

# Quality Matters

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St. Mary's University College

## In this Issue

From the Editorial Desk.....	2
News .....	3
Research Corner.....	4
Interview.....	5
Perspective.....	7
Photo Gallery .....	11

## Quote of this issue

*"A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies, but the man who never reads lives only once."*

*George R.R Martin*

This newsletter is published every three months by the Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA) of St Mary's University College (SMUC). The objective of the newsletter is to inform the SMUC community as well as interested public, private, non-governmental stakeholders about the activities and endeavors of the institution in fostering quality education and research in the Ethiopian Higher Education setting.

Tel.251-11-553 7999 / 8001

P.O.Box:1211

Email: [ceiqa@smuc.edu.et](mailto:ceiqa@smuc.edu.et)

<http://www.smuc.edu.et>

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## A Session on Annual Research Review Held

St. Mary's University College held its annual research review session here at the Main campus on 01 March 2013. At the day-long gathering, 13 research proposals were presented toward securing funds from the University College. The proposals covered issues like institutional quality of services, assessment, material preparation, exit examination and the role of higher education institutions in poverty alleviation. The presenters were drawn from the Testing Center, College of Open and Distance Learning, Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance, Research and Knowledge Management Office and the Teacher Education Faculty, SMUC. As part of the efforts to support the research initiatives undertaken by the staff, the University College allocates annual funds and releases to promising researchers on competitive basis. The annual event was organized by the Research and Knowledge Management Office, SMUC.

## Children's Books Launched

The Center for the Development of Educational and Creative Materials (CDECM), St. Mary's University College, launched two children's books written by the late Michael D. Ambatchew (D.Litt.), who passed away on September 25, 2012 due to illness. Including the 38 books he wrote in his life time, the new books titled 'Muna's Monkey' and 'The Giant Pineapple', published posthumously, add up the total number of his books to forty. The books were launched here in Addis Ababa at Taitu Hotel on March 9, 2013, in the presence of family members, relatives, friends and invited guests. Welcoming speech was made by Wondwosen Tamrat (Asst. Prof.), President of St. Mary's University College

... Continued on Page 4



## From the Editorial Desk

Communication refers to the exchange and negotiation of information between sender and receiver through the use of a medium which can be verbal and non-verbal symbols, oral and written visual modes. Every communication has a purpose. People may explain, argue, describe or narrate while conveying their message and an effective message sender understands very well the goal of each communication and apply and use the required features to be understood by the recipient. While explaining, for example, there is a need to inform audience by representing reality in an understandable manner through definition, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, instruction, opinion reason, classification and exemplification strategies. While arguing there is a need to present logical and adequate reasons to persuade the opponent. While describing, there is a need to portray an object, event or person being described with the appropriate adjectives and adverbs. While narrating, there is a need to tell the story in an interesting manner, having appropriate structure of beginning, middle and ending. Each type of communication has its own unique characteristics, and effective communicators use them in the right way and at the right place and time.

Successful message reception, on the other hand, requires an understanding of the purpose and objective of the communicator, and the use of relevant background knowledge to comprehend the message.

Information processing can be affected by several factors. One of the determining factors is language competence. Language is the gateway to the internalization of knowledge, skills and practices. The more proficient communicators are in the medium language, the more efficient they become in exchanging messages. In other words, mastery of the language is the key to an effective communication.

English is the medium of instruction in Ethiopian secondary and tertiary education system. Students learn

the language starting from grade one. Language items are presented in an integrated manner in order to involve learners in meaningful interaction and to *develop the study skills which the students need in order to work efficiently both at school and at tertiary level. However, studies reveal that students are poor in their English proficiency.*

The language is a foreign language which does not have environmental back up. Students use the language only in the classroom setting. Once they get out of the school compound, they switch to the use of their mother tongue or any other second language in which they can communicate comfortably. As a result, learners are weak in their English language proficiency which affects their day to day learning. What is significant to the learning process is the fact that mastery of the language in which a subject is taught is the key to mastery of the subject matter. The use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction becomes a hindrance against successful teaching and learning. *This is because instruction does not build upon the linguistic and conceptual resources possessed by the student from his/her home and residential environment, but seeks, as it were, to implant linguistic and conceptual apparatuses from somewhere else.*

To avoid the above problem, Ethiopia should develop indigenous languages as languages of instruction in its secondary and tertiary education systems and should design a strategy, which can enable learners master the English language easily. Mastery of English can be attained by upgrading the quality of teachers, diversifying teaching materials (using audio and video), reducing the class size, implementing the communicative approach effectively, involving learners actively in the classroom interaction and developing students reading habit through content subjects.

This newsletter focuses on languages of instruction and reading habit. Enjoy reading it!



## Research Corner

**Research Title:** The Predictive Validity of Ethiopian Higher Educational Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) and its Relationship with Proficiency and Other Examinations

**Researcher:** Atlabachew Getaye

Unlike the past when the focus of language is on linguistic competence, these days the syllabus of English language in Ethiopia is designed based on communicative approach which presents skills in an integrated manner, applying different techniques such as pair and group work, drama, project work, role play, etc. This is assumed to develop students' language skills and facilitate the way for the development of their study skills so that they will pursue their academic study without difficulty and be effective in the world of work.

The purpose of tests in communicative approach is to assess the communication ability of learners by using the language in life like situations. Regarding the nature of communicative testing, Weir (1990, p.6) suggests tests to be "more integrative and less discrete; more direct and less indirect, more criterion referenced and less norm referenced." The implementations of such tests provide appropriate information regarding the competence of candidates.

In spite of the progressive strides in language teaching and testing in Ethiopia, it is evident that students are tested in EHEECE, applying a multiple choice format alone. The test format is not conducive to appraise the communicative ability of candidates. In other words, the content and form of communicative language teaching which students learn in classroom are not manifested in the content and form of the EHEECE examination. As a result, the examination brings a rift between language teaching and testing.

In essence, if the test is supposed to indicate how well an individual uses a language but does not require the individual to use the language in the examination; needless to say, the validity of the test, in general, and

the predictive validity of the test, in particular, is indecisive.

This study, therefore, aims at investigating the relationship of Adama University learners' score of EHEECE with their achievements of proficiency, preparatory English average and 1st semester University CGPA scores. First year Social Science students of Adama University were the target population for the study. From 1049 Social Science students, 200 learners were selected using simple random sampling. The majority of the populations were males (144) with 56 females.

The study employed a quantitative method. Pearson Coefficient correlation analysis, linear regression co-efficient and T-test scores were used to identify the relationships and predictive power of EHEECE and preparatory English average examinations. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation and percentages were also employed to analyze the data.

Tests were the data gathering instruments. The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Results of EHEECE and preparatory English average scores and first semester CGPA of learners' academic performance (2005), which are secondary sources, were collected from the Office of the Registrar of the University and a self developed proficiency test which is a primary data source were applied to gather data. The proficiency exam consists of reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary items.

After examining different international proficiency tests, the researcher extracted and prepared a self developed test in line with the needs analysis of Ethiopian higher learning students based on the work of local language researchers. Then, the tests were given to instructors and test experts to get their views regarding the appropriateness of the domains of the proficiency test, the fairness of time allotment, the clarity of instructions and the familiarity of test formats. Incorporating instructors and experts' comments, the test was piloted on 30 students at Adama University. Using the split-half method, the reliability of the test was calculated and the result showed ( $r = .8308$ ) high stability. To maintain the reliability of the tests, results



were marked by two scorers. Interestingly, markers reliability exhibited high correlation.

The findings of the study make clear that most students are low achievers in both the EHEECE ( $\bar{x}=45.4350$ ) and the proficiency examinations ( $\bar{x}=24.5675$ ). Besides, the discrimination power of preparatory English average ( $S=6.9943$ ) and EHEECE ( $S=.6533$ ) appears to be low in comparison to the proficiency examinations ( $S=12.9705$ ) and University 1st semester CGPA ( $S=17.2028$ ).

Regarding the relationships of the variables under considerations, they show positive relationships, having differences in terms of strength. In most cases, the relationships are weak. The preparatory English average portrays ( $r= .424$ ) a closer tie to the proficiency test than the EHEECE ( $r= .288$ ). Among the variables, proficiency test score shows ( $r= .592$ ) moderate relationship with University first semester CGPA.

The EHEECE and preparatory English average predict learners University academic performance. The results further disclose that EHEECE and preparatory English score account for about 14% and 11% of the variations in students' first semester University CGPA. The predictive powers of the two tests are unsatisfactory. They leave 86% and 89% of the variations unexplained, respectively. Similarly, EHEECE and preparatory English average predict learners' language proficiency. The results further display that about 23% and 18% variations in their proficiency levels are explained by the variations in their EHEECE and preparatory English average scores. Finally, the result reveals that males perform better than females in the EHEECE.

Recommendations such as upgrading the quality of English teachers, improving class size, applying both objective and subjective formats, assessing the language proficiency level of candidates, distributing common checklist domains to preparatory schools to bring test fairness and uniformity across the country and enrolling students who score at least 50 percent of the exams (instead of enrolling detainees) were proposed as possible solutions to alleviate the problem.

*Continued from page 1...*

followed by words of acknowledgements by Dr. Michael D. Ambatchew's widow, Ms. Fassikawit Ayalew', and anecdotal statements on the childhood experiences of the author by his elder brother Dr. Abiye D. Ambatchew.

At the event, personal reflections were presented by friends who knew the author well. As author, he had the patience and perseverance to overcome the challenges of publishing children's books. As teacher educator, he was considered as one of the few teachers, who never missed classes while he was teaching first at the Kotebe College of Teacher Education, and other centers of language learning in his later life.

## Photo Gallery

### Research Seminar:





# Interview

This column features interviews of people including government officials, policy makers, educators, and presidents of universities or colleges as well as students on quality related issues. In this edition of the newsletter, we presented Dr. Tekeste Negash. He obtained his Ph.D in 1987 from the Department of History at Uppsala University. From 1988 to 1998, he did some research on three rather distinct areas, namely; political history, educational policy studies and the evolution of land tenure systems in the Horn of Africa. Since 1998, he has been studying democracy in Africa, Nation building, contemporary war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, European aid and a critical role of NGO and development studies.

He is the author of *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education. Some Implications to Nation Building (1990)*, *Rethinking Education in Ethiopia (1996)* and *Education in Ethiopia: From Crisis to the Brink of Collapse (NAI Discussion Paper) (2006)*. He has also written three additional history books. Extracting from his books, we have presented his ideas, written about the English language as medium of instruction in Ethiopia, in the form of simulated interview. Enjoy the interview!



**Quality Matters:** When did Ethiopia start to use English as a medium of instruction?

**Dr. Tekeste:** Ethiopia started to use English as a medium of instruction in 1908. During Italian occupation, the education system of the country was interrupted. In 1941, Ethiopia reintroduced the use of English in its education system, and it has been in use since then as a medium of instruction in both secondary and tertiary education systems.

**Quality Matters:** How do you assess the quality of English teaching learning of that time?

**Dr. Tekeste:** During that time the quality of teaching learning of English was better, compared to the subsequent times. This was the case because most of the teachers were foreigners. Between 1961 and 1974, for instance, 40 percent of secondary school teachers in Ethiopia were from overseas. Of these, 400 of them were American Peace Corps who came to teach in Ethiopia as a result of the good relationship which existed between the two countries. Besides, the teacher student ratio of that time was very conducive to maintain quality. And yet, the curriculum was irrelevant. Everything was imported from abroad, given that there were no native teachers who could prepare materials. Besides, the country did not have book publishers.

**Quality Matters:** How about the Derg regime?

**Dr. Tekeste:** It was during the Derg regime that the quality of English language teaching learning started to decline. The ideology shift which occurred in the country from pro liberal to Marxism- Leninism compelled all the foreigners to leave the country which brought scarcity of English teachers. The growing number of students aggravated the issue. In other words, the teacher student ratio was not conducive like that of the Emperor period to realize quality education.



By around 1990, the uncontrolled expansion of the secondary school sector brought its own negative impact on the quality of education. The number of students was increasing in an alarming rate, and yet there was no comparable increase in infrastructure or recurrent expenses. The shift system became the rule rather than the exception. As a result of acute classroom shortage, the number of students per section was up to 120 students. The increase of subjects was an additional factor that exacerbated the shortage of classrooms. Full time students were forced to spend less than three hours per day in school.

By 1990, I could say that English had effectively come to an end to be the language of instruction, even if it remained as the language of text books for all subjects for junior and senior secondary education. Teachers as well as students were facing difficulties in using the language for both academic and general communication purposes.

**Quality Matters:** How do you appraise the present status of English as medium of instruction?

**Dr. Tekeste:** The present education system is characterized by expansion at all levels. This has brought its own effect on quality of education in general and that of English in particular. The country is in a race to fulfill the universal primary education of the UN Development Goals. The massification of higher learning is also the fashion of the day. The World Bank has already pointed out that the education system of Ethiopia is in a state of stress and unacceptable pedagogical condition.

In relation to English, the government introduced a televised lecture based education system which signals the lack of teachers for different subjects including English due to the expansion. Plasma teaching is viewed as a solution since it tackles the scarcity of teachers. Nevertheless, in the absence of both electronic and

printed resources and an erratic supply of electricity, the success of plasma teaching, in my opinion, is questionable. Experienced teachers from some of the well established secondary schools of Ethiopia informed me that the English proficiency of both students and teachers is much worse now than what it was fifteen years ago.

**Quality Matters:** What do you propose to curb the problem?

**Dr. Tekeste:** I feel that Ethiopia, through time, should develop local languages as languages of instruction in its tertiary education system.

**Quality Matters:** Thank you very much for sharing your research based views!

**Dr. Tekeste:** Mention it not!

### Virtual Links

Ethiopian Ministry of Education

Web site: <http://www.moe.gov.et>

Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (Ethiopia)

Website: [www.higher.edu.et](http://www.higher.edu.et)

PROPHE- Programme for Research on Private Higher Education

Website: [www.albany.edu/dept/caps/prophe/](http://www.albany.edu/dept/caps/prophe/)

International Network for Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

Website: <http://www.inqaahe.org>

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)

Website: <http://www.qaa.ac.uk>

Center for International Research on Higher Education

Website: [http://bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/soe/cihe](http://bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe)

Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia

Website: <http://www.qsae.org/>

International Institute for Capacity Building in Africa

Website: <http://www.eric.ed.gov>

International Network for Higher Education in Africa (NHEA)

Website: <http://www.bc.edu>

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Website: <http://www.enqa.eu>

Asian Pacific Quality Network

Website: <http://www.apqn.org>



# Perspective



## READING ABILITY PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS AND SOME POSSIBLE SUGGESTIONS

By : ATLABACHEW GETAYE

getayeatlabachew@gmail.com

Reading, according to the National Council of Teachers of English Commission on Reading, is defined as a “complex, purposeful, social, and cognitive process in which readers simultaneously use their knowledge of the topic of the text, and their knowledge of their culture to construct meaning. Reading is not a technical skill, acquired once and for all in the primary grades, but rather a developmental process”(Coutant & Perchemlides, 2005, p. 42). It is an interactive process which utilizes both top-down and bottom-up processing. It is the art of interpreting printed and written words, the most effective process of conscious learning which influences the extent and accuracy of information as well as the attitudes, morals, beliefs, judgment and action of readers (Panigrahi and Panda, 1996; Eyre, 2005).

Reading has a lot of personal and social advantages. Through reading, readers acquire a wealth of wisdom such as culture, knowledge and information. Reading ability has academic, developmental, economical, societal and political benefits. Academically, readers can gain knowledge, technological knowhow and skills. Without the ability to read well, in today’s knowledge society, both academic and job successes are unlikely. Kirsch and Guthrie (1984) reinforce this claim saying that reading is a prerequisite for job and career development. As to personal development, reading improves one’s comprehension, word power, spelling, grammar and writing (Krashen, 1993). It also enriches one’s linguistic, topical, world knowledge, cognitive and metacognitive strategies and skills which are the prerequisites for effective and efficient reading comprehension. In addition, it amends lives; serves as a passport to get out of poverty and transforms readers’ future (Elkin, 1999). While explaining

societal value, according to the United Kingdom’s Department of Culture, Media and Sport in Spencer and Mathieson (2003,p.392):

*The value of reading ... stretches far beyond the benefits to the individual. It brings social benefits. It is hard for people to be active citizens unless they read newspapers and government publications. It is hard for people to be informed consumers. Being unable to read cuts people off from their own potential and society....*

By expanding employment and strengthening the productive sector, reading brings economic value (UNDP, 2003). Reading provides information that can help people on how to start business, or on how to market the products of a business. In terms of politics, reading can provide social protection. It empowers people to take part in decisions that affect their lives. It also creates informed citizens who can take part in national development. Last but not least, reading has recreational benefits. People can read for pleasure in their spare time materials like novels, magazines and newspapers.

Making it specific to schools, research on reading has shown that reading is a complex cognitive activity that is crucial for adequate functioning of students. To cope with the present education system, students must know how to read effectively. The achievement of quality education in school learning calls for the application of mature reading habit. Reading is a key for students to function well in their learning. It is through reading



that learners internalize a wealth of experience which can enable them to be problem solvers, creative and innovative. Reading is important for students in general in order to cope with new knowledge and apply it to the demands of the day.

However, students in Ethiopia seem to lack the required reading habits. They do not possess the required reading demands that are placed upon them due to environmental and cultural reasons. It is common to see higher learning students while applying inefficient strategies; for they did not develop mature reading habits during their stay at primary and secondary education. They appear to approach reading passively, relying heavily on the dictionary and spending long hours, laboring over sentence-by-sentence translations. Despite all the efforts they make, their reading comprehension remains poor (Tsegaye, 1981). To analyze the ability of students reading comprehension, Tsegaye (1981) applied the fog index and the cloze test and he concluded that Social Science students were on the frustration level. Other studies also point out that students are not good at transferring information, identifying main ideas, inferring message, comparing and contrasting, synthesizing, and analyzing complex texts which are by and large the day to day activities of higher learning students. As far as their reading comprehension achievement signals, most of them are students who are at risk. They can read, but they do not read, and if at all they read, they do it poorly.

Mature reading habit is the most important component for an efficient comprehension of texts and academic success of learners. Appropriate reading habits paves the way for effective comprehension and academic success. It is the means for substantiating one's learning independently. Without effective comprehension skill which emanate from mature reading habit, academic success is a wishful thinking for a student. Literature indicates that academic success is achieved when learners possess cognitive academic language proficiency which entails knowledge of text types, structure, technical/specialized vocabulary, textual cues and the relationships between the elements of the text

(Cummins, 1981; Cummins, 1984; Collier, 1997; Pretorius, 2002; Cooper, 2000). In our case, it is dubious whether students' cognitive academic language proficiency has developed to the level that the skills can be transferred to the academic language.

Academic performance requires the reading and comprehension of textbooks and a number of other related texts. Academic discourse is learnt primarily through first hand exposure to print. This partially explains the relatedness of extensive reading and academic achievement. Mokhtari and Sheorey (1994) explored the reading behavior patterns of 158 ESL students and found that university ESL students' levels of education and English proficiency were associated with their reading behavior patterns. Subjects in high English proficiency group spent more time reading both academic and non-academic materials than subjects in low English proficient group. Similarly, Jiya's (1993) findings indicate that tertiary students whose reading skills are not well developed seem to have difficulties in their academic work.

With the advent of technology, it appears that reading is being affected negatively. In fact, findings are supporting the above assertion. According to Long (2005), reading is declining and its rate of decline has tripled in the last three decades. This trend holds true to youngsters and college students too (Gallick, 1999). In Africa, for example, it is only 5% of the population who are regular readers (Land (2003)).

However, findings also reject the above claim provided that readers have developed positive attitude towards reading (Fields & Spangler (2000)). Once readers have established the love and interest to reading, they continue to be devoted readers. Studies reveal that people approach or avoid reading based on the type of feeling and habit they have towards reading (Makenna, Kear, & Ellsworth, 1995). If people's attitude to reading is favorable, they will consider reading as beneficial and read materials whenever they can or even by avoiding doing other tasks. On the other hand, if people do not develop positive attitude towards reading, they will avoid



it and engage in different forms of activities which are not related to reading. The positive attitude implanted in students during primary school serves as a corner stone to the development of mature reading habit of students and the vice versa.

In our case, the culture and environment of Ethiopia is not conducive to develop positive attitude and habit of reading due to the subsequent factors. 85% of the population is agrarian society. In other words, many parents of students are illiterate which acts as a barrier for the development of students reading habit. Parents conceive reading as any other task since they have not experienced reading themselves, and their children cannot get the required support from them. For example, they cannot get books at home. They do not have role models since reading is not a way of life in their family. Many school libraries in Ethiopia are poorly furnished in terms of resources, and under such circumstances, it is difficult to develop mature reading habit. What exacerbates the issue is that the majority of English teachers in Ethiopia are not fluent speakers of English, but are expected to teach English in general and reading in particular in the language in which they are not good at. There is also a shortage of trained language teachers.

The grading system of Ethiopian school system has its own negative impact on the reading habit of students. Most students read in Ethiopia to pass an examination. In the past, the number of universities and colleges were very limited and the chance of joining higher education was so narrow that most best minded students could not get the chance to join higher learning despite their impressive reading habit and ability. By contrast, nowadays, access to universities and colleges is easy since there are many universities and colleges. To fill the available space, students seem to be graded in a loose manner which develops a care free attitude towards their reading

ability and habit. To elucidate through data, the average scores in the national assessment of grade eight students of English were 38.7, 41.1 and 38.4 for 2000, 2004 and 2007 academic years which showed that learners scored far below the minimum requirement which is 50%. If we examine that of grade 10 students, the results turned to be worse than the previous. In 1999 and 2000 the average scores of English were 29.3 and 24.1. This reality is similar to other subjects too (National Organization for Examination, 2001 & 2004). Since the existing system encourages offering students a pass grade, learners do not have the desire to read; for they can easily attain the pass mark. Therefore, the generous grading system has brought its own negative impact on students reading practice, and it has also brought on the part of teachers and instructors a remiss attitude to evaluation and grading. They seem to be inclined to develop objective tests which are not conducive to evaluate higher order skills like analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

To bridge the gap of students' reading ability, there is a need to rectify the mode of assessment at all levels and engender the love of reading in students by promoting the merits of reading. Students need to be motivated to read by developing their reading habit i.e., enjoying the reading experience and changing their attitude from unfavorable to favorable. While promoting reading, it is possible to use either book centered or reader centered approaches, such as the following:

#### **Reading Material Availability**

The availability of reading materials can influence readership positively. Therefore, it is good to make accessible to readers, a variety of relevant materials which are linked to the life experience and activities of readers. This can be done by educational institutions, NGOs and interest groups. For example, interest groups from a certain place can form a union and contribute money on



a monthly basis, and at the end of the year, they can buy books and donate to a disadvantaged school whose library is poorly furnished. They can also influence the rich to follow their footsteps.

### **Book Display/Fairs**

Addis Ababa University has a culture of book display, being held once a year. By doing so, it brings printed materials into the attention of readers. And other institutions should follow the example of AAU to promote reading culture.

### **Media**

The media can influence a wider section of society irrespective of location, age, ethnicity and religion. Educational institutions, publishers and the government should establish partnerships to effectively use the media to promote the reading habit of the nation in general and students in particular. Some of the FM radios in Addis, for instance, inform new books to their listeners which in a way are encouraging their audience to read.

### **Mobile Libraries**

In remote areas where there is no access to reading materials, mobile or portable libraries are useful to promote reading culture. Cars, motorbikes or animals can be used.

### **Expansion of Websites**

Electronic sources should be available at primary and secondary school levels. E- Books should be an alternative to offer reading resources to rural and remote area school students. It is possible to link the schools website to local and international free websites. This will provide an opportunity for disadvantaged students to develop their reading habit.

### **Classroom Teachers**

Classroom teachers, at all levels and in all subjects, should play the role of a reading mentor. They should motivate their students by giving reading assignments

and arouse their interest probably by telling the gist of a certain interesting printed material. By doing so, learners can link text and life and perceive books as source of knowledge to solve practical real life problems. This will make them lifelong readers.

### **Forming Reading Clubs**

Reading should be promoted through reading clubs. Popular reading clubs can create a strong culture of readership by improving members reading strategies and comprehension; paving the access to exchange reading materials; building the image of readers as they can view through time themselves as readers which will develop their confidence and commitment towards reading.

### **Reading Contests**

Schools and universities can conduct reading contests among their students on a semester basis by registering and discussing materials read by students with their teachers or any other delegated person for this purpose. By honoring passionate readers, it is possible to motivate struggling readers.

*continued on page 11 ...*

#### **Managing Editor**

Atlabachew Getaye

#### **Layout Designer**

Robel Tegene

Center for Educational Improvement and Quality Assurance (CEIQA)

St. Mary's University College (SMUC)

Tel. 251-115-53 79 99 / 53 80 01 ext. 145

P.O.Box:1211

Email:ceiqa@ smuc.edu.et

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

If you have comments on this issue of the newsletter or would like to contribute to future issues, please contact our office on 011 553 79 99, 011 553 80 01 Ext 145

Email: ceiqa@smuc.edu.et



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# St. Mary's University College

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Center for Educational Improvement and  
Quality Assurance (CEIQA)

Tel: (251) 115537999

P.O.Box: 1211

Addis Ababa