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INTERDEPENDENCE AMONG AMHARIC LANGUAGE (L_1) READING ABILITY, ENGLISH LANGUAGE (L_2) PROFICIENCY AND L_2 READING ABILITY OF GRADE ELEVEN STUDENTS

Abstract: The purpose of the current study was to examine interdependence among mother tongue or Amharic language (L_1) reading ability, English as foreign language (L_2) proficiency and reading ability of grade eleven students at Damot Preparatory Secondary School for Higher Education, West Gojjam Administrative Zone, Ethiopia. Researcher randomly selected a sample of fifty grade eleven students. Mixed-method approach was employed for data gathering and analyses. To make the tests contextualized, one Amharic language and one English language school teachers prepared the tests to measure students' L_1 reading ability and L_2 reading ability respectively. For students' L_2 proficiency, their first semester English language (L_2 proficiency) final examination result was used. Then, the reading ability tests and L_2 proficiency examination were analyzed through quantitative data. Correlations and regression were used to analyze the quantitative data. Researcher used unstructured-interview questions to collect qualitative data and analyzed in descriptions. It was found that learners' (L_2) reading ability score is influenced both by their first language (L_1) reading ability and English as foreign language (L_2) proficiency, with differences in effect. Students' L_2 reading ability is influenced both by their L_1 reading ability and their L_2 proficiency. This might imply both the interdependence and threshold level hypotheses contribute to L_2 reading ability of learners. Thus, it is recommended that students' L_1 reading ability and L_2 proficiency be promoted to help them improve their L_2 reading ability. Besides, students need to be trained on L_1 reading strategies so that they can transfer and employ them while they read their L_2. In doing so, students could develop both their L_1 reading ability and L_2 reading proficiency and use them as facilitator in learning reading in their L_1 and L_2 language skills, promote their reading ability, acquaint them with academic reading, and in their day-to-day activities. Further research could be made to check interdependence among L_1 reading ability, L_2 proficiency, L_2 reading ability and reading strategies in different contexts and grade levels. Studies might also be conducted on reverse effects of transfer from students' L_2 reading ability and L_2 proficiency to students' L_1 reading ability at universities and colleges of Ethiopia and other multilingual countries.

Key words: Interdependence, Amharic language (L_1) reading ability, English language (L_2) proficiency and reading ability.

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Introduction

When western modern education began in Ethiopia, English language was taught as a subject until the 1935 Italian occupation (Abiy, 2011; Chanyalew & Abiy, 2015). Currently, English as a foreign language (L_2) is taught as a compulsory subject in Ethiopia at primary level of education (beginning from grade one) and used as a medium of instruction in secondary and higher learning institutions (Ethiopian Ministry of Education, 2010). National curriculum of the country stresses on good command of their first language (Amharic) as well as the English language. In spite of such efforts, however, there are serious complaints regarding L_1 and L_2 ability of students (Abiy, 2011; Berhe, 1989). For example, many students in secondary schools have low proficiency and reading ability in the English language. As a result, there is a widespread worry about the ability of students to read in the English language (Institute of International Education, 2012). There is, thus, a felt need to study the issue to help students develop the required reading capacity. The purpose of the present study, therefore, aimed at investigating the interdependence among Amharic language (L_1) reading ability, English language (L_2) proficiency and (L_2) reading ability of grade eleven students at Damot Preparatory Secondary School for Higher Education, West Gojjam Administrative Zone, Ethiopia.

Many scholars argue that reading is a fundamental language skill to learn other language skills and promote academic achievement of students (Clarke, 1979; Cunningham, & Stanovich, 2003; Penfield, 1986). Although the skill of reading is a spring board to learn the English language skills as well as the other content area subjects, Ethiopian students at different grade levels had deficiencies in L_2 reading capacity (Abiy, 2011; Tesfamichael, 2011). It was found that students in both primary and secondary schools failed to cope with the reading ability expected of them which is a very serious concern (Tesfamichael, 2011). In relation to this problem, a lot of studies have been conducted in the areas of literacy and bilingual education and examined whether low reading ability among students is a reading or a language problem. The studies attempted to see the causes for students' failure in reading and posed the following questions. For example, Alderson (1984) posed question on, "Is reading in students' foreign language a reading problem or a language problem?" He defined reading as complex activity involving an interaction between a reader and a text, and suggested that poor reading in students' L_2 is a function of either inadequate L_2 proficiency or poor L_2, or both, whereas good reading in L_2 is a result of good L_1 reading ability or good L_2, or both. He further asked questions on the connection between reading ability and strategy saying that, which is more problematic, is it a problem of using appropriate strategy or lack of adequate threshold L_2 proficiency?

This question has prompted much research on the transfer of reading skills from L_1 to the learning of L_2. In response to the questions, scholars fall back on Cummins's (1979) linguistic interdependence and threshold level proficiency theory. From that on, these theories have been issue of continuing debate. There is thus, a felt-need of investigating the impact of students' L_1 reading ability and L_2 proficiency on their L_2 reading. Therefore, this study aimed at examining which of these variables significantly contribute to students' L_2 reading ability.

A study by (Abiy, 2011; Berhe, 1989; Chanyalew & Abiy, 2015; Institute of International Education, 2012; Ministry of Education, 2010) showed that many parents and teachers are complaining and dissatisfied with students' achievement for grade eleven students exhibited low reading ability. It was reported that students' insolvency in reading ability might have been caused by a multitude of factors among which could be the students' first language

reading skill in Amharic language (L_1, in this case) which should have been transferred to effectively read in English (L_2) or their low level proficiency in English (L_2). There are fluid arguments about the role of first language reading ability and second language threshold level in the development of students' learning in general and their reading ability in particular. One of the arguments relates to the lack of reading experience students exhibit in the target language, that is, English. The distinction between unpracticed and practiced view of readers relates to Cooper's (1984) work that is between readers who pursued their previous education through the medium of their first language and those who pursed their education through a foreign language. It was indicated that the amounts of print students are exposed to also affect their cognition and reading achievement.

The other side of the argument advocates that students' reading skill in L_1 can be transferred to their reading in L_2 (Baker, 2001; Chen, & Vellutino 1997; Chu-Chang, 1981; Rivera, 1999). Various studies had been made in the areas of literacy and bilingual education apropos whether students' problem is a reading or a language problem and attempts were made to show which of these researches were acceptable.

However, findings unraveled unsettled results. Some of the studies disclosed that students had difficulties on reading ability which is associated with low proficiency on their L_2 (Abiy, 2011; Berhe, 1989; Chanyalew & Abiy, 2015b). On a similar vein, others also indicated that advanced L_1 readers fail to cope with the required standard because of inept in L_2 (Berhe, 1989). These researchers posit that students require a certain level of L_2 reading development to be successful in their L_2 reading ability. Other researchers, however, postulate those students' L_1 reading ability transfers to L_2 reading (Roberts, 1994; Rodríguez, 2010). Gudschinsky, as cited in (Roberts, 1994), reported that in literacy programs run in Peru, Mexico, and Vietnam, L_1 literacy promoted L_2 literacy. Studies on bilingual education also revealed that students who were literate in L_1 learnt L_2 more easily than preliterate bilinguals. Goodman, Goodman & Flores, 1978; Roberts, 1994). The disparate promulgation apropos the role of L_1 reading background to L_2 reading development and the need for a threshold level in L_2 relates with theories of Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (LIH, here after) and Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH, here after).

Conceptual framework

LIH and LTH

There are two widely known hypotheses regarding the relationship between L_1 reading ability and L_1 reading ability: The LIH and the LTH. The LIH, in its easy form, proposes that L_1 reading ability transfers to L_2 reading ability. It assumes that there is a common underlying cognitive ability between L_1 and L_2 reading process. This is because students have the chance of acquiring skill of reading in their L_1, where they can easily transfer this skill while reading L_2. According to this hypothesis, transfer happens automatically. The LTH proposes, on the other hand, that a threshold level of L_2 reading ability is necessary before L_1 reading ability transfers to L_2. Connection between LIH and LTH was backed up by a research finding that shows both L_2 specific and non-L_2 specific variables seem to be intervened in L_2 reading process (Graesser, 2007; Ke & Chan, 2017; Roberts, 1994; Sanford, 2015; Yamashita, 2002). This implies that L_2 learners need to acquire some basic linguistic knowledge or proficiency before they are able to read in L_2

 As indicated by Cummins (1979), language specific skills are not easily transferred from L_1 to L_2, but one can see moderate to high correlations between literacy-related language skills. In learning reading, we use linguistic resources from our L_1 when learning our L_2. In other words,

the set of skills that we learn in our L_1 can be transferred to the L_2. The knowledge of language, literacy, and concepts learned in the L_1 can be drawn upon in the L_2 after oral L_2 skills are developed, with no relearning required. Once students develop these skills in L_1, according to the theory, they will not need to relearn them in their L_2. The skill set will remain; the child will only have to focus on learning the new vocabulary and grammar of the L_2. This means that, by focusing on fully developing their reading skills in the L_1, students are also enhancing learning to read in the L_2. This signifies that children are not disadvantaged by first studying their L_1 and then shift to read in their L_1. It indicates that developing skills in the L_1 highly benefits L_2 learning because most of those skills will not need to be relearned in the L_2 (Baker, 2001). The interdependence of academic language proficiency (CALP) across languages implies that L_1 to L_2 CALP are manifestations of the common underlying proficiency (CUP).

To check the relationship among L_1 reading ability, L_2 proficiency and L_2 reading ability, many studies have been carried out to provide support for the hypothesis that L_1 background on reading may serve as a stepping stone for increasing L_1 reading ability, and that the impacts could be stronger for students with lower L_2 proficiency, while students achievement with higher L_2 proficiency could be the results of a threshold level for which exposure to L_1 reading ability no longer provides an added advantage (Friesen, & Jared, 2007; Jarvis & Jensen, 1982). For example, Friesen and Jared (2007) examined whether or not exposure to a text in a certain language will lead to an enhanced reading ability in a certain language, and found that vocabulary word learnt in L_1 text written in L_1 would facilitate subsequent reading ability of the same words in a text written in L_2.

However, Walter (2007) argued that access plays a major role in L_2 reading ability, and he rather prefers access than transfer. According to him, when L_2 learners understand L_2 texts, it has been said that they transfer reading comprehension skills from their L_1 to their L_2. He proposed that transfer is a misleading metaphor, and that it is better to speak of access to an already existing, non-linguistic skill.

On the other hand, LTH (initially termed short-circuit hypothesis), favors the assumption that students' reading L_2 proficiency is the key aspect for their L_2 reading ability. The assumption here is that as proficiency level grows, reading comprehension ability level catches up (Chu-Chang, 1981; Ke, & Chan, 2017). Different studies also indicated inconsistencies inclining linguistic knowledge as powerful predictor. There is, thus, a tendency of researching the consolidation of both LIH and LTH, and focus has been directed to studying cognitive processes in supporting each other for enhancing students' L_2 reading ability.

Role of L_1 reading ability and L_2 proficiency on students' L_2 reading ability

Students' reading ability in L_2 (grammar, vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, in the present study) can be influenced by their reading experience in the L_1 (Cziko, 1992; Perkins, & Brutten, 1988; Chu-Chang, 1981). It is believed that students who are reading various types of reading texts will gain a wider exposure to their L_2. As a result, they will expand their vocabulary, grammar usage, and the organizations of texts, which can enhance their L_1 and L_2 reading abilities (Chu-Chang, 1981; Friesen & Jared, 2007; Ke, & Chan, 2017; Kong, 2006; Perkins, & Brutten, 1988). It was indicated that students' vocabulary and grammar knowledge significantly correlate to reading ability although may not be taken for granted to have significant results on accurate and effective reading ability. Others, for example, (Carrell, 1991; Friesen & Jared, 2007; Ke, & Chan, 2017) also argued that a combination of word recognition and comprehension abilities can be related to the positive sides of reading abilities. Experts assume a person who has the ability to read for basic comprehension in the

L$_1$ reading ability will also have the ability to find information in a text of L$_2$ (Roberts, 1994; Yamashita, 2002).

The present study attempted to examine the interdependence among students' L$_1$ reading ability, L$_2$ proficiency and L$_2$ reading ability (which one predicts students' L$_2$ reading ability more, their L$_1$ reading ability, their L$_2$ proficiency or both?). As indicated in the introductory section of this paper, many students in Ethiopian preparatory high schools have difficulties in English language reading (Tesfamichael, 2011). Thus, mechanisms should be devised to minimize deficiencies in students' reading. One mechanism might be showing students to use strategy in their L$_1$ reading; and the other could be developing their L$_2$ proficiency, or focus on both. Which of these factors better predicts students' L$_2$ reading ability significantly? Such a study was not conducted in Ethiopia to date (Berhe, 1989; Mendida, 1988).

Hence, the current study attempted to investigate which of the variables- students' reading ability in their L$_1$ or L$_2$ proficiency can predict their reading ability. To date, in Ethiopia, studies were conducted on readability of texts and comprehension level of secondary school students (Berhe, 1989) and comparison of students with reading level expected of them at freshman Addis Ababa University (Mendida, 1988). The effects of Linguistic Interdependence or Linguistic Threshold of preparatory secondary schools for higher education students in Ethiopia have not yet been taken care of; this initiated the researcher to make the present study. Researcher believes that student reading ability plays the prime role in L$_2$ that should be studied, as English is taught in EFL context beginning grade one and used as a medium of instruction at grade five and beyond. Therefore, investigating the relationship between L$_1$ and L$_2$ reading ability of preparatory secondary school students may enhance better reading ability. Therefore, the study addressed the following research questions:

- Is there interdependence between students' L$_1$ reading ability and their L$_2$ reading ability?
- Is there interdependence between students' L$_2$ proficiency and their L$_2$ reading ability?
- Which of the variables-students' L$_1$ reading ability or their L$_2$ proficiency significantly predicts their L$_2$ reading ability?

Methodology

The current study examined the interdependence among students' Amharic language (L$_1$) reading ability and English language (L$_2$) proficiency (which includes students' grammar knowledge, reading comprehension, and vocabulary) could significantly predict their English language reading ability. The study employed survey study with descriptive type. The reason for using mixed-method approach was that it ***allows cross-validating or triangulating results obtained from quantitative data with the qualitative data (Creswell, 2013; Dornyei, 2007). Hence, mixed-method was incorporated for it is important in providing expanded understanding of research problems in social and behavioral sciences (Tashakkori, & Teddlie, 2003).***

Subjects for the study

The subjects of the study were fifty grade eleven students who were attending their lessons at Damot Preparatory Secondary School for Higher Education, West Gojjam Administrative Zone, Ethiopia, by 2019 academic year. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the subjects from six sections of one hundred and eighty-five students. Researcher chose simple random sampling technique because he assumed that it would provide each student

with equal representation. It was felt that the total number of students would be representative of group heterogeneity and manageable.

Data collecting tools

Three types of tests were used in the study. Grade eleven students' tests comprised L_1 reading ability, L_2 proficiency and L_2 reading ability. As far as possible, an attempted was made to make the test items to be similar to that of first semester final L_1 examination. To assess students' Amharic language (L_1) reading ability, a team of teachers prepared the test consisting of a total of forty vocabulary and comprehension questions. To gauge students' L_2 proficiency, their first semester English language (L_2) final examination consisting of comprehension, vocabulary and grammar questions based on continuous assessment, mid test, and final examination was used. Regarding their English language (L_2) reading ability test, a team of teachers prepared total of forty vocabulary and comprehension questions.

Focused group discussion (*FGD)*

To assess students' opinions about the transfer of their L_1 reading ability and reading strategy to their L_2 reading ability, and see the relation between L_2 proficiency and their L_2 reading ability, three open-ended **FGD questions were** prepared and used after having administered the tests.

Procedures for the study

Content validity and reliability of L_1 reading ability and L_2 reading ability tests

Two teachers who were teaching at grade eleven prepared L_1 reading ability test from Amharic language (L_1) department. ***To check content and face validity of the test, other three grade eleven*** L_1 ***teachers evaluated the test questions. Two curriculum experts and three measurement and evaluation instructors evaluated each question in terms of structure, accuracy, wording, difficulty level, and relevance. Based on the feedback obtained from the above stakeholders, two test questions were rejected; three test questions were revised and altered. Accordingly, 25 multiple-choice test items consisting of vocabulary and reading comprehension questions were prepared to be answered by the students within one hour. The above procedure was repeated to prepare students'*** L_2 reading ability test question items with the participation of grade eleven teachers of L_2.

Concerning the reliability of test items, however, the 25 vocabulary and reading comprehension multiple questions fo*r** L_1 reading ability and reading strategy to their L_2 reading ability, ***were pilot-tested with thirty students (n=30) of Merawi General Secondary and Preparatory School for Higher Education, West Gojjam, Ethiopia. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability of the reading comprehension questions of the alpha coefficient was 0.80 for L_1 reading ability test and ***0.78*** L_2 reading ability test respectively. ***The minimum learning competencies of (Ministry of Education, 2010) were used as the basis for each content domain in categorizing the reliability of test items. Therefore, suggestions on both tests could indicate reliability.***

Regarding L_2 proficiency test items

First semester English language final examination was assumed to assess and indicate students' L_2 proficiency level. It was believed that it had the power of covering the skills and contents of the semester's syllabus in measuring students' proficiency in L_2. Thus, the already

calculated students' first semester scores out of one hundred percent were taken as they were by getting permission and obtaining them from the Head of Record Office of the school.

Validity and reliability of open-ended interview questions

To assess students' opinions about the transfer of their L_1 reading ability and reading strategy to their L_2 reading ability, and see the relation between L_2 proficiency and their L_2 reading ability, three open-ended interview questions were prepared. Questions focused on if students feel that they had a good ability in reading their L_1 and L_2. The validity and reliability of interview questions can be evaluated by **panel of experts** (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). ***Thus, an educational psychologist, two*** L_1 ***teachers and two*** L_2 ***teachers evaluated content and face validity items of the interview questions in terms of their appropriateness for the purpose they were designed.*** Having administered the tests on students' L_1 reading ability their L_2 reading ability, researcher interviewed six randomly selected students in the school principal's office that covered eight to twelve minutes to each student. Researcher took notes during the interview to help him to use in analyzing qualitative data.

Data analyses techniques

Quantitative data obtained from students' L_1 reading ability, L_2 reading proficiency and L_2 reading ability were analyzed using multiple regression analysis, where as interview (qualitative data) results were analyzed using description.

The descriptive statistics below in Table 1 revealed that students' L_1 reading ability test score was below average. That is, the mean score was 13.36. Their L_1 reading ability score was little higher than the average (a mean of 16.62). Similarly, the mean of students' L_2 proficiency examination scores in their first semester aggregate was a little higher than half of the total score of one hundred percent. Further computation was made to check whether or not the means of students' L_1 reading ability test score and L_2 proficiency examination scores significantly correlate among themselves. In order to see the correlation, Pearson Product Moment correlation statistics was calculated.

Results and discussion

Results

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of (L_1) **reading ability test, (L2) reading ability test and (L2) proficiency exam scores**

Variable	Mean	Std
English language (L_1) reading ability test scores	13.36	3.87
Amharic language(L2) reading ability test scores	16.62	3.53
English language (L2) proficiency examination scores	61.34	11.65

As can be seen from Pearson's correlation coefficient results, it revealed that learners' Amharic language (L1) reading ability significantly correlated with their English language (L2) reading ability test results and their first semester English language (L2) proficiency examination results.

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Likewise, the results of students' English language (L_2) reading ability scores significantly correlated with their first semester English language (L_2) proficiency examination results at 95% confidence level.

Attempts were made to see which one is more interrelated to students' reading in English: their Amharic language (L1) reading ability or their English language (L2) proficiency? Thus, a multiple linear regression analysis was calculated using SPSS 20 to respond to this question, the dependent variable being students' English reading (L2) ability. Table 2 below displayed the summary of the scores.

Table 2: Correlations among students' L_1 reading ability scores and L_2 reading ability test scores as well as their first semester (L2) reading proficiency scores

	L2 reading ability test scores	L1 reading ability test scores	L2 proficiency (first semester final examination scores)
(L2) reading ability test scores	1.000	0.516*	0.472*
(L1) reading ability test scores		1.000	0.506*

*P< 0.05

The summary of the case wise analysis is depicted in Table 3 below. As shown in the Table, the Te Beta in both cases revealed a positive increase and interdependence, and the t-value is significant at p<0.05.

As the summary of the regression results disclosed in Table 3 above, the analysis indicated that the multiple correlation coefficient was 0.571 and the adjusted R^2 was 0.297. This means that both of the independent variables contributed to 29.7% of the variance in students' L_2 reading ability. The significance was observable, and it was significant at p<0.05. As can be seen from the case wise analysis, each dependent variable significantly predicts students' L_2 reading ability (see Table 3 below for the results). It was found that students' L_1 reading ability test scores seem to have been stronger relation compared to their first semester final examination (L_2) proficiency scores. For clarity, Table 3 below is used to summarize the results.

Table 3: Summary of the regression results

Variables	B	Beta	T	Sig.
L_1 **reading ability test scores**	.408	.152	2.677	.010
L_2 **reading ability test scores**	.095	.046	2.049	.046

Dependent variable: L2 **reading ability**
Adjusted R2=.297

From the regression analysis, it is possible to say that there is positive interdependence among independent variables, that is, L_1 reading ability and L_2 proficiency with the dependent variable, that is, L_2 reading ability.

Discussion of quantitative data

The descriptive statistics disclosed that students achieved more than average level reading ability in their L_1 although there is minor difference in their L_2 reading ability achievement, which is not significant. The regression analysis disclosed both students' L_1 reading ability and

L_2 proficiency have predicted their L_2 reading ability significantly. Although the two independent variables have significant effects on students' L_2 reading ability, the significance was found stronger in the case of L_1 reading ability than L_2 proficiency.

Finding of the present study is consistent with (Taki's, 2016) finding that there was significant difference between the Iranian readers of L_2 and Farsi L_1. This finding is also in agreement with (Chu-Chang, 1981; Rivera, 1999) which indicated that reading abilities in their L_1 facilitate and support the learning and reading processes in their L_2. Kong (2006) also found that students had an obvious transference process of reading strategies from L_1 to L_2. She concluded that L_1 reading increases L_2 reading comprehension ability because it provides strategies and foundations to read L_2 texts. Alderson, Nieminen, & Huhta (2016) also found that one's reading ability in Finnish was a significant distinguishing characteristic between weak and strong foreign language (FL) readers of all age group of students. The above findings are also in agreement with Graesser [21] who indicated that both L_1 reading strategy transfer and the students' L_2 proficiency could contribute to their L_2 reading. The findings were also in conformity with the above findings discussed so far (Alderson, 1984; Bernhardt, & Kamala, 1995; Ke, & Chan, 2017).

Comparatively, their reading ability in students' L_1 was better most probably because of their linguistic mastery as it is their L_1 for almost all the students studied. As reports on students' L_1 reading ability in Ethiopian secondary schools showed, students got poor results in their L_1 reading test scores. In the current research; however, they scored a bit higher than the average. Students' English language (L_2) proficiency examination result was found to be a little higher than the average score of their L_1 reading ability L_2 reading ability achievements. The first semester final English language (L_2) proficiency examination is an aggregate of the continuous assessments comprising group work, class work, assignments, mid-test and final examination. In all the continuous assessments, students were given bits of grammar items, vocabulary words and reading included only in the terminal examinations. Different factors might have affected the results; one could be related to the way marks are given by schools. The discrepancy in results might have been caused by the difference in methodology, the context and status of English language in different areas, the level of students' competence and other hosts of factors. These factors might presumably have raised students' L_2 proficiency scores of the first semester. Jadie, Sonya, Laura and Natasha (2012) indicated that students' reading ability in L_2 depends on their level of L_2 proficiency. Study of Sanford (2015) disclosed that there are a variety of cognitive and affective factors which could interfere with reading comprehension of secondary school students, and knowing the relative importance of these variables will help identify appropriate instruction to target key reading problems.

However, the findings of the present research were inconsistent with the findings of (Rodríguez, 2010) that students with lower L_2 proficiency benefitted substantially from reading the text in both languages as evident by their performance on the recall and question and answer reading comprehension tasks. In contrast, L_1 input did not provide an added advantage over reading the text twice in L_2 for students with higher L_2 proficiency.

Walter (2007) contended that transfer does not cross from L_1 reading ability to L_2 reading tasks, where as access plays a major role in L_2 reading. He further argued that transfer is a misleading metaphor, and that it is better to speak of access to an already existing, non-linguistic skill.

From the above discussion on quantitative data, it is possible to say most agreed on the transfer of L_1 reading ability to L_2 reading ability along and the role of L_2 language proficiency to L_2 reading development.

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Discussion of qualitative data

Description of *focused group discussion (FGD)*

Data obtained from students' FGD were analyzed below. Students were asked to reflect on the transfer of reading back ground linguistic knowledge from their L_1 reading to L_2 reading process; *whether or not their* L_2 proficiency **helped score the required** L_2 reading ability and *whether or not* the *reading strategies they knew when learning their* L_1 reading could help them while learning their L_2 reading. *Students' reflected that their back ground linguistic knowledge of their* L_1 reading gave them clues while they read the L_2 *reading lesson. They indicated that the prior knowledge and skill acquired from their* L_1 *on vocabulary grammar and reading comprehension enhanced their* L_2 reading *activities and tasks. They further reflected that* they mostly did while reading was trying to recall their L_1 readings while they were learning their L_2 reading. They used to recall the ideas in the first paragraph while they read the next. They used to connect the unity in ideas between sentences and paragraphs in the text while they read. Similar to the above finding, Kong (2006) also found that students had an obvious transference process of reading strategies from L_1 to L_2.

From the reflections given above, students tried to follow different way of comprehending the text such as, using prior knowledge, predicting about the title of the passage, focusing on what they called unfamiliar or key vocabulary words in the text, and utilizing the pre, the while and the post reading stages. Students' response showed that they tried to connect the knowledge and strategies they gained from their L_1 to their L_2 reading process. Students indicated that they applied the reading strategies they used for L_1 reading during reading in their L_2. This finding is in harmony with Taki (2016) that Iranian readers choose similar strategies when they read in both Farsi L_1 and English L_2.

Regarding strategy training, students underscored the necessity of reading strategy usage as it helps them analyze and understand the whole picture of the reading text in order to look into the general ideas. Results of the FGD complement the statistical findings where students used to analyze their L_1 reading strategy to solve problems facing them while they read in their L_2. This finding supports the statistical (regression) results that the interdependence theory works among these students which can go in harmony with the findings of (Yamashita, 2002).

Conclusion and recommendations

The current findings in this study revealed that students' L_1 reading ability was found to be low. The findings also disclosed that their L_2 reading ability was influenced both by their L_1 reading ability or reading experiences and their L_2 proficiency. Both the interdependence and threshold level hypotheses (LIH and LTH) had effects on students' L_2 reading ability. However, it was found that the two hypotheses contribute to students' L_2 reading ability in varying degrees. Thus, it is recommended that students' L_1 reading ability and L_2 proficiency be promoted to help them improve their L_2 reading ability. Students need to be trained on L_1 reading strategies so that they can transfer and employ them while they read their L_2. In doing so, students could develop both their L_1 reading ability and L_2 reading proficiency and use them as facilitator in learning reading in their L_1 and L_2 language skills, promote their reading ability, acquaint them with academic reading, and in their day-to-day activities of academic endeavor. Further research could be made to see interdependence among L_1 reading ability, L_2 proficiency, L_2 reading ability and reading strategies in different contexts and grade levels. Additional studies might be carried out on reverse effects of transfer from students' L_2

reading ability and L$_2$ proficiency to students' L$_1$ reading ability at universities and colleges of Ethiopia and other multilingual countries.

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