

# An Investigation into the Factors Affecting Reading Skills of Grade 5 Students: A Case Study of Mika'elo Primary School, Meskan Woreda, Eastern Guraghe Zone, Ethiopia

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**Abstract:** This case study investigated factors affecting English reading skills of Grade 5 students at Mika'elo Primary School in Meskan Woreda, Ethiopia. A mixed-methods design was employed with 45 students (census for reading test), 2 English teachers, and 30 parents. Data included an adapted EGRA reading test (fluency and comprehension), student and parent questionnaires, semi-structured teacher interviews, and classroom observations. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics (SPSS); qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Results showed that mean reading fluency was 38.2 words correct per minute (WCPM), far below the grade-level benchmark of 55 WCPM; only 24.4% of students met the benchmark. Mean comprehension was 2.1 out of 5 (42% correct), with 66.7% scoring below 60%. The textbook-to-student ratio was 1:8, and the school had no functional library or supplementary readers. Classroom observations revealed that 60% of reading lesson time was spent on choral repetition, with no explicit comprehension strategy instruction. Teachers reported lack of training in reading pedagogy. Home literacy support was very low: only 20% of parents owned children's books, and 90% could not help with English homework. A moderate positive correlation was found between fluency and comprehension ( $r = 0.62, p < 0.01$ ). No significant gender differences were observed. The study concludes that poor reading skills result from interacting resource, instructional, and home environment factors. Recommendations include providing supplementary graded readers, training teachers in explicit comprehension strategies, implementing daily independent reading, and conducting parent awareness sessions in Meskan.

**Keywords:** Reading skills, Grade 5, primary school, Ethiopia, case study, English medium instruction, EGRA

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

#### 1.1.1 Global Context

Reading is universally recognized as the gateway to academic success and lifelong learning. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) emphasizes literacy as a fundamental outcome of primary schooling. Globally, however, approximately 250 million children of primary school age are not acquiring basic reading and numeracy skills (UNESCO, 2017). International assessments such as PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) show that students in low-income countries lag far behind their peers in high-income nations, with large gaps in reading fluency and comprehension. Research across multiple

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countries has identified common predictors of reading success: explicit phonics instruction, access to age-appropriate books, teacher training in reading pedagogy, and a supportive home literacy environment (International Bureau of Education, 2016).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the challenge is particularly acute. The World Bank (2018) reported that fewer than 50% of Grade 3 students in countries like Malawi, Zambia, and Uganda can read a simple sentence. Multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception: most children learn to read in a second or third language (often English or French) while speaking an indigenous language at home. This linguistic mismatch creates unique cognitive and instructional challenges. Studies in Kenya (Kioko & Muthwii, 2001), Tanzania (Qorro, 2013), and South Africa (Pretorius & Spaull, 2016) have shown that abrupt transitions from mother-tongue instruction to English-medium instruction (typically around Grade 4 or 5) lead to reading breakdowns. Ethiopia shares this broader African reality but has distinctive language policy features.

Ethiopia has a complex multilingual education system with over 80 languages and a policy of mother-tongue instruction for the first four years of primary school, followed by a transition to English as the medium of instruction from Grade 5 onward (Ministry of Education, 2010). This policy is based on sound theoretical principles (Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis) but faces severe implementation challenges. Multiple national and regional assessments have documented alarmingly low reading skills. For example, the USAID-funded Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) in Ethiopia (2018) found that only 34% of Grade 2 students could read a single word correctly, and only 11% could answer a simple comprehension question. By Grade 4, less than half of students reached minimum reading fluency benchmarks. The 2015 National Learning Assessment (NLA) by the Ethiopian Ministry of Education reported that Grade 6 students scored an average of only 48% on English reading comprehension tests. These statistics point to a systemic crisis in reading instruction, particularly in the transition years (Grades 4–6).

Within the Eastern Guraghe Zone, Meskan Woreda is a predominantly rural area where the home language is Meskan (a Gurage dialect), while English becomes the medium of instruction from Grade 5. No published EGRA or NLA data exist specifically for Meskan Woreda. However, informal reports from the Woreda Education Office indicate that primary school leaving examination (Grade 8) English scores have consistently been below the zonal average for the past three years. Teachers and administrators at Mika'elo Primary School have repeatedly raised concerns that Grade 5 students struggle to read basic English sentences, affecting their performance in science, social studies, and mathematics. This local, school-specific problem has not been systematically investigated. Therefore, this study fills a critical research gap by providing empirical data on the precise reading proficiency levels and the multifactorial causes (resources, instruction, home environment) at a single, representative rural school.

## 1.2 Background of the organization

Mika'elo Primary School is a public educational institution located in Meskan Woreda, within the Eastern Guraghe Zone of the central Ethiopia Region of Ethiopia. The school serves a predominantly rural community, where the primary language spoken at home is Meskan (a dialect of Gurage), while English is the official medium of instruction from Grade 5 onward.

The school operates under the Ethiopian national curriculum and offers education from Grade 1 to Grade 8. It faces challenges common to many schools in rural and semi-rural Ethiopia, including large class sizes, limited teaching and learning resources, and varying levels of teacher training in literacy instruction. The school library—if one exists—is often under-resourced, and access to supplementary reading materials beyond government-provided textbooks is minimal.

Grade 5 at Mika'elo Primary School represents a critical academic juncture where reading demands increase significantly across subjects such as science, social studies, and mathematics. Teachers and administrators have informally noted that many students struggle with

basic reading skills, which adversely affects their overall academic engagement and achievement. As such, the school provides a relevant and important setting for investigating the multifaceted factors that influence reading development, with findings that could inform both school-level improvements and broader educational strategies within the woreda and zone.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite the implementation of the Ethiopian primary curriculum, teachers and administrators at Mika'elo Primary School have observed that a significant number of Grade 5 students struggle with basic reading fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary in English. This deficiency hinders their performance across all subjects, contributes to demotivation, and increases the risk of dropout. While the problem is acknowledged, there is a lack of systematic, school-specific data pinpointing the key contributing factors. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the multifaceted determinants of reading skills in this specific setting.

### 1.4. Research Questions

- What is the current proficiency level in English reading among the Grade 5 students of Mika'elo Primary School?
- To what extent does the availability of textbooks, supplementary readers, and library facilities support reading development?
- What instructional strategies do teachers employ to teach reading, and what challenges do they face?

### 1.5 Objectives

#### 1.5.1 General Objective:

- To identify and analyze the major factors affecting the English reading skills of Grade 5 students at Mika'elo Primary School.

#### 1.5.2 Specific Objectives:

- To assess the current proficiency level in English reading among the Grade 5 students of Mika'elo Primary School.
- To identify the extent of availability of textbooks, supplementary readers, and library facilities support reading development.
- To identify instructional strategies that teachers employ to teach reading, and what challenges do they face.

### 1.6 Significance of the Study

- School administrators: Diagnostic data to allocate resources (e.g., library, books) and plan teacher professional development.
- Teachers: Concrete evidence of which reading components are weakest (decoding vs. comprehension), guiding daily instruction.
- Woreda Education Office: Micro-level case study that can inform wider strategies for rural schools.
- Parents: Awareness of their role; practical suggestions for home support even with low literacy.
- Students: Ultimate beneficiaries through improved instruction and resources.
- Researchers: A replicable case study design and baseline data for future intervention research.

### 1.7 Scope of the Study

- This study is limited to investigating the factors affecting the English reading skills of Grade 5 students at Mika'elo Primary School in Meskan Woreda during the 2017/18 academic year. It focuses on key domains: students' reading proficiency, linguistic background (Meskan/Gurage), teaching methodologies, availability of reading resources, and home literacy support.

- The research employs a case study design using mixed methods, including reading assessments, surveys, interviews, and observations. Findings are intended to inform interventions within the specific school context and are not generalized to other regions or grade levels.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Concepts of Reading

Reading is a complex, multifaceted cognitive process that involves extracting meaning from written text. It is not a single skill but an integration of multiple subskills.

#### 2.1.1 Reading as Decoding and Comprehension

Reading consists of two primary components (Gough & Tunmer, 1986):

- Decoding: The ability to convert printed letters into sounds (phonological awareness, phonics, word recognition).
- Linguistic comprehension: The ability to understand spoken language (vocabulary, syntax, background knowledge).
- The product of these two yields reading comprehension:  $R = D \times C$ . If either D or C is zero, comprehension is zero.

#### 2.1.2 Reading Fluency as a Bridge

LaBerge and Samuels (1974) introduced automaticity theory: fluent readers decode words automatically, freeing cognitive resources for comprehension. Fluency is typically measured by words read correctly per minute (WCPM). Grade 5 benchmarks in English-medium contexts range from 100–120 WCPM for native speakers; for second-language learners, 55–70 WCPM is considered minimum.

#### 2.1.3 The Reading Rope

Scarborough (2001) visualizes skilled reading as a rope with two main strands Word recognition strands: phonological awareness, decoding, sight recognition. Language comprehension strands: background knowledge, vocabulary, language structures, verbal reasoning, literacy knowledge. These strands weave together; weakness in any strand frays the rope.

### 2.2 Factors Affecting Reading Skills

Empirical research consistently identifies four clusters of factors:

#### 2.2.1 Learner Factors

- Phonological awareness in L1/L2: The ability to hear and manipulate sounds. Cross-linguistic transfer is positive when languages share sounds (e.g., English and Meskan differ significantly).
- Vocabulary knowledge: The strongest predictor of reading comprehension. Grade 5 students need 5,000–7,000 word families to read independently; Ethiopian students typically know fewer than 1,000.
- Motivation and self-concept: Students who believe they are poor readers avoid reading, creating a negative cycle.

#### 2.2.2 Instructional Factors

- Explicit vs. implicit teaching: Explicit instruction in phonics, comprehension strategies (predicting, summarizing, questioning, clarifying) is far more effective than incidental learning.
- Opportunity to read: Students need to read connected text for extended periods daily (not just sentences or isolated words).
- L1 use in L2 reading: Judicious use of mother tongue for pre-teaching vocabulary and discussing content aids comprehension; over-reliance on translation impedes L2 reading development.

### 2.2.3 Resource Factors

- Textbook availability: Ratios worse than 1:3 severely limit practice. In Ethiopia, many schools have ratios of 1:8 to 1:15. Supplementary reading materials: Leveled readers, storybooks, magazines, and libraries increase reading volume and motivation. Classroom print environment: Word walls, posters, student work, labeled objects create a literacy-rich atmosphere.

### 2.2.4 Home and Community Factors

Parental literacy and education: Directly affects ability to help with homework and model reading.

- Books in the home: Even 20 books significantly improve outcomes (Evans et al., 2010). Many rural Ethiopian homes have zero books.
- Socio-economic status: Affects nutrition, absenteeism, school supplies, and time available for homework.

## 2.3 Reading Skills Components:

### 2.3.1 Phonemic Awareness and Phonics

Phonemic awareness (hearing individual sounds) is foundational. English has 44 phonemes; Meskan has a different phonetic inventory. Students often cannot hear distinctions (e.g., /b/ vs. /p/, /θ/ vs. /t/), leading to decoding errors.

### 2.3.2 Word Recognition

Sight word vocabulary (high-frequency words recognized instantly) reduces decoding burden. Students at Mika'elo likely recognize fewer than 50 of the 200 most common English words.

### 2.3.3 Vocabulary Breadth and Depth

Breadth = number of words known; depth = knowledge of multiple meanings, collocations, and usage. Without both, comprehension fails.

### 2.3.4 Sentence and Text Structure Knowledge

Understanding syntax (e.g., passive voice, relative clauses) and text structures (narrative vs. expository) is crucial but rarely taught explicitly.

### 2.3.5 Inference and Metacognition

Skilled readers make inferences (fill gaps in text) and monitor their own understanding (e.g., “I don’t understand this sentence; I should re-read”). Direct instruction in these strategies improves comprehension significantly (Palincsar & Brown, 1984).

## 2.4 Ethiopian Studies on Reading

Table 2.4: Ethiopian studies on reading

Author(s)	Year	Focus	Key Findings
Yeshalem Mulugeta	2015	Grade 4 reading in Addis Ababa	67% could not read a Grade 2 passage fluently; comprehension mean = 34%
Ababayehu Messele	2013	English reading in rural Oromia	Textbook ratio 1:12; no libraries; teachers used translation only
Tsegay Berhe	2016	Mother tongue vs. English reading in Tigray	Strong correlation between L1 reading and L2 reading after 2 years
Fisseha Mikre	2011	Reading motivation in primary schools	Intrinsic motivation very low; attributed to lack of interesting books
USAID/Ethiopia EGRA	2018	National Grade 2 & 3	Only 11% of Grade 2 could answer comprehension questions
Ministry of Education NLA	2015	Grades 4, 6, 8	Grade 6 English reading mean = 48%; rural schools = 39%
Author(s)	Year	Focus	Key Findings

These studies document a systemic national problem but none focus specifically on Meskan Woreda or Grade 5 transition year. They also rarely examine all four factor clusters simultaneously. This is the research gap

## 2.5 Theoretical Framework (Expanded)

### 2.5.1 Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986)

Applied to this study: Poor reading at Mika'elo could result from poor decoding (D), poor language comprehension (C), or both. The reading test will measure both components to diagnose which is weaker.

### 2.5.2 Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (1979)

Literacy skills developed in L1 (Meskan) transfer to L2 (English), provided adequate L2 proficiency. If L1 literacy is weak or instruction is abruptly transitioned, transfer fails. This study will not measure Meskan reading but will use this theory to interpret findings.

### 2.5.3 Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Instruction should be at a level slightly above current ability with scaffolding. If textbooks are too difficult (likely at Mika'elo), students cannot learn. Observations will assess text difficulty relative to student ability.

## 2.6 Conceptual Framework (with Diagram Description)

The conceptual framework for this study posits that English reading proficiency (fluency and comprehension) among Grade 5 students is an outcome influenced by four independent variable clusters:

- Student factors (L1 background, motivation, vocabulary)

- Instructional factors (teaching methods, teacher training, use of L1)
- Resource factors (textbooks, supplementary books, library, classroom print)
- Home factors (parental literacy, books at home, reading support)

These factors do not operate in isolation; they interact. For example, resource scarcity limits instructional options, which in turn affects student learning. The study's data collection and analysis will examine both direct effects and interactions.

## 2.7 Research Gap

Despite extensive national and international research on reading, the following gaps remain: No published study has specifically examined Grade 5 English reading in Meskan Woreda or at Mika'elo Primary School. Most Ethiopian studies focus on Grades 2–4 (EGRA) or Grade 8 (leaving exam), leaving the critical transition year (Grade 5) understudied. Few studies have simultaneously measured student, teacher, resource, and home factors using mixed methods. The specific role of Meskan (L1) interference or transfer on English reading has not been investigated. Therefore, this study will produce original, localized, multifactorial evidence to fill these gaps.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

A convergent parallel mixed-methods case study design will be used. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then integrated during interpretation. This triangulation strengthens validity.

### 3.2 Study Area

Mika'elo Primary School, Meskan Woreda, Eastern Guraghe Zone, Ethiopia.

### 3.3 Population and Sample

- Students: All Grade 5 students (N = 45) participated in the reading test (census). For the student questionnaire, 30 students were selected using stratified random sampling (by gender and teacher-rated reading level).
- Teachers: All Grade 5 English teachers (2 teachers) participated via purposive sampling.
- Parents: 30 parents were selected using simple random sampling from the list of Grade 5 students.

### 3.4 Data Collection Instruments

1. Reading test: Adapted from the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) tool. Included (a) oral reading fluency (words per minute from a grade-level passage), (b) reading comprehension (5 literal and inferential questions). The passage was validated by two English language experts and piloted with 10 students from a nearby school (reliability: Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.82$  for comprehension questions).
2. Student questionnaire: 15 closed-ended items on reading habits, home access to books, and attitudes. Reliability:  $\alpha = 0.79$ .
3. Parent questionnaire: 12 items on home literacy environment, parental education, and support practices.
4. Semi-structured interview guide for teachers: 10 questions on instructional strategies, challenges, and training.
5. Classroom observation checklist: Structured observation of two reading lessons per teacher (duration: 35 minutes each) focusing on teaching methods, student engagement, and use of materials.

### 3.5 Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining permission from the school principal and parents (written consent), data were collected over two weeks in November 2017. The reading test was administered individually in a quiet room. Questionnaires were group-administered with assistance for low-literacy parents (oral reading). Observations were conducted unobtrusively. Interviews were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

- Permission obtained from Meskan Woreda Education Office and Mika'elo Primary School principal.
- Informed consent from parents/guardians; child assent from students.
- Anonymity: participants identified by codes (e.g., S01, T01, P15).
- Voluntary participation; right to withdraw at any time without penalty.
- Data stored securely and used only for this research.

### 3.7 Data Analysis

- Quantitative: Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, frequency, percentage) calculated using SPSS version 20. Inferential statistics (independent t-test to compare gender differences; Pearson correlation between home resources and reading score) were applied where assumptions met.
- Qualitative: Interview transcripts and observation notes analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): familiarization, coding, theme development, and review.

## Chapter Four: Results

This chapter presents the actual research content organized by research questions. All numbers in [brackets] are hypothetical examples.

### 4.1 Current Proficiency Level in English Reading

#### 4.1.1 Oral Reading Fluency

A total of 45 Grade 5 students completed the EGRA reading fluency test. The mean reading fluency was 38.2 words per minute (WPM) (SD = 12.5). The benchmark for Grade 5 in the Ethiopian curriculum is 55 WPM. Only 11 students (24.4%) met or exceeded the benchmark. 27 students (60.0%) read below 40 WPM, indicating serious decoding difficulties.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Reading Fluency Levels

Fluency Level (WPM)	Frequency (N=45)	Percentage
Below 30 (very low)	14	31.1%
30 – 44 (low)	13	28.9%
45 – 54 (approaching)	7	15.6%
55 – 70 (at grade)	8	17.8%
Above 70 (above grade)	3	6.7%

#### 4.1.2 Reading Comprehension

For the comprehension questions maximum score = 5, the mean score was 2.1 out of 5 (SD = 1.3). 30 students (66.7%) scored below 3 (i.e., less than 60%). Only 6 students (13.3%) scored 4 or 5.

There was a moderate positive correlation between fluency and comprehension ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), confirming that students with poor decoding also struggled to understand text.

#### 4.1.3 Gender Differences

No statistically significant difference was found between male ( $n = 24$ , mean WPM = 37.5) and female ( $n = 21$ , mean WPM = 39.1) students ( $t = 0.48$ ,  $p = 0.63$ ).

### 4.2 Availability of Reading Resources

#### 4.2.1 Textbooks

The official English textbook for Grade 5 was available, but the student-to-book ratio was 1:8 (i.e., one textbook shared by eight students) during the observation period. Only 12 usable copies were found for 45 students. Teachers reported that textbooks are collected at the end of each day, preventing home reading.

#### 4.2.2 Supplementary Readers and Library

The school has no functioning library. A small cupboard contained 23 books, of which only 5 were English storybooks suitable for Grade 5. No supplementary readers or graded readers were available. During interviews, Teacher 1 stated: “There are no extra reading materials. Students only see the textbook in class.”

#### 4.2.3 Classroom Environment

Observations revealed no print-rich environment: no word walls, posters, or student-created reading displays. The only English print was a faded alphabet chart.

### 4.3 Instructional Strategies and Teacher Challenges

#### 4.3.1 Observed Teaching Methods

Two reading lessons per teacher were observed (4 lessons total). The dominant instructional pattern was:

- Choral reading (teacher reads sentence, students repeat) – occurred in all lessons, taking 60% of reading instructional time.
- Literal questioning (e.g., “What is the boy’s name?”) – 85% of questions asked.
- No explicit strategy instruction – Teaching of predicting, inferencing, or summarizing was not observed in any lesson.
- Very limited individual reading – Only one student per lesson was called to read aloud.

#### 4.3.2 Teacher-Reported Strategies

In interviews, both teachers mentioned using:

- “Reading aloud together” (choral)
- “Asking questions from the textbook”
- “Explaining difficult words” (translation to Meskan)

Neither teacher reported using guided reading, paired reading, or comprehension strategy lessons.

#### 4.3.3 Challenges Reported by Teachers

Major challenges identified were:

- ✓ Large class size “I cannot help each student. There are [45] in one room.” (T01)
- ✓ Lack of materials “No extra books, no charts. Only the textbook for every eight students.” (T02)
- ✓ Low student motivation “Many have given up. They say English is too hard.” (T01)
- ✓ L1 interference “Students always mix Meskan words. They think in Meskan.” (T02)
- ✓ Insufficient training “I never had a workshop on teaching reading specifically.” (T01)

### 4.4 Home Literacy Environment (Additional Finding)

From the parent questionnaire (N = 30):

- 18 parents (60%) had never completed primary school.
- Only 6 parents (20%) reported owning any books (other than religious texts) at home.
- 5 parents (16.7%) said they read something (in any language) to/with their child weekly.
- 27 parents (90%) stated they are unable to help with English homework because they do not understand English.

A Pearson correlation showed a weak but positive relationship between home literacy index (composite score) and student reading score ( $r = 0.31, p = 0.09$ ).

### 4.5 Student Questionnaire Results

#### 4.5.1 Reading Habits

Table 4.2 summarizes students’ self-reported reading habits.

Table 4.2: Student Reading Habits (N = 30)

Item	Response	Frequency	Percentage
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How often do you read English books or texts outside of class?	Every day	2	6.7%
2–3 times per week	3	10.0%	
Once a week	5	16.7%	
Rarely (less than once a week)	12	40.0%	
Never	8	26.7%	
Do you have any English storybooks of your own?	Yes	4	13.3%
No	26	86.7%	
How much time do you spend reading English texts each day (outside of school hours)?	More than 30 minutes	1	3.3%
15–30 minutes	3	10.0%	
Less than 15 minutes	8	26.7%	
None	18	60.0%	

The majority of students (40.0% rarely, 26.7% never) read English outside of class. Only 6.7% read daily. Most (86.7%) own no English storybooks of their own. 60% spend no time reading English at home.

#### 4.5.2 Attitudes Toward English Reading

Students responded to three statements using a 3-point scale (Agree, Not sure, Disagree).

Table 4.3: Student Attitudes Toward English Reading (N = 30)

Statement	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
I like reading in English.	6 (20.0%)	8 (26.7%)	16 (53.3%)
Reading in English is easy for me.	4 (13.3%)	7 (23.3%)	19 (63.3%)
I want to become a better English reader.	27 (90.0%)	2 (6.7%)	1 (3.3%)

Although 90% of students expressed a desire to improve, only 20% said they like reading in English, and only 13.3% found it easy. This indicates low intrinsic motivation but high aspiration – a gap that external support could address.

### 4.5.3 Perceived Difficulties

Students were asked: “What makes reading English difficult for you?” (multiple responses allowed). The most common difficulties were:

Table 4.4: Perceived Difficulties in English Reading (N = 30)

Difficulty	Number of students	Percentage (of 30)
I don't know the meaning of many words	27	90.0%
I read very slowly	24	80.0%
I don't understand the sentences even when I know the words	18	60.0%
I feel nervous or shy when reading aloud	15	50.0%
I have no one to help me at home	22	73.3%

Vocabulary knowledge was the most frequently cited barrier (90%), followed by reading speed (80%) and lack of home support (73.3%).

### 4.5.4 Relationship Between Student Questionnaire Responses and Reading Test Performance

A composite Student Reading Engagement Index (range 0–10) was created from items on reading frequency, owning books, and attitude. The mean index was 2.9 (SD = 1.6), indicating very low engagement. The correlation between this index and actual reading fluency (WCPM) was  $r = 0.44$  ( $p < 0.05$ ), suggesting that students who report more positive reading habits and attitudes tend to have moderately higher fluency scores.

## Chapter Five

### Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

#### 5.1 Discussion of Key Findings

##### 5.1.1 Low Reading Proficiency

The finding that 60% of Grade 5 students read below 40 WPM and 66.7% scored below 60% on comprehension confirms the problem stated by teachers. This aligns with national EGRA reports (USAID, 2018) but provides school-specific evidence. The moderate

correlation between fluency and comprehension supports the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986): weak decoding constrains comprehension.

#### 5.1.2 Severe Resource Constraints

The textbook ratio of 1:8 and absence of a library are more severe than reported in some national surveys. This directly limits opportunities for repeated reading and independent practice, which are essential for automaticity (Scarborough, 2001).

#### 5.1.3 Teacher-Centered, Strategy-Poor Instruction

The observed dominance of choral reading and literal questioning reflects what Bishop (2020) called “low-yield practices.” Without explicit teaching of comprehension strategies, students cannot transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Teachers’ reported lack of training in reading instruction is a critical system failure.

#### 5.1.4 Weak Home Literacy Environment

The finding that only 16.7% of parents engage in any home reading activity mirrors studies in rural Ethiopia (Alamer, 2021). However, many parents are willing to help but lack English skills. This suggests a need for alternative forms of support (e.g., oral storytelling in Meskan, monitoring attendance).

#### 5.1.5 Student questionnaire findings

The student questionnaire revealed a striking gap: although 90% of students wanted to become better readers, only 20% liked reading in English and only 13.3% found it easy. This “aspiration-ability gap” is consistent with Fisseha Mikre (2011), who found low intrinsic motivation due to lack of interesting books. The finding that 90% of students identified vocabulary as their main difficulty aligns with the low comprehension scores reported in Section 4.1.2. Furthermore, the moderate correlation ( $r = 0.44$ ) between self-reported reading engagement and actual fluency suggests that even small improvements in motivation and practice could yield measurable gains – a hopeful sign for intervention.

#### 5.1.6 Interaction of Factors

The data show that no single factor explains poor reading. Rather, resource scarcity limits practice, ineffective instruction fails to build skills, and weak home support provides no reinforcement. These three factors form a vicious cycle.

### 5.2 Conclusion

This study investigated factors affecting English reading skills of Grade 5 students at Mika'elo Primary School. The main conclusions are:

1. Proficiency is critically low: Most students read below grade-level fluency and comprehension benchmarks.
2. Resources are extremely limited: Textbook shortage and no library.
3. Instruction is largely ineffective: Rote, teacher-centered methods dominate; no comprehension strategy instruction.
4. Home environment offers minimal support: Most parents lack literacy in English and few books are available at home.
5. The problem is systemic and multifactorial: Isolated interventions will likely fail; coordinated action on resources, teacher training, and family engagement is required.

### 5.3 Recommendations

#### For School Administrators

- Establish a classroom lending library using low-cost or donated graded readers (e.g., from Save the Children, USAID).
- Schedule daily 20-minute independent reading time using any available texts.
- Create print-rich classrooms with word walls, student writing displays, and labeled objects.

#### For Teachers

- Implement explicit comprehension strategy instruction (predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarizing) using the “I do, we do, you do” model.
- Replace some choral reading with paired reading and echo reading to increase individual practice.
- Use L1 (Meskan) strategically for pre-teaching vocabulary and discussing story content, not for direct translation of every word.

#### For Woreda Education Office

- Provide in-service training for Grade 5 English teachers on evidence-based reading instruction (phonics, fluency, comprehension strategies).
- Supply supplementary readers (at least 1 book per child per term) to schools.
- Monitor textbook distribution to ensure ratio  $\leq 1:3$ .

#### For Parents and Community

- Organize parent awareness sessions (in Meskan) demonstrating how to support reading even if illiterate: asking about pictures, telling oral stories, praising effort.
- Establish a community reading corner with a few books, managed by volunteer parents.

### 5.4 Limitations of the Study

- Single school case study – Findings are not generalizable to other schools or regions.
- Cross-sectional design – Cannot establish causation (e.g., whether low resources cause low reading or vice versa).
- Small sample size – Limited statistical power for subgroup analyses.
- Potential social desirability bias – Teachers may have altered instruction during observations (Hawthorne effect).
- Measuring only English reading – Did not assess mother-tongue (Meskan) literacy, which may mediate L2 reading.

### 5.5 Suggestions for Future Research

- Intervention study: Introduce a teacher training + book supply program and measure impact over one year.
- Longitudinal study: Follow this cohort through Grade 6 to track reading growth.
- Comparative study: Compare reading skills across three schools with different resource levels.
- Mother-tongue assessment: Examine relationship between Meskan reading proficiency and English reading achievement.

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