Tomlinson, 2012; Richards, 2001).

The analysis began with the extraction of soft copies of the reading activities, which were then organized into systematic grids categorized by reading phase. A dual analytical approach was employed namely qualitative content analysis provided detailed descriptions of activity functions whereas quantitative content analysis focused on the frequency of activity types and cognitive demands. This structured approach facilitated a triangulation of findings, allowing for a rich exploration of the relationship between instructional approaches and reading skill development (Flick, 2018; Jick, 1979). Results were discussed across in categories, providing a nuanced understanding of the interplay between textbook design and its impact on students' reading skills development.

4. Results and Findings

4.1.Types of Activities in OEB-adapted English textbooks for grades 7 and 8 reading activities

The analysis revealed that pre-reading activities in Grade seven predominantly feature visual analysis (80%) while Grade 8 exhibits a balance with 57% visual analysis. This suggests a stronger emphasis on visual comprehension strategies over explicit vocabulary instruction. The activities engage students in picture analysis. These visual analysis activities require students look at pictures and discuss what they see and what the people in the provided pictures are doing in small groups. Some picture based pre-

reading activities are followed by discussion questions that activate students' prior knowledge to reading topics. For instance, Activities 1.12, 3.11, 4.10, 7.12 and 10.9 in grade seven pre-reading activities ask students to discuss what they see in pictures. These activities are important for activating students' prior knowledge and making comprehension easier. Pre-reading activities incorporate visual based inference activities. For instance, Activity 6.7 in grade eight, asks students to look at a picture of a tree and make inferences about the topic of the text they are going to read the poem 'Trees'. Activity 6.7 also instructs students to make a list of the importance of trees for people and compare their lists with their partners.

The textbooks also employ brainstorm questions. For instance Activity 4.10 brainstorm about endemic animals in Oromia. Activity 3.11, Activity 6.8, Activity 9.8 (grade seven) and Activity 3.7 (grade 8) brainstorm students about topics of reading texts. These activities are important for prior knowledge activation, which in turn facilitate reading comprehension.

Furthermore, the pre-reading activities incorporate vocabulary activities. For instance, in grade 8 textbook, Activities 2.12 (goddess and evolve), 3.8 (article, devastating and gravity), 4.10 (hikers indiscriminate and predominantly) and 6.7 (Afforestation and Reforestation) students are engaged in studying the meaning of words key words, in the brackets with the activities numbers, before they read a text. Thus, pre-teaching vocabulary is one among the comprehension activities the textbooks use. These activities are important for easing learners' comprehension of key vocabularies. However, the English textbook for grade seven lacked such an activity. The absence of vocabulary activities in the pre-reading stage might make comprehension difficult for students.

Experience sharing type pre-reading activities are also employed though it appeared less frequently in both textbooks. For instance in grade seven, Activity 5.11 engage students in sharing their experience of milk processing and factory that process and sells milk and milk products before reading. Activity 8.15: "What do people in your area do to keep their physical fitness?" (Students discuss and share ideas, requiring them to connect their personal experiences to the text.).

Various types of while-reading activities are employed in the textbooks. True/false statements, multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, matching exercises, and sentence and table completions are the common types of While-Reading Activities in both grades seven and eight.

Activities 1.13, 2.9, 3.12, 4.11, 6.9, 9.9 and 10.10 are True/False questions, Activities 2.10, 3.13, 4.12, 5.12 and 8.13 are short answer questions, the only matching Activity is Activity 1.14, Activities 2.11 and 5.14 are evidence-based questions, visual recognition (Activity 4.12), multiple-choice questions (Activity 2.14), table completion and summarization (Activity 4.11) types reading activities in grade seven. These types of activities highly important for assessing students' understanding of the texts they have read. In grade 8, activities 1.12, 3.9, 4.11, 5.9, 6.10, 8.10 and 9.10 are true/false activities, activities 1.11 and 5.12 matching activities, short answer activities include activities 1.13, 2.13, 3.10, 4.12, 4.14, 5.10, 6.9, 8.11 and 10.10. multiple-choice activities include 1.14, 5.8, 6.7, 7.9, 9.9 and 10.9. the distribution of these types of activities in while-reading activities in grade 8 indicates the textbook's effort to facilitate students' comprehension skills.

Figure 1 illustrates types of reading activities grade seven English textbook.

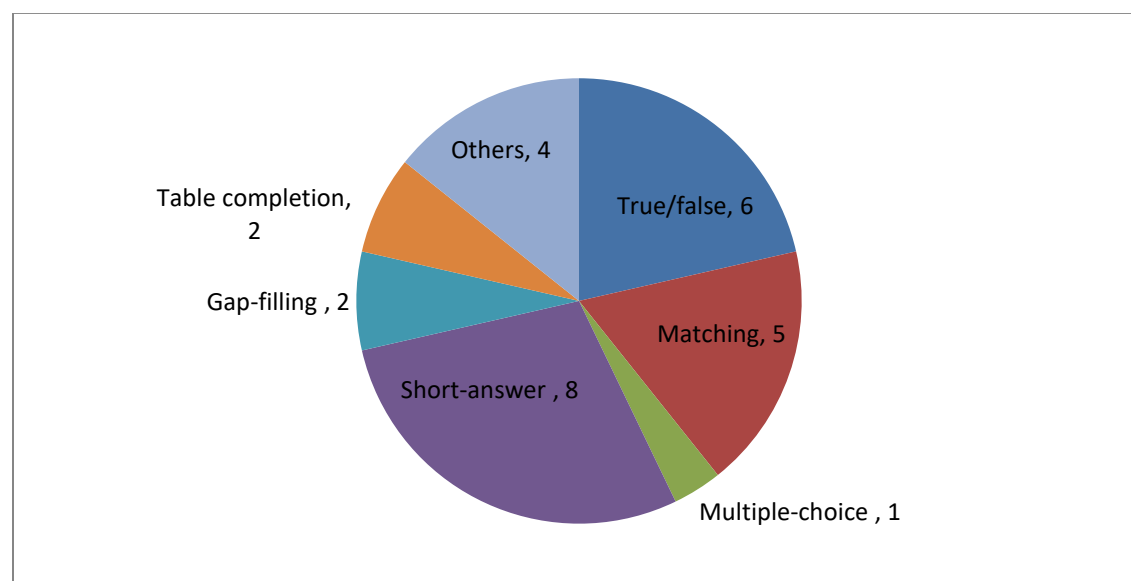


Fig. 1: Frequency of Type of activities in while-reading activities in grade eight

The most frequently employed activity type, short-answer questions with 8 occurrences, allows students to engage with the text and foster comprehension by requiring students to extract and formulate answers from the text. With 8 occurrences, this format prompts learners to articulate their understanding in their own words, fostering skills like inference. True/false questions, appearing 6 times, offer a

straightforward means of assessing students' comprehension and helping them identify information from texts. This can enhance their ability to identify key details and understand the main ideas within a text.

Matching activities, utilized 5 times, serve as an effective tool for reinforcing students' ability to identify main ideas and making connections between images and their underlying concepts. The inclusion of both gap-filling and table completion tasks, though less frequent, also supports the development of organizational skills and comprehension, as students are prompted to pay attention to context and detail. While the multiple-choice format was used minimally, it can play a role in quickly assessing understanding and promoting decision-making based on textual evidence. The 'Others' category to 4 occurrences indicates a range of activities, such as diagram labeling and pronoun reference identification; promote visual learning and the ability to read between lines organizational structures of texts. This diversification helps engage students in identifying word referents. Overall, the varied approach in Grade 7, characterized by the total 28 recorded activities, effectively addresses multiple aspects of reading skills, encouraging main idea and supporting details identification skills, inference skill and vocabulary development.

Figure 2 shows the frequency of types of activities employed by grade eight English textbook.

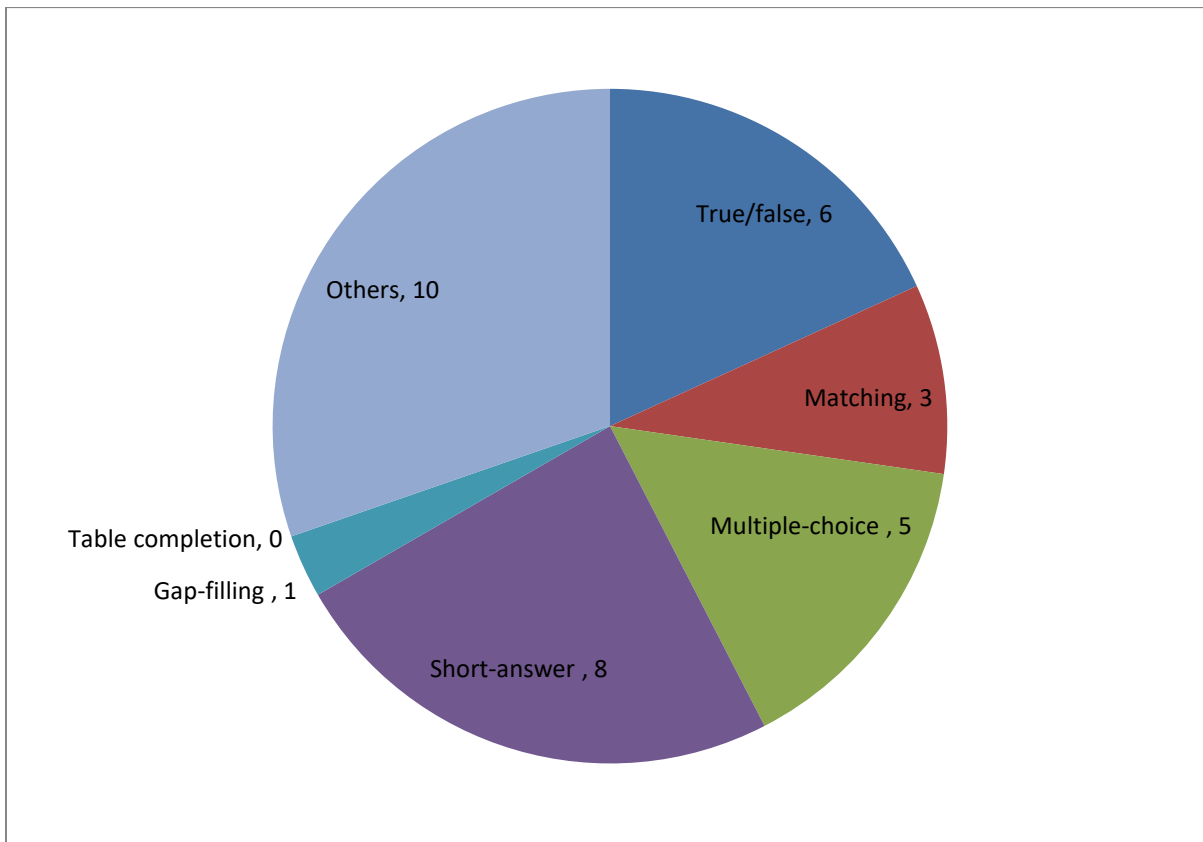


Fig. 2: Frequency of Type of activities in while-reading activities in grade eight

In Grade 8, the use various types of activities at while-reading stage reflects the textbook's effort to further develop students' reading skills. With a total of 33 recorded activities at while-reading phase, there is an increase in opportunities for engagement with texts. Short-answer activities continue to be favored, maintaining their frequency at 8 occurrences. This type of activities prompt extracting information from texts and require students to express their understanding. True/false questions appeared 5 times and serve as a quick method for assessing comprehension, while the shift in matching activities to only 3 occurrences signals a need for diversified approaches within skimming strategies. The increased frequency of multiple-choice questions, rising to 5 instances, provides an additional tool of assessment that encourages students to evaluate options based on textual evidence/information, fostering analytical skills and decision-making.

Notably, the surge in the ‘Others’ category to 10 occurrences indicates a broader range of activities, such as diagram labeling and pronoun reference identification, which promote visual learning and the ability to follow narrative structures. This diversification helps engage students in different ways, catering to various learning styles and preferences. The array of activities in Grade 8 maintains foundational skills established in Grade seven and enhances vocabulary understanding, and a more rounded development of essential reading skills.

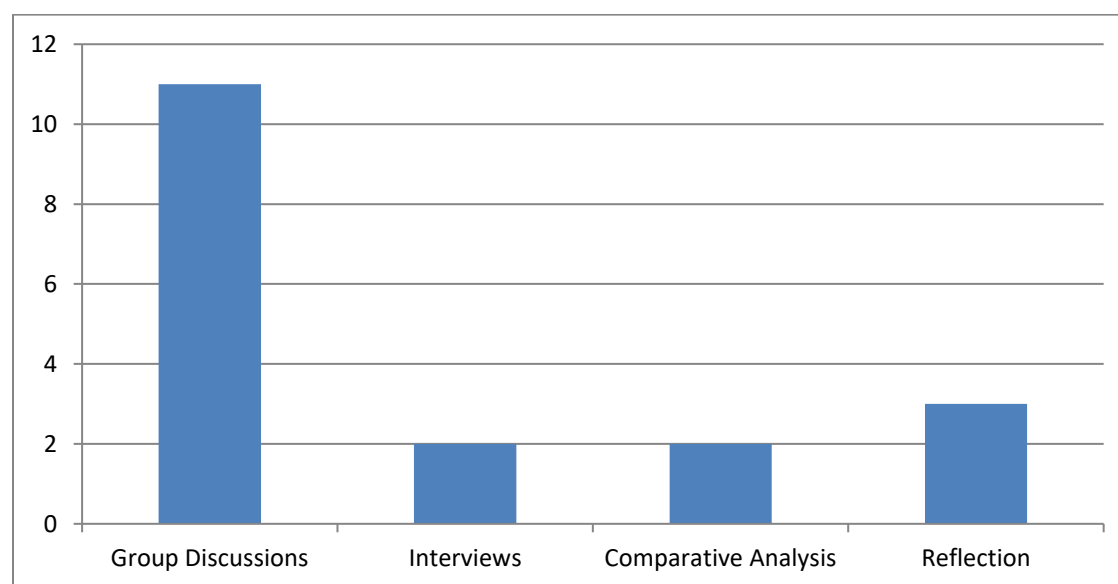


Fig. 3: Distribution of types of activities in post-reading activities of grades seven and eight

As in Fig. 3 above, 11 post-reading activities out of 18 (10 in grade seven and eight in grade 8) are group discussion activities. The post-reading activities are open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking and allow students to express their thoughts and connections to the text.

On the other hand, interviews and comparative analysis type of activities are less frequent appearing twice in the textbooks. This limited appearance of such activities, might hinder students to develop their communication skills and creative thinking. Personal reflection type activities appeared three times in the textbooks. It is important that students should be engaged in such an activity to foster their critical thinking skills and make evaluative analysis.

Overall, the OEB-adapted English textbooks for Grades seven and eight incorporate a variety of pre, while, and post-reading activities that engage students in different ways and enhance their reading comprehension skills through prediction, analysis, evidence retrieval, discussion, reflection, and personal connections.

4.2.Types of Questions in Reading Activities

Figures 4 and 5 below shows the type of questions and their distributions in English textbooks of grades seven and eight.

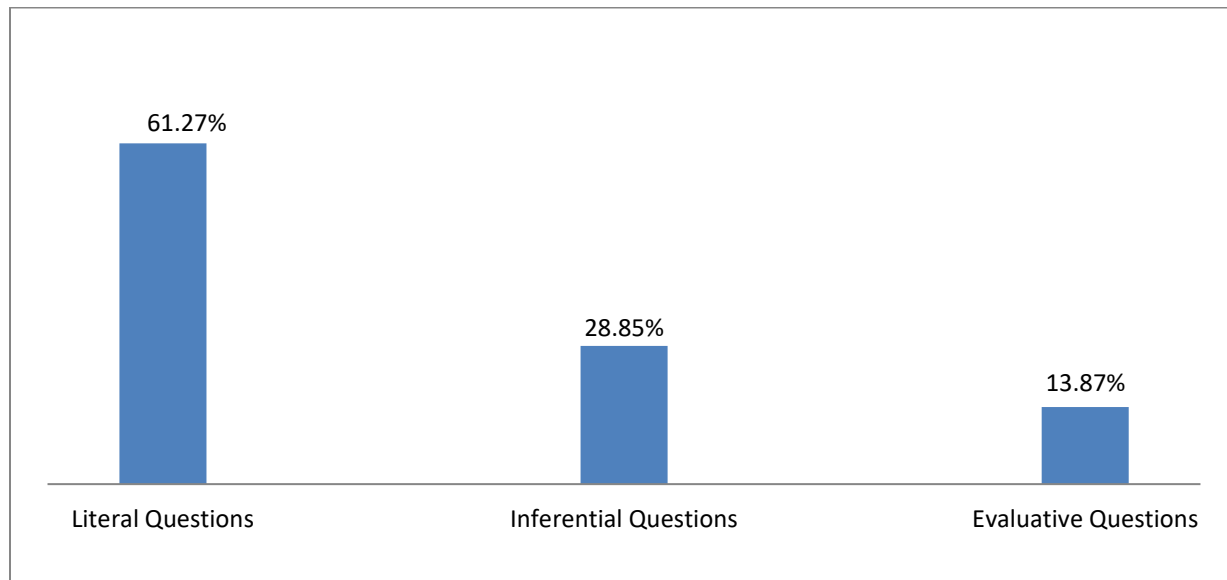


Fig. 4: Questions Types in Reading Activities of Grade 7

As in Fig. 4, 61.27% (106 out of 173) of Grade 7 questions focus on factual recall, demonstrating a heavy reliance on lower-order cognitive skills. Inferential questions comprise 28.85%, while evaluative questions are limited to 13.87%, highlighting a need for improvement in fostering critical thinking.

The distribution of types of questions in reading activities in Grade Eight is presented as in Figure 5 below.

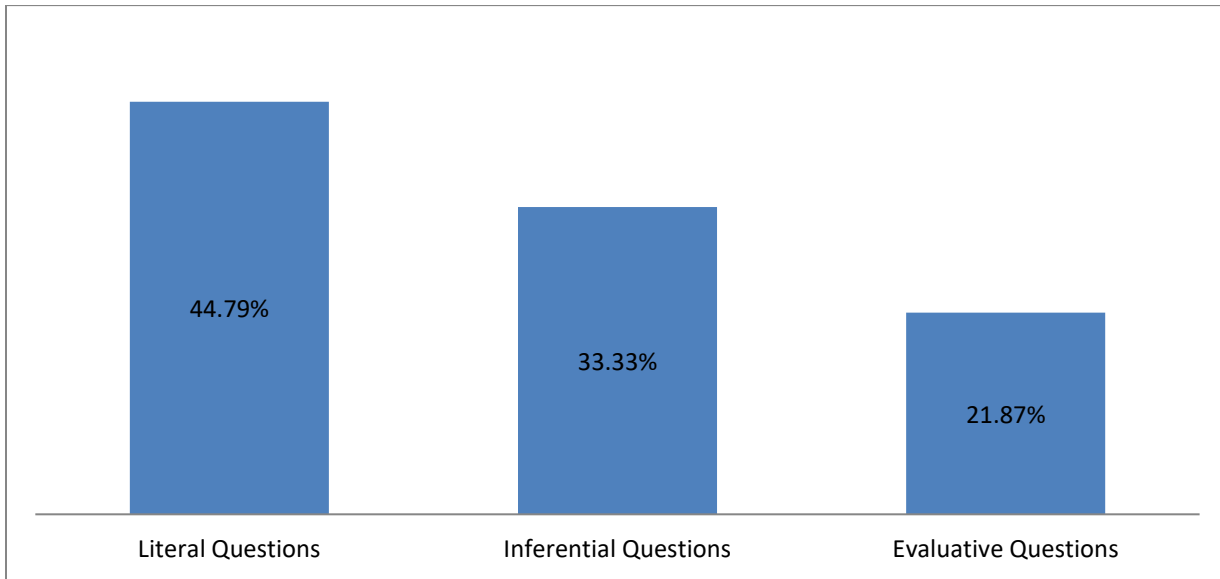


Fig. 5: Question types in grade eight reading activities

Figure 5 above shows 44.79% of the 237 total questions in grade 8 are literal questions that target factual recall, while 33.33% require inferential reasoning, and only 21.87% engage with evaluative thinking. This shows the textbook incorporate questions that address varied cognitive demands, though it emphasizes on understanding through literal questions. This distribution underscores a foundational approach; needing enhancements in reading activities that promote critical engagement.

4.3. Instructional Approaches the textbooks employ in teaching reading

The instructional approaches utilized in textbooks for teaching reading encompass were analyzed for enhancing students' engagement and comprehension. Table 1 illustrates the instructional approaches the textbooks employed along with their respective counts.

Table 1: Instructional Approaches Employed for Teaching Reading in Grades 7 and 8 English textbooks

Instructional Approaches	
Active Learning	

Instruction	
ning	
al Learning	

Table 1 shows collaborative learning (Count: 32) is a prominent instructional approach in the textbooks, with a significant number of activities designed to foster group discussions. This method encourages students to work together, sharing their thoughts and insights about the text. Through cooperative engagement, learners are able to clarify their understanding, explore different perspectives, and build interpersonal skills. The emphasis on collaborative learning not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a sense of community within the classroom.

Direct instruction (Counts 48) is the most frequently employed approach, with structured teaching methods focused on explicitly teaching reading strategies. This method emphasizes clear, direct communication of skills, making it essential for guiding students through complex texts. By utilizing direct instruction, educators can ensure that students acquire foundational reading strategies such as decoding, summarization, and comprehension monitoring. This approach provides a framework that supports students in becoming proficient and confident readers.

Peer teaching (Counts 12) serves as a valuable instructional strategy where students collaborate to reinforce each other's learning. This approach allows students to take on teaching roles, explaining concepts and strategies to their peers. Through peer teaching, students deepen their understanding of reading materials, develop communication skills, and build confidence. This interactive method encourages a sense of ownership over their learning process, making it a beneficial addition to the instructional repertoire.

Experiential learning (Counts 10) is integrated into the reading curriculum through activities that promote personal reflection and interviews. This approach allows students to connect their own experiences with the content, enhancing engagement and comprehension. By reflecting on texts and conducting interviews, students can gain deeper insights into characters, themes, and motivations. This

hands-on experience fosters critical thinking and enables learners to relate texts to their own lives, thus enhancing their overall reading experience.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significance of diverse reading activities in the OEB-adapted middle school English textbooks. The primary aim of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of these textbooks in promoting reading skills among seventh and eighth-grade students. The analysis revealed that while the textbooks include a variety of pre, while, and post-reading activities, the cognitive demand and the types of questions posed have limitations to foster higher-order thinking skills among learners.

The predominant use of picture-based discussions and brainstorming activities in pre-reading sections of the textbooks aligns with current educational theories that advocate for activating prior knowledge as a crucial step in reading comprehension (Baker & Garmon, 2020). Such activities help students mentally prepare for reading tasks by connecting new knowledge to their existing cognitive frameworks (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). The findings in this study suggest that these activities serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for engaging students and enhancing their comprehension by bridging the gap between their experiences and the text (Marzano, 2017).

However, while the textbooks successfully activate prior knowledge through visual and experiential prompts, they appear to lack a sufficient number of pre-teaching vocabulary activities, especially in the Grade 7 textbook. Research indicates that explicit vocabulary instruction is directly related to improved reading comprehension and can significantly impact students' ability to understand texts (Baker et al., 2014; National Reading Panel, 2000). The absence of structured vocabulary instruction in Grade 7 may hinder students' comprehension capabilities, as a strong vocabulary is essential for effective engagement with reading materials (Griffin & Watson, 2019).

The data revealed a heavy emphasis on questions that seek factual information in both grades, with lower-order question types constituting a substantial portion of the assessments. This over-reliance on literal comprehension questions is consistent with findings from previous research indicating that many

EFL textbooks prioritize surface-level understanding over deeper analytical skills (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983). Although questions that engage inferential and evaluative thinking were present, they were underrepresented, particularly in the Grade 7 textbook. This is concerning, as higher-order questioning strategies are essential for fostering critical thinking skills and allowing students to engage more deeply with the text (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Studies show that employing a variety of question types can significantly enhance students' cognitive engagement and critical thinking capabilities (Donnelly & Roe, 2020). Thus, the limited exposure to evaluative questions might restrict students from developing the necessary skills to analyze, critique, and synthesize information, skills vital for academic success (Facione, 2015).

The instructional strategies integrated into the textbooks, such as group discussions and peer analysis, promote collaborative learning, which is an effective method for developing communication and critical thinking skills among students (Johnson & Johnson, 2018). The instructional approaches employed in teaching reading, collaborative learning, direct instruction, peer teaching, and experiential learning; provide a comprehensive framework for developing reading skills. The combination of structured guidance through direct instruction and the engagement of collaborative and experiential strategies ensures that students are not only equipped with essential reading skills but are also active participants in their learning journey. This diverse array of instructional methods contributes to a rich and supportive reading environment, ultimately promoting reading proficiency and enjoyment.

Engaging students in discussions about their reading builds comprehension and fosters a sense of belonging and community in the classroom. Furthermore, the findings show a strong reliance on group discussions in the post-reading phase, reflecting a pedagogical commitment to collective knowledge building (Hattie, 2012).

Nonetheless, the limited incorporation of reflective and comparative analysis activities may limit students' opportunities for deeper personal engagement with the texts. Research suggests that individual reflection is crucial for developing metacognitive skills and enhancing self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2002). By encouraging students to reflect on their thoughts and connections to the texts,

teachers can cultivate a more profound understanding of the material and its relevance to their lives (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2008).

The findings of this study have significant implications for EFL textbook development and instructional practices. Textbook authors should consider integrating a more balanced distribution of question types that encompasses both lower and higher-order thinking skills to promote a more comprehensive approach to reading comprehension. Additionally, incorporating robust vocabulary instruction within pre-reading activities can empower students by equipping them with essential vocabularies for engaging with texts.

Professional development efforts for teachers should also emphasize the importance of fostering higher-order thinking through tailored instructional strategies that promote critical thinking and reflective practices. Ultimately, enhancing the effectiveness of EFL textbooks and employing varied instructional strategies can significantly contribute to improving reading comprehension and critical thinking skills in middle school students.

In conclusion, while the OEB-adapted English textbooks provide a solid foundation for developing students' reading skills, efforts to enhance their cognitive demand and the integration of diverse question types and activities are critical for advancing students' abilities to navigate texts in their academic journeys.

Authors' Detail

Minyashal Alemayehu Benegde

- PhD student at Addis Ababa University in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature.
- M.A. Degree in English Language Education from Haramaya University
- B.A. Degree in English as a Foreign Language from Addis Ababa University
- Taught English for more than 15 years

Alemu Hailu (Asso.Prof)

- Certified educator and researcher at Addis Ababa University; Ethiopia

REFERENCES

1. Abebe D.B. Teaching reading skills in English as a foreign language through interactive classroom teaching versus plasma teaching with reference to grade ten students in Addis Ababa. 2012. Addis Ababa.
2. Anderson R.C. Role of the reader's schema in comprehension, learning and memory // *Theoretical Models and Processes of Literacy*. 1994. UK: Routledge, pp. 136-145. DOI: 10.4324/9781315110592-9
3. Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Longman.
4. Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. Longman.
5. Asalefew M.W. Assessing the metacognitive awareness of reading strategies among freshmen university students, Ethiopia // *International Education & Research Journal*. 2018. Vol. 4, no. 10, pp. 27-33.
6. Baker, L., & Garmon, S. (2020). Reading comprehension and the role of prior knowledge. *Reading Psychology*, 41(1), 47-67.
7. Baker, S. K., Simmons, D. C., & Kame'enui, E. J. (2014). Vocabulary acquisition: Research bases. In E. H. Hiebert & M. L. Kamil (Eds.), *Teaching and learning vocabulary: Bringing research to practice* (pp. 23-32). Routledge.
8. Beck, I. L., McKeown, M. G., & Kucan, L. (2013). *Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.
9. Biemiller, A., & Slonim, N. (2001). Estimating root word vocabulary growth in popular children's literature: A longitudinal study. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 93(1), 70-83. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.93.1.70>
10. Bloom, B. S., Englehart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook I: Cognitive Domain*. New York, NY: David McKay Company.
11. Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (2000). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. National Academy Press.
12. Brown H.D. *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. 2001. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc. 480 p.
13. Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.

14. Carrell, P. L., & Eisterhold, J. C. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading: Classroom implications and applications. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(4), 553-573. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586615>
15. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2017). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. SAGE Publications.
16. Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing Your Coursebook*. Oxford: Heinemann.
17. Davis, J. (2021). "Explicit Reading Strategy Instruction: Effects on Student Comprehension." *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 60(1), 55-77.
18. Donnelly, D. M., & Roe, D. (2020). The effects of questioning strategies on student engagement and comprehension. *Journal of Educational Research*, 113(4), 500-512. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2019.1573892>
19. Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies*. Oxford University Press.
20. Duffy, G. G., & Roehler, L. R. (1986). The role of instruction in fostering comprehension. *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 18(4), 373-391.
21. Duke, N. K., & Pearson, P. D. (2002). Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension. In A. E. Farstrup & J. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* (pp. 205-242). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
22. Facione, P. A. (2015). *Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts*. Foundation for Critical Thinking. <https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>.
23. Flick, U. (2018). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
24. Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2019). *Engagement Strategies for the Classroom*. ASCD.
25. González, A., et al. (2021). "The Impact of Multimedia on Student Engagement in Reading." *Computers & Education*, 175, 104245.
26. Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. L. (2011). *Teaching and Researching Reading*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
27. Graves, M. F. (2000). *A vocabulary program to complement and enrich core reading instruction*. International Reading Association.
28. Griffin, K., & Watson, J. (2019). The importance of vocabulary in reading comprehension. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 15(1), 36-52.
29. Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. Routledge.
30. Hattie, J. (2021). *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn*. Routledge.

31. Hijazi, D. (2018). The role of textbooks in English language teaching: A review of the literature. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 9(4), 700-706. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0904.05>
32. Jick, T. D. (1979). Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Triangulation in Action. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4), 602-611.
33. Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2018). Cooperative Learning: Improving University Instruction by Basing Practice on Validated Theory. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 20(3), 1-23.
34. Kintsch, W. (1998). Comprehension: A Theoretical Framework for Reading Comprehension. In D. M. B. Smith (Ed.), *Text Comprehension and Process* (pp. 1-33). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
35. Krippendorff, K. (2018). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
36. Marzano, R. J. (2017). *The New Art and Science of Teaching Reading*. Marzano Research.
37. MoE, (2020). *General Education Curriculum Framework*. Addis Ababa.
38. National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read*. National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. <https://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/documents/report.pdf>
39. Nuttall, C. (2005). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*. Heinemann.
40. Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
41. Richards, J. C. (2001). *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
42. Ruddell, R. B., & Unrau, N. J. (2004). Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading. In R. B. Ruddell & N. J. Unrau (Eds.), *Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading* (pp. 1-25). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
43. Schulz, R. (2008). The Evaluation of Teaching Materials and Its Implications for Foreign Language Instruction. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(2), 290-309.
44. Schunk, D. H., & Zimmerman, B. J. (2008). *Motivation and Self-Regulated Learning: Theory, Research, and Applications*. Taylor & Francis.
45. Sheldon, L. E. (1988). Evaluating ELT Textbooks and Materials. *ELT Journal*, 42(4), 237-246.
46. Teddlie, C., & Tashakkori, A. (2009). *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. SAGE Publications.

47. Tomlinson, B. (2012). *Materials Development for Language Learning and Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
48. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
49. Webb S.A. (2009). The effects of pre-learning vocabulary on reading comprehension and writing // *The Canadian Modern Language Review*. 2009. Vol. 65, no. 3, pp. 441-470. DOI: 10.3138/cmlr.65.3.441
50. Yeeding S. (2007). Using pre-reading activities to increase learners' motivation in reading comprehension: a case of 2nd year vocational students enrolled in the Electrical and Electronic Certificate Program at Industrial Technology College. Pranakorn.
51. Zhaohua S. (2004). Effects of previewing and providing background knowledge on EFL reading comprehension of American documentary narratives // *Journal of TESL Reporter*. 2004. Vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 50-63.
52. Zimmerman, B. J. (2002). *Becoming a Self-Regulated Learner: An Overview*. *Theory into Practice*, 41(2), 64-70.