

The relationship between lecturers' beliefs and their actual methods of reading instruction: An Ethiopian case study

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The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between lecturers' beliefs and the actual methods they use in teaching reading. The study, which was conducted in teacher training colleges in the Amhara Region in Ethiopia, showed quite a number of discrepancies. The findings revealed that although in many cases lecturers were aware of the required methods to teach reading in the classroom, they did not use them. If students are not taught the necessary skills to enable them to read fluently and with comprehension in English as their second language, the implications might be far-reaching. Possible consequences will be lack of confidence and motivation to read and study in English. Furthermore, as teaching of English second language reading is not only of utmost importance as a foundation for learning in higher education, but also the language of teaching and learning in Ethiopia, the most important implication is that it might deprive students from being successful in their studies. The findings of this study will benefit lecturers and higher education institutions. The study not only creates awareness of possible discrepancies that might exist between lecturers' beliefs and their actual practices but also recommends lecturers to be involved in continuous training on how to confidently use the best reading methods to assist students to be fluent readers and literate students, and be able to study in the language of teaching and learning.

Introduction

Reading skills may be regarded as the most important of the four skills in language teaching and learning and much has been written in this regard (Alvermann, Phelps & Gillis 2010; Bharuthram 2012; Salinger 2003). Rajabi (2009) argues that the ability to read with comprehension not only serves as a means of information and pleasure but also provides students with a rich experience of the language and presents a gateway to continuing education. Through reading, students are able to develop a sufficient language base that enables them to produce spoken and written messages, resulting in efficient communication. In fact, reading is at the heart of most academic tasks that students have to perform. Shen (2005) makes the point that for English second language (ESL) students, reading may be the most important of the four skills in language arts because it is the foundation of learning. This is even more applicable in an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) situation. The ability to read may be the main motivation behind why millions of students around the world study English. However, no empirical study on teaching EFL reading in teacher training colleges in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia could be found, and this study intends to make a contribution in this regard.

Considering how crucial reading is for college students, the importance of developing their reading ability cannot be overemphasised. Lecturers of reading should therefore implement the best instructional practices and techniques supported by theories to develop students' reading ability.

Reading strategies and teaching methods

Phan (2006) mentions that reading strategies are operationalised into methods, techniques and behaviours, enabling readers to effectively construct meaning. Lehr and Osborn (2005) describe reading strategies as specific cognitive procedures which guide readers to become aware of how well they comprehend as they read. From these definitions, it becomes clear that reading strategies refer to conscious reading behaviour, while methods are used by a lecturer or teacher to teach reading. Oxford (1990), who has conducted extensive research on language, and specifically reading and teaching strategies, suggests some methods which have shown a positive

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relationship with good reading, such as reading aloud, question-and-answer and peer tutoring. Taberski (2009) adds that reading strategies could be referred to as a set of particular moves that proficient readers use over and over again, sometimes deliberately and sometimes not. Reading strategies, although defined differently by different researchers, refer to a repetition of certain conscious cognitive actions to improve reading.

Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) emphasise the importance of classifying reading strategies into three categories: pre-reading strategies, during-reading strategies and post-reading strategies. These strategies have been documented by various authors such as Christen and Murphy (1991), Tierney and Pearson (1994) and AD-Heisat (2009), and they will be summarised next. Pre-reading strategies assist in linking the readers' schema with the new knowledge by predicting, improving interest and anticipating what will be read. Strategies used during reading, help readers cope with new vocabulary and contexts, as well as build bridges between existing knowledge and the new text. Post-reading strategies help readers to interpret, confirm predictions and evaluate their understanding of the text while making generalisations and connections to their own lives.

Research in ESL and EFL reading has mainly focused on reading strategies. Both Singhal (2001) and Wessels (2007) confirm that in most cases such studies have found that strategy training leads to improved reading performance and comprehension. To help students become efficient readers, it is necessary for lecturers to cultivate the awareness of the use of reading strategies. Moreover, students should use a variety of strategies to assist them with the acquisition, storage and retrieval of information (Singhal 2001). Good readers, on the one hand, deliberately and, sometimes, coincidentally use a range of reading strategies for understanding a text, and lecturers should be able to guide students in this regard. Lehr and Osborn (2005) also agree that weak readers, on the other hand, have a very small repertoire of reading strategies and may often choose to continue reading, even if they do not understand.

Although many methods or approaches exist to teach reading, researchers such as Oxford (1990), Brantmeier (2002), Lehr and Osborn (2005), Raphael (1986) and LaDuke-Pelster (2011) agree that significant methods include reading aloud, questions and answer relationships (QAR) and peer tutoring. Because of their relevance to the current study, they will be discussed next.

Reading aloud may be regarded as an important method to teach reading as it helps motivate students to learn to read, extends their oral language and gives them opportunities to connect new information to what they already know. Little and Hines (2006) argue that readers must be exposed to reading aloud, and lecturers should read aloud to students to model fluent reading and for students to experience and hear how new words are pronounced, to learn more about the world and, finally, to develop a love for reading. Harvey and

Goudvis (2007) further argue that lecturers should not read aloud for the purpose of instruction alone, but that they should also do so for enjoyment. Scanlon, Anderson and Sweeney (2010) state that reading aloud builds vocabulary and background knowledge and expands comprehension. Although reading aloud is a method generally used by teachers in a school context, lecturers at college level may also successfully use it to model fluency and teach aspects such as pronunciation, as was the case in the current study.

Questions and answer relationships is a method that has the potential to build reading comprehension in class. Lecturers could systematically teach their students to find the answers to complex comprehension questions (Lawrence 2015). It further helps students to understand the texts they read. Lawrence (2015) indicates that the most important aspect of this method is that it gives students and lecturers a language for talking about questions and their answers – which is of particular importance in a second or foreign language class. According to Raphael (1986), this question-and-answer method helps students realise the need to consider the information in the text, as well as the information from their own background knowledge. Without having had QAR instruction, students tend to rely either on the text only or on their own background knowledge.

Peer tutoring seems to be a commonly practised method of teaching reading on almost all levels (Veerkamp & Kamps 2007). During collaborative learning, students form groups. Depending on the purpose of reading, reading in small groups enables everyone to have access to the information. Furthermore, it teaches students that listening has important functions: paying attention, thinking about and responding to what is read. Peer tutoring may help students share their overall experiences regarding learning the language in general and reading in particular. It also enhances the culture of self-learning among students. Fields, Lois and Spangler (2008) assert that the main focus of peer tutoring should be on the interconnection between listening, speaking, reading and writing, although most language educators tend to teach the skills separately.

Theoretical framework

This study is framed within the constructs of Bandura's sociocultural theory. This theory focuses on a person's self-perceptions, beliefs and expectations (Bandura 1986). Within the context of this study, a lecturer's self-efficacy refers to the extent to which he or she believes that he or she is able to influence a student's performance (Chiampa & Gallagher 2017). Bandura (1994) believes that mastery experiences create a greater chance of self-efficacy: this means that the better a lecturer masters a task, the more self-efficacy improves. Similarly, when lecturers do not believe that a task can be successfully completed, self-efficacy decreases (Rogers-Haverback & Mee 2015). For the purpose of this study, it may be assumed that if lecturers believe that they are successful in their teaching of reading skills, they will have a high level of self-efficacy for teaching reading.

A high level of self-efficacy is important, as it influences lecturers' actions, thoughts, beliefs and feelings about their work. These feelings, in turn, may influence lecturers' accomplishments. Plourde (2002) defines a lecturer's self-efficacy as a belief in one's capability to teach effectively.

The aim of this study was to find out how lecturers perceive their role in teaching reading skills to their students.

Purpose of the research

Researchers such as Chou (2008) and Farrell and Ives (2015) confirm that not much research has been conducted on the interplay between lecturers' beliefs and their practices of teaching second language reading. Farrell and Ives (2015) refer to the works of Johnson (1992) and Kuzborska (2011), which showed strong relationships between lecturers' beliefs and their practices. In the current study, we were interested in how lecturers' beliefs at teacher training colleges in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia, correspond with their instructional practices. This curiosity flowed from the preliminary observation which showed that in many instances students experience serious challenges in reading English texts. These challenges, in turn, affected their ability to communicate and their general academic progress as English reading proficiency is a prerequisite for academic success. Although English is not an official language in Ethiopia, it is the medium of instruction from secondary school onwards. As a result of the fact that students are taught in English, a language that they sometimes speak and read with difficulty, many lose interest in learning and merely attend classes for the sake of attending. They also become demoralised and may fail the course, which, in turn, leads to low self-esteem. For this reason, we found it necessary to determine what lecturers' classroom practices were and how these might affect their students' reading ability.

Methodology

The purpose of the current research was to investigate lecturers' beliefs about teaching reading and how these correspond with their actual reading strategies. To achieve this purpose, the following research questions were formulated:

- How important is teaching English reading at teacher training colleges in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia?
- Which methods are used to teach reading in English as a second language?
- Which reading materials are used in teaching English reading strategies?
- How can reading strategies be improved in the ESL classroom?

Research design

This research followed a qualitative approach, and a case study was used. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) argue that qualitative research has a distinctive character aiming to

provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of the participants by learning about their experiences and perspectives. Because we were interested in the 'how' and 'why' questions about a contemporary set of events (Yin 2003), we regarded a case study appropriate for this research. Stake (1995) argues that case study research examines the particularity and complexity of a single case, trying to understand its activity within specific circumstances. The particularity of this case study is that it is an in-depth study of the beliefs and the practices of English language lecturers who are teaching reading at teacher training colleges in the Amhara Region.

According to Bloor and Wood (2006), piloting involves field testing and refers to preliminary research to provide a structured opportunity to reflect on matters such as the research design, the instrument and timing. In this study, piloting was done by conducting an interview with an English lecturer at one of the colleges. The testing involved word and terminology appropriateness to the target participants, identification of vague and irrelevant questions, determining the approximate time it would take the participants to tell experiences of teaching reading and testing the effectiveness of the audio tape recorder in recording and playing back the stories when transcribing.

When the pilot study was conducted, no terminology or wording discrepancies were identified, but the value of printing out the interview guide to enable participants to read the questions on their own and narrate accordingly, was determined. Moreover, more time than initially anticipated was necessary to accommodate the participants' pace and to allow for more probing. All the necessary changes were made after the pilot study.

To ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner, we obtained ethical clearance for this study. Permission to conduct the research was granted by the authorities at the three teacher training colleges. During the interviews, participants were treated in an ethical manner and were assured of their anonymity at all times. To confirm that we adhered to the notion of trustworthiness, the key aspects of credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability, according to Shenton (2004), were addressed. In addressing the issue of credibility, we did member checking, which allowed us to share the data, interpretations and conclusions with the participants and make adjustments where necessary. Confirmability verifies if the findings are shaped by the participants and not the researcher, and in this regard we checked, rechecked and corroborated the data. Dependability was addressed by carefully documenting the research process. This process includes research design, data collection method and data analyses. Lastly, Shenton (2004) states that to achieve transferability in a study, the researchers should provide as much as possible contextual information to enable the reader to decide how far the findings could be generalised and transferred to similar studies. In this research, measures have been taken to address this aspect, such as describing the context, the research process and the

participants; however, because of a relatively small sample size, the specific context and the nature of qualitative research, it cannot be said that the results of the current study are transferable to similar studies. However, the purpose of the study was not to generalise the results but rather to do an in-depth study of a specific case.

Participants

By using purposive sampling, six lecturers and nine students from three teacher training colleges in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia were regarded as a representative sample. Two lecturers in the three respective colleges who had at least completed a reading course in their undergraduate programme, had a Master's degree in Education and had done some action research on English reading instruction, were selected. The six lecturers had between 2 and 35 years of experience in English reading instruction. All the lecturers were male because there were no female lecturers teaching English (reading) at the time of the research. The management of the Departments of English at the colleges assisted us in the selection of both the lecturers and the students. Rubin and Babbie (2001) argue that in purposive sampling, a sample of observation that researchers believe will yield the most comprehensive understanding of the subject of study needs to be selected. For this reason, we selected students either in their second or third year of study who performed well in the English teaching classroom. In total, four students were in their second year and five in their third year of study. Three students from each of the three colleges were selected to take part in the study. Five students were males, while four were females. We believe that the selected sample was able to provide us with comprehensive, in-depth data.

Data collection

Interviews and observation were used to collect data, offering the opportunity to explore how everyday life is experienced and how meaning is understood. We were looking for a unique opportunity to probe, explore and negotiate the participants' experiences regarding lecturers' teaching of reading practices. Semi-structured, one-on-one interview, which, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), could provide us with first-hand experiences, opinions and knowledge, were chosen for both the lecturer and the student participants. Interviews lasted between 45 min and 60 min. In the opinion of Corbetta (2003), this kind of interviews embraces individual differences and is sensitive to diverse forms of expression. While the one-on-one interviews with lecturers focused on their beliefs and perceptions regarding their teaching and the methods they used when teaching reading, the focus of the interviews with the students was on the methods of reading instruction, and lecturers' activities and practise in the classroom.

Non-participant observation was also used to collect data. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), the observational method relies on a researcher seeing and hearing things and recording these observations rather

than relying on the participants' responses to questions or statements. Kuzborska (2011) confirms that very few studies have been conducted where interviews have been combined with classroom observation to determine actual classroom practices. Furthermore, Kumar (2005) contends that observations are the most appropriate way of collecting data, when, for instance, more information is needed to get accurate information. An observation sheet was used to guide the observation in the classrooms with a focus on instructional techniques during reading lessons. Three classes (teaching second and third year English reading) were observed in each of the three colleges, and the classes were visited during reading lessons, or until data saturation was reached.

Data analysis

To analyse the data collected, thematic analysis was used (Braun & Clarke 2006). Initially, data from the interviews were transcribed and read together with the data from the observations. Looking for patterns, the data were systematically coded across the entire data set. The next step was to collate the codes into potential themes and to put all coded data with these themes. The final step in the process was to refine and name the identified themes. The data analysis was guided by the research questions.

Findings and discussion

The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between lecturers' beliefs and their actual strategies in teaching reading skills to ESL students in higher education. To address the research questions, we will discuss the following four themes that emerged from the empirical study:

- the importance of teaching English reading at teacher training colleges in the Amhara Region, Ethiopia
- methods used in teaching reading in English as a second language
- reading materials used in teaching English reading skills
- the need for continuous professional development.

The importance of teaching reading

In response to a question about the importance of teaching reading, all the lecturer participants agreed that it was important. One lecturer stated, 'we as lecturers are responsible for teaching our students to be able to read and understand different English texts. All students need this skill', while another said that 'our students must be able to read English texts'.

As English is the medium of instruction in Ethiopia from secondary school, one can understand why lecturers in this study found the development of English reading skills of utmost importance. Lecturer participants also believed that regular practice and frequent opportunities to read a wide range of materials were necessary for the development of both fluency and enjoyment in reading. One lecturer

indicated that 'teachers need to emphasise the importance of this skill from the elementary level', while another lecturer was of the opinion that English language lecturers who are teaching reading should be given workshops, seminars and training on reading continuously for them to focus more on reading.

From the interviews with the students, it emerged that students did not agree that lecturers regard the teaching of reading as important. According to them, lecturers did not regard the teaching of reading as important and this consequently led to a lack of motivation and interest in reading on their side. One student stated that 'most of the time lecturers do not give attention to the reading part of the lesson. And I also do not give attention to reading'. Another student said that 'lecturers do not put in any effort to motivate students to read texts that are written in English'. In this regard, a lecturer, although agreeing on the importance of the reading skill, confirmed what was said by the student by stating,

'Students do not get enough good opportunities to practise reading in the classroom. Even we, instructors, do not give much attention to the reading part of the lesson. Rather we focus on the grammar aspects of the lesson.' [Lecturer, male, 52 years old]

Our class observation confirmed this statement by the student, as classes had more emphasis on grammar than on reading.

Rajabi (2009) emphasises the importance of reading to students for two reasons: firstly, this skill provides students with access to a wealth of experience of the language and, secondly, reading presents a gateway to continuing education via students' reading skills. Through reading, learners are able to develop a sufficient language base that enables them to produce the spoken or written messages, making it possible to communicate to others. It seems as if students in this study were not able to experience the richness of the language, which might hinder their opportunities for, and success in, further education. If students are not motivated and do not see the importance of obtaining English reading skills, it is unlikely that they will read.

Methods used in teaching reading in English as a second language

We were interested in the different instructional techniques or methods lecturers were using to teach reading in the classroom. When asked how reading was taught, the participants indicated that they were aware of and were using pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading activities. When referring to pre-reading activities, one of the lecturer participants stated:

'I usually start by asking questions about the topic to arouse the students' interest and get their attention. Then, I ask a few pre-reading questions related to the new topic to help the students know that reading is a purposeful activity and to predict certain pieces of information that are found in the texts. This helps me decide on the amount of input I have to provide for students to

have a better understanding when they engage in the reading tasks. Then I teach a few new words from the text before students read the text.' [Lecturer, male, 58 years old]

Effective reading instruction requires teaching methods that give due attention to what the reader brings to the text. The beliefs of lecturers confirm that they understood the importance of combining students' prior knowledge and experiences with the texts they are reading. One of the lecturer participants mentioned that:

'I start my reading lesson with pre-reading activities to arouse the students' interest; thereafter I provide questions for students to answer while reading and finally I give students post-reading activities to check their overall understanding of the text.' [Lecturer, male, 44 years old]

During the observation, only one lecturer was using these instructional techniques to teach reading, which means that they were aware of this theory from their own studies or research, but that they did not always use it in practice. During the interviews, lecturers did not mention question-and-answer methods (QAR) or translating for students to understand texts, but we found that these were the two most common instructional techniques used by the lecturers in the reading classrooms. One possible reason for not mentioning these methods is that they thought that these might not be the best or appropriate methods to use. Lecturers depended on either reading the texts aloud or asking volunteer students to read the texts. It was also observed that they were mainly using the question-and-answer method to assess students' understanding of texts. In a few cases, questions were asked about the topic of the text in an attempt to link students' prior knowledge with the content of the text or to arouse students' interest and capture their attention.

Lecturers, in general, seemed to be more comfortable with text-driven processing methods of teaching reading, especially when they considered a certain part of the passage as important to be understood by students. In three cases, the observation showed that lecturers would translate texts phrase-by-phrase to help students understand them fully. During the interviews, most lecturers were not convinced that their instructional techniques were successful. One of the lecturers admitted: 'I do not think the method I apply when I teach reading is very successful because when I assess students they do not perform well' (he was referring to the question-and-answer method that he uses to assist students in reading comprehension). This shows a low level of self-efficacy because the lecturer doubted his capabilities, which has the potential of discouraging him from persevering until he is successful (Bandura 1994).

It was further evident that students were not involved in group work during reading classes. During the interviews, lecturers indicated that in most cases they preferred to use individual rather than group work in the class when they were teaching reading. In this regard, a lecturer indicated that 'I prefer to teach the whole class and ask questions to students. Then the whole class benefits. I do not prefer group work.

It is time consuming'. Another lecturer had a different reason by indicating that 'my classroom is not conducive for group work. If I have to move students to go into groups, it disturbs everybody'. Students confirmed this, and one student said 'There is no interaction among students during reading classes. The lecturer dominates the class'. This was confirmed during observation as none of the lecturers made the students work in groups while they were teaching reading. In this regard, Sidek (2010) makes the point that for students to play an active role by contributing ideas and responding to the input from other students, they need group work and peer tutoring.

The data collected from both the interviews and observations further indicate that lecturers saw the reading lesson in a limited way. Typically, the lecturers started a reading lesson by explaining to the students that they were going to first read the story of the text and expected the students to listen and follow what they were reading carefully. The lecturers demonstrated the correct pronunciation of words while reading. Little variation of this instructional technique was observed. For instance, as part of the introduction of a reading lesson, a lecturer said: 'I will start by reading the paragraph and I want you to look carefully where I am reading'. He explained that this would help them to listen to the correct pronunciation of words. This is in line with the sentiments of Miller (2006) and Little and Hines (2006), who argue that reading aloud offers lecturers the opportunities to share a variety of genres, model fluency, reading behaviours and correct pronunciation and that readers must be exposed to reading aloud for them to benefit from reading. In all the three colleges, lecturers preferred reading aloud, either by themselves or by their students. For example, one lecturer stated that he orders the students to read the text individually, and he then gives a few students the opportunity to read aloud in the class. Thereafter, he explains the text paragraph by paragraph. Finally, he asks the students to answer the comprehension questions extracted from the text in writing.

Reading materials used in teaching English reading skills

It is important for EFL and/or ESL lecturers at a college level to select appropriate reading materials, considering students' needs, interests and abilities. Based on a question to lecturers and students on whether they used any additional materials other than the prescribed textbook or material, the participants admitted that they believed that a variety of reading materials was necessary to improve students' reading skills, but that the reality in the classroom did not allow them to do so. One lecturer stated that 'the students' personal efforts are very low. 'Students are not interested to practise their reading', while another lecturer admitted that 'I just do not have enough time to use materials other than the prescribed textbook. I even struggle to cover the content in the textbook'. Two lecturers admitted that they never gave students extra reading materials or activities for the English reading class, while four lecturers stated that they usually advised their students to read English texts such as

newspapers, magazines, fiction and other books. However, they did not make a follow up and were not sure if students were actually doing this. A few of the participants stated that they used other materials such as newspapers and magazines in the classroom. A variety of reading materials is important for the students to improve their reading skills (Ballou 2012). However, from the students' interviews it became clear that most students hardly ever read. Those students who admitted that they read additional materials in their free time, mentioned that they did so in their mother tongue and not in English. In this regard, a student admitted that 'I read books in my mother tongue, not in English'.

It seems as if one of the biggest inhibitors of allowing students to get exposure to different reading materials was the compulsory use of the training module. According to the lecturer participants, the colleges received the training module from the Department of Education, and they had to use the texts in the training module. For instance, a lecturer explained that he focused on the training module which was designed for the reading course and that he had to stick to the already prepared training module to prepare the students for the final examination, which was based on the module. He also explained that the training module contained a substantial amount of theoretical rhetoric which he also had to cover in the reading class. Another participant confirmed the previous statement by saying that 'due to the training material we have to cover, we do not have enough time and students and lecturers cannot use all the strategies in the classroom, although they know it theoretically'.

Observations confirmed the findings of the interviews and showed that most of the lecturers used only texts from the training module to teach reading. When observing the texts of the module, we found that they included less common vocabulary which students in many instances struggled to understand. For this reason, lecturers had to do extra explanations for students to understand the texts. Besides, the texts were more theoretical in nature and beyond the background knowledge and comprehension level of the students, resulting in a loss of interest in reading and students failing to develop positive reading habits. In this regard, one lecturer mentioned that 'students are not interested in practising reading'. Ultimately with less reading opportunities, not much learning takes place.

The need for continuous professional development

Regarding the question on lecturers' opinions on how teaching strategies could be improved in the ESL classroom, most of the lecturers indicated that they needed training. One lecturer stated that 'English language lecturers who are teaching reading should be given workshops, seminars and training on reading continuously'. Another participant argued,

'The difficulties go both to students and lecturers in the sense that lecturers did not have sufficient training particularly to teach English reading; sufficient support was not given to the lecturers by those in authority.' [Lecturer, male 59 years old]

It was observed that there was a lack of experience among teachers in developing modules, in general, and in selecting interesting texts for reading, in particular. On the side of the students, there was no reading of supplementary materials to develop their reading proficiency. It seems the students did not have a good foundation in their early grade levels because of lecturers not being adequately trained. As one participant stated, 'training is needed for all of us to teach English reading'. Only two of the lecturers reported that they have attended workshops on the teaching of English reading in the ESL classroom, while the rest said that besides their undergraduate courses, they have never attended training in this regard. The lecturers further mentioned that they were not always sure if they were using the right methods as it sometimes appeared as if students' reading skills did not improve, and they were not motivated to read English texts.

Discussion

Based on the interviews with the lecturers, it was clear that they agreed that it is important to teach English reading to their students. During the interviews, all the lecturers reported that teaching of reading strategies was extremely important. In addition, they suggested that students should regularly practise and read a wide range of different texts, not only for fluency but also for enjoyment. These ideas confirm Linnakyla, Malin and Taube's (2004) stance that English reading skills are an important means of functioning effectively in education and of developing as an individual, within and outside school, in the present and in later life, in further education, at work, and in leisure. Furthermore, as English is the medium of instruction in Ethiopia from secondary school, one can understand why lecturers in this study found the development of English reading skills of the utmost importance. However, this belief was contradicted in practice, as interviews with students confirmed that lecturers did not prioritise reading in the classroom. As a result, students were left with very little interest and motivation. The lecturers themselves agreed that they did not give students enough opportunities to read and that they, in general, focused on grammar.

With regard to reading strategies used in the English reading classroom, the lecturers focused on the importance of pre-reading, during-reading and post-reading activities. Some of them even explained these strategies by providing examples of how this could be done. They found it important to link students' existing knowledge with the new knowledge in the texts. It was interesting that lecturers focused on these strategies, and yet none of them mentioned teaching methods, such as *reading aloud*, *questions and answer relationships* and *peer tutoring*. During the observation, we found that only one lecturer was using *pre-reading*, *during-reading* and *post-reading* strategies. The lecturers did not mention question-and-answer method or translation, but we found that these were the two most common strategies used by the lecturers in the reading classrooms. These findings are consistent with the findings of Khonamri and Salimi (2010),

who found no significant correlation between high school teachers' beliefs about methods of reading instruction and their classroom practices.

Although the lecturers did not mention *reading aloud*, all of them were using this strategy by either reading aloud themselves or allowing a few strong readers to read to the class. The lecturers confirmed that they did not give students enough opportunities to read; therefore, students did not get much practice in the class. Extensive reading was also not thoroughly undertaken and encouraged as a resource to improve reading efficiency. Furthermore, *peer tutoring* was also not used, as the lecturers confirmed that they were not using any group work in their classes. The latter was a matter that was confirmed by students, as they said that there was not much interaction, and that lecturers dominated the reading classes.

When asked about the importance of teaching reading in the classroom, lecturers mentioned the importance of using a variety of reading materials. However, in practice, this belief was contradicted as lecturers felt obliged to use the training module because of the centralised examination that focused on this resource. Although some lecturers indicated that they were encouraging students to read different texts, this was not compulsory and was not part of the formal reading lesson. The lecturers also did not follow up to check if this was done.

During the interviews, most of the lecturers mentioned that they needed training and were not always sure if the methods they were using in the classroom were effective. In this regard, Bandura (1994) states that the more lecturers manage to master tasks, the more their self-efficacy will improve, which, in turn, will positively influence their students' accomplishments. On the other hand, the less lecturers believe that they are able to master tasks, the lower their self-efficacy will be.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study shows a significant amount of contradiction between lecturers' beliefs and their actual practices when teaching English reading. However, the relationship between lecturers' beliefs and their practices is multifaceted, and there are a number of possible reasons why inconsistencies between the two occurred. In this regard, Khonamri and Salimi (2010) agree that contextual factors could have powerful influences on teachers' beliefs and their actual classroom practices. In the current study, the lecturers in most cases were aware of pre-reading, reading and post-reading strategies, and although they were able to explain how to use them, they seemed not to have had enough confidence to use them in the class. Furthermore, it appears that they were possibly not familiar with the different methods that might work well in the reading classroom. This situation calls for workshops and relevant training support for the lecturers in the colleges. Perhaps the lecturers themselves have not been trained in using a variety of reading methods.

Another reason contributing to the inconsistencies between lecturers' beliefs and their practices is the fact that lecturers had to teach reading from the training module and that centralised examinations test students on the content. The use of the training modules seems to limit lecturers' use of different teaching methods and their choices regarding the texts they use for reading. This study therefore recommends closer liaison between the Department of Education and higher education institutions on preparing and prescribing study materials for students.

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between lecturers' beliefs and their actual practices in teaching reading skills to students. The study revealed quite a number of discrepancies between the two. In light of the complexities that go with the relationship between beliefs and actual practices, they were not unexpected and lend themselves as topics for further research. However, if students are not taught to read with comprehension in English as their second language, the implications might be far-reaching. Possible implications include a lack of confidence and motivation to read and study in English. Furthermore, it might deprive students of successful academic performance in higher education. This study recommends that lecturers should not only be made aware of discrepancies between their beliefs and the actual teaching techniques they are using in the classroom, but that they should also be equipped to become effective in their teaching of reading. This will assist them in closing the gap between what they ideally want to do and what they truly do in the reading classroom. Furthermore, it will build a strong sense of self-efficacy, helping them to be successful in teaching ESL and EFL reading with confidence to students who desperately need it to be successful in life.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

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