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## HOW PREPARED ARE ETHIOPIAN ENGLISH TEACHERS TO TEACH EARLY GRADE READING?

### НАСКІЛЬКИ ГОТОВІ ЕФІОПСЬКІ ВЧИТЕЛІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ НАВЧАТИ ЧИТАННЮ В ПОЧАТКОВИХ КЛАСАХ?

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#### ABSTRACT

**Purpose.** This paper examines how prepared Ethiopian public primary school English teachers are to teach early grade reading.

**Methodology.** A descriptive research design of mixed methods was employed. A sample of 125 English teachers in 20 randomly selected primary schools in Hawassa City Administration was the source of data. The researchers employed a knowledge

**Мета.** У цій статті досліджується, наскільки вчителі англійської мови в ефіопських державних початкових школах підготовлені навчати читання в початкових класах.

**Методологія.** Використовувався описовий дизайн дослідження змішаних методів. Джерелом даних була вибірка з 125 вчителів англійської мови в 20 випадково відібраних початкових школах адміністрації міста Хавасса, Ефіопія. Для збору необхідних даних

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assessment test, focus group discussions, and questionnaires to gather the necessary data. The analysis of quantitative data was carried out by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 25.0).

**Results.** It has been learned from the findings that primary English teacher preparation paid little attention to coursework and practicum to teach early reading. The results also revealed that English teachers felt somewhat prepared to teach early grade reading. There is serious knowledge limitation among English teachers that (12)9.6% of primary English teachers scored 50% and above, whereas (113)90.4% of teachers scored below 50%; the teachers' average knowledge test score was 36.4%. The results have clearly indicated that it is statistically significant, the direct relationship among teacher preparation coursework emphasis, practicum attention statistically significant, direct relationship among teacher preparation coursework emphasis, practicum attention, and teachers' felt preparedness at ( $p=0.001$ ).

**Conclusions.** The results have led to the conclusion that teacher preparation, both in its coursework and practicum, did not pay due attention to teaching early grade reading. That is, primary English teachers were inadequately prepared to teach early grade reading.

Based on the results of this study, to improve the practice of early literacy instruction, English teachers' knowledge and skills gaps need to be duly addressed. Further studies that investigate the current practice of early literacy teacher preparation and professional development should be conducted with a larger sample size and diverse contexts.

**Keywords:** coursework emphasis, knowledge of early literacy instruction, practicum attention, preparedness, teacher preparation.

дослідники використовували тест оцінки знань, обговорення у фокус-групах та анкетування. Аналіз кількісних даних проводився за допомогою пакету Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS версія 25.0).

**Результати.** Результати показали, що в підготовці вчителя початкової школи з англійської мови приділяється мало уваги практичній роботі з навчання читання. Результати також показали, що вчителі англійської мови відчували непевну готовність навчати читання в початкових класах. Серед вчителів англійської мови існує серйозне обмеження в знаннях: (12)9,6% вчителів початкової школи з англійської мови набрали 50% балів і вищі бали, тоді як (113)90,4% вчителів набрали нижче 50% балів; середній бал знань вчителів на тесті склав 36,4%. Результати чітко показали, що існує статистично значущий прямий зв'язок між підготовкою вчителів, увагою до практичних занять і самопідготовленістю вчителів ( $p=0,001$ ).

**Висновки.** Отримані результати дозволили дійти висновку, що підготовці вчителя в практичній роботі не приділялося належної уваги щодо навчання читання в початкових класах. Тобто вчителі початкових класів з англійської мови були недостатньо підготовлені до навчання читання в початкових класах.

Виходячи з результатів цього дослідження, щоб покращити практику раннього навчання читання, потрібно належним чином усунути прогалини в знаннях, уміннях і навичках вчителів англійської мови. Подальші дослідження, які вивчатимуть практику підготовки та професійного розвитку вчителів з раннього навчання читання, мають проводитися з більшим розміром вибірки та у різноманітному контексті.

**Ключові слова:** акценти на курсовій роботі, знання раннього навчання читання, уваги на практикумі, підготовленість, підготовка вчителя.

## INTRODUCTION

Teachers are now seen as self-reflective, inquiring, and critically motivated practitioners and researchers. Teacher preparation and training have been demanded to pay attention to a variety of instructional approaches and strategies that suit teachers' classroom instructional practices. This was the result of a change made from considering a teacher as an object to transfer knowledge to creative, problem solver and decision maker (Roberts, 1998).

Objectives of teacher preparation are required to be presented in measurable and operational expressions, stating the environment for teacher practice, observable teacher behavior and the required accuracy level of performance. This time, change was made from prescriptive courses to focus on measurable competencies (Richards & Nunan, 1990). The student teachers are viewed as those who receive knowledge from their educators and imitate them in their later teaching.

Then, the communicative approach to second language teacher preparation evolved following the importance of English for international trade and communication. The development of the communicative approach during the 1970s influenced teachers' practices with the intent of recreating the real-life social and functional situations in the classrooms (Burns & Richards, 2009).

The Mid-1980s to mid-1980s saw another perspective, the socio-cultural approach to second language teacher preparation, which considers the complexity of teachers' practices and the way their practices are influenced by their previous learning, practical knowledge, values, and beliefs they developed

Second language teacher preparation is considered the beginning of their professional development when prospective teachers practice in school classrooms where they share experiences with peers, tutors, and mentors and connect theories learned in the college coursework and actual classroom-based teaching through the practicum. Reflecting on one's practice enables teachers to critique, make better-informed decisions and improve their teaching. Human learning and development, according to constructivist theorists, occur in cultural contexts and are negotiated by language and other symbols (Salmani Nodoushan & Pashapou, 2016).

Literacy, the ability to read and write, is recognized as one of the basic skills providing for academic achievement, lifelong learning, and sustainable development. None of the competencies known to contribute to lifelong learning and sustainable development is as fundamental as the ability to read and write. Thus, early literacy, the ability to read and write, has a realistic link with citizenship, cultural identity, socio-economic status, human rights, equity, etc. (Smith et al., 2012).

If a given society is to transform, enough attention needs to be paid to the quality of education for its citizens, especially primary education. Of the factors that help ensure quality education, a qualified teacher is considered to be the most important one, in whose absence the other resources do not make any difference (Anderson, 2002). Teacher proficiency leads to effective teaching, which in turn is the result of effective teacher preparation (Amare, 1998).

The significant influence that a teacher's teaching ability has on students' language learning achievement necessitates preparing English teachers (Wubalem & Sarangi, 2019). Teachers have been prepared to teach English as a subject and use it as a medium of instruction. Nowadays, the English language as a subject begins with preprimary education in all federal states of the country, but there are variations among states of Ethiopia in terms of using English as a medium of instruction (Gashaye & Alem, 2018).

Teaching English as a subject and its use as a medium of instruction in the first and the second cycles of primary schools is also deficiently resourced. Inadequately prepared teachers remain a chief challenge in both cycles (Damitew, 2012). Berhanu (1999), cited

in Damitew (2012), states that the lack of qualified English language teachers, among many other things, influences the quality of English language instruction.

Qualified teachers can never be substituted by any other things, such as a well-designed curriculum, nicely furnished classrooms, abundantly available resources or technologies, well-prepared materials, etc. With regard to the low level of English use in Ethiopia, teachers have been reported to have certain contributions.

The problem of low proficiency of teachers in teaching English language reading is customary at all levels of education (Yigzaw, 2005). Moreover, grades for English teachers' language proficiency and English teaching skills are too weak to implement the tasks and activities set in the English syllabus (Biniyam, 2012).

To ensure access to quality primary education, it is important to primarily make sure that teachers are well trained and professionally developed through effectively handled prospective and on-job teacher training accompanied by continuous professional development whose emphasis is on content knowledge, pedagogy, and language skills (Abebe, & Woldehanna, 2013). Thus, the sensible assumption for a particular program is "while there may be some 'materials-proof' teachers, there are no 'teacher-proof' materials" (Anderson et al., 1985, p. 92).

Different studies have been conducted (e.g., Shibeshi, 2009; Abebe & Woldehanna, 2013; Koye, 2014) and have placed their focus on the importance of qualified teachers to ensure quality education. A particular way in which teachers are trained may have positive or negative impacts on the quality of education (Abebe & Woldehanna, 2013). Well-prepared and experienced teachers positively influence students' academic achievement. The quality of a given education system is significantly determined by the effectiveness and commitment of teachers in it, which is also influenced by the way teachers are prepared (Shibeshi, 2009).

Ethiopia has been improving the level of attention paid to education sector development and recorded success. However, students' literacy learning progress is falling to the reverse and has become an issue of research, public discourse, professional debate, etc.

Specifically, deterioration in the quality of education prevails at all levels of the country's education, but it is more worrisome at the elementary level. A larger proportion of teachers have passed through deficient teacher training and lack the knowledge and skills needed to teach at their respective grades of assignment (Semela, 2014).

Most of the previous studies done in relation to reading considered the practice of teaching reading, learners' reading ability, the way they use strategies, the use of age-appropriate readers, and factors that affect teaching reading in early grades, among which is teachers' deficiency in knowledge and practice.

Bachore (2015) examined the status, roles, and challenges of teaching reading and found out that there was a serious English proficiency problem among English language teachers, teachers of natural sciences, and students of primary and secondary schools; Mijena (2014) investigated practices and impeding factors facing teaching English to young learners and came up with the results that teachers use mother tongue to teach English and lack understanding and knowledge of the purpose, procedures and

approaches of teaching English to young learners because of lack of proper pre-service and in-service professional development courses on how to deal with young learners.

Enyew and Yigzaw (2015) looked into teachers' current practice of teaching English reading and grade four students' reading achievement and disclosed low student scores, low infusion of teaching strategies in reading lessons, and poor assessment of reading skills; Debru (2015) investigated teaching reading to first cycle primary students and its challenges; Tsehay (2012) reports the deficient assessment of early grade children's reading progress.

Gebre (2016) examined the practice of teaching early reading in Ethiopian primary schools and found that teachers were using inappropriate reading techniques and procedures to teach early grade reading. It has also shown that teachers are deficiently trained in phonological awareness, phonics instruction, comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary.

Semela (2014) reports that Ethiopian schools, especially primary schools are staffed with teachers who lack subject matter knowledge and skills for teaching but have not considered the emphasis placed on preparing English teachers to teach the essential components of early grade reading and their teaching in the classroom.

Thus, in Ethiopia, limited studies available have been carried out on issues related to early grades in English language reading skills but with no attention to teacher preparedness involving knowledge assessment tests on research-based issues in relation to teaching early grade reading.

From the research reports and official documents reviewed, it is learned that the problem is associated largely with the selection mechanisms through which Ethiopian adolescents are brought to the teaching force, the way they are prepared and professionally developed (UNESCO, 2014; Semela, 2014).

As a result, poor literacy learning achievement of children in Ethiopian primary schools has been reported in different assessments (Piper, 2010; National Learning Assessment (NLA) over time, 2000, 2004, and 2007) (MOE&USAID,2008) as children are not learning the knowledge, abilities, and skills as expected in the minimum learning competencies (MLCs).

To the best knowledge of the authors of this research, the studies done in Ethiopia so far have not paid enough attention to assessing the knowledge and preparedness of primary school English teachers to teach early grade reading. Thus, this study was intended to examine how prepared primary school English teachers are to teach early grade reading as stated below.

The main **purpose** of this study was to investigate how prepared Ethiopian English teachers are to teach early grade reading.

Specifically, this research strived to:

1. examine the level of emphasis teacher preparation placed on teaching early grade reading
2. assess English teachers' knowledge of early grade reading instruction

3. describe the extent to which primary school English teachers felt prepared to teach early grade reading
4. identify the relationship among teacher preparation coursework emphasis, practicum attention, and teachers' felt preparedness to teach early grade reading

– **Research Questions**

1. How much emphasis did college teacher preparation place on teaching early grade reading?
2. How knowledgeable are English teachers about early grade reading instruction?
3. To what extent did primary school English teachers feel prepared to teach early grade reading?
4. Is there a statistically significant relationship among teacher preparation coursework emphasis, practicum attention and teachers' felt preparedness to teach early grade reading?

– **Theoretical Basis**

This particular study has been guided by socio-cultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978; Bandura, 1986). The mental functioning of individuals is based on social sources supported by social and psychological planes. Fundamentally, social interaction is taken as the basis of cognitive development with significant variation across cultures. Learning and behavior are shaped by individual, social, and contextual factors.

## **METHODOLOGY**

– **Research Design**

A descriptive research design of mixed methods was used for this study. The data were collected through knowledge assessment tests, focus group discussions, and questionnaires.

– **Context**

The study area was conducted in the Sidama National Regional State whose capital is Hawassa. It is located 273 km south of Addis Ababa, the capital of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The population of this particular study was drawn from English teachers in 44 Public primary schools in the city administration in the academic year of 2022/23.

– **Participants**

The participants of this study were 125 English language teachers in twenty randomly selected elementary schools in Hawassa City Administration in the academic year of 2022/23. Among participant English teachers, 51(40.8%) were male and 74(59.2%) were females. In terms of qualification, 82(65.6%) were diploma holders, and 40(32.0%) had bachelor's degrees; 3(2.4%) of the teachers were at certificate level. Moreover, 78(62.4%) of the teachers were in the age range of 25-30 years. When their teaching experience is considered, 49(39.2%) of the teachers have taught English for 6-10 years long.

### – **Sampling Techniques**

There were 44 public primary schools in the Hawassa City Administration. Twenty public primary schools were randomly selected from a list of 44 public primary schools in the City Administration. There were 131 English teachers in the selected schools. Among these, 126 English teachers were willing to take knowledge measure tests and fill in the questionnaire. However, a test paper and a piece of questionnaire were discarded because of incomplete responses. So that, 125 English teachers in selected public primary schools in the city administration were the actual participants of this study. From the twenty randomly selected schools, two schools with a larger number of English teachers were selected for focus group discussions. A total of 16 English teachers took part in two focus group discussions.

### – **Data Collection**

The data needed for this study were gathered through knowledge assessment tests, focus group discussions, and questionnaires.

### – **Knowledge Assessment**

A knowledge assessment test of 40 multiple choice items which have been used in other studies (Mather et al., 2001; Washburn et al., 2011; Moats, 1994; Binks-Cantrell et al., 2012) was adapted. The items were used to assess English teachers' knowledge of five critical components of early grade reading instruction. The test items were adapted to the local context and administered to assess how knowledgeable English teachers are in early reading instruction.

### – **Focus Group Discussion**

Two focus group discussions were held in two randomly selected schools guided by group interviews guided by seven items. Discussion one involved nine (five female and four male) primary school English teachers, whereas there were seven (four male and three female) teachers involved in the second focus group discussion.

The discussions were conducted in the schools during teachers' off time so as not to disrupt the schools' regular functioning. Each discussion took 45 minutes on average. Participant English teachers were given enough explanation about the need for discussion.

To prevent the dominance of extrovert participants, the discussants were given numbers to moderate the discussions. Participant teachers were coded as (e.g., D1P1, D2P2... to mean discussion one participant 1, discussion two participants 2, etc.) to maintain confidentiality.

### – **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire, divided into four sections, was employed to collect data from English teachers on how much attention to teacher education was paid to preparing English teachers to teach the foundational reading skills and how prepared English teachers felt to teach the components of early grade reading.

The items of the questionnaire were adapted from (Salinger, et al, 2010). The sections for coursework, practicum and feeling of preparedness each consisted of fourteen (14) items

of four (4) scales. It was tested for suitability to the local context before it was administered to collect data for this study.

#### – **Validity and Reliability**

To check the validity of the questionnaire and group interview guide, the tools were given to two English teacher educators at Hawassa College of Teacher Education, and constructive comments were received. The questionnaire for coursework, practicum, and feeling of preparedness were of internal consistency in alpha coefficient .850, .854, and .837, respectively, which is excellent.

#### – **Data Analysis**

The data were cleared, sorted, and prepared for analysis after all the data needed had been collected. A statistical package for social sciences (SPSS Version 25.0) was employed to analyze the quantitative data. Qualitative data were analyzed using software for data analysis, Nvivo version 10.

#### – **Ethical Consideration**

In this study, due attention has been paid to consideration of ethical concerns. The schools selected for this study have been communicated through a letter of cooperation from Addis Ababa University. The participants got enough explanation about the purpose of data collection, confidentiality of information, and harmlessness of participation, and they gave verbal consent to participation.

#### – **Procedure**

To get access to English teachers and public primary schools of Hawassa City Administration, the city administration education department was communicated through a letter of cooperation from Addis Ababa University. The school principals and heads of English were also communicated through a letter of cooperation from Addis Ababa University referred to them by the higher administrative body.

Among 44 public primary schools in the city administration, twenty schools were randomly selected for this study. Next, English language teachers took a knowledge assessment test and filled out the questionnaire (N=125). Then, two focus group discussions were held with 16 teachers in two schools.

The data collected were cleared, sorted, and made ready for analysis. A statistical package for social science (SPSS V. 25.0) was used to analyze quantitative data, whereas qualitative data was analyzed using Nvivo version 10.

## **RESULTS**

The data gathered on coursework emphasis, practicum attention, knowledge assessment, and teachers' feelings of preparedness were analyzed and presented as follows and discussed, substantiated with the data from focus group discussions.

#### – **Coursework Emphasis**

English teachers filled in a questionnaire of 14 items about college teacher preparation coursework with an emphasis on teaching early grade reading. The analysis of responses of 125 participant English teachers has been presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
*Teacher Preparation Coursework Emphasis*

Nº	Items	Scales							
		None		Little		Moderate		Considerable	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Teach children how to identify, isolate, separate, blend and manipulate sounds in spoken words	9	7.2	58	46.4	44	35.2	14	11.2
2	Teach children to use phonics skills to figure out how to pronounce unfamiliar words	8	6.4	60	48.0	47	37.6	10	8.0
3	Teach children to monitor how well they understand what they read and correct the problems as they occur	12	9.6	50	40.0	42	33.6	21	16.8
4	Use a variety of methods to teach children the meaning of words, including direct and indirect instruction, multiple exposures and repetition	11	8.8	54	43.2	47	37.6	13	10.4
5	Identify the words in a text that children do not know and using their background knowledge to help them figure out word meanings	21	16.8	49	39.2	40	32.0	15	12.0
6	Make instructional decisions based on assessments of children’s oral reading fluency	10	8.0	57	45.6	47	37.6	11	8.8
7	Teach children a variety of strategies for understanding the text they read, such as using graphic organizers, making predictions, asking questions, and identifying the main ideas	7	5.6	53	42.4	48	38.4	17	13.6
8	Teach phonics to children in a systematic way, with a series of skills and activities	10	8.0	54	43.2	44	35.2	17	13.6
9	Teach children to recognize letters and name them	8	6.4	53	42.4	38	30.4	26	20.8
10	Have children repeatedly read the same text aloud to improve their speed, accuracy, and expression	6	4.8	58	46.4	39	31.2	22	17.6

<b>11</b>	Use textbooks, teacher’s guide and other age-appropriate supplementary readers	8	6.4	55	44.0	44	35.2	18	14.4
<b>12</b>	Assess children’s progress in acquiring reading skills	9	7.2	60	48.0	50	40.0	6	4.8
<b>13</b>	Use a variety of teaching strategies to teach early reading	10	8.0	60	48.0	45	36.0	10	8.0
<b>14</b>	Prepare teaching aids and creating literacy rich environment with locally available materials	13	10.4	56	44.8	45	36.0	11	8.8

In Table 1 above, the response to coursework emphasis placed on teaching strategies (phonemic isolation, phonemic categorization, phonemic identity, phonemic segmenting, phonemic blending, and phonemic manipulation) used to teach phonemic awareness as one of the essential components of teaching early grade reading, (58) 46.4% of participant English teachers responded that teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on teaching phonemic awareness.

With regard to teaching phonics skills, which is essential to help early grade readers to recognize unfamiliar words, (60) 48% of participant English teachers replied that teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on teaching phonics skills to recognize unfamiliar words. Similarly, (54) 43.2% of the respondent teachers said teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on teaching phonics systematically with a series of skills and activities. Moreover, (53) 42.4% of participant English teachers responded that college teacher preparation coursework placed moderate emphasis on teaching letter recognition and naming.

Teachers rated teacher preparation coursework with emphasis placed on employing a variety of methods to teach children the meaning of words, including direct and indirect instruction, multiple exposures, and repetition. In response, (54) 42.4% of participant teachers said the coursework placed little emphasis on using different methods to teach words and their meanings. Moreover, (49) 39.2% of participant English teachers responded that teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on identifying unfamiliar words in texts and using learners’ prior knowledge respectively to figure out word meanings.

The participant English teachers were also asked to rate the level of emphasis teacher preparation coursework placed on using different strategies to develop children’s reading fluency. For helping children repeatedly read the same text aloud to improve their speed, accuracy, and expression, (58) 46.4% of participant English teachers responded that teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis. In addition, (57), 45.6% of the teachers responded that college teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on assessing students’ reading fluency progress and making instructional decisions based on assessment results.

The coursework emphasis section of the questionnaire also considered reading comprehension. One of the issues raised was teaching children a variety of strategies for understanding the text they read, such as using graphic organizers, making predictions, asking questions, and identifying the main ideas. In response, (53) 42.4% of the

respondents said teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis. Another important point was teaching children to monitor how well they understand what they read and correct the problems as they occur. (50) 40% of English teachers said that teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on teaching children to monitor their reading comprehension and deal with problems that may occur.

English teachers also rated how much emphasis of teacher preparation coursework was placed on using various strategies to teach early grade reading. (60) 48% of the teachers said little emphasis has been placed on using a variety of teaching strategies to teach early reading. Likewise, (55) 44% of participant teachers reported that teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on using student textbooks and teacher’s guides as part of their preparation for teaching.

Participant English teachers rated the extent to which teacher preparation coursework emphasis was placed on making teaching aids and creating a rich literacy environment. (56) 44.8% of the teachers said the coursework placed little emphasis on these. Moreover, (60) 48% of participant English teachers said that assessing learners’ progress in acquiring reading skills received little attention in teacher preparation coursework.

– **Practicum Attention**

College school link enables prospective teachers to be familiar with the school environment, the learners, the resources, and their use so that they can practice what is learned theoretically. The prospective teachers carry out different learning tasks under the guidance and support of teacher educators from teacher education colleges and mentor teachers from cooperating schools. Participant English teachers in randomly selected schools in Hawassa City Administration were required to rate how much attention teacher preparation practicum paid to teaching early grade reading. Their responses have been presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2**  
*Teacher Preparation Practicum Attention*

Nº	Items	Scales							
		None		Little		Moderate		Considerable	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	<i>Teach children how to identify, isolate, separate, blend and manipulate sounds in spoken words</i>	8	6.4	64	51.2	34	27.2	19	15.2
2	<i>Teach children to use phonics skills to figure out how to pronounce unfamiliar words</i>	10	8.0	61	48.8	46	36.8	8	6.4
3	<i>Teach children to monitor how well they understand what they read and correct the problems as they occur</i>	8	6.4	60	48.0	45	36.0	12	9.6
4	<i>Use a variety of methods to teach children the meaning of</i>	9	7.2	61	48.8	41	32.8	14	11.2

	<i>words, including direct and indirect instruction, multiple exposures and repetition</i>								
<b>5</b>	<i>Identify the words in a text that children do not know and using their background knowledge to help them figure out word meanings</i>	15	12.0	48	38.4	54	43.2	8	6.4
<b>6</b>	<i>Make instructional decisions based on assessments of children's oral reading fluency</i>	15	12.0	52	41.6	49	39.2	9	7.2
<b>7</b>	<i>Teach children a variety of strategies for understanding the text they read, such as using graphic organizers, making predictions, asking questions, and identifying the main ideas</i>	9	7.2	62	49.6	41	32.8	13	10.4
<b>8</b>	<i>Teach phonics to children in a systematic way, with a series of skills and activities</i>	17	13.6	61	48.8	36	28.8	11	8.8
<b>9</b>	<i>Teach children to recognize letters and name them</i>	9	7.2	67	53.6	35	28.0	14	11.2
<b>10</b>	<i>Have children repeatedly read the same text aloud to improve their speed, accuracy, and expression</i>	8	6.4	64	51.2	41	32.8	12	9.6
<b>11</b>	<i>Observed, discussed, practiced, and reflected on using textbooks, teacher's guide, and other age-appropriate supplementary readers</i>	11	8.8	60	48.0	44	35.2	10	8.0
<b>12</b>	<i>Participated in, practiced and reflected on assessing children's progress in acquiring reading skills</i>	9	7.2	60	48.0	50	40.0	6	4.8
<b>13</b>	<i>Observed, discussed, practiced and reflected on using a variety of teaching strategies to teach early reading</i>	10	8.0	60	48.0	45	36.0	10	8.0
<b>14</b>	<i>Observed, discussed, practiced and reflected on preparing teaching aids and creating literacy rich environment with locally available materials</i>	13	10.4	56	44.8	45	36.0	11	8.8

When phonemic awareness instruction techniques are considered, (64) 51.2% of participant teachers responded that teacher preparation practicum paid little attention. In relation to teaching to use phonics skills to figure out unfamiliar words, (61) 48.8% of English teachers said teacher preparation practicum paid little attention.

Likewise, (60) 48% of participant English teachers described that teacher preparation practicum paid little attention to teaching phonics in a systematic way with a series of skills and activities. In relation to teaching phonics skills to recognize and name letters, (61) 48.8% of English teachers said it got little attention in teacher preparation practicum.

With regard to teacher preparation practicum paid attention to vocabulary teaching strategies in early grade reading, (61) 48.8% of participant teachers said teacher preparation practicum paid little attention to using a variety of methods to teach children the meaning of words, including direct and indirect instruction, multiple exposures and repetition. Whereas (54) 43.2% of participant teachers responded that identifying the words in a text that children do not know and using their background knowledge to help them figure out word meanings got moderate attention in teacher preparation field experiences.

In relation to the strategies the teachers would employ to help children develop reading fluency, (64) 51.2% of participant English teachers said having children repeatedly read the same text aloud to improve their speed, accuracy, and expression got little attention in teacher preparation practicum. Similarly, (60) 48% of English teachers reported that little attention was paid to teaching children using both fiction and textbook reading materials in practical aspects of teacher preparation. In addition, making instructional decisions based on assessments of children's oral reading fluency, (52) 41.6% of participant English teachers reported that it got little attention in teacher preparation practicum.

Concerning teaching reading comprehension strategies, (62) 49.6% of participant English teachers responded that little attention to teacher preparation practicum was paid to teaching children a variety of strategies such as using graphic organizers, making predictions, asking questions, and identifying the main ideas for understanding the text they read. Moreover, (60) 48% of English teachers said that little attention to teacher preparation practicum was given to teaching children to monitor how well they understand what they read and correct the problems as they occur.

In relation to prospective teachers' observation, discussion, practice, and reflection on using a variety of teaching strategies, (60) 48% of participant English teachers responded that teacher preparation practicum paid little attention. In addition, (60) 48% of English teachers said little attention was given to using textbooks, teacher's guides, and age-appropriate supplementary readers.

With regard to making and using appropriate teaching aids and creating a rich literacy environment, (56) 44.8% of participant English teachers replied that teacher preparation practicum paid little attention. Again, (60) 48% of the teachers responded that little attention was paid to participating in, practicing, and reflecting on assessing children's progress in acquiring reading skills.

#### – **Teachers' Knowledge**

The Table below presents the results of teachers' knowledge assessment test

**Table 3**

*Knowledge Test Scores*

Test Scores (100%)				Responses				Mean Score
<50%		≥50%		Correct		Incorrect		
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
113	90.4	12	9.6	17	42.5	23	57.5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>40</b>		<b>100%</b>		<b>36.4%</b>

Out of 40 items on the teachers’ knowledge assessment test, (17) 42.5% were answered correctly, whereas the rest (23) 57.5% were answered incorrectly. Table 3 shows only (12) 9.6% of English teachers scored 50% and above, while the rest (113) 90.4% of the teachers scored below 50%. The participant teachers’ mean score on the knowledge test was 36.4 below 50%.

**Feelings of Preparedness**

The Table below presents teachers’ felt preparedness to teach early grade reading.

**Table 4**

*Teachers’ Feelings of Preparedness*

Nº	Items	Scales							
		Not at all prepared		Somewhat prepared		Mostly Prepared		Adequately prepared	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>1</b>	<i>Teach children how to identify, isolate, separate, blend and manipulate sounds in spoken words</i>	20	16.0	53	42.4	41	32.8	11	8.8
<b>2</b>	<i>Teach children to use phonics skills to figure out how to pronounce unfamiliar words</i>	12	9.6	53	42.4	50	40.0	10	8.0
<b>3</b>	<i>Teach children to monitor how well they understand what they read and correct the problems as they occur</i>	7	5.6	58	46.4	50	40.0	10	8.0
<b>4</b>	<i>Use a variety of methods to teach children the meaning of words, including direct and indirect instruction, multiple exposures and repetition</i>	7	5.6	65	52.0	43	34.4	10	8.0
<b>5</b>	<i>Identify the words in a text that children do not know and using their background knowledge to help them figure out word meanings</i>	10	8.0	64	51.2	42	33.6	9	7.2

<b>6</b>	<i>Make instructional decisions based on assessments of children's oral reading fluency</i>	17	13.6	59	47.2	36	28.8	13	10.4
<b>7</b>	<i>Teach children a variety of strategies for understanding the text they read, such as using graphic organizers, making predictions, asking questions, and identifying the main ideas</i>	16	12.8	59	47.2	39	31.2	11	8.8
<b>8</b>	<i>Teach phonics to children in a systematic way, with a series of skills and activities</i>	13	10.4	66	52.8	36	28.8	10	8.0
<b>9</b>	<i>Teach children to recognize letters and name them</i>	10	8.0	57	45.6	46	36.8	12	9.6
<b>10</b>	<i>Have children repeatedly read the same text aloud to improve their speed, accuracy, and expression</i>	13	10.4	55	44.0	44	35.2	13	10.4
<b>11</b>	<i>use textbooks, teacher's guide and other age-appropriate supplementary readers</i>	18	14.4	51	40.8	44	35.2	12	9.6
<b>12</b>	<i>assess children's progress in acquiring reading skills</i>	17	13.6	63	50.4	35	28.0	10	8.0
<b>13</b>	<i>use a variety of teaching strategies to teach early reading</i>	10	8.0	69	55.2	36	28.8	10	8.0
<b>14</b>	<i>prepare teaching aids and creating literacy rich environment with locally available materials</i>	12	9.6	57	45.6	48	38.4	8	6.4

In Table 4, it is indicated that English teachers felt somewhat prepared to teach early grade reading. Specifically, teaching phonemic awareness- to identify, isolate, separate, blend, and manipulate sounds in spoken words, (53) 42.4% of participant English teachers said they were somewhat prepared to teach phonemic awareness, not completely sure how to use these activities with students in all early grades and at all reading levels.

In terms of teaching phonics in a systematic way with a series of skills and activities, (66) 52.1% of English teachers felt somewhat prepared. Participant English teachers, (53) 42.4% also replied that they felt somewhat prepared to teach children to use phonics skills to figure out how to pronounce unfamiliar words. In addition, (57) 45.6% of the teachers said that they felt somewhat prepared to teach children to recognize letters and name them.

English teachers also rated how prepared they felt to teach vocabulary. (65) 52% of participant English teachers replied that they felt somewhat prepared to use a variety of methods to teach children the meaning of words, including direct and indirect instruction, multiple exposures, and repetition. Likewise, (64) 51.2% replied that teaching children to identify the words in a text that children do not know and use their background knowledge to help them figure out word meanings as they felt somewhat prepared to teach.

In relation to teaching reading fluency, (55) 44% of the teachers replied that they felt somewhat prepared to have children repeatedly read the same text aloud to improve their speed, accuracy, and expression. Similarly, (59) 47.2% felt somewhat prepared to make instructional decisions based on assessments of children’s oral reading fluency.

English teachers also expressed their felt preparedness to teach reading comprehension in the early grades. With regard to teaching children a variety of strategies, such as using graphic organizers, making predictions, asking questions, and identifying the main ideas, (59) 47.2% of the teachers replied that they felt somewhat prepared. Moreover, (58) 46.4% of the teachers answered that they felt somewhat prepared to teach children to monitor how well they understand what they read and correct the problems as they occur.

English teachers also rated whether they were prepared to employ a variety of instructional strategies while teaching early grade reading. In this regard, (69) 55.2% of teachers felt somewhat prepared to use a variety of teaching strategies to teach early reading. For teaching reading using textbooks, teacher’s guides, and other age-appropriate supplementary readers, (51) 40.8% of English teachers said they felt somewhat prepared. Also, (57) 45.6 % of English teachers responded that they felt somewhat prepared to make teaching aids and create a rich literacy environment for teaching early grade reading. With regard to assessing students’ progress in learning to read, (63) 50.4% of English teachers felt somewhat prepared.

**Table 5**  
*Correlations among variables*

		<b>Teacher preparation Coursework emphasis on teaching early grade reading</b>	<b>Teacher preparation Practicum attention to teaching early grade reading</b>	<b>Teachers' feelings of preparedness to teach early grade reading</b>
Teacher preparation Coursework emphasis on teaching early grade reading	Pearson Correlation	1	.714**	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	125	125	125
Teacher preparation	Pearson Correlation	.714**	1	.642**

Practicum attention to teaching early grade reading	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	125	125	125
Teachers' feelings of preparedness to teach early grade reading	Pearson Correlation	.612**	.642**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	125	125	125

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

There is a statistically significant, positive, and strong relationship among teacher preparation coursework emphasis, practicum attention and teachers' feelings of preparedness to teach early grade reading. Teacher preparation coursework emphasis and practicum attention placed on teaching early grade reading are correlated at  $r=.714$ ;  $p=.001$ . Coursework emphasis on teaching early grade reading also has a statistically significant positive relationship with teachers' felt preparedness at  $r=.612$ ;  $p=.001$ . Moreover, teacher preparation practicum has a statistically significant positive relationship with teachers' felt preparedness at  $r=.642$ ;  $p=.001$ .

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the questionnaire have been discussed and substantiated by qualitative data from focus group discussions. Teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on teaching early grade reading. The results in Table 1 show that teaching early grade reading has been designated certain periods of a course in teacher preparation coursework. It can be understood from the results that strategies for teaching early grade reading have not gotten the due attention of teacher preparation coursework. That is, teaching foundational reading skills has been briefly addressed in a few periods of one of the courses of the teacher preparation program. Participant teachers' responses in focus group discussions also confirm that teaching early grade reading got little attention from teacher preparation coursework. For instance, **DIP2** says the following,

*If your question is how sufficient the college training was in terms of enabling teachers to help children learn to read, we dealt with these issues in a course. There was little attention paid to teaching reading in early grades in association with speech sounds. Much attention was paid to general reading related concepts; little attention was paid to practice related to sounds. Now, the issue is there in student textbooks to a certain extent. There is an attempt to transcribe some words and show how they are pronounced phonetically. However, it was not like this when we were students. Some of the teachers who have better academic performance and the desire to help children enabled certain children to learn to read, but teacher preparation was insufficient. Instead, more emphasis was on reading skills such as skimming reading for gist, scanning and comprehension, etc.*

The above response indicates that college teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on teaching early grade reading with regard to considering the linguistic

bases of reading. That is, teaching early grades reading in association with speech sounds did not get adequate attention of teacher preparation coursework. As a result, some early grade English teachers find it difficult to help early grade students learn to read. These findings are in line with the results of previous local studies (Mijena, 2014; Teshome, 2014).

From the results in Table 2, it is understood that teaching the foundational early grade reading skills have been accorded little attention in teacher preparation practicum. That is, teacher preparation practicum briefly addressed the early literacy instruction skills in a course of teacher preparation practicum. Teachers' group interview also confirms this as, "umm....umm I remember it was in the second year in college when we were taking a methodology course, and no one teacher among those we observed during practicum was using an appropriate strategy. There was no textbook when we went to schools for practical teaching; practicum did not give any attention to teaching reading skills" (D2P1). This result is in line with that of Barends and Nel (2017), which recommends an urgent need to put emphasis on the integration of college coursework and teaching practice.

Knowledge assessment test result (Table 3) shows that there is a serious knowledge gap among English teachers about teaching early grade reading. The teachers were also asked in focus group discussions how much understanding they had about five essential components of early grade reading instruction. For example, D2P2 has to say, ".....We do not have the knowledge and experience about teaching early reading in association with sounds. For example, the knowledge of speech sounds or phonemes is necessary to teach words effectively. College teacher preparation was deficient in this regard". These results are in line with the findings of (Endrias & Abebe, 2024b).

Moreover, it is learned from the results presented in Table 4 that participant English teachers felt somewhat prepared to teach early grade reading. Teacher preparation programs did not enable primary school English teachers to be completely sure to employ a variety of early literacy instruction strategies. Teachers' responses to discussion Q2 confirm that they were inadequately trained to teach early grade reading. For instance, D2P6 says,

*We reflected on what we observed in schools. We learned about teaching reading in a course, presenting reading lessons- pre-reading, while reading, and post-reading, but we did not learn how to teach reading fluency; now we are making our own effort in this regard. We did not get any technical and scientific procedures in terms of helping children develop reading fluency. For example, we did not know anything as to how many words, on average should, a child be able to read appropriately to the level; we did not also learn how to assess reading fluency, and we still do not know.*

Here, participant English teachers witnessed that they did not receive sufficient training on teaching basic skills of early grade reading. Both teacher preparation coursework and practicum did not equip English teachers with the necessary techniques and procedures of early literacy instruction. These results comply with the findings of previous local studies (Belilew, 2016; Teshome, 2014).

As can be seen in Table 5, teacher preparation coursework emphasis, practicum attention and teachers' felt preparedness to teach early grade reading have a statistically significant, positive and strong relationship.

As practicum provides (Wendaferew, 2024) prospective teachers the opportunities to practice what they learnt in the coursework, there is a statistically significant positive relationship between college coursework and practicum in terms of attention paid to teaching early grade reading. Teachers feel prepared when they are taught well how to teach and do it practically in a school context, so there is a statistically significant, positive, and strong relationship between college coursework (Anteneh & Anshu, 2024), practicum, and teachers' felt preparedness.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Following the results displayed and discussed, it is concluded that teacher preparation coursework placed little emphasis on teaching early grade reading. That is, the teacher preparation coursework briefly addressed teaching early grade reading skills in certain sessions of a course. Teacher preparation practicum also gave little attention to teaching early grade reading. Teacher preparation practicum considered teaching early grade reading skills only in a few of the practicum activities. Participant English teachers felt somewhat prepared to teach early grade reading. The teachers were not completely sure how to employ a variety of early literacy instruction strategies with all early grades and levels of reading.

Teacher preparation coursework and practicum gave little attention to planning, teaching, reflecting, and providing feedback on teaching early grade reading. English teachers were not sufficiently trained to use textbooks and teacher's guides. Statistically significant, direct relationship among college coursework emphasis, practicum attention, and teachers' felt preparedness to teach early grade reading imply that deficiencies in teacher preparation coursework emphasis and practicum attention have an influence on prospective teachers' knowledge and preparedness to teach.

The findings of this study have implications for teacher preparation and professional development. Teacher preparation coursework should increase the time allocated to teaching critical components of early grade reading. Both coursework and practicum of teacher preparation should pay due attention to planning, teaching, reflecting, and providing feedback on teaching early grade reading.

Systematic, explicit, and hands-on training should be provided for primary school English teachers on teaching early grade reading. Teacher preparation should pay due attention to training prospective teachers on using student textbooks and teacher guides while teaching early grade reading. Teacher education colleges and the Ministry of Education should make sure that teacher preparation and primary school English language education curricula align with one another.

Curricular revisions of primary schools and teacher education programs should give due consideration to research-based educational innovations. Further studies of larger sample sizes, diverse contexts, and more methodological complexity may yield a better description of the situation.

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