3. Chapter Three: A Review of the Related Literature

Reading is perhaps one of the most fascinating and, therefore, one of the well-researched areas in language teaching. Surprisingly, however, it still remains one of the least understood areas in that research has only touched upon the tip of the reading iceberg. Bachman (2000:x) reminds us, "Reading, through which we can access worlds of ideas and feelings, as well as the knowledge of the ages and visions of the future, is at once the most extensively researched and the most enigmatic of the so-called language skills."

This chapter will give a brief review of Ethiopian and international research on reading. Most research in Ethiopia tends to be on English skills at secondary and tertiary levels owing to the fact that attention was disproportionately focussed on these levels. It is only recently that there has been a shift of interest to primary education. Nevertheless, a review will be made of those studies on reading skills. These studies usually go along similar lines: they are conducted as prerequisites to graduation at a post-graduate level. They are conducted on freshman students and measure the students' reading ability, which shows the lack of some major skill, or else, they experiment with a new approach that usually proves better than the one used at the time in that particular institute. Cases in point are Tsegaye (1982) Hailemichael (1984), Molla (1987), Mendida (1988), Gebremedhin (1993), Taye (1999), and Gessesse (1999). An exception to this is the recent Ethiopian National Baseline Survey (NOE,2001), which is pertinent to this study and will be discussed in greater detail than the others.

Following this, a closer look at the theory and practice of children's literature will be taken. A discussion of factors influencing reading schemes internationally will be given. Then three studies of students involved in extensive reading in Japan, the Philippines and Yemen will be reviewed. Finally, the theoretical framework for extensive reading will be discussed.

3.1 A Review of Ethiopian Research on Reading

3.1.1 Journals

It would be valuable from the outset of this part to keep in mind that the whole area of educational research in Ethiopia is very weak. There is a vicious circle in which researchers have been discouraged from doing research owing to the lack of local academic journals, which in turn could not flourish because of the lack of publishable articles. There was an attempt to break this cycle with the establishment of the Institute of Educational Research (IER) at the Addis Ababa University (AAU). Unfortunately, the IER journal was perceived to be elitist and tended to be restricted to within the University faculty rather than serve as a forum of education for scholars nation-wide.

The Ministry of Education introduced The Educational Journal in 1995 in an attempt to break the next vicious circle, whereby AAU lecturers wrote articles for their colleagues within the University, forming a closed society. This journal aimed at extracting educational research from the AAU ivory tower and provide a forum for all educationists.

On the language education side, although both the above mentioned journals accept articles on language research, the articles published tend to come from such a wide variety of fields that they do not prove valuable resource for the language teacher. In an attempt to fill this gap, the departments of English and Ethiopian Languages at Kotebe College of Teacher Education started publishing the Journal of Language Studies. The Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at AAU began the Journal of the Institute of Language Studies in 1996. Although both these journals were bravely labeled as 'bi-annual' and 'quarterly', they are floundering under a lack of funds in addition to a lack of staff time dedicated to their publications.

Surprisingly, only one of these four journals has published an article on reading and even that is a shorter version of Gebremedhin's dissertation (1993). In light of this, it comes as no surprise that there are no books published on reading by Ethiopian scholars.

3.1.2. Theses

This dearth of research articles about reading in the Ethiopian situation is partially compensated for by the fact that English majors at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels are required to write dissertations as a prerequisite to graduate. Consequently, there are several theses written on reading. Most of these concentrate on the educational aspect of reading with hardly any on the social aspect and none on the psychological. Again because the research was done for theses and the majority of postgraduate students are themselves tertiary level instructors, the research focuses almost exclusively

on reading at the tertiary level. Following is a rapid review of some of those theses written on reading. They are discussed starting from the least recent.

One of the earliest studies still available is that of Tsegaye (1982). He set out to measure the reading ability of first year AAU students using cloze tests. He found the students' reading ability was very poor.

Hailemichael (1984) tried to improve the reading skills of AAU freshman students by comparing the effectiveness of what he called 'traditional' versus 'communicative' approaches to reading. His communicative approach was basically more interactive and he found it to be beneficial to the students.

Molla (1987) assessed the reading skills of AAU students and stated that their comprehension skills were relatively good. Nevertheless, their speed of reading was painfully slow and this in turn affected how many books they could read.

In contrast to Molla, Mendida (1988) aimed at investigating why Bahir Dar Teachers' College trainees reading ability was poor. He looked into specific skills and discovered that not only did the students lack knowledge about English grammar and vocabulary, but they were also weak in using higher comprehension skills. This is probably significant in that it implies that the students lack major reading skills not only in English but also in their mother tongue and any other languages they might use.

Like Hailemichael, Gebremedhin (1993) tried to focus on assisting university students to acquire reading skills for English for Academic Purposes to help them cope with their studies. He used an 'individualised reading approach' in which he tried to let students read at their own pace and do exercises individually without worrying where their classmates were. He maintained that his approach assisted the students in reading. However, his experiment took place in classes of around 30 students while class sizes in schools could be triple that size.

Taye (1999) investigated the social background knowledge, academic background knowledge and language proficiency and their role in reading proficiency. He used t-tests and stepwise regression analysis on the results of the tests carried out on freshman students at AAU. He concluded that academic background directly affected results, whereby students from the arts stream scored better at social science courses than those from the science stream. Moreover, he pointed out that the differences in the amount of extra-textual and intra-textual background knowledge affected reading only up to a certain level after which the effect diminished. Reading comprehension was directly affected by language proficiency, and language proficiency had a stronger effect than background knowledge on reading comprehension.

Gessesse (1999) wanted to experiment if a process approach to the teaching of reading for first year students at a teacher training college could bring about any marked improvement in their reading abilities. He set out to determine the effects of this approach with two experiments and two control groups. Having analyzed pre and post

test measures using ANOVA, as well as observing classes and collecting data with questionnaires and open-ended reports, he noted certain changes. He concluded that the experiment groups both showed a perceived effect in improving their reading ability as well as positively evaluating the approach in their the reports. However, their attitude towards reading showed no significant change in comparison to that of the control group.

On the whole, these research theses all go along similar lines. They are carried out on first year students. This is probably owing to the ease of setting up experiment and control groups simultaneously, while the researchers also teach their regular classes. Then they measure the students' reading ability, which they inevitably find to lack some major skill or component, or else they experiment with a 'new' approach, which proves more efficacious than the one used at that particular time and institute.

Probably as a consequence of the fact that these studies are conducted as requirements for graduation, the studies are shelved and no further attempts to implement the new approach or to eradicate the deficiencies at primary and secondary levels are made. Instead the tertiary level instructors smugly lay the blame of 'appalling language habits' squarely on the shoulders of secondary level teachers who readily pass on the baton of blame to the primary teachers. They in turn point accusing fingers at the 'uneducable' students.

3.1.3 The Ethiopian National Baseline Assessment of Grade Eight Students'
Achievement

Although Ethiopia has a fairly well-established educational system, it was in the
embarrassing situation of not having had any baseline surveys done on a national or
regional level. The National Organisation for Examinations (NOE) rectified this situation
by conducting the Ethiopian National Baseline Assessment (ENBA) on Grades Four and
Eight. ENBA started in 1999 and ended in 2000. The findings were published as The
Ethiopian National Baseline Assessment on Grade Eight Students' Achievement Summary
Report (NOE,2001a) and The Ethiopian National Baseline Assessment on Grade Eight
Students' Achievement (NOE, 2001b) in April 2001. This historic survey is discussed
separately in the literature review not only because it is the first review of its kind, but also
because it is the sole existing piece of real research at the primary level so far.

ENBA was conducted to determine the level of students' achievements at the end of the
second cycle of education by testing over 5000 Grade Eight students in ten regions of the
country. The study focussed on four subjects including English. The major aims of the
study were (NOE,2001a:2):

> To determine the achievement levels of grade 8 students in four key
subjects (Maths, English, Chemistry and Biology)
> To make a survey of students' attitude (sic) towards their school
environment,
> To lay down a baseline of information for monitoring students'
achievement over time,
> To identify regional variability in terms of educational inputs and
other factors which may have a relationship with students' achievement,
> To provide policy-makers with information and recommendations
about the different levels of students' achievement across region, sex, age
and location,
> To generate ideas for improving learning outcomes.

The team of researchers, which included three Ethiopians and two foreigners, set out with five basic research questions that were (NOE,2001a:2-3):

> ➢ To what extent have learning outcomes or objectives for the second cycle of primary school grades 5 to 8 in selected key subjects been attained across the regions and schools of Ethiopia?
> ➢ Does achievement differ significantly with respect to the students' gender, age, school, region and location?
> ➢ To what degree have the desired attitudes been developed in grade 8 students?
> ➢ How do schools and regions differ in terms of schools inputs?
> ➢ Which school factors contribute most to students' achievement?

The ENBA differs from the present study in that it is conducted in many regions, while the present study is only in one region and that it covers four subjects in contrast to one skill of one subject covered here. Both studies recognise that English is a key subject contributing to students' success or failure in their academic careers and see student achievement as the litmus test of whether or not learning has taken place.

Regarding methodology, a multi-stage stratified sampling method was used with the probability of inclusion proportional to the number of schools in a given region. The school was considered as the primary sampling unit and the students as the secondary sampling unit (NOE, 2001a:9). A minimum of 10 sample schools was taken from each region, with a maximum of 32 from the larger regions. At least 40 students from each school were included in the survey.

Instruments used for collecting information included an achievement test, information on the students' school-based test scores and a student questionnaire. The English achievement test was a multiple choice test with 40 items across a range of key topics taken

from the English curriculum. Although, the test was said to have acceptable test internal consistency with split-half corelations of 0.718, this might have been compromised by the very nature of multiple choice, which easily lends itself to cheating. The researchers tried to overcome this factor by running a Pearson Correlation with school based test scores. Nevertheless, the school tests were also multiple choice tests.

Methods of analysing the data were descriptive statistics, analyses of variance, Spearman's RHO correlations and multiple regression analysis. These methods are in accordance with the aims of the study as they enable comparison of many variables at the same time. Consequently, the researchers used them to check performance against factors like region, school location, gender and age.

The overall mean score for Ethiopia as a whole was disappointingly low at 39%, indicating that the level of English learnt all over the country is very low indeed. It should be kept in mind that this result was not obtained at an international standard but rather at a national level with the national curriculum and textbooks used as the springboard for designing the achievement test. At the regional level, Addis Ababa had the best mean score in English at 46%, which is still below the half way mark.

Interestingly, the Spearman's RHO Correlations of school-average Grade Eight combined achievement scores with school inputs and process showed that some factors in the school infrastructure had a significant association with the students achievement results. These factors included the brightness of classrooms, the school directors' narrow focus on school

matters, the average age of teachers and their use of radio for instruction, the amount of homework given and the availability of textbooks, teacher guides, pedagogical centres, laboratories and libraries (NOE, 2001a:18). The availability of libraries is related to the present study. Unfortunately, however, the effect of these factors was not correlated to achievement in individual subjects.

The study found that "Having a textbook, listening in school over the radio to supplementary instruction, and doing homework were the three instructional process variables most strongly associated with the achievement of grade 8 students" (NOE, 2001a:25). Moreover it stated:

> Overall student interest in the subjects of English and Maths are lower than their interest in other subjects. In that student interest in a subject is associated with learning the subject, special attention should be devoted to strengthening the quality and attractiveness of the curriculum, learning materials, and teacher preparation in the subjects of English and Maths.

The researchers failed to note that both English and Maths are basically skills courses, requiring active use, whereas the other subjects lend themselves to the traditional rote memorisation method most familiar to the students. Therefore, if the students are using rote techniques for English and Maths, and not getting good results, their lack of interest could be due to their low results and not vice versa. Moreover, the other subjects could be understood by using reading skills geared to memorisation. However, English and Maths would require a different type of reading, which requires understanding. Consequently, ENBA actually lays the ground for this study in that it gives a glimpse of the poor mastery of English by Ethiopian students in government schools and it also hints at the possibility

that these students are not able to adjust their reading skills according to the purpose of their reading.

3.2 The Conceptual Framework for Extensive Reading

The why and wherefore of extensive reading has a history of its own apart from reading, or more accurately branching off from the types of reading. Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (2001:1) define extensive reading as the kind of reading that is done for information or pleasure and is necessarily done in large quantities. They stress that the immediate focus of the reader should be on the content rather than on language or language skills. Day and Bamford (2000:2) also give a list of characteristics of extensive reading which include the fact that reading is done as its own reward, dictionaries are only rarely used and the person involves in such kind of reading for a variety of personal, social or academic reasons. They state that the readers should have the freedom to stop reading whenever the materials no longer interest them and that their reading is usually fast.

Nation (1997:1) explains that encouraging such a type of reading among students could be very advantageous in that it allows for different learners with different reading proficiency levels, interests and schedules to select materials of their own taste and read in their own time at their own pace. Consequently, educationists and teachers have been interested in using extensive reading as a supplementary or complementary activity to teaching English and reading for a long time. The provision of deliberately graded

readers to facilitate language and reading acquisition has also been used for many decades.

Bell (2001:1) traces interest in graded readers as far back as the 1950s with the writings of Michael West. He states that a sustained interest in developing reading speed through extensive reading got momentum in the 1960s with the studies of Fry and the De Leeuws. Obviously, this study shows that the interest continues in the present millennium.

It is clear that reading takes place in a social context and is best promoted by interaction. Therefore many researchers and teachers have used extensive reading and designed reading schemes to assist their students to improve their reading and language. Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (2001:1) give us a glimpse of the variety of the names of such schemes which include Book Flood, Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading (USSR), Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) and Silent Uninterrupted Reading for Fun (SURF). Others, like the Primary Reader Scheme (PRS), also exist worldwide. Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (2001:1) list the advantages of such schemes as:

> ➢ Increased knowledge of the world.
> ➢ Enhanced language acquisition in such areas as grammar, vocabulary, and text structure.
> ➢ Improved reading and writing skills.
> ➢ Greater enjoyment of reading.
> ➢ Higher possibility of developing a reading habit.

Numerous educators have written articles on how they have used extensive reading successfully in their classrooms.

Nation (1997:1) wanted to make sure that such schemes not only improved reading fluency, but other language skills too. He says that the relationship between language proficiency and extensive reading is complex in that success in formal study could make reading more feasible. At the same time, success in reading could motivate students to do further study and more reading. Moreover, students who speak and listen to English outside the classroom also do more extensive reading.

He reviews some studies and says that it is clear that students gain in their vocabulary knowledge and have a greater than normal success rate in their academic examinations. Nation (1997:7) concludes by stressing:

> The research on extensive reading shows that there is a wide range of learning benefits from such activity. Experimental studies have shown that not only is there improvement in reading, but that there are improvements in a range of language uses and areas or language knowledge. Although studies have focussed on language improvement, it is clear that there are affective benefits as well. Success in reading and its associated skills, most notably writing, makes learners come to enjoy language learning and to value their study of English.

Other scholars like Heal (1998:1-3) give practical examples of how they have overcome the difficulty of teaching large unmanageable reading classes with unmotivated students. Heal explains how her students would not come to class and did not do their homework. So she used extensive reading along with peer-pressure and competition to motivate her students. She divided her class into groups and then gave them weekly quizzes. Eventually, there was a noticeable improvement in both the classroom atmosphere and the students' reading scores.

Day and Bamford (2000:1-7) discuss the pleasures and benefits of extensive reading schemes. Provided that interesting reading materials can be obtained they state that reluctant readers can be transformed into proficient ones. They say that the benefits are not only in reading skills, but in writing, listening, vocabulary and other areas as well. They say the students are weaned away from word-by-word reading through repeatedly meeting the same patterns of letters, words and word combinations, thereby developing automaticity and increasing their reading skills. They say that extensive reading provide the students in foreign language contexts with opportunities for increased exposure to English and many students also develop positive attitudes to the language.

Day and Bamford (2000:5-6) also discuss how teachers can use extensive reading. They suggest three options. The first is to integrate extensive reading into the curriculum as it helps students to read and pass their exams. They recommend having a separate extensive reading course. If this is not possible, they suggest adding on the extensive reading portion to an existing language course, as a non-credit activity, or through assigning a certain portion of the semester's grades to extensive reading. If both of these are not possible, then they suggest that the extensive reading scheme be added on as an extracurricular activity outside the regular curriculum. This third option could be especially viable in rural schools in Ethiopia, where teachers usually have half days free and are not involved in income generating activities.

3.3 A Review of International Extensive Reading Research

Fortunately, the dearth of research on reading in the Ethiopian context is more than

compensated for by the abundance of reading research internationally. Urquhart and

Weir (1998:19) scrutinise the number of articles with the word "reading" in their

titles published between 1966 and 1996 and found in ERIC. They discovered that

the least number published per year was 600 and the most well above 3000.

Alderson (2000:1) admits from the outset of his book:

> The sheer volume of research on the topic belies any individual's
> ability to process, much less synthesise, everything that is written.
> Similarly, the number of different theories of reading is simply
> overwhelming: what it is, how it is acquired and taught, how reading
> in a second language differs from reading in a first, how reading
> relates to other cognitive and perceptual abilities, how it interfaces
> with memory. All these aspects of reading are important, but will
> probably never be brought together into a coherent and
> comprehensive account of what it is we do when we read.

A review of international research on reading and reading schemes tend to unambivalently

state that the provision of books to children results in improvements in their reading

efficiency. For example, Parker and Parker (1984:184) strongly advocate the use of 'book-

based' approaches to the teaching of reading and further back up their claims by references

to Elley and Mangubhai, Spack and Carrell. Krashen (1993:84) also declares that extensive

reading schemes are invaluable to the teaching of reading. He summarises studies

comparing the achievements of studies who received traditional reading comprehension

classes with those who also read extensively on their own and stated that 93% of the 41

comparisons showed that extensive reading benefited the students immensely. This

obviously makes sense from a language acquisition point of view, because as Williams

(1984:204) states, there is so much evidence of learners learning a language along the same

route that some researchers maintain that teaching cannot alter this order. She (1984:203) stresses, "what appears to be unquestioned in the literature is the crucial role of language input – input of language through listening and reading – for the learner to act on in order to activate and develop his/her own learning mechanisms…".

Due to the massiveness and impossibility of reviewing all the research on extensive reading, a review of such reviews will be made of two leading experts in the field of reading, Urquhart and Alderson. Urquhart and Weir (1998: 219-221) begin their review of research on extensive reading by stating the surprising fact that there are almost no negative comments on the subjects. The only disadvantages they come up with are practical administrative ones like the cost and time of establishing and running such programmes efficiently, as well as the need for some curriculum time required for private reading. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile keeping in mind that practical administrative constraints can disrupt a whole reading scheme, as properly administering a scheme is the most relevant part of implementation. An invaluable book on practical administrative constraints is one entitled *Promoting Reading in Developing Countries*, which is a collection of various articles that adequately portray the various aspects and challenges of trying to run reading schemes in various countries around the world (Greaney, 1996).

Urquhart and Weir (1993: 219-221) state that researchers like Rodrigo (1995), Day et al. (1991), Pitts et al. (1989) and Krashen (1993) have all found that extensive reading contributes directly to both reading comprehension and vocabulary development. Some researchers like Hafiz and Tudor (1989:5) are said to attribute this development to the

tension-free environment in which extensive reading takes place leading to the relaxed in-take of large quantities of comprehensible input.

Urquhart and Weir (1998:220) extend their review beyond English speaking countries and explain that the positive effects of extensive reading programmes have been reported upon in countries like Japan and Fiji by Robb and Susser (1989) and Elley and Mangubhai (1983) respectively.

Interestingly, they point out that extensive reading has been positively examined and recommended by numerous researchers, including Davis (1995), Elley (1991), Hamp-Lyons (1985), Krashen (1993), Nation (1997) and others. Despite this amount of overwhelming evidence, little sustained reading occurred in classrooms throughout Britian and as little as 15% of classroom time was devoted to reading. Discussions, questions and other factors associated with the testing of reading took up more time than the actual teaching of reading. Apparently, this is worse in the USA, where Alevermann and Moore (1991:974) report that reading strategies do not play a large part in the reading classroom.

The only mention of the possibility of extensive reading being anything but a resounding success is made by Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (2001:1). They mention that poorer countries that lack adequate reading materials, low teacher salaries and in adequate preparation of teachers, have been found to have implementation difficulties. Perhaps this is of utmost importance to Africa, as many of the countries including Ethiopia come

under the 'Least Developed Countries' criteria. Therefore, reading schemes, which have worked in other regions of the world, cannot be replicated without looking at the specificity of the African context. A lack of reading materials, low teacher training and motivation, undernourished students and a lack of a reading culture are part and parcel of the African educational setting in general and Ethiopia, in particular.

In an attempt to be selective and get a flavour of how some studies on extensive reading were carried out, three studies will be reviewed in more depth. The first study is on the relationship between extensive reading and its contribution to the students' reading speed and reading comprehension as researched by Timothy Bell (2001) on Yemeni students very recently. The second was a study by Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (2001) and examines if conducting extensive reading in remedial classes can be of any assistance to weaker students. The third, is a study mentioned earlier by Robb and Susser (1989) which scrutinises whether extensive reading might actually contribute more than a traditional skills building course in improving students' English in a foreign language setting. All three studies have been selected on the basis that they cover different aspects of extensive reading and could contribute more to the understanding of the role extensive reading could have in Ethiopia.

3.3.1 Extensive Reading : Speed and Comprehension

Bell (2001:1) set out from the given premise that extensive reading contributes greatly to the reading speed of students and that advanced students could increase their reading speed up to 57% over a couple of years. However, he wanted to research the slightly

neglected area of whether these remarkable gains in reading speed were at the expense of reading comprehension. On the other hand, he speculated that perhaps the poor understanding of slow readers due to the fact that their memory is insufficient to retain the information in large chunks to enable process of the meaning could be overcome by this faster reading. Therefore, reading faster improves comprehension.

The research design he used was a quantitative one in which he had a control group and a test group. "The control group (n = 12) received an entirely different reading program which was intensive in character, being based on the reading of short passages and the completion of tasks designed to 'milk' the texts for grammar, lexis, and rhetorical patterns" (Bell, 2001: 2). The exercises included the types of traditional reading exercises like dictation, vocabulary, comprehension questions, cloze, gap-filling, multiple choice and true/false questions. The test group, on the other hand, consisted of 14 students and " received an extensive reading program consisting of class readers, a class library of books for students to borrow, and regular visits to the library providing access to a much larger collection of graded readers (up to 2000 titles)" (Bell, 2001:2).

Records of time spent on reading were closely monitored. Then both groups had to sit for a series of reading speed tests and reading comprehension tests, which though not sophisticated served their purpose. For example, in the reading speed tests, students had to mark where they had reached when the teacher banged on the desk. The statistical tool used to analyse these results was the 't' test for correlated samples.

The results proved both his hypotheses that the learner in the extensive group would achieve significantly faster reading speeds and that the learner in the extensive group would achieve significantly higher scores on the tests of reading comprehension. So he concludes by stating that there are significant gains in using an extensive reading programme to improve students' reading rather than using traditional reading lessons, (Bell, 2001:7). He stresses this especially as the test group had scored less in their reading tests before the extensive programme and so the programme had actually reversed the scores.

The biggest limitations to this study, which Bell (2001:8) admits to himself, is the small number of students used in the experiment and the questionable reliability and validity of his reading comprehension and reading speed tests. Nevertheless, this study is useful to Ethiopia in that both Yemen and Ethiopia share similar features in geographical location and the use of English, and that the study was not set in an English speaking country and therefore reduces the chances of incidental learning outside the classroom.

3.3.2   A Study of Extensive Reading with Remedial Reading Students

This study is set in the Philippines. Like schools in Ethiopia the school in the study had around 2800 students and an average of 52 students per class. Their classes last for 40 minutes and the school operates on a shift system. 90% of the students are estimated to come from low-income families and reading materials are scarce in such environments, (Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya 2001:2).

Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (2001:2) started out on their research because they felt:

> While much good work in ER takes place, sustained, well-run programs are more often the exception than the rule. Effective ER programs seem especially scarce for lower achieving students, as many educationists express the view that such students lack the desire and skills to read extensively. Thus further research is needed to develop and test situation-appropriate ER with lower achieving students.

Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (2001:3) used a Pre-test – Post-test control group quantitative design. They used two instruments, which were the Informal Reading Inventory and the Gray Standardised Oral Reading Test. The latter indicates the grade level, which the student is reading at. The students in the experimental group went through an extensive reading programme, which lasted for six months and involved 45% of silent reading time. The control group simply followed the regular English syllabus in their remedial English lessons.

They used the t-test to compare all the scores and set a familywise alpha level of .05. They had a degree of freedom of 20 and set the critical value at 2.676 to compensate for the fact that more than two values were being analysed (Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya 2001:4). They found that significant differences developed in the reading proficiency between the groups after the treatment. So they proved their first hypothesis that there was no significant difference in the pre-test reading proficiency scores and disproved their second hypothesis that the same would hold true after the six month extensive reading programme.

Lituanas, Jacobs and Renandya (2001:7) round off by saying:

> In conclusion, students who are not currently skilled, enthusiastic readers face unnecessary and serious obstacles to realizing their potential contributions to themselves, their families and to society in general. In this information age, they will be shut off from the power gained through obtaining and providing information and from the splendor and inspiration of good fiction. Thus, educationists need to create and implement programs to help students who fall behind in reading. The accumulated wisdom embodied in the current study and the many which came before it strongly suggests that ER can play an important role in helping students gain in their level of reading skill, confidence and enjoyment. ER can help people discover the joy and power that reading brings.

3.3.3   Extensive Reading vs Skills Building in an EFL Context

Robb and Susser (1989) conducted their research in Japan on Japanese college freshman students. They state that while there is general agreement that reading is the most important skill in EFL situations, very little data-based research exists on extensive reading as an L2 pedagogic procedure (Robb and Susser, 1989:1).

They wanted to see if extensive reading alone could bring about an improvement in students' reading abilities and if language skills are better learned when specifically taught. So they set out with 125 Japanese students who had no significant differences in reading.

The experiment group had to do extensive reading during the year. They started reading at a fairly low level and were allowed to read at their own pace. They were engaged in silent reading and were allowed to proceed to a higher level after demonstrating that they had achieved acceptable reading comprehension at the existing level. They were not taught any skills overtly and were required to read a minimum of 500 pages at home

during the year. The teachers monitored their work by making them write short summaries of the stories they read.

The control group had to work through a reading skills textbook with 12 chapters and 2 reading sections in each chapter. Students read the passages individually and did the exercises in the book. For homework, they had to do an additional section of the test and were monitored by a two-item quiz at the beginning of each period (Robb and Susser 1989:4).

Robb and Susser (1989:3) used the Multiple Skills Series Midway Placement Tests before and after the treatment. They concluded that the students in the extensive reading programme could read faster, understand important facts and guess the meaning of new words from context better than the control group. Moreover, they were as good as the control group in getting the main idea and making inferences. Interestingly, the test group also showed a more marked improvement in their writing skills than the control group. Therefore, Robb and Susser (1989:7) strongly recommend extensive reading, as students enjoy it more and also learn more from such an approach.

They (Robb and Susser,1989:6) acknowledge that some of the weaknesses of the study could be contamination from other English courses and differences in study time between the groups and they decided to conduct a repetition of the experiment in the next academic year.

All three of the studies reviewed came up with findings that reiterated the benefits of extensive reading programmes on the reading skills of students who use English as a second or foreign language.

3.4 Using Children's Literature

3.4.1 The Rationale behind Using Children's Literature

Most researchers agree that reading provides a unique opportunity to assist the psycho-social development of children. In pre-literate days or in societies with oral cultures, it was story-telling that had the role of assisting in the child's development. Fordham, Holland and Millican (1995:94) say, "Most oral cultures record history and communicate events through story-telling, and teach moral and cultural values through riddles and proverbs." However, with the increase of print, and the availability of books, reading took over the role of oral literature and added some new aspects of its own. Davis (1992:3) sees reading as giving children the opportunity to reshape their own lives and holds:

> Reading, writing, growing-up, trying to re-understand the past you have come out of in search of the future you are going into - these seem part of the project for such people who want to try to make and re-make lives of their own.

Spink (1989:37) sees reading as being fundamental in shaping children's lives in the first place. He argues:

> ...reading can assist with self-identity in terms of our sexual identity, our ethnic and cultural and geographical identity, and our religious and moral selves. Many of these matters are areas of conflict: conflict with parents, friends, school, or our inner selves.

Although researchers may emphasise different aspects, they all tend to agree that reading books enhances the child's psychological development. Some say that the reading process involves conscious attention and automatic activation and that extensive reading could significantly affect the automatic activation (Urquhart and Weir, 1998:38). How to go about the teaching of reading, however, is another matter entirely. Some researchers oppose the practice of teaching reading in schools through the use of phonics and reading comprehension questions because they feel such approaches bleed the texts dry and take away the enjoyment of reading for the students. Others see these as necessary steps in enabling students to read, in contrast to those who regard them as irrelevant obstacles to acquiring reading. People like Frank Smith (1985) have been arguing against a 'programmatic approach' to teaching reading for several decades. Smith in particular strongly argues that the only end to such exercises are their own instructional ones and their continued use lies in thoughtless tradition. As an alternative solution he states that all children should join what he calls 'the literacy club'. This is basically reading as a means of obtaining meaning and interacting with others who encourage and enjoy reading themselves. Although all scholars would probably not agree with the extremist view of eradicating formal reading lessons, most would agree that creating a non-threatening environment is advisable. Such an environment would be risk-free owing to the absence of tests, examinations and questions to answer. Students would read at their own rates on topics of their own choice simply for the pleasure of reading. One of the ways of creating such an environment is to have supplementary readers in school libraries. Therefore, the need to include supplementary reading materials has been advocated for a long time. Some countries like the UK boast a stock of over 1,621 readers

at present and this vast resource of language for learners has been used with increasing interest and theoretical awareness over the years. The basic need for such a resource is that individual students have individual and at times unique styles of learning. Obviously, in classes of over 80 students in the Ethiopian situation, a single teacher cannot accommodate all the individual traits of the students. Consequently, having a library with graded readers allows the students to study individually at their own preferred rate and in their own style. Maxwell and Meiser (1997:45) give us a general rule of thumb to calculate the span of reading levels in an average class. They advise that we divide the grade number in half. For instance, if we were working with grade 6, dividing it in half would result in 3. Then the resulting figure, in this example 3, is added on to the grade level to get the upper level. So 3 plus 6 would give us 9. Then the resulting figure, in this example 3, is subtracted from the grade number to get the lower level, which would be 3 in this example. Hence to get the individual reading levels of Grade Eight students, we divide 8 by 2 getting 4. Then we add 4 on to 8 and subtract 4 from 8, which would give us 4 and 12. Consequently, the individual reading levels of Grade Eight students would vary from 4th to 12th grade.

No single coursebook could accommodate for such a huge range of reading levels and would as a result slow down the good readers and prove too difficult for the weaker readers. The availability of supplementary readers would thus allow for students to read at their own rates and provide the perfect student centre task. Maxwell and Meiser (1997:230-231) list the following five points as the basic reasons for using children's and young adult literature:

> ➢ Students learn to make critical judgements about what they read.
> ➢ Students learn to support and explain their critical judgements.
> ➢ Students will gain an understanding of themselves and others.
> ➢ Students learn about a wider life.
> ➢ Students' enjoyment of reading will increase.

Reflecting on this, we can deduce that as students read more and more books they will prefer some over others and gradually learn to make critical judgements. As these judgements will vary from those of their friends, they will discuss their differences of opinion. In order to convince their friends, they will have to support and explain why they liked or disliked a certain character, event or story. This in turn will develop their thinking skills. Hopefully, while discussing the characters in the stories, they will be able to identify with some and get better insights into what people are like. This will assist them in getting better understanding of themselves and others. The more they read about characters from other places, the more they will learn about a wider life. Two great advantages are that the students will be learning all this vicariously and will not have to actually experience the hard blows of life. Moreover, in Africa, where the economic status is low, people cannot afford to travel. So books can provide them with glimpses of the wider world at almost no cost at all. Finally, and most important a virtuous circle of reading will begin to emerge where the students' successful reading will increase their enjoyment of reading and will in turn lead them to read more.

Admittedly, at elementary level the basic aim would be to enable students to develop good reading habits and discover that reading is a pleasurable lifelong activity. Consequently, rather than being bothered by literary analysis theories such as historical

criticism, social criticism and new criticism, students are usually allowed to carry out 'subjective analysis', which basically involves talking about their likes or dislikes of a certain story or poem. Therefore, the children will not see reading as a burdensome task, but rather as a recreational one.

3.4.2 Optimum Reading Age

Most researchers tend to agree that once an optimum point for reading is past, it is very difficult to teach reading effectively. Chambers (1972:26) points out, "Studies of deprived children suggest that those who do not receive the necessary stimulus in early childhood may never be able to compensate." This is particularly worrying in the Ethiopia context where over half the population is said to live below the poverty line of a dollar a day and 100,000 children are living on the streets. Moreover, Ethiopia has the highest growth of stunted growth of children in the world.

Chambers (1972:28) points out that from the day a child is born, the environment he grows up in contributes to his perception and attitude to reading. There is no sharp schism between a child's infancy or early childhood and the time he enters school and starts learning formally to read. If the child is raised in an acquisitionally-rich environment, in which his parents and siblings are reading and there are colourful storybooks, he is definitely at an advantage to a less privileged child. Such a context contributes to the child's emergent literacy. But even children from less privileged backgrounds can be assisted in their early school days.

Clay (1972: 165) stresses this point and says:

> perceptual and cognitive functioning change markedly between five and seven years. It is my belief that, at this important time, we begin the production of our reading failures by allowing some children to build inefficient systems of functioning, which keep them crippled in this process throughout their school careers. As older readers they are difficult to help because they are habituated in their inefficiency. In the terms of the computer age, they have been poorly programmed.

Acknowledging the difficulties, Neville and Pugh (1982:88) give us a glimmer of hope when they state:

> Unless, a breakthrough occurs, how can the slow starter (and often slow pupil) ever catch up? He has not the time to do so in school and, unless he has very understanding and concerned parents, it is doubtful whether the home will be able to help much. The school must, then, provide enough easy material in school or class libraries for leisure reading so that, if interest is aroused, it is not at once stifled by stories that are too difficult.

What are the implications of these statements for a country like Ethiopia, whose children have passed through many famines and civil wars and who in the best of time live in a society that has more oracy than literacy?

Since education aims at bring about change and has to deal with the realities of the classrooms, many schools feel it to be their responsibility to provide a conducive environment in which good readers can improve even more and weaker readers can catch up with their peers. However, if irreparable damage has taken place in early childhood, it is doubtful if there can be much progress at a later age. Nevertheless, reading schemes have been implemented in an attempt to help readers. Clay (1972:165) points out:

> If the problem reader is young, any "lost" behaviour which he no longer tries to apply to his reading will not be buried too far below the surface and with encouragement (that is positive reinforcement) it can be recovered. The longer the narrow, specialised responding has been practised the harder it will be to build new learning into the old system. This is a good reason why reading failure should be detected early.

However, one ought to keep in mind that a lot of this research has been conducted in the West, where the major problem is that a child has not received adequate support from the family regarding reading. In the context of Africa, however, the child might be suffering from a deluge of problems. To begin with, his mother may not have had good post-natal and ante-natal care. Next, the child might have suffered physically during delivery. Once into this world, he might have suffered from malnutrition, which could cause learning difficulties. Most likely, his parents are illiterate due to the high illiteracy rate in the country. This would leave him without role models, not to mention an acquisitionally-poor learning environment. Consequently, although we might talk about the "Optimum Reading Age" for children in general, we ought to keep in mind that though it is desirable to introduce children to reading at the ages of 5 – 7 at the latest, this might not be feasible in continents such as Africa.

3.4.3 Reading Schemes

What it takes to have an effective reading scheme has often been discussed by teachers, practitioners and researchers. Parker and Parker (1984: 181 –182) propose a framework for reading development. They base their discussion on Brian Cambourne and reiterate seven key conditions for successful reading development. Thorpe (1988: 9-12) also gives a complete description of a successful reading scheme, except she gives six major components for a successful scheme provision, access, staffing, promotion, parental participation, and reading with friends. Nevertheless, there is a close relationship between these six components and the seven conditions discussed by Parker and Parker (1984: 181 –182).

3.4.3.1 Provision

Thorpe (1988: 9-12) mentions the actual provision of supplementary readers as the first and the most obvious necessity for any reading scheme. Neville and Pugh (1982:98) point out that a large number of books at various levels of difficulty are necessary for a good scheme. The selection of the titles of the readers has to be as varied as possible, especially since reading is such a private cognitive process and each student has his/her own peculiar preferences and dislikes, so a greater of variety of books could meet the disparate tastes of readers. Harrison (1980:112) points out that the first years, when a child is beginning to gain independence in reading, is crucial because the task of matching a reader to a text is at its most delicate. This is evident in that the first taste of anything tends to leave a lasting impression in one's mind. Therefore, if the child find his/her first book too difficult or not to his/her liking then he/she may be put off from reading. On the other hand, if the child enjoys his/her first experience of reading, then he/she may become an addict for life.

Similarly, Parker and Parker (1984:181–182) refer to their first condition as "Immersion". Here they are describing the existence of the language in the environment of the learner in the shape of books, newspapers and other materials, allowing him/her to have opportunities to read. Here again, a certain socio-economic pre-condition in which a publishing industry is well-established and infrastructure for the distribution of books is assumed to exist. As discussed in Chapter Two, a lot of these pre-conditions do not exist in Ethiopia.

3.4.3.2 Access

Thorpe (1988: 9-12) calls her second major component "Access" and states that the mere existence of books is not very meaningful, unless the students are able to borrow them and read them whenever they like. Even if books are available in abundance in a school library, unless the students are able to use them, then they might as well not exist. Neville and Pugh (1982:98) warn that unless the reading material is freely accessible, a child might be deterred from reading by the slightest difficulty in actually getting a book. This warning cannot be over-emphasised, especially in developing countries where books are so hard to purchase that most books tend to be kept under lock and key, thus not keeping them only out of the way of the possible thief, but also out of the hands of the eager reader.

Parker and Parker (1984: 181 –182) set a condition they call "Responsibility". As the word suggests, this is the condition whereby the learner is independent to select his/her own reading material. It is the process of ascertaining the learner's right to choose the material, place and time to read. If encouraged, this condition helps the learner to develop a feeling of independence and a penchant to reading out of his own choice. In Ethiopia, the lack of a wide variety of reading materials, their inhibitive prices and the lack of libraries all work against the learners developing this characteristic.

3.4.3.3 Staffing

Thorpe (1988: 9-12) uses the term "Staffing" to refer to both teachers and librarians. Unless active promotion of the materials takes place not much can be achieved.

According to Greenwood (1988:9) the failure of many class libraries can be attributed to the expectation of the teachers that students can develop reading and interpretative skills and a pleasure from reading within a vacuum, without encouragement or guidance.

Both teachers and librarians should play an active role in helping the students to choose the right books. If a student consistently selects inappropriate readers, it could put him off the reading process all together. Davies (1995:6) states that social, affective and cultural factors play a major role in influencing readers' selection of texts. He says their interaction with texts and their concepts of themselves as readers or non-readers is crucial to their reading successfully. These concepts can be determined according to comments made by the people around them, so teachers have to be sensitive when they correct students.

Greaney (1996:31) also points out that "teachers should be introduced to sound pedagogical approaches for teaching reading through long and short term inservice programs," as teachers in developing countries may lack the fundamental teaching skills. Moreover, teachers should give students time in the classroom for silent reading and serve as reading models themselves. Teachers should also assist in the selection of readers for the students.

Nevertheless, it is not so easy to select readers. Bradman (1986:70) points out that a child might listen to tales of ghosts, and ghouls and monsters without batting an eyelid - only to have nightmares caused by a story about a child who gets harmlessly lost in the forest. The imagination of a child and an adult differ and it is at times difficult for an adult to

gauge the tastes of a child. The brighter side is that there are aspects of the readers that adults can reasonably assess. As Southgate and Roberts (1970:73) explain, a teacher choosing supplementary story books needs to bear in mind not only the vocabulary but also the subject matter and interest levels of the basic books which they are supposed to supplement. Therefore, objective factors like vocabulary and subject matter are much easier to judge.

Parker and Parker (1984: 181 –182) have a condition they call "Demonstration". This is the existence of a reader in the environment of the learner, who can set an example by actually reading. This role model could be the child's parents, teachers or peers. The learner has to understand that reading is a worthwhile activity to imitate. The role model basically demonstrates that reading is a real activity to do in the real world. In rural Ethiopia especially, the existence of such role models are few and far apart. Teachers tend to be the role models for the students as most of the rest of the society are not very literate. However, the lack of reading materials outside the capital city renders it very difficult for even those literate teachers to set good examples for the students. Unfortunately, many teachers are observed trying to get involved in income generating activities in their spare time and drinking alcohol, playing cards and chewing a local narcotic leaf for recreation. Good teachers and librarians are necessary for any reading scheme to be effective.

The condition of "Expectation" set by Parker and Parker (1984: 181-182) is closely related to "Demonstration" and it is the conscious or unconscious communication to the

child of what can be achieved through reading. If the role models portray that reading is an activity that can positively contribute to life, then the child is likely to pick up their attitude towards reading. On the other hand, if the child is told to sit in a corner and read quietly, while the adults are watching television, then he/she will pick up the expectation that reading is an arduous task not related to entertainment. As explained above, teachers and the society at large are not portraying a positive image of reading in general. To add to this dismal scheme, economic crisis tend to negatively affect the society's expectations to reading and learning in general. Over the last half-century the general positive expectations towards education have been changing into negative ones due to the fact that the educated are not perceived to be advancing economically. Old sayings and songs such as "Better an educated person kills you than an uneducated one" and " Young bride be proud you are marrying a teacher" have disappeared from the scene. Instead they are being replaced by new sayings such as "Owning a grocery is better than having a hundred degrees" and "If the worse comes to the worst, you can always marry a teacher!" More discouraging are sayings that actually dissuade students from reading and studying. For instance the saying, "Better to have good eyes for a day than study for a hundred," actually encourages the students to cheat on the day of the examination instead of studying for the whole semester.

3.4.3.4. Promotion

Thorpe (1988: 9-12) uses the term "Promotion", which overlaps with some of the ideas of "demonstration" and "Expectation". Although good teachers and librarians are necessary for any reading scheme to be effective, the children have to get into the reading-rooms or

libraries before the parents and librarians can begin influencing them. To get the children into the reading-rooms and libraries, parents have to be aware of the existence of the reading schemes and encourage their children to go there, and students should be motivated to go there too. Therefore, parents should be informed through various means of the existence of the scheme and students should find the places to have an attractive atmosphere. To achieve both these ends, the schools should make a sustained effort to promote the reading scheme.

This component presupposes that parents are literate and would encourage their children to go to the library as much as possible. This is not so in most of Africa. Moreover, in rural areas, children are usually needed for domestic chores like fetching water or looking after the sheep.

3.4.3.5. Parental Participation

Thorpe (1988: 9-12) stresses that a supportive home environment can have a decisive role on whether a child adopts the habit of reading and becomes an effective reader. One especially successful scheme had family reading groups in which whole families actually went to the reading room and spent evenings choosing, discussing and sharing books. Parental role models of how reading should be integrated into one's life are very important. A parent who makes a child sit in a corner with a book and sits on a couch and watches a video is sending clear messages of which is the more pleasurable activity. Whether programmes involving family reading groups would work in a developing

country where leisure time is scarce and adults and children are involved in income generating tasks in the evenings is doubtful.

Parker and Parker (1984: 181-182) discuss the need for "Approximation", which is the process that allows the learner to gradually acquire greater proficiency in negotiating meaning with the text. The setting of numerous comprehension questions after the student reads a book or a text, does not allow for gradual approximation. In the normal process of reading, the student usually skips unfamiliar words and even whole passages may be vague. It is only through experience or maturation that the students' reading strategies become refined. This is obviously enhanced if the home environment encourages the children to do as much reading as possible.

This is very important in Ethiopia, where the children might begin school after the optimum reading age has passed, and has then to make great advances in their reading skills, especially since the textbooks are demanding. Students whose parents are teachers have a distinct advantage over others. Unfortunately, most homes do not provide a supportive environment. On the contrary, many students have illiterate parents, who might even be uncomfortable if their children read too much in the house. Greaney (1996:13) describes the difficult home environment in many developing countries by saying:

> Home factors that militate against the development of literacy in developing countries include illiterate parents and elders in the home, reticence about encouraging reading in the home, lack of appropriate reading material, inability of parents to purchase any form of reading materials, lack of space and light, number of household chores, child labour practices, and in some instance, communal lifestyles frown on solitary activities such as reading.

Another related condition discussed by Parker and Parker (1984: 181-182) is "Employment". This refers to the continuous reading of books and texts rather than sporadic one-off attempts performed during the class period. A good reader does a lot of reading of his own free will. The recent "Harry Potter Mania", which is sweeping Europe, is a good example of children feeling addicted to reading. Unfortunately, such a culture of reading takes many years to develop and is not so apparent in many African countries that still have an oral culture, where the word-of-mouth of the elders is given more respect and importance.

3.4.3.6. Reading with Friends

Thorpe (1988: 9-12) explains that peer pressure tends to be an influencing factor throughout a person's life. It tends to be especially strong during childhood and adolescence. Appearing "cool" according to peer standards tends to be a driving force, so if reading is considered to be an "in thing", it will be much easier for students to enjoy reading. However, if reading is seen as a "girl thing", then it will be difficult for any boy to do much reading in public, without being teased by friends. Therefore, schools should try to ensure that reading is regarded positively by the students at a school.

Parker and Parker (1984: 181-182) also set their last condition as that of "Feedback". This does not refer to error correction, but rather a meaningful way in which the child interacts with others about materials he/she has read. It could be an adult asking him/her for an opinion or it could be the discussing of characters or events with peers. Such

feedback is necessary for the child's reading skills not to develop in a vacuum and lead to the reading process being an act of isolation. Granted, that reading can at times be an act of escapism. However, this is more of the advanced reader rather than for one just discovering the reading process and developing his/her skills. Perhaps this is the sole factor working in favour of the African child. As Africa tend to be an oral society, the child who can tell a new story from what he has read to his classmates, can receive a lot of feedback in the form of questions and comments.

3.4.3.7. Others

Although the above points are quite an extensive list, each scheme is unique in itself and may have special factors that should be included to make it successful. Consequently, teachers ought to undertake research into their unique environments and constantly monitor the schemes to ensure that they are having the desired impacts.

To sum up, it is fairly obvious to everybody that a few hours spent on reading instruction is not going to provide students with adequate reading skills. Consequently, schemes in which students are actively and meaningfully involved in reading by their own free choice have to be developed. Setting up reading schemes, book clubs and the like have been done quite successfully in many developed countries. However, it is unlikely whether transplanting such schemes to African soils and expecting them to bear the same fruit is realistic. Such schemes in Africa must be closely monitored to ensure that they are doing what they are supposed to be doing; making African students members of 'the literacy club'.

Due care must be given to several aspects of the reading scheme. Especially in rural areas students might actually be living in conditions that are oblivious to the act of reading and need further support and encouragement to adopt it as a part of their life. In urban areas too, modern electronic media appear to be taking over the leisure time of students. In Europe videos and films might be competing with books for children's attention, but in Africa reading books has not been a major hobby. Therefore, the setting up of successful reading schemes are bound to demand innovative approaches for a unique setting.