

# Appropriateness of Passages for Students and Teachers in Abomsa Government and Private Primary Schools: EFL Teaching and Learning Materials for Ethiopia Grade 2 and 3

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## Abstract

*Throughout the history of SLA research, the worthiness and unworthiness of textbooks have been documented well. A well-prepared textbook is considered as a compass for teachers and students showing where to begin and where to end their lessons. The focus of the present study was on investigating the difficulty level of the reading and the listening passages of EFL textbooks. For this purpose, data were collected through questionnaire from 26 EFL teachers from four primary schools in Abomsa, Ethiopia. Classroom observations were also made to see how teachers and students are able to read the passages. Moreover, the selected reading and listening sections of grade two and grade three EFL textbooks for Ethiopia were evaluated in depth. The finding shows that the passages in the textbooks are found to be difficult for both the target students and their teachers although the difficulty level varies. In the passages, complex and very long sentences found which were difficult to be understood by grade two and grade three EFL students. Since most of the comprehension questions require higher thinking ability, students faced problem on answering them. Recommendations were provided based on the findings.*

**Key words: EFL Textbooks, reading passages, EFL Teachers, EFL Students**

## Introduction

Throughout the history of second language acquisition (SLA) research, merits and demerits of textbook usage in the school have been discussed. A textbook, the most central element of the curriculum, is used as a compass for teachers and students showing where to begin and where to end their lessons. This is because, it is a readily accessible resource of teaching material that is supportive for teachers to deliver their lessons effectively (McGrath, 2006), as well as it is a motivating and a stimulating force for language learners. The EFL textbooks are also helpful for the learners so that they use it outside the classroom for rereading texts and practicing different activities. This becomes true, as suggested by Miekley (2005) if it is prepared and chosen suitably. However, if the preparation is below or above the level of both the teachers' and the students' understanding, instead of being a compass, it can be the source of confusion and discouragement; as a result, it may lead students to the failure of learning.

Nowadays, EFL textbook is playing a pivotal role in providing foreign language teachers with guidelines concerning syllabus, teaching methodologies and the materials to be taught. Regardless of its importance if its preparation is not encouraging the teachers, it may be the source of uncertainty. This confusion transferred to students and discourages them not only to learn the language in general but also the language skills in specific.

To see whether the textbook is effective or not, there is a need for evaluation. What is evaluation and how it is taken place and by whom it should be done? Evaluation is the process of investigation of something whether it is prepared in terms of the intended

purpose and the person belongs to. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987) cited in Fatima, Shah and Sultan (2015), "Evaluation is the matter of judging the fitness of something for a particular purpose". Thus, the textbook should be evaluated to provide a judgment on its suitability to the students and teachers' needs, interest and understanding level. Textbook may be evaluated by the teachers, the writers or the researchers. With whomever the textbook is evaluated, according to (Fatima, et al., 2015) authenticity, difficulty level of the words, the grammars, the tasks, the topics should be checked in terms of students' needs and interest. In general, an evaluation of the textbook should be made paying special attention on its contents, organizations, effectiveness and appropriateness to the target learners age and cognitive level (Dereje, 2012), and the teacher's qualification as well.

A textbook can be evaluated before, during or after actual application (Grant, 1987; Tomlinson, 2003). According to Lawrence (2011), the finding of textbook evaluation is crucial in order to create understanding for the teachers to make appropriate revision and using other additional materials for their classroom delivery. Additionally, textbook evaluation tells the book writers to revise it again and made improvement in order to achieve the intended goal of education. However, the main inquiry should be what are the methods of textbook evaluations? In the literature there exist different types of textbook evaluation methods which are differently classified—impressionistic method, checklist method, and in-depth method (Fatima, Shah & Sultan, 2015); predictive and retrospective (Ellis, 1997); and theoretical and empirical (Karamoozian and Riazi, 2008; Nguyen, 2015).

"Impressionistic reading textbook evaluation method is concerned to obtain a general impression of the material and involves glancing at the publisher's blurb and content pages of each textbook, and then skimming throughout the book looking at various features of it" (Fatima, et al., 2015: 3). As to Miekley (2005), checklist method of textbook evaluation is crucial not only for evaluating but also for selecting appropriate EFL reading material. When a predictive textbook evaluation is deployed so that decision is to be made what materials to be used, an introspective evaluation is, on the other hand, made in order to examine the textbook that has been applied in actual use (Ellis, 1997). The first type of evaluation is most often applied by the text writers or the curriculum designers when the second type of evaluation most of the time is done by the classroom teacher. A textbook evaluation method applied using the researcher's experience, expertise and literature on the area refers theoretical evaluation; whereas, a textbook evaluation made using the users of the textbook such as teachers and students as a source of information refers to empirical textbook evaluation (Nguyen, 2015).

Teachers are required to evaluate the textbooks they are using to address their subject to their students while and post usage. Hence, an effective classroom teacher should evaluate the textbook he/she is using in order to provide the course being taught using different principles. Likewise, researchers may conduct a textbook evaluation for the sake of getting their degree. According Ellis to (1997), such kind of textbook evaluation may be applied using impressionistic or empirical methods. The later one can be applied by investigating specific teaching task.

Aiming at investigating the perceptions of teachers and students for grade 12 EFL student's Textbook for Ethiopia, Abebe (2016) made textbook evaluation applying a survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as data collection tools for the selected 100 students and 4 teachers from Addis Ketema Secondary and Preparatory School in Hawassa, Ethiopia. According to the finding, although the teachers and the students had positive perceptions towards the textbook, they commented a significant number of drawbacks of the textbooks. The book had no glossary lists; the allotted time is not enough to cover the contents in the course, there are no model questions for achievement test, the listening texts placed in the teacher's guidebook are not included, and there is no pronunciation lesson.

Hailu (2008) conducted a textbook evaluation for his MA thesis aiming at investigating the level of the quality of Grade 11 EFL textbook for Ethiopia. He selected 60 grade 11 students, 10 EFL teachers, 15 external evaluators, and applied questionnaire and

textbook analysis checklist as data collecting instruments. The finding from the data analyzed deploying qualitative and quantitative methods reveal that the evaluated textbook had no good level of quality. In the textbook, the tasks lacked genuine communication, some of the language skills did not fit the needs of the students, many of the topics and the contents did not consider the interest and the culture of the students.

Although language learning involves the four language skills such as listening, speaking, writing and reading, in the current review receptive skills were focused on. Therefore, the purpose of the present study was evaluating the appropriateness and the effectiveness of the passages included in grade two and grade three learning and teaching EFL materials—students' textbooks and teachers' guide to the target students and the teachers. This is because the researcher observed that most of the students are reluctant to read school textbook perhaps considering it is too difficult to be read. According to Harrison (2004), "school texts were often 'inconsiderate' in that they were unhelpful to readers, either because they did not give the reader signposts to the structure of the argument of the text or because they did not have a clear or coherent structure in the first place". In the mentioned textbooks there are two types of passages: reading and listening.

These learning and teaching materials were selected to be evaluated whether the preparation and the section of the passages were in terms of the grade level of the target students or not. Moreover, the appropriateness of the tasks emanated from the texts was also evaluated in terms of the grade level of the target students.

In other words, this study focused on the readability of the passages in the aforementioned textbooks for both teachers and students. What is readability and how it is measured? According to Richards et al. (1992:306), readability can be defined as "how easily written materials can be read and understood. This depends on several factors including the average length of sentences, the number of new words contained, and the grammatical complexity of the language used in a passage." This means, the readability of the reading passage can be measured by assessing the length of the words, the sentences and the types of grammar included in the text in accordance with its target readers. Therefore, using this definition of readability as a model, the following research questions were formulated.

1. Are the passages in the textbooks appropriate to the grade level of the students?
2. Are the comprehension questions suitable for the grade level of the students?
3. Are the passages in the textbooks are compatible with the language command of the EFL teachers in the school?

### **Research Design and Methodology**

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. Data were collected from teachers using survey questionnaire and from the textbooks using depth evaluation of the passages of grade two and grade three for Ethiopia students' EFL textbooks and teacher's guide. In other words, an empirical and theoretical method of textbook evaluation methods were applied (Nguyen, 2015).

### **Samples and Sampling Techniques**

#### **Teacher Participants**

26 EFL teachers were selected from four Primary schools in Abomsa town, Ethiopia—Abomsa Number 1, 2, and 3 government schools and Robot private school using available sampling technique. These teachers had a certificate (1), diploma (12) and degree (13), and their age categories were between 20 and 61 years. The majority of these teachers 16 (61.5%) had 18 and above years of teaching experience when 2 (7.7%), 5 (19.2%) and 3 (11.5%) were with of 6-9 years, 10-13 years and 14-17 years of teaching experience respectively. The participant EFL teachers were trained in different fields of study. Half of the teachers 13

(50) were trained in English language when 4 (15.4) in Amharic language, 1 (3.8%) in Afan Oromo, 4 (15.4%) in language stream—English, Afan Oromo, and Amharic languages, and 4 (15.4%) in Civics, Business, EDPM and General Course.

### Student Participants

With different preschool backgrounds, 118 grade four Abomsa Number one primary school students were participated in the study. More than half of the students 64 (54.2%) went neither to kindergarten nor to zero class schools; they began the class from grade one. When 32 (27.1) of the students went to kindergarten, 22 (18.6%) of them went to zero class before they went to formal school. These students were most of the time allowed to stay in zero class for a year only due to the shortage of class and teachers in the schools. These students had low reading ability as indicated in the finding of Melese (2018a), the current article is the continuation of the previous article.

### Data collecting Instruments

A survey questionnaire was applied to collect quantitative data from EFL teachers. Grade two and grade three students' EFL textbooks were selected to be evaluated in correspondence with their teacher guides. Since these books have 14 and 12 units respectively, from each material half of the units (1-7 and 1-6) were selected for evaluation purpose as a sample. When data were collected from both the EFL teachers and the textbooks, the target students were in grade four who had taken the reading test in the previous article.

### Data collecting and analysis Procedures

In order to deal with the area of this theme, data were collected through questionnaire from EFL teachers. The collected data were analyzed applying frequency and percent following the research questions of the study. Then, so that these data were substantiated, both teachers and students books were analyzed qualitatively. The analysis was focused on the length and the contents of the listening and the reading passages, the selection of the words (the type and the number of syllables), and construction of the sentences (the complexity level).

### Major Findings

#### The appropriateness of passages in the textbooks for the students' understanding level

Table 1: Appropriateness of the listening and the reading passages to the students' grade level

| Statements   | All |      | Half |      | Quarter |      | None |      |
|--|-----|------|------|------|---------|------|------|------|
|  | F   | %    | F    | %    | F       | %    | F    | %    |
| The passages in the textbooks students are pleased to read   | 2   | 7.7  | 17   | 65.4 | 4       | 15.4 | 3    | 11.5 |
| The contents of the passages in the EFL textbooks that considered the grade level of the target students | 5   | 19.5 | 8    | 30.8 |         | 23.1 | 7    | 26.9 |
| The length of the passages in the EFL textbooks that considered the grade level of the target students   | 3   | 11.5 | 12   | 46.2 | 4       | 15.4 | 7    | 26.9 |
| The passages in the EFL textbooks the target students can read and listen                                | 4   | 15.4 | 3    | 11.5 | 8       | 30.8 | 11   | 42.3 |

As shown in Table 1, half of the listening and the reading passages in the textbooks are interesting for the students. The majority of the teachers 17 (65.4%) selected the option **half** when 4 (15.4), 3(11.5%) and 2 (7.7%) selected the options **quarter**, **none** and **all** respectively.

Moreover, 5 (19.5%), 8 (30.8%), 6 (23.1%) and 7 (26%) of EFL teachers responded for the question which inquires the relevance of the contents of the listening and the reading passages to the grade level of the target students **all**, **half**, **quarter**, and **none** respectively. The result shows that 50% of the respondents replied above the average (all and half) and at the same time 50% of them responded below the average (quarter and none). Therefore, the majority of the contents of the passages in the textbooks are considered to be difficult for the students when almost less than half of the contents are prepared based on the understanding level of the students.

As can be noticed in Table 1, the majority of the teachers 12 (46.2%) indicated that the half of the length of the passages in the students textbooks were prepared by focusing on the grade level of the students. Writing in another way, according to the respondents, half of the passages (in terms of length) in the materials were not selected based on the grade level of the target students. Students' reading skills achievement might be influenced negatively due to two factors: readers' variable and passages' variables. According to Anderson (2000), the former factors are the reader's background knowledge, abilities, skills, motivation, and attitudes; whereas, the latter factors include the passages' content, length, type, genre, organization, typographical features, and readability.

This means the length of the passage can affect the reading or the listening comprehension of the students either negatively or positively. A study conducted by Wayland et al. (2013) shows that text length has a negative effect on the students' listening comprehension test performance on recall items but not on multiple choice items. This is perhaps students may respond to the multiple item questions by guessing, but they don't have any opportunity to guess for recalling items. The passage may be too long or too short. Long passages may discourage students to read or to listen to, the same is true for short passages. Since the latter ones are below the level of the students, they may not give special attention to the listening or the reading classes. For illustration, if advanced readers or university students are given kids' stories to listen to and read in the classrooms, it is noticeable that they do not do the activities by paying special attention. Moreover, students of grade two or three if they are told to read or to listen to about scientific findings or how to conduct research, the reading or the listening activities, particularly for the EFL and the ESL learners, is deteriorating their interest.

The teacher participants witnessed that one fourth of their students were able to read and listen to the passages in the textbooks with understanding. Of the 26 EFL teachers, 8 (30.8%) and 11 (42.3%) responded quarter and none of their students were able to read and listen to with understanding the reading or the listening passages. This result evidenced that due to the tedious length of the passages, students were discouraged to read or to listen to.

Exploring some of the listening passages of grade two EFL textbook would be critical to strengthen this finding. In the first unit of lesson 4, a story is displayed entitled as "**The Lost Butterfly**" with three paragraphs and 125 words written into two pages (MOE, 2010:4-5— SB, Grade two). In this reading lesson, it is the teacher who reads the passage while the students listen to. The teacher is requested to read the story four times. When the teacher reads at the first time, he/she is suggested to tell the students to listen to the story. Before the teacher reads for the second time, he/she is required to tell the students to listen to the names of classroom objects and the prepositions that are used to express location. The teacher should tell the student to raise their hands when they hear the names of classroom objects and clap for [position words or prepositions].

Then, the teacher is stipulated to explain the meanings of "**lost and butterfly**" by showing students the picture of the insect in the students' textbook (page 4) by acting out as he/she was looking for his/her pen and finding it again.

The presentation of the listening passage is ongoing. As soon as finishing reading the passage for the second time, the teacher was suggested to ask his/her students to name the objects and the position words that showed positions in the story. While the students

were saying the objects and the position words, the teacher was required to write them on the blackboard. Moreover, the teacher was requested to read the story out loud to the students for the third time and order students to move their hands or their fingers on the position words although it was difficult to check whether they move on the right words or not.

Moreover, the activities of the listening passage were suggested to be read by the teacher while the students listen to in the next lesson (Lesson five, page 11 on TG; Page, 6 on SB), that is for the fourth time. Then, the teacher was recommended to ask his/her students about fourteen comprehension questions listed down in the TG page 12 which its attainment is in question.

As can be understood from the above discussion, the students were suggested to be provided with a long listening passage. Not only reading about four times but also if it had to be read hundred times if the listeners were unable to understand, what could be the merits of reading or listening for the teachers and the students? Such kinds of listening activities may be suitable for native speakers of primary students or for intermediate EFL students because they might be able to notice the words easily and able to listen to and understand at ease due to their good command of the English language.

Besides the length of the listening and the reading passages in general, the words and the sentences included in the texts are also too long and complex. The following excerpts are the manifestation of the unnecessary length of the sentences which didn't consider the grade level and the language command of the target students.

Table 2: Example Sentences excerpted from Grade Two EFL Students' Textbooks

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hakim asks Yonas to watch his goats and sheep while he gathers firewood for his family.</li> <li>2. Yonas knows he must get the animals to the watering hole before the sun gets stronger.</li> <li>3. He says, "Hakim, I am so glad you have come to the watering hole and that you have found my missing sheep"</li> </ol> |
|--|

Source: (MOE, 2010:20 and 22—SB, Grade 2)

As can be noticed, sentence number one is a complex sentence with one independent sentence (Hakim asks Yonas to watch his goats and sheep), and one dependent sentence (While he gathers firewood for his family). A complex sentence is to be constructed from one or more dependent sentences and only one independent sentence (Andersen, 2004). Even the first simple sentence is difficult to be understood by grade two students who began learning English a year ago. The students were given to listen with understanding the complex words and phrases, for example, firewood, watering hole, gets stronger, my missing sheep, while, etc.

In this grade level, it was essential if they were provided with simple sentences. The first sentence can be broken into two simple sentences that may fit the command of language skills of grade two students in most of government schools especially in rural area and small towns of Ethiopia (in such schools most children begin their learning in grade one without going to pre-primary school).

1.1. Hakim asks Yonas to watch his goats and sheep. 1.2. He gathers firewood for his family.

Moreover, the second sentence is too difficult to be understood by the mentioned students because the sentence construction is too complicated and the words are confusing. This sentence is compound complex in its grammatical structure with two independent sentences "Yonas knows" and "He must get the animals to the watering hole", and one dependent sentence "Before the sun gets stronger". The word "get" for example, is the source of confusion due to its different meanings in both clauses. Therefore, in this

grade level, students should be provided with concrete words, if not, instead of teaching them, the process of instruction would be discouraging or inspiring the students to hate the language. So that the target students are able to listen and understand, the second sentence can be broken as follow.

2.1. Yonas knows. 2.2. He must take the animals to the watering hole. 2.3. The sun is stronger.

A similar problem was found in the EFL textbook of Grade three students of Ethiopia. The reading passages are full of long sentences that might de-motivate children’s reading interest specially who didn’t attend kindergarten. In Unit three of grade three students’ English textbook, there is a reading passage titled as “**My Little Sister**” with four paragraphs consisting of 51, 58, 37 and 22 words in each paragraph (MOE, 2011:43, SB, Grade 3). It is better to explore additional reading passage in the same grade level and in the same unit titled as “**The Fishy River**” classified into four paragraphs with 74, 62, 71 and 83 words in each paragraph.

Table 3: Example Sentences excerpted from Grade Three EFL Students’ Textbook

|   |
|---|
| 1. Good students must stay on their seats, listen carefully, speak quietly, and study.                          |
| 2. “We will return exactly in one hour, and I am sure I will catch the biggest fish our village has ever seen!” |
| 3. “We have been patient, and our patience has brought us the biggest fish our village has ever seen!”          |
| 4. Our aunts tell us that our grandparents want everyone to work hard to make a good life for themselves.       |

Source: (MOE, 201:52-53—SB Grade Two)

As can be noticed in Table 3, all of the sentences are assumed to be difficult to be understood not only by the students but also by the teachers. The four extracted sentences from grade three EFL textbook listed in the table are simple, compound, compound and complex. Even though the first sentence is simple in its grammatical structure, it is too long with different parts of speech or language aspects. This sentence has four predicates. So that the message of this sentence is to be recognized by the target students, it should be broken into four sentences like; (1) Good students must stay on their seats; (2) Good students must listen carefully; (3) Good students must speak quietly; and (4) Good students must study.

In addition to the structural complexity of the sentences, the word selection is also one of the de-motivating factors for students to read. For illustration, the word **patience** and **patient** in the fourth sentence may not be recognized by these students in whatever method they are taught. Although discussing the grammar is not the issue of this paper, the tense used in the sentence 3 (future and present perfect) and in the sentence 4 (present perfect) are totally unsuitable to the grade level of the students. Therefore, it was found that both the reading and the listening passages in the textbooks are not prepared based on the age and the grade level of the students. Similar study but different grade level, Hailu (2012) ’s, grade 11 English textbook evaluation study shows that the selection of texts, topics, and contents for presenting some language skills for the target learners did not consider the needs, interest and the culture of the students.

**The Appropriateness of the Tasks from the passages to the EFL Learners**

Table 4: The Appropriateness of the Tasks Emanated from the passages Students

| Statements | All |   | Half |   | quarter |   | None |   |
|------------|-----|---|------|---|---------|---|------|---|
|            | F   | % | F    | % | F       | % | F    | % |
|            |     |   |      |   |         |   |      |   |

|   |   |      |   |      |   |      |    |      |
|---|---|------|---|------|---|------|----|------|
| The students who are able to answer most of the questions from listening and reading passages in the student's EFL textbooks. | 3 | 11.5 | 6 | 23.1 | 7 | 26.9 | 10 | 38.5 |
| The students raised their hands to answer questions after listening and reading the passages in the students' EFL textbooks.  | 1 | 3.8  | 7 | 26.9 | 8 | 30.8 | 10 | 38.5 |

The focus of this theme was on investigating the appropriateness of the tasks drawn from both the reading and the listening passages for the target students. Data were collected through questionnaire from EFL teachers and from textbooks of grade two and grade three through detailed analysis method.

As displayed in Table 4, nearly two-thirds of EFL teachers showed that their students were not able to answer most of the questions emanated from the listening and the reading passages. The significant number of teachers 10 (38.5%) replied that all of their students could not do the activities taken from the listening and the reading passages in the textbooks, and 7 (26.9%) of the teachers responded only one-fourth of their students were able to answer most of the questions prepared from the passages. Similarly, according to a good number of teachers 6 (23.1%), half of their students were able to answer most of the questions from the passages, and a few teachers 3(11.5%) showed that all their students were able to answer most of the questions.

Likewise, most of the students were not voluntary to answer questions taken from the listening and the reading passages. As shown in Table 2, most of the teacher respondents 10 (38.8) replied that **all of** their students did not raise their hands to answer both listening and reading comprehension questions. Also, a good number of teachers 8 (30.8%) responded that the majority of the students (**three-fourth**) were not voluntary to answer comprehension questions after they listened and read passages. Almost one-fourth of teachers 7 (26.9%) said that half of their students raise their hands to answer questions both after listening and reading lessons.

To sum up, students had low command of language to answer the questions emanated from the passages prepared for delivering listening and reading skills. The evidence from the teacher's guidebook shows that students are reluctant to answer questions from the passages due to the difficultness and the number of the questions included. In the listening passage presented in grade two EFL teacher's guidebook, the comprehension questions which are suggested to be answered by the students are 14 in number. Of this number of questions, some of them need higher thinking ability of the students to be answered. As be shown below, the six questions (taken from grade two and grade three TG and SB) to be answered, students need to think highly because the answers for the questions could not be found in the listening or in the reading passages.

**Table 3: Sample Questions from Grade 2 and Grade 3 EFL Teaching and Learning Materials**

|  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you feel when you lose something?</li> <li>2. How do you think Yonas feels when a sheep is missing?</li> <li>3. What do you think Geleta eats if he does not catch any fish?</li> <li>4. Do you think Assiya is [a] good student? Why?</li> <li>5. How do you think Amina feels as she starts to walk through the woods to visit her grandmother? Find clues in the story</li> <li>6. What other lesson does the ant teach us at the end of the story?</li> </ol> |
|--|

Source: (MOE, 2010:12, 36, 105—TG Grade 2; MOE, 2011:50, 81—TG, SB: 50 Grade 3)

They are required to analyze the questions after listening or reading the passages thoroughly with understanding so that they are able to answer the questions presented in Table 4. Nevertheless, analyzing listening and reading texts need a good command of language ability. According to Medjahdi (2015), if the length of the reading passage and the students' level of reading ability do not match, the students' reading achievement can be affected negatively. Students in these grade levels are not fluent users of the English language but may be of their first language. Therefore, how such students with such command of English language ability are able to answer those types of questions? As the questions are read, there is a need for higher thinking ability in order to answer them. Listening skill is more difficult even for higher grade level of the students; hence the prepared questions to be answered by the students are above their level of reading ability.

#### Appropriateness of the passages in the Students' EFL Textbooks for Teachers

To achieve this theme of the study four questions were provided to be answered by the aforementioned EFL teachers. Their responses were also presented in Table 5. Moreover, for triangulating the result from the teachers' response to the questionnaire, classroom observations were made with some of the selected teachers.

Table 5. The appropriateness of Textbooks for the teachers

| Statements  | All |      | Half |      | Quarter |      | None |   |
|---|-----|------|------|------|---------|------|------|---|
|   | F   | %    | F    | %    | F       | %    | F    | % |
| The contents of students' EFL textbooks EFL teachers are able to read with understanding.             | 17  | 65.4 | 6    | 23.1 | 3       | 11.5 | --   |   |
| The passages in the students' EFL textbooks EFL teachers can read with understanding.                 | 11  | 42.3 | 8    | 30.8 | 7       | 26.9 | --   |   |
| The questions of the exercises in the students' EFL textbooks EFL teachers are able to answer easily. | 13  | 50   | 5    | 19.5 | 8       | 30.8 | --   |   |

As can be noticed in Table 3.3, the majority of the teachers 17 (65.4%) were able to read all contents of the student's EFL textbooks they are using when delivering the lesson for the students. Moreover, a good number of the teachers 6 (23.1%) responded as they were able to read and understand half of the contents of the mentioned textbooks. A few of the teachers 3 (11.5%) replied as they are able to read one-fourth of the contents of the textbooks. These teachers may be teachers of other school subjects or with a low educational background. As shown in the methodology section of this paper about one-third of the teachers were trained in different fields of study, but they are given to teach English language due to the shortage of the trained EFL teachers. As the interview result shows, the majority of the teachers were not voluntary to teach the English language. The majority of these teachers, including the English language graduates, were not interested in teaching English. Most of them reasoned out that students are weak in English and the textbooks are difficult for the students to be understood.

Pertaining to the reading and the listening passages, the EFL teachers were asked how many of the passages in the textbooks can be read by them easily. Nearly half of the teachers 11 (42.3%) responded as they were able to read all of the passages prepared for the teaching of reading and listening skills in the textbooks. Almost one-third of the teachers 9 (34.6%) replied that they were able to read the half of the texts with understanding when one-fourth of the teachers 6 (23.1%) responded as they were able to read one-fourth of the passages in the textbooks with understanding. To explore the understanding level of the teachers and the difficulty level of the passages in the textbooks, another question was raised whether the teachers are able to answer the questions emanated from the listening and the reading passages without big effort. Table 3.3 shows that half of the teachers 13 (50%) were

able to provide answers for all of the questions taken from the mentioned textbooks prepared for evaluating the comprehension level of the students at ease. One-fifth of the teachers 5 (19.5%) were able to answer the half of the comprehension questions without difficulty; whereas, a significant number of teachers 8 (31%) replied that, they were able to do the one-fourth of comprehension exercises without big effort.

To examine whether these results were really true or not, classroom observations were made with some randomly selected teachers. The purpose the observation was twofold. One was in order to explore the reading and listening ability of both teachers and the students. The other one was exploring the usage of the textbook and the teacher guide in the classroom. As pointed above most of the teachers never use teacher guide, they teach only using the students textbook. The textbooks merely included tasks or activities, grammars, reading and listening passages. However, the objectives, the patterns of languages, the assessment techniques, and the teaching methods were included in the teacher's guide. Therefore, in spite of its difficultness, without using the teacher's guidebook, it is impossible to address the intended objectives of the curriculum.

The following are some of classroom observation events. Teachers read the passage to the students, they asked questions from the listening passages in the textbooks, few students attempted the answers, and the majority of the students sat idle, and finally, the teachers gave answers for some of the questions and gave the rest of the questions to the students as homework.

In the following periods, teachers asked their students orally and sometimes by moving around the class and checking their exercise books to see whether the students did the given homework or not. Then, two or more clever students were asked to read their homework or to answer the questions and some of the questions were answered by the teachers and rushed to the new lesson.

The first teacher was teaching English in grade three. She wrote "English" on the top of chalkboard and revised the previous lesson by remembering as they were discussed "position words" using both English and Amharic languages.

Without letting students say something about the revision, she immediately rushed to the new lesson. She let students open their textbook on page ten and see the map of Africa and the flag of Ethiopia. She then asked the number colors in the flag (e.g. **How many colors the flag has?**).

Some students answered that Ethiopian flag has three colors using their native language. Without practicing this as much as possible, the teacher wrote the title of the listening passage as follow. **Hanna goes to a new School**

Then, she read the passage by translating each sentence into the students' L1. Even though she asked her students some questions from her reading, none of the students tried to answer. After finishing the reading passage, she invited students to read like her. One of the students was voluntary to read and she gave him a chance for reading. Then, the teacher let the students give him a clamp for the student who read. Next, she invited some girls to read even a sentence, and one of the students read one sentence and got a clamp from the students. And the teacher advised the students to have reading ability. Next, she tried to motivate another student to read but none of them were voluntary to read.

Finally, she told the students to try for the following period. She tried to motivate one student but she denied for reading. The teacher told students to try for the next period and she told her hope that all of them are going to read.

Another teacher was teaching the English language in grade two. Greeting the students, writing "English" on the top of the chalkboard and asking students where the lesson was stopped, she wrote the lesson number and the title of the new lesson without waiting the students' response for the question she inquired. **English**

**Lesson Eleven: Yonas and the Animals Part 2**

After explaining the title, using both English and their mother tongue Afan Oromo, she told the students to open their textbook on page 21 and watch the pictures. She asked the whole students, “What did you see [i]n the picture?” using both languages. No one attempted to tell what was seen in the pictures. Saying nothing about the pictures, the teacher then let students read the passage, but no one was voluntary to try. Then, she read the passage and translated into Afan Oromo, the students’ L1.

Finishing reading, the teacher asked the students the meanings of the following new words from the reading passage. However, none of the students said anything about the words. As the words can be seen below, she translated some of them incorrectly.

1. watering hole – she translated wrongly
2. Counts- explained the meanings by counting students.
3. find – Translated into Oromo language (sooquu)
4. Brown- translated wrongly ‘dalachaa’ meaning-Grey
5. missing –translated “badu” meaning- lost

In the middle of this lesson, by teaching another lesson about “the numbers”, she told students to copy these words on their exercise book. After a while she let her students open their textbook on page 22 and write the topic as follow on the chalkboard.

#### **Lesson Eleven: Yonnas and the Animals (Part Three)**

Writing the title as shown above, after reading some part of the passage, she wrote, “Yonnas missed the brown sheep” and she wrote the word “calling” and she translated into students’ L1 as **baa- baa**. She then wrote the word “**glad**” on the chalkboard and asked the students its meaning and one of the students answered as it is “**Thank you**”. Accepting the answer as it was correct; she told the meaning of the word “glad” using Oromo language as it was answered by the student.

This confirms that the textbook is difficult for the EFL teachers or the teachers didn’t prepare their lessons well before delivering to the students. The observed teachers used neither the teachers’ guidebook nor the home-prepared note, but they used only the students’ textbooks. Moreover, they didn’t prepare their lesson before they went into the class. In the EFL classroom, most of the time they used students’ mother tongue for every activity. They rarely used the English language.

#### **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The focus of the present study was on investigating the difficulty level of the reading and the listening passages of EFL textbooks for grade two and grade three students in the selected schools in Ethiopia. The difficulty level of the passages in the textbooks was investigated paying special attention on the selection of words, the length of sentences, and the appropriateness of comprehension questions emanated from the said textbooks for both students and teachers. The result shows that the textbooks are not only difficult to the students but also to the teachers even though the difficulty level is less compared to the students. The good quality of textbook considers the age, the grade level, the educational background and the command of language of the users. It can be concluded that the presentation of the receptive skills for most grade two and grade three students of the selected schools in Ethiopia did not match their language ability and the textbooks can be the de-motivating factors for learning English language in general and reading and listening skills in particular despite the delightfulness of the stories in the passages.

Therefore, when textbooks are prepared a thorough need analysis must be done. Furthermore, before the prepared textbooks are applied for the whole students in the country, the books must be piloted to some groups of students considering the different context of the country, for example, rural versus urban, educated family versus uneducated family, kindergarten experience versus non-kindergarten experience, etc.

Moreover, short training should be given to the teachers how to use both the teachers’ and the students’ books before the New Year school have been begun. Providing such training may help teachers remind the good things and the bad things they made

throughout the previous year. In other words, such kind of training helps teachers to evaluate their previous works of teaching and planning the new one by avoiding the bad ones and strengthening the good ones so that effective learning and teaching processes that might lead children to be successful in their school and tomorrow lives to be taken place.

The current study was conducted in some selected few schools in Ethiopia. Therefore, it could not be concluded to all grade two and three students and EFL teachers of the country. Since the study has limitation of including different participants, other studies should be studied to fill the gap of the study.

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