

# Enhancing early grade reading development: A call for education reform and innovation

Reda Darge Negasi (Ph.D.) 

Professor, Department of Psychology, College of Education, Bahir Dar University; Lead Guest Editor, Special Issue II, Bahir Dar Journal of Education

## Abstract

Welcome to the May issue of Bahir Dar Journal of Education. The present issue is a special issue focusing on the theme "Early Grade Reading Development". In this issue, we present five research articles that examine crucial topics in early-grade reading development. Authored by a total of 13 scholars from four universities in Ethiopia and Norway, the articles provide a comprehensive exploration of the complexities surrounding early-grade reading. They also offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of this critical issue and shed light on the various factors that influence early-grade reading development in Ethiopia and beyond.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 15 May, 2024

Accepted: 25 May, 2024

## KEYWORDS


Early grade reading; writing skill.

## Introduction

The ability to read is a fundamental skill for children, serving as the foundation for their academic growth and independent learning (Antoni & Heineck, 2012; DES, 2011; French, 2013). Proficiency in reading empowers students to excel in all academic endeavors. Developing reading skills, which involve decoding, interpreting, and comprehending written texts, is crucial for academic, social, and economic success. Despite its importance, reading proficiency continues to be a persistent challenge. As many research reports revealed, students in many countries around the world spend several years in school without achieving basic reading skills (MoE, 2011; AIR, 2019).

To address this challenge, a comprehensive strategy is urgently needed. Factors such as inadequate teacher training, limited parental support, and ineffective teaching methods contribute to the issue. Consequently, ongoing research into effective approaches to enhance early-grade reading is of utmost importance.

In its commitment to disseminate impactful research that enhances educational practices and informs policy-making initiatives, the Bahir Dar Journal of Education dedicates this special issue to the development of early-grade reading. In this special issue, we aimed to provide a valuable platform for sharing cutting-edge research that highlights the intricacies of this critical period in a child's educational journey.

**CONTACT** RedaDargeNegasi  [reda\\_darge@yahoo.com](mailto:reda_darge@yahoo.com)

© 2024 The Author (s). **Open Access.** This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons AttributionNonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/bdje.v24i2.1>



The opening article of this issue explores the influence of orthographic depth on early grade students' reading of words and non-words in Sidaama and English languages. Using a mixed methods approach, the authors (Samrawit Bekele Demissie, Abraha Asfaw Ambaye, and Ingvill Krogstad Svanes) found that students in Sidaama language, with its transparent orthography, demonstrated higher accuracy in both word and non-word reading compared to English, which has a deeper orthography. The results of this study suggest that the orthographic disparities between the two languages posed challenges for students in decoding words and non-words, confirmed by teacher interviews and classroom observations.

Motivated by concerns over low literacy achievement in mother tongue languages, the authors of the second article, i.e., Nigist Gedife Hunegnaw, Elena Tkachenko, and Emilia Andersson-Bakken examine explicit reading instruction in Grade 1 Amharic classrooms in Ethiopia. Using a qualitative case study design, the study found variations in implementation, with modeling, discussion, feedback, and guided practice as the most prominent instructional moves. The content focused primarily on grapho-phonological aspects, with external factors like lack of materials and teacher competence influencing practices. The study provides a descriptive foundation for future research and highlights the need for policy changes and interventions to improve literacy instruction.

The article by Samuel Belayneh Kame, Mulugeta Tarekegne Tsegaye, Mona Evelyn Flognfeldt, and Margareth Sandvik, on the other hand, analyses the 2016 Ethiopian Ministry of Education guidelines for developing and selecting supplementary reading materials. The study finds that the guidelines promote a simplistic view of reading, overlooking the affective dimension. The study argues for an active approach that creates a more engaging textual experience and supports reading development, with implications for teacher training. The findings highlight the need to align policies with current research on the science of reading.

Coming to the fourth article, the author, Chanyalew Enyew Adamu, examines the impact of word attack instructional strategies in improving Grade 6 students' reading skills. Using a mixed methods approach, the study found that the implementation of meaning attack and visual attack strategies significantly enhanced students' reading performance, self-confidence, motivation, and participation. While the quantitative results showed improvement in reading, the qualitative findings obtained from observations and interviews confirmed the positive impact of the intervention. The findings indicate that incorporating word attack strategies into reading instruction can significantly enhance students' reading abilities and overall literacy experiences.

Finally, in the fifth article, Etagegne Gedefaw Getahun and Getachew Endalamaw Asefaw investigate the impact of the interactive writing instructional method on the Amharic writing skills of hearing-impaired students. Using a single-group experimental design with a small sample of participants selected through a comprehensive sampling technique, the study analyzed pre-and post-test data with a paired sample t-test, revealing a significant improvement in writing ability when the intervention was implemented. The findings suggest that the interactive writing instructional approach promoted the Amharic writing skills of students with hearing impairment.

In sum, the authors of the articles featured in this special issue emphasize the need for a multifaceted approach to early grade reading development in Ethiopia. They also came up with evidence-based recommendations to address the challenges posed by orthographic

depth, improve teacher training and instructional materials, and promote a holistic understanding of reading development aimed at empowering early grade students to become confident and competent readers, equipped to excel in their future academic pursuits.

As we reflect on the findings presented in this issue, we are reminded of the urgent need for policy changes and practical interventions aimed at enhancing teachers' competence and improving the provision of adequate literacy instructional materials. We hope that this special issue will contribute to a renewed focus on early grade reading development in Ethiopia and inspire educators, policymakers, and researchers to work together towards creating a more literate and equitable society where all children have access to quality education.

## References

- AIR- American Institutes for Research. (2019). *Early grade reading assessment (EGRA) 2018 end line report. USAID reading for Ethiopia's achievement developed monitoring and evaluation.* <https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1865/Ethiopia-Early-Grade-Reading-Assessment-2018.pdf>
- Antoni, M., & Heineck, G. (2012). *Do literacy and numeracy pay off? On the relationship between basic skills and earnings.* <https://docs.iza.org/dp6882.pdf>
- DES- Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011- 2020.* <https://assets.gov.ie/24521/9e0e6e3887454197a1da1f9736c01557.pdf>
- French, G. (2013). Early literacy and numeracy matters. From *Journal of Early Childhood Studies* (OMEP), 7, 31-49. <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1065&context=aaschsslarts>
- MoE- Ministry of Education. (2011). *Ethiopia's education system presented for the international literacy day.* [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Ethiopia\\_Fuad\\_Ibrahim.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Ethiopia_Fuad_Ibrahim.pdf)