

PROMOTING READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCE AMONG ENGLISH
SECOND LANGUAGE HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS
IN A DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY

by

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research study was to determine whether extensive reading, supported by the instruction and use of appropriate strategies, would

- a improve learners' comprehension achievement
- b increase academic achievement in English, and
- c promote higher achievement in general academic performance.

One hundred and twenty-one learners participated in this project. Three groups of learners: extensive readers, less extensive readers and non-extensive readers were identified and studied. The result indicated that extensive reading not only leads to improved achievement in comprehension, but that it also leads to improvement in general academic performance in all subjects across the curriculum; while lack of extensive reading has an adverse effect on both reading comprehension achievement and general academic performance as a whole.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The ability to read is essential for successful communication, as it is required to solve practical problems of daily life, it is necessary for the growth and well-being of an individual in order for him/her to comprehend road signs, warning labels, telephone books, maps, newspapers, books and so on (Colberg and Snart, 1992:121). Yet, some studies show that about 30% of US students leave primary grades without basic competence in reading (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott & Wilkinson, 1985; NAEP, 1984; 1992). Bryant and colleagues (Bryant, Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, Ugel, Hamff and Hougen, 2000:238) state that concern about students' reading abilities has been expressed at various levels of government in the USA and that in 1996 President Bill Clinton announced in a State of the Union address that it was a national priority that every child should read by the end of third grade. Snow and others (Snow, Scarborough and Burns, 1999:48-49) have pointed out that reading is essential to success in an increasingly technological society where the ability to read is highly valued and is important for social and economical advancement.

Here in South Africa, the situation appears to be worse, especially among English second language learners. Dreyer (1998:18) reports that a pilot study which was undertaken in a multilingual classroom in the North West Province at the beginning of 1995 showed a failure rate of approximately 75% among standard 6 (grade 8) learners on a reading comprehension test. Saunders (1991:14) also states that a survey, which was carried out at some of the teacher training colleges in the North West Province, indicated that the average reading age in English of incoming Black students was the equivalent of the average English first language learners halfway through standard 1 (grade 3).

In fact, the immense role that reading comprehension plays in both academic and social settings is widely documented. Showers et al (Showers, Joyce, Scanlon and Schnaubelt, 1998:27) indicate that in the middle and high school years, poor comprehension in reading causes acute academic and social problems. Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997:165) express a similar concern when they point out that efficient reading is absolutely central to academic success, particularly in cases where English is also used across the curriculum as the language of learning and instruction (medium of instruction).

This is emphasised by other reading researchers, who have stated that reading is probably the most important skill for second language learners in academic contexts (Carrel, 1989; Lynch & Hudson, 1991). This means that in a community where English is used as the language of learning and instruction, learners are expected to exhibit or possess efficient reading comprehension skills in order to enable them to achieve academic success.

However, this is not always the case, particularly for those learners who use English as a second language. That the level of English second language high school learners' reading comprehension is low is a matter of great concern. This is evidenced by the number of English language support courses that are offered at South African universities, particularly for students who use English as a second language (Brooks & Greyling, 1992; Colborn, Leon & Colborn, 1993; Kotecha, 1992; Mammon & Imenda, 1993; Kilfoil, 1997). For instance, Kilfoil (1999:46) states that at the University of South Africa (Unisa), the Department of English offers a special language course in Comprehension Skills, known as Comprehension Skills for Science (CSS), as part of the undergraduate programme in the Faculty of Science, to both first and second language users of English. This is an indication of the fact that the majority of high school learners in disadvantaged communities, especially in the rural areas, are not able to read a comprehension text, either silently or aloud, by themselves and obtain a general understanding of the text without any assistance from the educator. Some learners even find it very difficult to read and understand the instructions to questions in a comprehension test,

though they may be able to give correct answers to some of the questions on the comprehension test; and may also be able to change a simple sentence to complex and vice versa; and may be able to construct sentences in the various tenses, and so on. Saville-Troike (1984:216) points out that the 'mastery of English grammatical structure is more closely related to native language background than the ability to use English for academic purposes'. This is re-affirmed by Kilfoil's (1999) research into the relationship between students linguistic competence and their general academic performance. One of her findings indicates that 'neither syntactic competence nor social fluency are good predictors of academic success; precision in language use within an academic framework, particularly precise command of vocabulary, is of greater significance' (1999:51). A similar sentiment is expressed by Pressley and Wharton-McDonald, who argue that although word-level comprehension is facilitated by automatic decoding, there is no doubt that comprehension beyond the word level requires much more (1997:449). They further note that 'there is a broad base agreement that the most important goal of reading education is to develop readers who can derive meaning from texts' (1997:448). Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997:62) concur in pointing out that reading comprehension operates above sentence level, and that the overall meaning of a text is greater than the meanings of the individual sentences of which the text is composed.

Goodman (1967) regards reading as a selective and information-processing skill by means of which the efficient reader does not read word for word or use all the textual cues, but samples the text selectively. This concept is also expressed by Kolars (1969), who states that what is seen or read on a page is only part of the meaning of a text, and that it is the reader who makes sense of what he reads because of his prior knowledge of reading and of the topic. This is confirmed by McEachern and Luther (1989), who found that culturally relevant materials and listening comprehension benefited Canadian-Native Indian children more than materials of which the background were not relevant to them. The literature points to the fact that background knowledge, as indicated by schema theory, is essential for successful reading comprehension (Smith, 1963; Stevans, 1982; Hayes & Tierney, 1982; McNeil, 1992). This

means that English second language learners with limited background knowledge may find it difficult to comprehend or make sense of a comprehension text which they read, although they may be able to understand some of the individual sentences of which the text is composed.

It is clear from the ongoing discussions that reading is a skill which needs to be taught and learned. Clarke and Siberstein (1977) regard the aim of reading as the development of skills that will enable the learner to extract meaning from any text. This is also expressed by Long and Richards (1987:233), who view the efficient reader as an active, information-processing individual who uses a minimum number of clues to extract the author's message from the page. They suggest that in teaching reading comprehension, learners must be trained to:

- gain overall comprehension;
- extract literal meaning;
- identify links between ideas; and
- make inferences from a comprehension text.

Since reading is purposeful, learners are to be taught to employ different reading speeds and strategies for different purposes. Thus they should be able to engage in four types of reading, namely, skimming or reading quickly for global comprehension; scanning or reading quickly for precise details; reading for comprehensive understanding; and critical reading (these strategies will be discussed in detail in chapter two). This implies that to develop reading comprehension competence among learners the educator has to use a strategies-based approach which concentrates on meaning, and must teach learners to comprehend chunks of information and not individual sentences. For, as Dreyer (1998:24) puts it, 'efficient reading is an essential prerequisite for success in today' world, where there is never the time to read everything in a leisurely manner and thoroughly'. He concludes that 'creating an awareness, attention, intentionality and control of reading strategies, are therefore among the most useful contributions that teachers can make to their students' future'.

The given background suggests that strategic and skilled reading is of utmost importance and value to academic success. Therefore, it is the view of this researcher that high school learners who use English as a second language can improve their academic performance if they are taught or trained to become effective and competent readers.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Perhaps the most difficult task or challenge that faces educators today is the ability to employ a variety of strategies-based approach in the instruction and use of reading strategies that will enable them to teach learners to become strategic and efficient readers. Clearly, this is not an easy task, especially for educators in high schools in disadvantaged communities where English is learnt as a second language, although it is also used across the curriculum as the language of learning and instruction. This is the exact situation which prevails at Batlhaping, a high school which is situated in Taung, one of the disadvantaged communities in the Vryburg District in the North West Province. In this area of Setswana-speaking people, the learners hear Afrikaans much more often than they hear English, as Afrikaans is the language which is most commonly spoken apart from Setswana, but English is taught as a second language and it is also used as the language of learning and instruction.

The problem then, is that learners in Batlhaping High School and others in this disadvantaged community have few or no real-life encounters with or experience in using the English language, except for the limited practice which is provided by the English educator in the classroom. This lack of regular practice in using the English language leads to lack of confidence and inability on the part of learners to read or to express themselves fluently and freely in English. This creates the problem that the majority of learners are not able to read and understand a comprehension text all by themselves without the teacher's assistance; although they may be able to give correct answers to some of the questions that are based on

the comprehension text, and may be able to transform simple sentences to complex and vice versa, construct their own sentences in the various tenses, and be able to change direct speech into indirect and so on.

The question, then, is how can a learner construct her own sentences in different tenses, transform simple sentences to complex and vice versa, and yet will not be able to read and understand a comprehension text which consists of these sentence patterns? This is a thought-provoking question that leads to the formulation of the aims of this study, which is the topic of the next section.

1.3 AIMS OF THE STUDY

The study is aimed at seeking to facilitate and promote the development of reading comprehension competence among English second language high school learners in a disadvantaged community, in order that they will be able to read and comprehend any comprehension or written text with little or no assistance from a teacher.

1.4 METHODS OF RESEARCH

In order to achieve the aims of this study research, the following methods were used:

1.4.1 Literature study

The aim of the literature study was twofold. Firstly, it was aimed at gathering information on a strategies-based approach to the teaching and use of reading comprehension strategies, that would enable learners to acquire the skills that would make them efficient or competent readers. Secondly, it was meant to gather evidence on how the reading of a variety of texts/written materials for different purposes would enhance learners' reading comprehension

ability – this is heretofore, referred to as extensive reading.

1.4.2 Experimental design

An experimental design with pretest, post-test non-equivalent control group design was used. This research design was chosen because the study was not focused on the comparison(s) between or among different groups of learners, instead, the focus was to teach and train learners to use certain reading comprehension strategies – namely, self-questioning, predicting, clarifying and summarising – and to apply these strategies by reading a number of different texts/written materials on their own. The learners' own or independent reading was guided and monitored (refer to 3.7.2 and 3.7.3). Finally, it was to be determined, through pre-test and post-test scores, whether or not each individual learner's reading comprehension ability would improve.

1.4.3 Instrumentation

Instrumentation consisted of two pre-tests after which the target group was taught and trained in the use of some reading comprehension strategies – self-questioning, predicting, clarifying and summarising (see 2.7.2). Then they were guided and monitored to practice these reading comprehension strategies in their own reading outside of school. (Refer to 3.7.3); and finally two post-tests were administered.

1.5 POPULATION

The population consisted of four grade 11 (standard 9) classes and 160 learners at Batlhaping High School in Taung.

1.6 **LIMITATIONS**

The study was conducted only in Taung, with the grade 11 (standard 9) learners at Batlhaping High School. The researcher doubts whether the findings will be applicable in other places as well.

1.7 **DELIMITATIONS**

The boundary of generalisation is Taung, since the study was conducted there.

CHAPTER 2

THE TEACHING OF READING COMPREHENSION

2.1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1.1 Introduction

Brand-Gruwel and colleagues (Brand-Gruwel, Aarnoutes & Van der Boss, 1998:65) state that 'reading comprehension is a highly complex process which operates on decoded language at various linguistic levels'. Besides this, various other cognitive and meta-cognitive processes also play a major role in the reading comprehension process (Hugo, 1993; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998; Chan, 1991; Cross & Paris, 1988; Bos & Vaughn, 1994; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Bakken & Whedon, 1996). This means that reading comprehension is a process which needs to be taught and learned.

The aim in teaching reading comprehension, therefore, is to teach strategies that will enable learners to interact communicatively with a variety of comprehension or written texts. However, current practices in the instruction of reading comprehension leave much to be desired. Loranger (1997:31-32) points out that not much has changed in comprehension instruction in elementary classrooms since Durkin (1978-1979) raised the awareness of the status of comprehension instruction. Durkin observed several fourth-grade classrooms and found that very little time was spent on comprehension instruction, and where instruction did occur, teachers only monitored learners' comprehension by asking questions after they had finished reading a text, instead of teaching specific strategies to help learners to develop comprehension skills (Swanson & De La Paz, 1998:210). Duffy and McIntyre (1982) made similar observations when they watched some primary grade teachers in grades one to six. A similar concern is expressed by Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997), who state that quite often the teacher makes no effort to treat the comprehension text as a communication in which learners

can develop the strategies or abilities that will enable them to make sense of comprehension texts as communication. According to them a typical reading comprehension lesson may proceed as follows:

- The educator may explain or teach the vocabulary and then read the text aloud.
- The learners may then read the text silently.
- The educator may go through the set questions with the learners who may respond orally or in writing; then the answers are checked (1977:167).

This method of teaching reading comprehension, as Kilfoil and Van der Walt continue to point out, has many weaknesses. Firstly, the comprehension passage may not be a text that has been written primarily for its communicative value, but it might have been written to exemplify a single grammatical structure, and therefore may not be suitable for effective reading comprehension. Secondly, the questions about most comprehension passages test, rather than teach, comprehension (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:167; Maria, 1990). In such cases learners do not often need to understand the passage at the level of communication since the questions may operate on individual sentences. This means that such questions can be answered by using the exact words of the passage, whereby learners bypass any meaningful comprehension and merely depend on recognition of linguistic and lexical items that are common to both question and answer. Thirdly, no strategies are taught or learned by the learners to enable them to read other comprehension or written texts (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:167). These researchers further note that learners need to acquire transferable skills that are not checked off as they are mastered but that are used in understanding more abstract, more difficult and more varied texts throughout their life, for in real life people do not read because they have to answer a set of questions; they read for information, pleasure and so on (ibid), therefore the teaching of reading comprehension should focus on the instruction of strategies that will enable learners to acquire the skills that are necessary for effective communication.

Crandall (1987:6) points out that seeming fluency in communicative situations can be deceptive, as students 'are not able to deal with the more abstract, formal, contextually reduced language of texts, tests, lectures or discussions of science or mathematics'. This is emphasised by Kilfoil (1999:51) who indicates that the gap, between basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency, disadvantages students in tertiary study because there is a layer of academic vocabulary that students have to learn, understand, and apply appropriately in order to become part of the academic discourse community. This means that literacy, i.e. the ability to read and write, is not enough; acquiring reading comprehension competence goes far beyond literacy. For learners to be efficient readers, or to achieve academic success, it is essential for them to be able to interact with a variety of written texts in a communicative manner.

What, then, is reading comprehension and what are the processes that are involved in reading? This question leads to the next section, which gives an overview of the term 'reading comprehension' and how it must be taught.

2.1.2 Conceptual overview

The term 'reading comprehension instruction' as used in this study means helping learners to understand or derive meaning from written text. Since the learners will often be reading the text themselves, the first issue that will be considered is the nature of the reading process.

Snow and others (Snow et al, 1995:50) define reading as 'a highly complex capability that depends upon the mastery and coordination of many component skills'. Dillner and Olson (1982) regard reading as consisting of three integrated skills. The first encompasses the skills in vocabulary which help a learner to pronounce the written words and to attach meaning to

them. The second aspect relates to comprehension skills which enable the learner to derive meaning from the written text and to apply what has been read. The third aspect consists of study skills, which enable the learner to use his or her vocabulary and comprehension skills effectively and efficiently. Alexander and Heathington (1988:16) indicate that a definition of reading should always include comprehension, that is, the comprehension the learner brings to the text and the comprehension that he or she receives from the text. In this way reading becomes an interactive, affective and cognitive process between the learner, the text and the task, which may differ from one learner to another and from one developmental level to another (Hugo, 1993:57).

Unfortunately, many teachers assume reading to be synonymous with decoding, that is, the process by which words are recognised. Thus, it was believed during the 1960s and the 1970s that if learners were taught word recognition (i.e. decoding) then comprehension would follow automatically (Devine, 1986). Accordingly, reading comprehension instruction was focused on word recognition skills such as selecting the main idea in a passage, paraphrasing the text, recognising literary devices and so on. Assignments and exercises centred on identifying main ideas, interpreting sequences, drawing conclusions and determining cause-and-effect relations. In most cases, however, learners were asked to perform the exercises and tasks but were not taught how (McNeil, 1992). Thus, reading comprehension, as pointed out many times (Durkin, 1978-1979; Maria, 1990; McNeil, 1992; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997), was assessed and not taught. This means that reading comprehension, that is, understanding or deriving meaning from written text, was considered to be an automatic outcome or product of word recognition and was thus, not regarded as a subject for special study or emphasis. Hence, when learners did not understand what they read, their failure was attributed to lack of intelligence rather than to lack of instruction.

The definition of reading, as indicated above, has, however, changed since the explosion of research in the late 1960s. Up to the 1970s the focus in reading was on the text, where

meaning was seen as being in the text, independent of the learner. The learner's role was only to find the author's intent and the implicit meaning of the text. Since then there have been several theories and models of reading which have led to a shift in the concept of reading. Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997:162) point out that although many of these theories and models of reading (Brown & Coy-Ogan, 1993; Pressley, El-Dinary, Gaskins, Shuder, Berman, Almasi and Brown, 1992; Rosenblatt, 1978) have been developed during the past three decades, most of them, they believe, have been similar in two ways:

- The focus of reading has shifted from the product or outcome (comprehension) to the process (comprehending) and the strategies that are needed for the process.
- The idea of the learner as a passive and receptive participant has changed to the notion that comprehension empowers the learner to create meaning.

This means that the learner is now seen as being active and constructive in the communicative process between the author and the learner himself or herself (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:167-168; Hugo, 1993:56 and 57; Dillner & Olson, 1982:17; Alexander & Heathington, 1988:16; Almasi, McKeon & Beck, 1996).

This new view of reading comprehension, that places emphasis on the process rather than the product of comprehension, also places the learner at the centre of the whole reading process. The process in which the learner actively searches for meaning is interactive, in that the learner's prior knowledge and experience continually interact with the information in the text to generate meaning and comprehension. Thus, to comprehend what he or she reads, the learner must organise the information in the text according to his or her own prior knowledge or experience in such a way that it will make sense to him or her, and must accept responsibility for constructing that meaning (Wittrock, 1990)

This means that the learner's prior knowledge and experience continually interact with the information in the text to create meaning or comprehension. Since each learner's prior knowledge or frame of reference is unique, each learner's understanding of a text will also be different. Thus, the result of the reading process in the classroom will not be a single shared understanding of the text, but a variety of as many understandings as there are learners (McNeil, 1992:4; Maria, 1990:8; Kilfoil & van der Walt, 1997:164).

If there is the possibility for such differences in understanding a text, then one may wonder how the teacher can be sure that anyone understands the text, or how it is possible for different readers to converge on its meaning. Chall (1983) warns that when theorists say that reading is a constructive process, they do not mean that the learner can make up the text as in pseudo-reading, where young children make up what the book says based on pictures and previous readings by adults. In fact Devine (1986) contends that comprehension is rarely successful in terms of a complete one-to-one correspondence between the author and the learner's ideas. He points out that usually enough overlap exists between the author and the learner's experiences to allow for considerable comprehension and communication. Hence, the closer the match between the learner's frame of reference and the content and structure of the text (i.e. the author's ideas), the greater the comprehension and communication (McNeil, 1992; Culler, 1975). However, if the gap between the learner's frame of reference, and the content and structure of the text, is wider then it is less likely that there will be a match between the author and the learner's ideas, and therefore, the less likely it is for comprehension and communication to occur.

The question of the content and structure of a text now becomes important. It is clear from the above discussion that the learner's prior knowledge and experience alone are not enough to activate comprehension. Culler (1975) points out that the meanings that are generated by the learner depend on how well the learner interprets the language conventions that are used by the author. It is, therefore, important for the learner to be conversant with the stylistic or

linguistic conventions that are used by the author in the text and with the particular content or topic area of the text. Thus, as mentioned earlier, the closer the match between the author's use of language and the learner's language competence, the greater the comprehension and vice versa. The fact that the learner's language competence is central to reading comprehension, and therefore academic success, is evidenced in a study which was undertaken by Kilfoil (1999). She found that the linguistic competence of science students correlated with their examination results.

All the ongoing discussions of reading comprehension are part of schema theory (Anderson and Pearson, 1984). The main principle underlying schema theory is that no text carries complete meaning in itself. In fact, Carrell and Eisterhold (1983:556) state that 'a text only provides directions for listeners and readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge'. Thus, schema theory attempts to indicate as to how the learner's prior knowledge influences the information in a text, how this knowledge must be organised to support interaction, and how the learner's schemata (plural for schema - i.e. mental structures or knowledge as they exist in the head of the learner) affect the processing of textual information (McNeil, 1992:4). The idea of reading as an interactive process is, therefore, very important, as it suggests that the reading process involves simultaneous parallel processing of the learner's linguistic competence, his/her knowledge of the topic of the text and also the situation in which the text is read.

Thus far an attempt has been made to throw some light on the concept of reading comprehension, and it can be said briefly that the emphasis in reading research over the past years has been on interactive reading activities that involve the learner's own knowledge and interest at all stages of the reading process.

Now the question as to what reading is and how it must be taught can be addressed. However, since the focus of this study is reading comprehension, the definition of reading given here will

also focus on comprehension. Thus, for the purposes of this study, reading is defined as a process of generating or creating meaning from written texts through :

- The interaction of the learner's cognitive processes, his/her prior knowledge of the topic area and knowledge of the linguistic conventions of the text;
- The learner's interpretation of the language that the author used in constructing the text;
- The situation or environment in which the text is read.
- According to this definition, a learner's achievement in reading comprehension will depend on
 - His/her prior knowledge of the content of the text;
 - His/her linguistic competence in the language used;
 - His/her motivation and the interest that the content has for him/her;
 - The level of difficulty and complexity of the text.

Since a learner's achievement in reading comprehension will depend on a multiplicity of factors, as mentioned above, instruction in reading comprehension strategies becomes a necessity. In fact, the efficacy of instruction in reading comprehension strategies is widely documented (Swanson & De La Paz, 1998; Danoff & Graham, 1997; De La Paz & Graham, 1997; Case, Harris & Graham, 1992; Johnson-Glenberg, 2000; Bryant et al., 2000; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Brand-Gruwel et al., 1998; Dreyer, 1998; Klingner, 1996; Boyle &

Peregoy, 1990; Padron, 1985; Loranger, 1997; Hugo, 1993; Snow et al., 1999; Showers et al., 1998; Kilfoil, 1999). Padron (1985) taught English second language learners reading comprehension strategies, and this improved their reading comprehension. Dreyer (1998:23) used the strategies of predicting, questioning, clarifying and summarising to train learners in reading comprehension, and the results indicated that reading comprehension strategies instruction can and does make a very significant contribution in increasing the reading comprehension ability of learners. Loranger (1997:31) found that learners who were trained in the use of strategies showed greater focus and engagement during reading groups, improved knowledge and use of strategies, and improved achievement in comprehension. Johnson-Glenberg (2000:778-780) found that poor reading comprehenders who were trained with metacognitive reading strategies significantly improved their performance on several key measures of decoding, reading comprehension and cognitive processing.

Research on second language reading has claimed that effective reading strategies can be taught and thus may help learners become better readers (Phillips, 1984; Sutton, 1989). Du Toit and others (Du Toit, Heese and Orr, 1995:3-7) point out that a focus on reading strategies can help learners become achievers in academic settings. A similar idea is expressed by Klinger and Vaughn (1996:275-276) who found that learners' reading comprehension improved after they received reading strategies instruction, and they concluded that comprehension strategy instruction is one of the promising approaches to improving learning opportunities for English second language learners, especially those with learning disabilities.

All these research findings clearly demonstrate that reading comprehension strategies can be taught and that they contribute significantly to the improvement of learners' reading comprehension abilities, particularly for learners who use English as a second language.

In summary, then, it can be said that reading is a language process which is similar to listening, speaking and writing. However, since written language is more difficult to

comprehend owing to its syntax, organisation, abstract concepts and the lack of direct interaction between the learner and the author, instruction in reading comprehension becomes a necessity.

2.2 FACTORS AFFECTING READING COMPREHENSION

2.2.1 Introduction

McNeil (1992:4) points out that teaching reading comprehension from the interactive perspective consists of developing learning strategies for relating previously acquired knowledge to the concepts and words of a text, monitoring one's comprehension, and learning how to reorganise old knowledge by using new knowledge in the text (1992:4). He further states that comprehension must therefore, consist of strategies that are related to the activation of relevant prior knowledge such as the drawing of inferences, retention and organisation of knowledge, and the changing of any prior knowledge that interferes with learning the content of the text. Thus, for a learner to be independent in his/her reading, he/she must learn to set his/her own purposes for reading and to adopt his/her reading strategies accordingly. In his model for reading comprehension, Wittrock (1990) proposed the idea of learners themselves being the source of plans, intentions, memories , strategies, and the emotions that are necessary for creating meaning. He indicates that in order for the learner to understand what he/she reads, the learner must organise the textual information in a way that will make sense to him/her. Some of the processes that are required in organising textual information are :

- Selective attention - that is, selecting relevant information from a text,
- Memory - that is, transferring selected information to long-term memory,

- Construction - making internal connections among ideas learned from a text,
- Integration - building connections between existing knowledge and ideas acquired in reading (McNeil, 1992).

In order for the learner to be able to carry out the above mentioned processes he/she must be able to engage in certain reading activities such as :

- Underlining keywords or phrases to help in selecting relevant information.
- Composing headings, generating main ideas, writing summaries, outlining, and organising the information into patterns to make internal connections within a text.
- Drawing inferences, giving examples, finding applications, critiquing the information, and offering alternative explanations to integrate new knowledge with learner's existing knowledge.

Subsequent sections of this chapter will focus on the three main components that have been identified by the definition of reading in this study, namely, the learner, the text, and the school environment, particularly the educator; and the ways in which factors in these components interact to bring about comprehension. The way in which this interaction can be mediated by the educator and some instructional strategies that can aid the reading comprehension process are also discussed.

2.2.2 Factors in the learner

2.2.2.1 Introduction

The interactive view of reading comprehension, which regards reading as the interaction between the learner, his/her own background knowledge and frames of reference, and the text, places the learner at the centre of the whole reading process. Learners' notions about reading will therefore determine whether they comprehend the text or not. McNeil (1992) indicates that the major difference between good and poor comprehension is the extent to which the learner is aware of the need to make sense out of the text. He explains that learners who are good readers understand that stories and other written texts should make sense and that reading comprehension instruction is a means of enhancing their understanding. Poor readers, on the other hand, do not possess such knowledge.

In fact, studies have shown that unlike good readers, poor readers do not acquire strategic reading behaviour by themselves, and so poor readers need to be taught how, where and when to consistently perform such procedures (Swanson & De la Paz, 1998:209). Quite often poor readers not only have insufficient knowledge of strategies but they also tend to underutilise them in controlling and regulating the reading process (Baker & Brown, 1984; Garner & Kraus, 1981-1982). They often read on despite the difficulties they encounter, they do not look back to reread sections in their texts as often as good readers, and they fail to control and monitor their own comprehension (Garner & Reis, 1981). Poor readers are often not involved enough with the reading process, for they do not check regularly to see if they still understand what they read and take too little action when the reading process reaches a deadlock (Duffy & Roehler, 1987). Raphael and Pearson (1985) also indicate that poor readers often seem to ignore or are unaware that different assignments pose different kinds of questions and they often use strategies that are inappropriate for task requirements. Poor readers do not make inferences from texts and do not integrate information or ideas from different parts of the text in order to create accurate representations (Oakhill & Patel, 1991). As Bos and Vaughn (1994) point out, even when poor readers are able to decode words correctly they typically do not attend to the meaning of the text nor relate what they read to their previous knowledge.

Many English second language high school learners in disadvantaged communities are poor readers who often do not know that reading is a communicative process and that it can be used to fulfill their own needs, and because of this they do not seem to realise that an effort to derive meaning from the text is essential in reading. John and Ellis (1976) found that learners' concepts of reading correlate with their reading achievement. Freppon (1989) also indicates that learners whose educators used the whole-language approach in reading instruction were more aware of occasions when a text did not make sense, and they placed more emphasis on understanding the text (and not merely getting the words right) than learners whose educators focussed on systematic teaching of phonic skills.

As the emphasis of the reading process is on the learner, it is imperative that the learner possesses certain skills and strategies that will enable him or her to interact communicatively with written texts. Some of these strategies are the learner's decoding ability, background or prior knowledge, linguistic competence, knowledge about reading and different reading tasks, knowledge about himself/herself as a reader, knowledge about comprehension monitoring, and the learner's interest and motivation.

In the next sections each of these strategies will be discussed briefly in order to illustrate how they influence the reading comprehension process.

2.2.2.2 Decoding

Poor decoding, that is poor word recognition, has often been cited as one of the factors contributing to poor comprehension. This means that if a learner is unable to recognise or decode any of the words in a particular text, then he/she will not be able to understand that text. Because of this many teachers, particularly those of English second language learners, delay comprehension instruction and only concentrate on instruction in word recognition fluency. But

poor decoding is not the only factor that causes poor comprehension. Some studies (Berger, 1978; Guthrie, 1973; Smiley, Oakley, Worthen, Campione and Brown, 1977) have found that learners with poor reading comprehension are also poor in listening comprehension; and that the listening comprehension of learners with good reading comprehension is significantly better. This confirms that poor decoding is not the sole factor causing poor reading comprehension among learners. Hayes and Jenkins (1986) express a similar concern when they indicate that most reading comprehension instruction for weak learners stresses direct instruction of basic decoding skills, sometimes to the complete exclusion of any comprehension instruction. Some other studies also report that English second language learners with learning disabilities have often been placed in programmes which stress activities that are related to word identification and literal comprehension, rather than to the development of comprehension (Cummins, 1984; Allington, 1991; Gersten & Jimenez, 1994; McGrill-Franzen & Allington, 1990).

Maria (1990:22) suggests that one of the reasons why learners with poor reading comprehension receive so little comprehension instruction may be that many of their teachers believe that comprehension is only appropriate after word recognition fluency has been achieved. Since decoding is one of the factors that affect reading comprehension, English second language learners may benefit from direct instruction in decoding but they should also receive reading comprehension instruction. In fact, it is argued that reading comprehension instruction does not have to wait until learners attain perfect word recognition (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997; Maria, 1990). This is emphasised by Pressley and Wharton-McDonald (1997:449) who argue that although word-level comprehension is facilitated by automatic decoding, there is no doubt that comprehension beyond the word level requires much more than mere decoding. Besides, research (Palinscar & Brown, 1984) shows that there are adequate decoders who are poor comprehenders. This is re-affirmed by a recent study which was undertaken by Johnson-Glenberg (2000), who found that small group training in reading strategies enhanced the performance of adequate decoders who were poor comprehenders

in terms of several key measures associated with text comprehension. Many English second language high school learners in Taung are adequate decoders but are poor in reading comprehension. This means that reading comprehension strategies should be taught not only in high schools in Taung but also at the beginning stages of schooling, as such strategies can help learners to improve their reading comprehension.

2.2.2.3 **Background or prior knowledge**

Background or prior knowledge is another factor that has great influence on reading comprehension. The literature indicates that knowledge about the topic of a text should enhance comprehension of that text. In fact, research in the past three decades using varied materials, subjects and methods of providing prior knowledge, demonstrates its extreme importance and its specific effects on comprehension. Bransford and Johnson (1972) found that high school learners who could read and understand all the words in a passage were unable to understand or recall the passage without the title which supplied the necessary background knowledge. It has also been found (Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert and Goetz, 1977; Goetz, Schallert, Reynolds and Radin, 1983; Pichert and Anderson, 1977) that learners with different cultural and intellectual perspectives or with different background knowledge (Brown, Smiley, Day, Townsend and Lawton, 1977) remembered only the information in the text that was important to their points of view. Pearson et al. (Pearson, Hansen and Gordon, 1979) found that learners with knowledge of a topic in a text were better at answering questions about the text than were learners with little knowledge of the topic.

The underlying principle of this background or prior knowledge is schema theory, that shows how old knowledge interacts with new knowledge in the process of comprehension. Indeed, it is schema theory that emphasises the importance of background knowledge and the problems that inadequate background knowledge can cause in reading. All this indicates that background knowledge is vital for successful reading comprehension.

However, Maria (1990) points out that many authors or texts that are used in high schools, write about experiences that are more common for middle-class English speaking learners. This means that English second language learners, such as those in Taung, will lack the background knowledge appropriate or necessary for many texts, since they come from cultures with different customs and values from native speakers of English. Thus, learners who use English as a second language are more likely to have low reading comprehension ability, owing to lack of background knowledge that may be essential for certain texts, yet some teachers sometimes act as if these learners have a general knowledge or intelligence deficiency rather than a lack of knowledge in certain topic areas. Maria (1990) therefore suggests that teachers who work with English second language learners should try to determine what the learners do know instead of focussing on what they do not know. Another suggestion is for the teacher to provide the background knowledge necessary for certain topic areas before asking learners to read the text.

The role of background knowledge in reading comprehension is a very complex one; therefore Anderson and others (1985) suggest that any attempt to categorise background knowledge dichotomously as present or not, or as more or less, is far too simplistic. They indicate that a learner may have the necessary background knowledge but may fail to call it up and use it as an aid to comprehending a text. Again, a learner may sometimes have misconceptions about certain topics and these misconceptions may cause more interference with comprehension than a deficiency in knowledge about the topic. Thus the responsibility rests with the teacher to determine what causes the low level or lack of comprehension among his/her learners in order that he/she may find the appropriate strategy to remedy the situation.

Although background knowledge has great influence on learners' reading comprehension it is essential to remember that over-reliance on background knowledge can also interfere with comprehension. In fact, Durkin (1978-1979:vxiii) warns that 'the profession has gone from one

top-sided position in which the text was all that counted to another in which prior knowledge is winning everyone's attention'. The interactive view of reading comprehension maintains that efficient reading requires the balancing of background knowledge with other factors such as decoding and linguistic knowledge. Thus a successful reading comprehension instruction lesson must consist of a combination of factors such as background knowledge, decoding, linguistic competence and the teacher's own methodology, that will all interact to promote reading comprehension competence among high school learners who use English as a second language.

2.2.2.4 **Linguistic competence**

Since reading is a language process, the learner's knowledge about language, particularly written language - that is, knowledge about vocabulary, syntax, text structure, and structural cue words such as conjunctions and so on - has a strong effect on reading comprehension. Though schema theory suggests that one cannot read with understanding unless one has some knowledge about the topic, it is also a well-known fact that one can learn new ideas through reading. This, according to McNeil (1992), is probably done by using one's linguistic knowledge to make up for one's inadequate background knowledge. In a study conducted by Maria and MacGinite (1987) with fifth and sixth graders who had incorrect background knowledge or misconceptions about several topics, it was found that their misconceptions were corrected after they read expository texts that presented new information. This is confirmed by other researchers (Kimmel & MacGinite, 1984; Meyer, Brandt and Bluth, 1980) who also found that use of linguistic cues was related to accuracy of recall of expository texts. Recent research re-affirms these findings. In a study carried out at Unisa to determine the relationship between the linguistic competence of first year science students and their academic performance, Kilfoil (1999) found that linguistic competence correlated with students' general academic performance. The tendency, according to Kilfoil, was for the linguistically weak students to be weak in their science subjects and for the linguistically

stronger students to perform well in their science subjects.

Other researchers (Lerner, 1985; Rubin & Liberman, 1983) believe that most learners who fail to meet expectations in reading comprehension have underlying problems with language, and these writers identify differences in language as one of the main problems. They refer to a language difference as a situation where the learner's oral native language is different, due to environmental rather than intrinsic factors, from the language the learner is learning to read. English second language learners obviously fall into this category. De Cordova (1989) indicates that a learner with limited English proficiency, such as an English second language learner, may have an active vocabulary of about 800 English words after one year in an English-speaking school, while the average English speaker enters school with about 1500 to 2000 words of expressive vocabulary and about 20 000 of receptive vocabulary.

Zimmerman (1997:121) estimates that in the USA an English first language speaker starting at a tertiary institution may not only know about 20 000 to 25 000 words, but may also know a great deal about each, 'such as its subtlety of meaning, its range of meaning, and appropriate contexts for use' (1997:121). This is in sharp contrast to the situation that prevails in the North West Province, and in South Africa as a whole. It is reported that a survey which was undertaken at some of the teacher training colleges in the North West Province showed that the average reading age in English of incoming black students was the equivalent of the average English first language student half-way through standard 1 (grade 3) (Saunders, 1991:14) These differences and concerns are quite significant if one considers the fact that most school reading materials or texts assume extensive prior language knowledge, not only of typical school vocabulary but also of vocabulary and idioms that are learned in other social settings. This means that English second language learners are greatly disadvantaged as far as reading comprehension is concerned, and therefore need instruction not only in reading comprehension but also in vocabulary.

2.2.2.5 **The reading task**

There is evidence (Wixson, Bosky, Yochum and Alverman 1984) to suggest that learners who are good readers and those who are poor readers have different understandings of what reading is. According to Baker and Brown (1984:358), learners who are poor readers have little awareness that they must attempt to make sense of texts, and they focus on reading as a decoding process rather than as a meaning-creation process. Such learners will have the same purpose of getting the words right, no matter what the reading task may be; and even if such a learner understands that reading should focus on meaning, he/she may not understand that different reading tasks have different purposes (Wixson et al., 1984; Raphael & Pearson, 1985). This idea is also expressed by Kilfoil (1999:53), who points out that poor readers are also reluctant readers even when material is available. For example, Showers et al (1988:30) state that many of the students who took part in a reading research study had not read a book outside of school in years and reported little in the way of reading habits.

However, learners who are efficient readers recognise the different purposes for reading and the need to use different strategies for these different purposes (Anderson, et al., 1985; Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997:449-452). For instance, they will know how to read an advertisement or a menu and what they should look for. Such a learner will not read every item or word on a menu, he/she will only skim and scan. In fact, Dreyer (1998:24) indicates that it is not enough for learners to know about the different reading strategies that can improve their reading comprehension, but they must also know how to use them and under what conditions it is appropriate to use them.

Thus to uplift the reading comprehension of English second language learners, the teacher will have to make learners aware of the nature of the reading task and the need to adopt different reading purposes and strategies for different reading tasks.

2.2.2.6 **Learners as readers**

The idea of learners understanding themselves as readers - i.e. knowing their strengths and weaknesses in relation to reading - has an effect on comprehension. Often teachers, peers and sometimes parents tend to have very low expectations of learners who are poor readers. Butkowsky and Willows (1980) contend that this and the learners' own feelings of failure in reading often cause such learners to have very poor opinions of themselves as readers. This is the problem that faces many English second language high school learners in Taung, who have extremely poor opinions of themselves as far as reading comprehension and the study of English as a whole is concerned. They often attribute their lack of understanding to lack of intelligence on their part rather than to lack of instruction and practice.

Research (Hiebert, 1983; Hill & Hill, 1982; Pearl, Bryan & Donahue, 1980) indicates that learners who are poor readers believe their success and failure are caused by external factors such as task difficulty and luck rather than by any effort on their part. Thus in instances where they are even capable of success, they may believe that success will not be possible (Harris & Sipay, 1985). In order to help learners overcome this problem, teachers should give such learners materials they are capable of reading and understanding, and not materials that are too difficult for them; because this can lead to a situation which Johnston and Winograd (1985) refer to as 'the phenomenon of learned helplessness', where effort is seen as useless, and this in turn can serve as a valuable psychological defence for those learners who are constantly experiencing failure in reading and comprehension and will, therefore, make no effort to read. The benefits of reading, as far as academic pursuits are concerned, are well documented in the literature. Showers and colleagues (Showers et al. 1998:30) report that the national studies of reading competence have found that extensive reading outside of the school is a high correlate of both vocabulary development and reading. This is re-affirmed by their own research which was conducted at Morse High School (San Diego, California), where many of the students, who used English as a second language, were poor readers who entered high

school two or three years below the usual grade level. Their findings (Showers et al. 1998:29-30) showed that students gained in reading achievement, vocabulary development, and an interest in reading books as a form of recreational activity, something which was foreign to many of the students. They further note, in their own words, that 'perhaps the most important implication of the effort is the clear evidence that these secondary students can learn to read. They can overcome their poor learning histories and the phobias they have developed about reading (1998:30).

It can thus be concluded that a learner's reading style is one area that needs to be explored, because as pointed out by Cay (1985) it is the learner's own perception of himself/herself as a reader that influences his/her reading performance.

Teachers and parents must therefore, encourage learners to read much more material than they are currently reading (Showers et al., 1998:29-30).

2.2.2.7 Comprehension monitoring

Comprehension monitoring refers to the learner's knowledge about and use of reading strategies. Paris (1978) defines a strategy as an intentional, deliberate self-selection of a means to an end. Pressley et al (Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGobrick & Kurita, 1989) define a strategy as a conscious, intentional and yet flexible tool that readers use to update their reading of a text. Strategies, according to them, are different from skills which imply routinisation rather than reflective use. Johnson-Glenberg (2000:772) states that a good strategy involves multiple cognitive subroutines, and explain that 'generating questions' about a text, for example, is a strategy that relies on searching the text, combining information, evaluating the worth of the question, and then judging whether one could answer that question. Rosenshine and Stevens (1984) also add that it is the implementation of these sorts of subroutines that should lead to better comprehension. Maria (1990) further points out that the

idea of intentionality is what makes a strategy different from a skill. She emphasises that strategies are not necessarily different actions; they are simply not automatic. This means that a learner will have to make an effort to apply or make use of certain reading strategies in order for him/her to comprehend a text. Paris et al. (Paris, Lipsin & Wixson, 1983) indicate that even the most skilful, very efficient adult readers make use of strategies when they are confronted with comprehension problems. This implies that strategies are very important for English second language learners who are engaged in learning school subjects or texts in a language which is different from their own and, therefore, are more likely to experience many comprehension problems than native English speakers.

The first thing to think about when considering reading strategies is knowing when these strategies are needed. Learners who are good readers normally stop periodically to check their understanding of the text; they may re-read parts of it and rephrase in their own words what they have read, or ask questions about the text, but it seems that learners who are poor readers do not monitor their comprehension as the good readers do (Garner & Reis, 1981; Bos & Vaughn, 1994; Cross & Paris, 1988). This means that poor readers are not able to rate the accuracy of their responses to comprehension questions (Forrest & Waller, 1979). Maria (1990) expresses a similar concern when she indicates that one of the biggest problems in comprehension instruction is making learners aware that they do not know something that they think they understand. In fact the literature (Baker, 1985; Markham, 1981) reveals that some learners are not able to monitor their comprehension because of the way they process the text. Some learners rely too much on their background knowledge and others fail to go beyond the details to ascertain the total meaning of a text. English second language learners who lack either the appropriate background knowledge or the linguistic competence necessary for comprehending many texts may even experience more difficulties in processing such texts.

Another useful comprehension monitoring strategy is for the learner to ignore a comprehension problem temporarily and to read on to seek further clarification. But because

poor readers, particularly English second language learners, attribute problems in comprehending a text to failures in themselves, they do not make use of this strategy. Paris and others (Paris et al., 1983) describe metacognitive awareness of available strategies as declarative knowledge. They point out that learners also need both procedural knowledge - i.e. knowledge about how to use strategies, and conditional knowledge- i.e. knowledge about when and why various strategies should be used. The only strategy that is mostly used by learners who are poor readers is re-reading. Many poor readers resort to re-reading when they encounter problems in comprehension. But as it has been pointed out (Garner, Wagoner and Smith, 1983), such poor readers consider re-reading as the process of reading the entire text rather than reading appropriate parts to find the answer to a particular question.

Thus, as stated by Maria (1990), learners who are poor readers, like many English second language learners, do not use effective comprehension monitoring strategies spontaneously because they are not aware of their lack of understanding and even when they are aware of a comprehension problem, they do not know what strategies are available to them. She (Maria, 1990) further notes that even when such learners are aware of the strategies, they do not know how to use them correctly. This is emphasised by Swanson and De la Paz (1988:209), who state that poor readers, unlike good readers, do not acquire strategic reading behaviour by themselves, and so poor readers need to be taught how, where and when to consistently use such procedures. A similar concern is expressed by Dreyer (1989:24) who indicates that it is not enough for students to know about the different reading strategies that can improve their reading comprehension, but they must also know how to use them and the appropriate conditions under which such strategies must be used. Johnson-Glenberg (2000:772) states that strategy use is perhaps more readily trainable and manipulable than other comprehension components such as prior knowledge, working memory, and inferencing skills. Thus, as Dreyer (1998:24) pointed out, 'creating an awareness, attention, intentionality, and control of reading strategies, are therefore among the most useful contributions that teachers can make to their students' future'.

It is therefore, essential that comprehension instruction should not only focus on teaching comprehension strategies, but should also make learners aware of how, when and why these strategies should be used and also aim to develop better awareness of comprehension problems among learners.

2.2.2.8 Learners' motivation and interest

Motivation is a factor that strongly influences reading achievement. Bettelheim and Zelan (1981) make it clear that learners must want to read in addition to having the ability, or they will not be successful. Learning to read is a social process, and so a strong factor in learners' motivation to read is the influence of their parents, teachers and peers. Since parents are the strongest influence on their children, low parental expectations can have negative effects on their children's motivation to read, irrespective of their social class (Maria, 1990). Thus in homes where there are books and children are read to, or where academic achievements are highly valued, learners tend to have strong motivations to read. The majority of English second language learners in the Taung area come from disadvantaged family backgrounds where there is little or no parental encouragement to read since most of the parents are not able to read or write. Teachers are, therefore, the main source of motivation for these learners, even though the time the teachers spend with their learners is limited only to the English periods.

Besides, if teachers themselves have low expectations for learners, they give such learners less praise and few classroom privileges such as reading. This, according to Wigfield and Asher (1984), can have a negative effect on learners' motivation for achievement especially in the Taung area where teachers are indeed the main source of motivation for their learners.

Interest is another factor that affects learners' motivation and their reading achievement. Wixson and Lipson (1984) point out that interest can have a positive effect on learners who are poor readers. Besides, teachers know that learners can often comprehend texts that are

considered too difficult for them when those texts are related to their interests. Therefore, it is advisable for teachers to give English second language high school learners texts of materials that are related to their interests in order to enhance their reading comprehension.

It can be realised from the above discussions that for a learner to be able to read and extract information from written texts with little or no assistance from a teacher, it is important that the learner must possess certain skills such as decoding ability, background knowledge and linguistic competence, since these factors interact to generate meaning and comprehension. These factors have been dealt with separately in order that they could be discussed in detail. This does not mean that they exist separately. Moreover, the focus on the learner should not be taken to mean that the learner is the only important component in the reading comprehension process, because the factors in the learner interact with factors in the text and the reading environment so as to generate comprehension. These other components, the text and the school environment, are discussed in the following sections.

2.2.3 The text

2.2.3.1 Introduction

The second main component in the reading comprehension process, the text, and the factors in a text that may affect comprehension, are the focus of this section.

For learners to become independent readers, they must be taught how they can use texts to extract information. Whether or not a learner is able to extract information from a text will depend on the level of difficulty of the text. Text difficulty interacts with other factors such as the learner's background knowledge to produce meaning. Wixson and Lipson (1984) indicate that a learner's reading ability varies with the text used and the task demanded. The level of difficulty of a text, therefore, depends on the language that is used in the text as well as on the learner's own knowledge of the language that is used in the text. This point leads to the next

section, which looks at the language of texts.

2.2.3.2 **Language used in texts**

Maria (1990) points out that just as the content and topic of the text interact with the background knowledge and interest of the learner, in the same way the language of the text interacts with the language ability of the learner so as to generate meaning. This means that learners need to acquire language competency so that they will be able to recognise different styles and rhetorical organisations such as explanations, descriptions and classifications, and be able to recognise when a writer is giving an example, when a point is being emphasised or an idea is being explained. Thus, in the process of reading, learners should be able to recognise the relationships within sentences and between sentences. Words such as conjunctions, pronouns and adverbs can signal relationships between sentences, as well as within sentences. To make these relationships clear and explicit is one way in which a text can be cohesive and coherent, and therefore easy to understand. Cohesion (cohesive) refers to the way sentences and paragraphs are linked to form a meaningful text rather than a mere collection of unrelated sentences. Coherence, on the other hand, refers to the ideas in a text belonging together and being meaningful in the context of the text, the situation, and the learner's background knowledge and experience.

Teachers should therefore, try to select texts with language that is appropriate for the learners they teach. However, appropriate language is not necessarily easy to read and understand. Learners need to be taught to understand written language and even language that is considered to be inappropriate. MacGinitie (1984) points out that one of the main reasons why learners find language construction difficult is that they lack experience with it, and that allowing them less experience will only make it more difficult. If learners, particularly English second language high school learners, are not exposed to long words, long sentences and difficult

constructions and structures, they will never learn to understand them.

Thus, learners who use English as a second language, particularly those in high schools, need to be exposed to all types of language structures so that they will learn to understand them, and this in turn will enhance their reading comprehension.

2.2.4 The school environment

2.2.4.1 Introduction

This section deals with the third main component in the reading process, that is, the school environment, and particular attention will be given to one of the most important factors in the school environment, which is the teacher.

It is the teacher more than the method or the type of materials, who determines the success or failure of a reading comprehension lesson. In his research, which focussed on determining which teacher behaviours are associated with high learner achievement, Duffy (1982) found that classrooms are very complex places where the teacher has to juggle many demands and pressures at the same time. He states that the first of these demands is the need for the teacher to maintain good social relations in the classroom, while at the same time effectively teaching large groups of learners with varied abilities. The second demand is the need for activity flow. Duffy (1982) further notes that unless activities keep moving the entire classroom system breaks down and the teacher loses control. Limitations that are placed on the teacher from outside the classroom, such as administrative dictates, also hinder the teacher's instructional options. Duffy (1982) concludes that if reading comprehension instruction is to be improved, then all these problems must be dealt with .

The majority of classrooms in the Taung area, and other disadvantaged schools, are over-

crowded with learners of varied abilities. This means that the teachers in these schools need to have skills such as management skills, the ability to create appropriate classroom climates, and other teaching skills in order to enable them to deal with the problems in the classroom. The following sections briefly look at some of the skills that teachers need to possess in order for them to create a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to successful comprehension instruction.

2.2.4.2 **Management Skills**

One of the management skills which is essential in a reading comprehension lesson is the need for the teacher to allocate more time for reading and comprehension instruction. Maria (1990) points out that the amount of time spent on reading instruction is related to learners' achievement. It is therefore important for teachers of English second language learners to allocate sufficient time for reading comprehension instruction, because these learners are greatly disadvantaged as far as the learning of the English language is concerned.

But since the teachers' time is limited by problems such as over-crowding, administrative constraints and other logistical problems, teachers can maximise the instruction time through the instructional approaches they adopt. For example, comprehension instruction should focus on reading as communication, or as obtaining global or overall meaning of a text, rather than focussing on comprehension as a process of generating meaning at sentence level.

Secondly, instruction should focus on teaching learners how to do functional reading, that is, how they can learn to extract information from a text, especially from content area texts such as Biology and History. Jones and others (Jones, Palinscar, Ogle and Carr, 1987) state that content concepts and reading comprehension strategies can be taught simultaneously, and in this way the time allocated to reading comprehension instruction can be increased.

For reading comprehension instruction to be successful, it is essential for the teacher to create a classroom environment which is conducive to effective teaching and learning. The teacher should create a classroom atmosphere with an academic focus on clear thinking, rather than on getting the one right or correct answer. Successful teachers maintain a strong academic focus; they are task-oriented, businesslike, and they model this behaviour for their learners so that the atmosphere in the classroom will also become task-oriented. Such teachers use time efficiently and they make their academic goals clear and move toward them with systematically well-developed lesson plans and few digressions (Rosenshine & Steven, 1984). They further state that effective teachers ensure that all their learners participate in the lessons and that they make precise use of learner input.

Besides, there must be a focus on reading for meaning and a recognition that interpretations of a text will differ because reading comprehension is a constructive process. For reading comprehension instruction to be effective there is a need for a climate of acceptance, and respect for answers that have intellectual integrity but differ from standard expected answers. This does not, however, mean that answers that are not related to the text should be acknowledged.

Another classroom condition which promotes effective comprehension instruction is a climate of risk taking, where learners are encouraged to make predictions and ask questions about what they read. The atmosphere in the classroom should be such that learners can discuss their interpretations of the text and feel free to disagree; for in such an open-minded atmosphere both the teacher and learners can change their ideas owing to the evidence provided by others in a discussion. Maria (1990) cautions that in such a climate, the ultimate sin is for either the teacher or other learners to humiliate a learner because of that learner's comment or response.

Teachers must, therefore, remember that in comprehension instruction the academic focus is

on the nature of the learner's thinking. Thus, the teacher must probe the learner's thinking irrespective of whether the answer to a question is the expected one or not. This does not mean that the teacher should accept any irrelevant answers. Niles and Harris (1981) indicate that probing a learner's thinking will often make it clear that they were in the right direction, except that he or she was not able to express his/her thoughts clearly. Sometimes learners may give the correct answers for the wrong reasons, and they must be made aware of their mistakes. Learners who are used to having only wrong answers questioned or probed will resent the teacher questioning their correct answers. It is therefore, essential for the teacher to make the purpose of such questioning clear to his/her learners.

Another way by which teachers can manage their classrooms is by providing appropriate teacher support. Learners, particularly those in high schools, need to take responsibility for their own learning; therefore teachers must provide them with strategies that will make them become active and independent learners. The teacher's explanation and modelling of a strategy whenever the strategy is introduced provide support and direction for the learners. Gordon and Pearson (1983) illustrate how the teacher can do this by making use of Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) model of comprehension instruction. Pearson and Gallagher (1983) break the reading task into four parts : asking the question, answering it, finding evidence in the text for the answer, and giving the reasoning. They suggest that at the initial stages of instruction, the teacher should demonstrate all the four parts of the reading task, and thereafter gradually shift responsibility to the learners. For example, the teacher can ask an inferential question and provide the answer; then the teacher can provide evidence for the answer and finally explain the reasoning that led to the answer.

At the second stage of instruction, the teacher should gradually shift responsibility to the learners by putting them in charge of certain aspects of the task. The teacher can ask the question and answer it, but should ask the learners to provide evidence and the reasoning that led to the answer. This should continue with the teacher putting the learners in charge of

various aspects of the task until the responsibility is gradually shifted to the learners.

English second language learners, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, might only assume this responsibility slowly but the responsibility must still be shifted to them. The teacher can achieve this by providing learners with opportunities to apply the strategies that they are taught to different kinds of texts in different situations.

This section has focussed on the environmental factors, particularly the teacher, that influence the reading comprehension process. It has become clear that the teacher needs to have certain management skills and must be able to create a classroom environment which is appropriate for successful reading comprehension instruction and learning. However, the literature indicates that these are not enough. In the following sections other strategies and tools that are vital for effective comprehension instruction are discussed.

2.3 TOOLS FOR TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION

2.3.1 Introduction

Comprehension instruction is different from instruction in other content area subjects because, as Duffy (1982:367) points out, research findings have not yet been translated into any consistent body of skills and strategies that should form the content of comprehension instruction. Comprehension instruction therefore differs from instruction in other content area subjects because the focus of its curriculum is the reading process instead of a specific body of content.

Traditionally comprehension instructional methods focus on the content of the text where questions and discussions centre on what the text says. When learners do not understand what they read, teachers usually explain the content instead of explaining how the learners can

use cues in the text to understand the content (MacGinitie, 1984). This is disturbing, since teachers who are supposed to be teaching learners to comprehend a text fail to provide any process instruction. Collins and Smith (1982) express a similar concern when they indicate that a reading curriculum should stress interpretation but it should also include teaching children how to comprehend interpretations'. They further note that if learners are not taught comprehension strategies, then the academically able learners will develop them on their own, and the weak ones will find reading very frustrating. But since process cannot be separated from content, what is needed is a balance between instruction in process and content; what Roehler et al. (Roehler, Duffy and Meloth, 1984) refer to as a process-into-content emphasis.

Reading authorities agree that both process and content should form part of comprehension instruction, but they differ as to how to provide this instruction. One view is that instruction should be delivered through the specific skills approach, i.e. direct instruction which regards comprehension as a set of discrete skills that can be taught separately. However, proponents of discovery or indirect learning (Beach & Appleman, 1984; Goodman, 1984; Harste & Mikulecky, 1984) are opposed to the idea of breaking down the comprehension process into discrete elements. They believe that the process should be taught indirectly and not by practising specific skills but by extensive reading of many kinds of texts for different purposes.

Still others (Duffy & Roehler, 1986; Gavalek, 1984; Jones, 1986) propose a mediated approach by which instruction is initially directed by the teacher, but the teacher gradually releases responsibility to learners. This instructional approach is based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of learning, which states that social interaction plays a vital role in fostering learning. While discovery learning stresses the role of the learner and direct instruction emphasises the role of the teacher, mediated instruction stresses the interaction between the learner and the teacher.

What is needed is an instructional approach that will focus not only on the content but also on the process of comprehension. But since there are several variations of comprehension

instructional methods that will focus on both content and process, the responsibility lies on the teacher to integrate into his/her comprehension instruction a combination of methods that teaches strategies as well as process instruction, by means of which the teacher will be able to demonstrate to the learners the clues and processes that he/she was using in making sense of texts.

Some of these strategies that are known to aid comprehension instruction are questioning, explanation, modelling and dialogue or discussion. These instructional strategies are discussed in the following sections to illustrate how they can improve reading comprehension instruction.

2.3.2 Teacher questioning

In comprehension instruction, teachers should ask questions about both the content and the process and should ensure that content questions relate to important information in the text. In traditional reading comprehension lessons, teachers use questions mostly as a means of assessing comprehension. As pointed out by Reynolds and Anderson (Reynolds & Anderson, 1982; Wixson, 1983) these questions often focus learners' attention on what they are expected to learn from the text without providing the learners with any assistance with their learning. The questions that teachers often consider to be high-level or important questions do not focus learners' attention on obtaining information from the text; in that some of the questions can be answered without understanding the text (Rhodes & Dudley-Marling, 1988). They point out that it is necessary for teachers to categorise questions as important - i.e. text-related, or as trivial - i.e. text-unrelated, because text-related questions are a means of focussing learners' attention on important text information. In fact, a question that focuses on explicit information in the text may be far more useful in helping learners understand than an inferential question that focuses on trivial information. For learners who use English as a second language, especially those from disadvantaged communities, text-related questions

may not only help them to understand the text, but may also help to focus and direct the learners' reading and thereby provide a purpose for their reading.

Besides, text-related questions may also provide motivation and interest in reading on the part of the learners. Smith (1989) indicates that text-explicit questions concerning details that are related to the central concepts of texts may be necessary for learners, particularly English second language learners, who fail to meet expectations in comprehension. He contends that such questions provide the base of information that is necessary to answer higher-level questions which prompt critical thinking. Costa and Marzano (1987) express a similar concept when they state that in asking these higher-level questions teachers should use precise language such as 'what evidence do you have that ...' For, as pointed out by Smith (1989), when teachers' questions are vague and general they do not guide learners' thinking. Therefore, the first step that should be taken in planning a comprehension lesson for a particular text is to identify a central concept or concepts that will be the focus of instruction. Maria (1990) indicates that pre-reading questions should focus on making connections between the central concepts and the learners' prior knowledge. Questions that are asked during and after reading should also focus on important text information.

Teachers should not only ask questions that are related to content, as comprehension instruction involves instruction in both content and process. Lipson and others (Lipson, Bigler, Poth & Wixkizer, 1987) found that learners who were asked about the reading strategies they used had better comprehension than those who were asked questions about the content of the text. Because many students with learning disabilities are inefficient learners who are unaware of their own cognitive processes, or of how to determine the particular task demands within a learning situation (Flavell, 1971; 1977; Torgesen, 1977; 1980; Raphael & Pearson, 1985), their lack of knowledge about when and how to apply strategies prevents them from using their abilities most advantageously (Baker & Brown, 1984; Gibson & Levin, 1975). Therefore, asking learners questions about the strategies they use focuses their attention on

those strategies and eventually increases their comprehension. Teachers should therefore use question sequence as prompts and support for learners' thinking because a sequence of questions posed by teachers does more than merely focus learners' attention on certain aspects of content and process. In fact, such sequences of text-related questions, built on one another (scaffolding), help to develop cognitive processing. Sequential questions will therefore help English second language learners who may lack both the prior knowledge and linguistic competence that may be essential for certain texts.

Questions can also be asked in an easier form such as providing choices or asking a yes/no or true/false question. The teacher's response to his/her learners' answers is important. It is simply not enough for the teacher to indicate that learners' answers are correct or incorrect, but the teacher should also probe the learners' reasoning. As mentioned earlier, questions can be used at all stages of the reading process to ensure comprehension. At the pre-reading phase questions should focus on global comprehension, and then move on to specifics. Questions should not be asked in such a way that learners will be able to answer them by quoting directly from the text. This means that questions that act on individual sentences, such as questions that start with words like who, when, where and what, should be avoided, since such questions can be answered by merely recognising the linguistic and lexical items that are common to both the question and the answer, and thus comprehension is bypassed.

Questions that require learners to understand the relationships between sentences and the way in which they combine, that is questions that begin with words such as why and how, are preferable since they act on the overall meaning of a text. This type of questioning involves the process of assimilation - i.e. selecting information from different parts of the text and combining the data in order to be able to answer the question; and the process of discrimination - i.e. deciding which information is relevant and which is not (Kilfoil & Van der Walt; 1997:176). To require full sentences as answers to questions on reading cannot be justified. They (Kilfoil and Van der Walt; 1997:177) further argue that it is not authentic

language behaviour to respond to questions continually in full sentences, because this distracts attention from reading as a communicative activity; and only tests grammar and writing skills and not reading comprehension.

Clearly, teacher questioning is one of the major strategies that the teacher can utilise to improve the teaching of reading comprehension. If properly used, it can change the focus of reading comprehension instruction from the traditional approach, which treats comprehension as a product, to the interactive approach, which regards comprehension as a meaning-creation process.

2.3.3 Explanation

Another instructional strategy that is very useful in comprehension instruction is explanation. Although explanation is extensively used by teachers, there are less traditional ways in which it can be used to make a unique contribution to the teaching of reading comprehension. In fact, explanation may be what comes into the minds of many people when they think of teaching. Since explanation involves the teacher talking and the learners listening, it is regarded as a passive way of learning. Therefore, teachers are now urged not to talk so much but to involve learners in experiential learning and allow them to discover explanations for themselves. This is because when teachers explain the content of texts, instead of showing learners how to read, the learners become passive and dependent on teachers. It is in the light of this that teachers are urged to ensure that explanations of reading strategies provide declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge. Declarative knowledge refers to the learner's ability to know what strategies to use, whilst procedural knowledge refers to the learner's ability of knowing how to use these strategies; and finally conditional knowledge which refers to the learner's ability to know when to use a particular strategy and when not to use that strategy.

Teachers should not only explain the content of what that text says but they should also explain

the process of how to read the text. This kind of explanation is essential for English second language learners, since many of them do not know what strategies to use when they read, and even when they know the strategies, they do not know how to use them (Flavell, 1971; Torgesen, 1977; 1980; Raphael & Pearson, 1985). Thus at the initial stages of instruction teachers should explain to learners how they should use strategies, and then during the later stages when learners begin to take responsibility for the reading task, explanations of how to use particular strategies can be provided when the need arises, through teacher modelling. Loranger (1997:32) indicates that one of the conditions that make strategies instruction effective is when there is modelling and direct explanation of strategy use and its importance.

Duffy and colleagues (Duffy, Roehler, Sivan, Rackliffe, Book, Meloth, Vavrus, Wesselman, Patnam & Bassiri, 1987) taught third grade teachers to modify their reading instruction in order that the emphasis of their explanations would be on the 'mental processing involving using skills as strategies'; they found that children in the low reading groups showed greater awareness of content and made more conscious use of strategies. Their achievement was better than that of children who did not receive explanations concerning strategies. They also found that teachers who were the best explainers did not only focus on declarative and procedural knowledge, but they also focused on conditional knowledge. This means that teachers who work with English second language learners can improve both comprehension instruction and learning through the use of direct explanations of strategies that involve learners' mental processing skills.

Teachers who are good explainers also realise that learners often do not understand their first explanation, no matter how clear and explicit it may be. Such teachers assess their learners' understanding of initial explanations through questions, and when learners' answers show lack of understanding, then they restructure their explanations to address the learners' particular source of difficulty. Duffy and Roehler (1987) refer to this process as 'responsive elaboration' and state that it may be an essential aspect of the effectiveness of teacher explanations.

Thus for teacher explanations to be effective, they must be used in conjunction with other strategies, such as teacher and learner questioning, teacher modelling and interactive discussion.

2.3.4 Modelling

As mentioned above, modelling or demonstration is also an essential instrument for comprehension instruction. Berliner (1987b) suggests that effective explanations should use examples to provide clarity. When teachers demonstrate how they use strategies, they provide examples of effective strategy use. In fact, Pressley et al. (Pressley, Johnson, Symons, McGoldrick & Kurita, 1989) indicate that specific instruction of students in strategy use, together with teacher modelling is very successful not only in enhancing comprehension, but also in promoting self-monitoring and motivation. This implies that teachers must be aware of their own reading strategies so that when they model these strategies to learners they will be able to put themselves in the place of their learners. Teachers should think aloud and verbalise the processes that they use to understand the text, so that learners can imitate these strategies.

A three-stage procedure for demonstrating strategies of prediction and comprehension monitoring has been proposed by Collins and Smith (1982). They suggest that firstly, the teacher should read the text aloud and interrupt or stop once or twice in each paragraph to make comments about the strategies and cues that he/she uses to understand the text. Secondly, the teacher should encourage learner participation and comments, and lastly, there should be guided and independent practice of the strategies by the learners. Cooper (1986) points out that getting learners to verbalise their processing of texts is an essential component of the modelling procedure.

Although modelling is an effective instructional strategy for the teaching of reading comprehension, it is often overlooked by teachers because of the problems that are associated with its use. The first problem is that for very efficient readers, such as teachers, the processes of reading comprehension can become so automatic that these processes become inaccessible to conscious awareness (Garner, 1987; Afflerback & Johnston, 1986). Therefore, teachers have to be conscious or aware of their own processes before they can model them. Maria (1990) proposes a solution in her suggestion that teachers should read texts that are very difficult for them in order that they can think aloud or verbalise the strategies that they use to understand the texts.

Another problem is that teachers who are skilled readers may not experience the same problems in understanding a text as their learners, particularly English second language learners who are now learning to acquire the language. Here, the teacher's knowledge about his/her learners' cognitive and language development will help him/her, but still the teacher will have to develop this awareness through experience with the learners, the texts that are used and practice in looking for the problems that are being experienced by the learners.

Moreover, another problem may arise when the teacher thinks that his/her way of solving comprehension problem or reading a text is the only way and communicates this point of view to the learners. In such cases learners who do not use any reading strategies will benefit from this type of teacher modelling. However, for learners who are good readers this kind of teacher modelling may present a problem. The teacher can avoid this danger by explaining to the learners that there are alternative strategies and can ask learners to verbalise the different strategies they use.

Maria (1990) states that teacher modelling can be one of the most effective ways of making comprehension instruction clear and explicit for learners as long as possible problems are kept in mind.

2.3.5 Discussion or dialogue

The last, but not the least, instructional strategy that needs to be mentioned is discussion or dialogue. Maria (1990) suggests that teachers should use the strategies of questioning, explanation and modelling in the context of interactive discussion that involves learner-to-learner, teacher-to-learner and learner to teacher discussions or dialogues. The literature (Gall, 1984; Stodolsky, Ferguson & Wimpelberg, 1981) points out that the discussions that take place in many classrooms can best be categorised or referred to as recitation, whereby teachers ask questions and learners answer. Alvermann and colleagues (Alverman, Dillion & O'Brien), 1987:3) indicate that discussion can be distinguished from recitation when it includes different points of view. They further note that learners and even the teacher should be ready to change their minds after hearing convincing counter-arguments. This means that there must be effective interaction among learners and with the teacher, and that responses to questions, especially those that solicit the opinions of learners, should be longer than the typical two or three phrases that are found in recitation. Encouraging learners to say more than one or two words in response to a teacher's question is necessary when the focus of instruction is on the nature of the learners' thinking. Discussions that are carried out in this way are essential in comprehension instruction, since comprehension instruction is a constructive process that involves different interpretations of a text.

Palinscar and Brown (1989) indicate that many teachers do not use discussion as a teaching strategy because it is difficult to manage. They contend that to maintain activity flow and hold the attention of learners whilst engaging in a meaningful dialogue where learning takes place, particularly in over-crowded classrooms, is not an easy task. Some researchers (Vacca & Vacca, 1986; Alverman et al., 1987; Johnson, Toms-Bronowski & Pittelman, 1984) have proposed certain guidelines for organising and managing successful classroom discussions.

They suggest that the teacher should:

- Arrange the classroom in a way that will enable learners to engage in face-to-face interaction and move easily from whole class to small group organisation. A circular arrangement is suggested as the best.
- Encourage an atmosphere where everyone, including the teacher, is expected to be a good listener.
- Provide clear directions about the topic of discussion and the goal and process of the discussion.
- Keep the discussion focussed on the main topic, and it should centre on very few teacher statements or questions, so that the discussion will not be turned into a recitation. Teachers should make learners aware of the distinction between discussion and recitation.
- Allocate sufficient time for discussion so that the learners can explore the topic in detail.
- Encourage learner-to-learner interaction and should not permit behaviour that disrupts discussion.

The teacher can prompt learners to respond to other learners' statements, but should not interrupt learners or allow other learners to interrupt, unless it is absolutely necessary.

These recommendations or guidelines can assist teachers in organising successful classroom discussions as a means of improving reading comprehension instruction among English

second language learners.

It can be realised from this section that the teacher, who is one of the most important factors in the school environment, can improve reading comprehension instruction by using a combination of methods and a variety of teaching strategies. The next section deals with reading strategies that are essential for successful reading comprehension.

2.4 STRATEGIES FOR LEARNING COMPREHENSION

2.4.1 Reading strategies

2.4.1.1 Introduction

Acquiring reading skills or strategies is vital in reading comprehension because for a learner to become an efficient and independent reader, it is important for him/her to acquire and make use of certain reading strategies. Research (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1992; McNeil, 1990; Maria, 1990; Jones, 1986; Jones et al., 1987; Palinscar & Brown, 1984) points to the fact that teachers can observe the strategies that are used by learners who are good readers and teach such strategies to learners who are poor readers. Jones and others (Jones et al 1987) have identified four strategies that can be used by learners to improve their reading comprehension. These are self-questioning, predicting, summarising and clarifying. These strategies are discussed in the subsequent sections to show how they can influence the reading comprehension process.

2.4.2.1 Self-questioning

As pointed out earlier, teachers can use questions in comprehension instruction to focus learners' attention and to guide their thinking. Questions can also be asked by learners

themselves as a means of enhancing their own comprehension. The teacher's main objective in asking questions should be to serve as a model in teaching learners. Training learners to ask their own questions is an important skill. Wong (1985) reviewed instructional research that related to training learners in the self-questioning strategy, and concluded that studies in which learners were taught to ask higher-order questions, self-monitoring questions, and questions that related the text to their prior knowledge, showed that these strategies improved their comprehension. In a metacognitive analysis of 68 studies which were designed to improve reading comprehension for learners with learning disabilities, Mastropieri and colleagues (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Bakken & Whedon, 1996) found that studies that included some type of self-questioning resulted in greater improvement than instructional approaches that did not include self-questioning. Other studies (Singer & Donlan, 1982; Wong & Jones, 1982) have shown that having students generate their own questions to answer improves reading comprehension. Swanson and De La Paz (1998:215) pointed out that 'by creating questions about a reading passage and answering them, students not only focus on important information, but also remember it better'.

However, attention should be given to the types of questions that learners of different abilities are taught to ask. Learners who are poor readers may benefit from training in asking questions that monitor their comprehension, while good readers will benefit more from learning to ask critical evaluative questions. For English second language learners with mixed abilities, it is important that teachers should combine the two types of questioning for the benefit of all their learners.

Learners should be taught to ask questions that relate to important text information and also questions that relate to their own purposes in reading. By training learners to ask questions that relate to both important text information and their own purposes, they learn to make predictions about upcoming text, and thus become active readers. Maria (1000:166) contends that reading is a problem-solving situation that involves taking all text cues and

information from prior knowledge into consideration. Learners need to become active readers by being able to solve problems when they read texts. Nessel (1987:444) argues that the traditional type of reading lessons, where teachers ask questions and learners answer them after reading, does not encourage learners to be active readers, because learners can answer even higher-order questions correctly yet their answers may not reflect either good comprehension or careful thinking. But when learners are encouraged to ask questions and make predictions with evidence from the text or their own knowledge about language and text structure, and are able to confirm or adjust their predictions after further reading, then they can learn to set their own purposes for reading and they can also learn that confirming or rejecting predictions based on later text information requires readers to take account of information from all sources.

Learners can also be trained to compose their own questions about the text as they read. The questions are then posed to other learners, on an individual or group basis, and where there are divergent opinions, then the learners must refer closely to the text in order to confirm or adjust their opinions. Once again, learners must be encouraged to ask global questions when they compose their own questions.

2.4.3.1 Predicting

The strategy of prediction involves learners' ability to foretell or guess what is to happen in upcoming portions in a text. Training learners in prediction can best be provided in group situations. When learners discuss their predictions in groups, they will become aware of the discrepancies between their own interpretations and those of others, and this awareness will motivate them to look for further evidence by rereading the text and thinking more carefully. Garrison and Hoskisson (1989:482) indicate that predictive reading in this way develops the capacity for self-correcting thought such as is found in scientific enquiry. This is emphasised by Nessel (1987), who points out that focussing on predictions in a group discussion of a text

improves group interaction, as learners will not only respond to the teacher but will also react to another learner's predictions based on text evidence. The curiosity and the urge to settle the argument motivate learners to read further; and thus the learners' motivation becomes internal rather than external.

2.4.1.4 **Summarising**

Summarising, like asking questions, helps learners to focus on important text information. It is a means of self-review which enables learners to monitor their comprehension. Summarising or getting the main idea is often synonymous with comprehension because paraphrasing a text in their own words not only enables learners to comprehend the text better but it also helps them to process the text more deeply.

To teach this strategy successfully, teachers need to be clear about what is meant by summarising. Maria (1990) indicates that summarising is often confused with retelling, in which the learner tells everything he/she can recall from a text. She states that summarising differs from a retelling in two ways, in that a summary contains only the important ideas in a text and it is brief, because the important ideas are condensed. Constructing a summary, therefore, involves both a selection (discriminative) process, that is, deciding what information in a text is important; and a reduction process, which involves condensing information by substituting general ideas for more detailed ones (Anderson & Hidi, 1988-1989). Teachers should therefore teach this strategy to learners through modelling and also by teaching them guidelines for summary writing. Some researchers (Brown & Day, 1983; Guido & Colwell, 1987) have identified certain guidelines that will teach learners how to condense and select information when summarising. According to them, teachers are to train learners to:

- \$ summarise by using their own words
- \$ include no unnecessary detail

- \$ collapse lists, that is, to use a general term for a list of specific items and to use one word to describe a list of actions that may occur in several sentences
- \$ avoid repeating anything.

Summarising is a difficult skill for learners; therefore these guidelines should be taught to enable them to acquire this strategy which will not only help them in summary writing but also in reading comprehension.

2.4.1.5 **Clarifying**

Whereas asking questions and summarising foster comprehension monitoring at the text level, clarifying on the other hand focuses on comprehension monitoring at lower levels, that is, the word, the sentence and relationships between sentences. The problems that are often addressed by the clarifying strategy are difficult or unfamiliar vocabulary, including unusual and metaphorical expressions and idioms, unclear referents, disorganised text and incomplete information (Maria, 1990).

This strategy can also be used to clarify to learners complex sentence structures that may pose comprehension problems. Like predicting, clarifying is not necessary after every portion of a text. The teacher should use this strategy or clarify where he/she sees that there are problems or when learners themselves ask for clarification. Although this strategy is often used by teachers, many learners and even some teachers are not aware that if it is properly and efficiently used, it can improve reading comprehension among learners. English second language teachers should therefore make their learners aware of this strategy and how it can contribute immensely to the improvement of their reading comprehension.

In summary it can be said that these four strategies, self-questioning, predicting, summarising and clarifying, have been found to be effective in improving learners' reading comprehension.

In studies conducted by Loranger (1997) and Brand-Gruwel et al. (1998), it was found that training learners in these four strategies improved their comprehension.

2.4.2 Reading Purpose

2.4.2.1 Introduction

Research (Clarke & Siberstein, 1977; Long & Richards, 1987; Pressley & Wharton-McDonald, 1997:449-452; Snow et al., 1999:50-51) shows that learners who are good readers use different strategies and different reading speeds for different reading purposes. It is therefore essential for learners, particularly those who use English as a second language, to be made aware of these strategies and of how they can apply them in their own reading. Long and Richards (1987) state that because reading is purposeful, learners should use different reading speeds for different purposes. They suggest that learners should be able to engage in four different types of reading, namely:

- \$ Skimming - which refers to reading that is done quickly to get overall comprehension, and can be used with almost any text.

- \$ Scanning - this is reading quickly for precise details or information, and is the type of reading one will engage in when looking for a telephone number from a telephone directory.

- \$ Reading for comprehensive understanding - this refers to the type of reading a learner will engage in when reading subject materials at school.

\$ Critical reading - refers to the reading of articles, essays, literature or any type of material in which points of view, attitudes and values are involved.

For learners to be able to perform these tasks, they should be in a position to carry out the following strategies:

\$ Skimming a text for global comprehension.

\$ Skipping unknown words.

\$ Using context to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words.

\$ Using a dictionary.

\$ Asking questions.

\$ Finding main and supporting ideas.

\$ Making connections between parts of the text by means of cohesive devices.

\$ Predicting.

\$ Scanning for specific information.

\$ Making use of graphic information.

\$ Recognising how the information in a text is organised.

- \$ Recognising the author's purpose.
- \$ Transferring information from a text to a diagram.
- \$ Making inferences from clues in a text (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:163; Mbhele, Ellis and Robinson, 1998:11)

It must, however, be remembered that any of these reading strategies that a learner may adopt will depend on his/her reading purpose. For instance, the learner should be able to vary his/her reading speed when looking for the meaning of a word and when preparing for an examination. However, in the classroom it is essential for the teacher to follow a structured procedure during the reading lesson. This will not only help learners, particularly English second language learners, to acquire these strategies, but the teacher will also be a model for them. Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997) have suggested a procedure that can be used in a reading lesson. This procedure, which consists of three main stages, namely pre-reading, during reading and post-reading, is discussed in the next sections.

2.4.2.2 **Pre-reading activities**

According to Kilfoil and van der Walt (1997:171), the pre in pre-reading means before, and this suggests that at this initial stage of the reading process, both the teacher and learners do not need to read the whole text; because the goal of pre-reading instruction is to interest and motivate learners and arouse their expectations by predicting and setting questions to be answered by reading the text. This means that the main purpose of pre-reading is to build or activate background knowledge which is appropriate to the text. Pre-reading instruction should therefore focus on a concept or idea which is central to the understanding of the text, since it (pre-reading) draws on the background knowledge of the learner. In fact, the activation of background knowledge which is related to central concepts in the text improves

comprehension of both narrative (Beck, Omanson & McKeown, 1981; Hansen & Hubbard, 1984) and expository texts (Johnson et al., 1984; Langer, 1984).

Learners' inability to relate new knowledge meaningfully to what they already know causes poor comprehension; therefore during pre-reading activities, the teacher should help learners to activate their background knowledge. Sometimes this knowledge in a certain topic area may be culture-related and the teacher will therefore have to supply the relevant cultural information before learners read the text. This means that the selection of comprehension texts is very important. The literature (Maria, 1990; McNeil, 1992; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997; McEachern & Luther, 1989; Tharp, 1982) points to the fact that culturally relevant material, particularly for second language learners, improves comprehension. This does not, however, mean that texts that have unfamiliar content should be avoided. What it means is that the teacher should pre-teach the knowledge that is necessary for the understanding of texts that have unfamiliar contents.

Unfamiliar stylistic conventions or rhetorical organisation (i.e. whether a piece of writing is narrative, descriptive, argumentative etc.) can also lead to poor comprehension, particularly among learners who use English as their second language. It is therefore the teacher's task to pre-teach the structure that the learners will encounter in the text. For instance, if the material comes from a Biology textbook, the teacher may pre-teach descriptions of processes and the use of passives.

Predicting what the text is about before the actual reading increases learner motivation. This can be done through a discussion of the title of the text in which learners may write down their expectations of the events to come, which they may confirm or adjust by skimming through the text.

Asking questions at the pre-reading stage of the lesson can also arouse learners' interest

through their anticipation of what is to happen. Such questions do not only help learners to focus on what they read, but they also provide learners with a reading purpose, and therefore help them to comprehend the text.

Pre-reading instruction should therefore form an integral part of comprehension instruction since it promotes comprehension.

2.4.2.3 **Instruction during reading**

This is the second stage of the reading process, which involves careful reading of the text to obtain detailed information from the text. There are certain activities, according to Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997), that are essential for efficient reading to occur during this stage of the reading process. Some of these activities are :

- \$ reading the text silently, skimming for global comprehension and re-reading for details;
- \$ analysing the language;
- \$ studying vocabulary in context.

Although the eventual aim of the reading lesson is for learners to be able to read silently, as reading is a silent activity, it is necessary for the teacher to demonstrate or model the reading strategies that he/she wants learners to use in their own reading. For example, the purpose of reading a prose text, such as magazine articles will be for learners to skim through the text before reading the whole passage in detail. In such a case the teacher will not only have to demonstrate the skimming strategy, but he/she will also have to prove to the learners that it is a good way to read. This means that the teacher will have to skim through the text by reading

aloud whilst learners follow in their own books.

Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997:15) further suggest that when skimming the text, the teacher will have to :

- \$ read the title with the learners and elicit information from them through questioning etc.
- \$ read the first paragraph of the text, the first sentence of all other paragraphs and the whole of the last paragraph, with the learners following in their own copies,
- \$ ask learners to sum up orally the information they have learned from the teacher's reading.

The teacher may write down this information on the chalkboard. The result of the learners' responses will be a framework of the main ideas of the text, and the teacher should make learners aware of this so that they can confirm or adjust these ideas by reading the whole text silently.

The teacher will have to follow the above procedure for several lessons with him/her doing the initial reading aloud; then learners can, for the rest of the year, be directed to skim texts silently and write down the information they obtain before they read for detailed understanding. In this way the teacher will have modelled the skimming strategy to the learners in a way that will help them to learn the strategy and see its value. As learners cannot use the same strategy with every text, the teacher will need to demonstrate the different texts they will read. For example, how should learners read an advertisement or a menu? What should they be trained to look for? Again the teacher should model the strategies that are appropriate for an advertisement or a menu for several periods before asking learners to read advertisements or menus on their own.

2.4.2.4 **Post-reading instruction**

The post in post-reading means after; thus after learners have read and discussed the text either in groups or pairs, they can be given another text to read and interpret individually by using the same strategies that they used in the text read in class.

Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997) state that questions that are posed after reading test comprehension only; therefore if too many factual questions are set after reading, the activity will no longer be a reading exercise but a test of short-term memory. This means that questions that are posed after detailed reading of the text should seek for global understanding of the text, and should not be the type of questions that act on individual sentences.

Some of the activities that are involved in the reading process at this stage are reviewing the text and sharing interpretations through interactive and creative activities.

2.5 **NOTE-TAKING**

Note-taking is also another way of ensuring basic comprehension. Quite often learners record their understanding of a text, for example in Biology, History or Science, so that they can have notes to study from at a later date. Learners make summaries, or are given summaries which they often memorise without any understanding. Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997) suggest that it is better to make a map of visual representation of a text which shows the main ideas and the relationship of ideas to one another. Since only key words and phrases will be used, though relationships will be shown, learners will be able to use their own language to express these ideas and relationships when they write sentences, paragraphs, or even essays in response to tasks in any subject.

There are various ways of making maps or other visual representations, such as linear notes, cognitive maps, tree diagrams, flow charts and so on. Many learners can make linear notes, where they write down the main idea of a paragraph and then list the ideas that support it in a linear form. Cognitive or mind maps are another way of note-taking. A cognitive map begins from a central point and gives the key words or focus of the text. The key information or words should normally be placed in a hand-drawn circle in the centre of a page. Lines are then drawn out from the centre circles that enclose the main ideas of the text. From these broad categories lines will lead to other ideas that will also be encircled. The initial ideas should move clockwise around the centre, so that it will be easy for learners to see the main ideas in the order in which they appear in the initial text. A mind-map using colour coding or pictures can also be useful in Geography or Agricultural Science while a tree diagram will be effective in transferring information that is structured into categories and sub-categories.

Mind-maps can also be very useful for vocabulary extension, especially for words that are conceptually related. The main concept can be placed in the centre and this is then likened to other related concepts and words in the rest of the diagram. A flow chart can also be used, depending on the nature of the text. It must, however, be noted that a flow chart is appropriate for indicating cause-effect relationships and processes.

Anything or any aid that will help learners to recall is helpful. Therefore, learners should be taught these different types of note-taking skills and should be encouraged to practise them across the curriculum.

A research study on reading comprehension instruction, such as this, would be incomplete without a section on comprehension assessment. Hence, the following section will deal with comprehension assessment and how it can contribute positively to reading comprehension instruction.

2.6 COMPREHENSION ASSESSMENT

2.6.1 Introduction

Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997:283) define an assessment or test as a measurement to sample behaviour, that is to say the teacher tests a limited amount or sample, and then generalises from the results. They further note that assessment should form an integral part of the comprehension instructional programme. They, however, caution teachers not to regard a measurement or assessment of linguistic competence as a precise instrument like a scale or a ruler that measures weight or length, because it is very difficult to measure competence accurately.

There are three main kinds of tests, namely, proficiency, diagnostic and achievement tests. Proficiency tests focus on the future in that they measure the level of skill in language that is considered as necessary for entry into a particular class or level, in order to enable teachers or administrators to place learners in a suitable classroom. Diagnostic tests are present-oriented in that they are aimed at the present in the sense that they measure learners' strengths and weaknesses, which will inform the teacher as to whether remedial lessons are needed or not. Achievement tests, on the other hand, are post-oriented because they assess a specific body of knowledge which is assumed to have been taught. They reveal weaknesses and test underlying competence, so their results can lead to remedial work or be used to predict future performance.

This section will focus on achievement tests since they are both proficiency-related and diagnostic in nature and are also the types of tests that are normally used in schools; therefore they have great influence on teaching strategies.

2.6.2 Comprehension tests

2.6.2.1 Introduction

A comprehension assessment or test is a necessary component of any type of effective reading comprehension instruction, in that it helps to answer many questions. Since the goal of comprehension instruction is to enable learners to comprehend a variety of texts independently, it is essential that comprehension assessment should be able to indicate how well learners are achieving this goal. Comprehension assessment should therefore indicate whether learners' comprehension measures up to expectations or not, and how teachers can help their learners to better their comprehension. Thus assessment must not only portray comprehension as a product, but it must also give some insight into a learner's comprehension process because one of the main objectives of assessment is to inform and guide instructional decision-making. Schell (1988) points out that reading is a complex process which is influenced by many factors (as discussed in earlier sections), and so learners who experience problems in comprehension may have problems with one or more of these factors. This means that comprehension assessment which seeks to support instructional decision-making should consider how the various factors may be affecting comprehension performance.

In assessing the comprehension of learners who use English as a second language, teachers will have to consider what learners' needs are, the situations in which learners use the language, activities that will reveal their knowledge, their own competence and the relevant topic areas. This means that when assessing the comprehension of English second language learners, teachers need to consider how their word recognition ability, background knowledge, linguistic competence, their knowledge of appropriate comprehension strategies, as well as interest and motivation, affect their comprehension of texts (Maria, 1990). Is a particular learner's inability to comprehend a text owing to the fact that he/she is not able to recognise

the words in it; or does he/she lack the background knowledge that is necessary to understand the text?

The way text factors interact with factors in the learner, as well as the effects of different situations on comprehension, also need to be considered as part of comprehension assessment. For example, can a particular learner do better with short texts than longer texts; or is he/she able to comprehend narrative texts better than expository texts; or is the text he/she is reading too difficult for him/her because there are too many words that he/she is not able to recognise? Is the learner able to read for details in a text yet fails to determine the main idea, or does he/she have more success with multiple choice questions than open-ended questions? These are some of the questions that comprehension assessment must seek to answer. This means that the aims and objectives of comprehension assessment must be linked to instructional objectives and should be expressed in terms of what learners should be able to do in English in real-life situations.

2.6.2.2 Factors affecting comprehension assessment

2.6.2.2.1 Introduction

Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997:283) state clearly that 'to teach what will be tested is the wrong focus, and that the teacher or examiner should test what has been taught'. This means that assessment and instruction should not be regarded as separate activities that require different materials with different goals (Brown & Lytle, 1988). Assessment should rather be seen as a vital component of instruction and a support for both the teaching and learning process. Thus, for assessment to be useful it must be valid, reliable norm- and criterion- referenced, and it must have teaching and learning value.

2.6.2.2.2 **Validity**

Validity shows that a particular test measures what it says it does. This means that a valid test, such as a reading test, will measure reading ability and not a different skill which is not related to reading. Thus for a comprehension test to be valid, it must be related to the particular theoretical framework that underpins the instructional approach that is used in the classroom. This implies that the view of language which is reflected in the syllabus must be the central point of testing. If it is the communicative approach which maintains that language is unitary and that there is some underlying competence that can be measured through performance, then the test will be integrative - i.e. all the four skills will be tested in a natural, contextualised way in which the focus will be on real-life situations and functional language use. However, if the theory that underpins the syllabus maintains that language is divisible into separate parts, then testing will be based on discrete points, whereby each structure and each skill will be tested separately (McNeil, 1992; Maria, 1990; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997).

This means that the content of the test should reflect teaching objectives. If learners have been taught to identify main and supporting ideas then in a test the learners' ability to identify main and supporting ideas, should be assessed.

2.6.2.2.3 **Reliability**

Reliability refers to the consistency of a test, which means that the test should yield similar results consistently if administered on successive occasions to the same or to different learners. This means that if a learner's score on a test depends on who gives or administers the test then the information the test provides cannot be reliable (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:285; Maria, 1990:233) Reliability can be affected by tension, temperature, the learners' physical and emotional health; and even the environment can promote concentration, or distract attention, through poor lighting or too much noise. The results of a test can also be

unreliable because of marking or scoring.

A measurement which is reliable discriminates between weak and strong learners, therefore any question(s) that does not discriminate between weak and strong learners should be eliminated. Reliability must be subject to validity because a test that yields consistent results does not mean, necessarily, that the test conforms to any language theory or that it tests what has been taught. The teacher can ensure reliability by using similar tests at regular intervals throughout the year with the same group of learners. This method of assessment, where similar tests are used for the same learners as a continuous assessment throughout the year, is known as employing equivalent forms of assessment.

2.6.2.2.4 **Norm- and criterion-reference**

A test must be norm- or criterion-referenced. Since raw test marks or scores are not absolute indications of a learner's knowledge or competence, the marks that learners obtain become significant only in terms of the context and purpose for which they are used. Thus test marks can be ranked against one another, in which case they are norm-referenced, or they can be interpreted according to a particular criterion or standard, in which case they are criterion-referenced.

Norm refers to the average or mean score that is achieved by the class or group. Then each learner's marks or performance can be indicated in relation to the performance of the class or group. Norm- referenced tests, also referred to as psychometric tests, discriminate well between strong and weak learners; therefore the scores obtained by learners should range from distinctions to failures (Maria, 1990; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997). Information such as the general or overall performance of the class, and learners who either perform below or above the class average, can be obtained from norm-referenced tests. Kilfoil and Van der Walt

(1997:287) suggest that the highest marks should be obtained by the learner whom the teacher knows to be the best in the class and the lowest marks should be obtained by learners who usually performs poorly in the class (1997:287). They point out that if both the weak and the strong learners score about the same marks on a test, then the teacher must know that there is something wrong with the test because it has failed to differentiate between learners with differing abilities. Criterion-referenced tests, also referred to as edometric, however, are used to indicate the amount or percentage of the work that has been mastered by learners. Thus, the teacher will be able to determine how far each learner has progressed towards a specific outcome in relation to how well he/she needs to be able to perform. There is no comparison of scores with the class because criterion-referenced tests are success-oriented. High or low scores by learners will indicate to the teacher as to whether both teaching and learning have been successful or not.

In assessing their learners' comprehension, particularly that of learners who use English as a second language, teachers should employ both norm- and criterion-referenced tests, as comprehension instruction aims at enabling learners to acquire a variety of skills and strategies that will enable them to extract meaning or information from any text without any assistance from the teacher.

2.6.2.2.5 Teaching-learning value

Comprehension assessment should also have teaching and learning value. This means that the teacher can use a test to modify his/her teaching methods, as well as to reinforce learning by motivating learners. This means that external examinations such as matriculation examinations should reflect the language theory that underlies the syllabus. This implies that the matriculation examinations should be based on the syllabus, otherwise this will have a negative effect on teaching in that teachers will only focus on or teach what will be examined. Thus, if the external examinations are non-interactive, non-integrative or are based on

discrete-point items without any real-life or functional use of language, then the majority of English second language learners may be able to pass their matriculation examination well, and yet they may not be able to use English functionally or communicate fluently in English either orally or in writing.

Therefore, comprehension assessments, particularly those for learners who use English as a second language, should have teaching and learning value, where the tests will reflect functional language use.

2.6.2.3 **Test formats**

Comprehension tests can be in different forms; they can be discrete-point or integrative. Discrete-point items test knowledge or specific points of language usage separately, one point at a time. The language theory that underpins the discrete-point format proposes that comprehension consists of separate or discrete skills which need to be mastered separately. Thus, this format tests aspects or skills separately with little or no contextualisation. Its assessment is quantitative and the scoring is more objective.

Integrative tests, on the other hand, are holistic in that they focus on the learners' degree of control of language in real-life situations. The theoretical framework that underlies the integrative format proposes that reading comprehension is an interactive process which involves simultaneous processing of a variety of factors in the learner, the text and the environment. Integrative questions therefore focus on language use in real-life situations. They test overall comprehension in contextualised situations. The assessment is qualitative but scoring is usually subjective.

2.6.2.4 **Kinds of Tests**

2.6.2.4.1 **Introduction**

There are different kinds of tests and these tests vary not only according to the kind of questions they seek to answer but also according to their structure. Comprehension tests range from the unstructured and spontaneous gathering of information during instruction to structured tests with specially defined outcomes and directions for administration and scoring such as teacher questioning during instruction and standardised tests like matriculation examinations. In between these two kinds of tests are semi-structured tests, for example informal teacher-made tests such as class tests, weekly and monthly tests; retelling, observations, cloze, short and long questions; dictation, oral language evaluation, and so on.

Since the focus of this study is not assessment, no detailed explanations will be given for the various kinds of tests. Rather, a brief discussion will be given of short and long questions since these are the kind of tests that are commonly used in assessing reading comprehension in high schools.

(a) Short questions

The type of short questions set will depend on the kind of answers sought, that is, whether the teacher merely wants to test the learners' ability to recognise a specific point or whether he/she expects the learners to be able to produce each point (Maria, 1990; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997; McNeil, 1992).

Short questions can be open-ended or multiple-choice. Open-ended questions in which learners construct their own responses, (which can be words, phrases or sentences, rather than choosing a response) require production of language while multiple-choice questions merely test recognition. This means that multiple-choice questions test comprehension at sentence level while open-ended questions test global comprehension. Open-ended questions can focus on collecting different types of information. For example, questions can be asked to

find out whether learners understand what they read, and what strategies they use in different reading tasks. Some of the advantages of open-ended questions are that learners cannot get the right answer by guessing, they can exercise choice since unpredictable responses are allowed, and productive skills are tested (Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997).

On the other hand, multiple-choice questions, which are a form of discrete-point testing, operate at sentence level. Any attempt to contextualise the questions can lead to the questions becoming interdependent. This means that if a learner gets one question wrong then he or she is likely to get the others wrong, and vice versa. Therefore, question interdependence should be avoided because it affects reliability.

Filling-in-the-gaps or blanks is also another type of discrete-point testing. These types of short questions can be used to test grammar and vocabulary. For instance, learners can be asked to fill in missing words such as prepositions, verbs and so on. The important thing that needs to be remembered is that sentences and phrases must not be ambiguous, in order to allow for only one possible answer.

Matching is also another form of testing at sentence level. Normally two columns are presented and learners will be required to match the items in one column with those of the other. For instance, the items in column A will be matched with those in column B. This is a good exercise for tests on vocabulary as well as on learners' knowledge of appropriacy and register. What is important in this type of testing is that the questions or items in column B should be longer or more complex in number than those in column A in order to prevent learners from arriving at correct answers by mere elimination.

True/false questions are also another way of testing comprehension. What is essential with this type of questions is the need to eliminate guessing. This can be done by asking learners to substantiate or motivate their answers by quoting from or referring to the passage.

(b) Long questions

Apart from short questions, long questions, such as those found in guided writing, should also be encouraged and practiced. For example, learners can be given the task of information transfer, in which they will be required to rewrite given information in columns as continuous prose or vice versa. Learners can also be given the task of re-ordering, in which they will rewrite sentences given in random in order to show narrative sequence or a line of argument. Another useful writing exercise is the task of changing the mode, where learners will be asked to rewrite a prose passage as a dialogue, a set of instructions as a description, a short dialogue as a message, a narrative as a description of a process, and so on.

2.6.2.5 Scoring

Since scoring or marking goes hand-in-hand with testing, it is necessary that a memorandum must be drawn up when a test is drafted. A memorandum comprises the expected responses to the questions that are set in a test. It must therefore include all the possible answers to discrete-point questions, and any other acceptable alternatives, and it must also have a grid for marking subjective questions. A memorandum is a necessary component of testing in order to ensure a high degree of reliability, particularly where many teachers mark the same test. A teacher may sometimes set questions that he/she may not be able to answer; in that case those questions must be deleted. Drawing up a memorandum may also reveal any shortcomings, such as ambiguous or incorrect phrasing of questions.

Comprehension assessment of both formal or standardised testing and informal teacher assessment should form an integral part of comprehension instruction. In assessing comprehension a variety of test formats and questions such as discrete-point and integrative

formats, open-ended and multiple-choice, and short and long questions should be used in order to provide learners with a wide range of choices to cater for individual learners' interests and preferences. The questions that are set must be based on the language theory that underlies course objectives, so that the assessment will have both a teaching and a learning value.

2.7 SUMMARY

In this chapter an attempt has been made to illustrate how the majority of English second language learners in high schools, particularly those in disadvantaged communities, experience difficulties in reading comprehension, and therefore to demonstrate the need for teachers to adopt a new approach to comprehension instruction. Three main components, the learner, the text, and the environment, particularly the teacher, have been identified as the main factors that influence the reading comprehension process. The way these three components interact either to bring about or to hinder comprehension; the skills and strategies that can be used to improve comprehension among learners; as well as comprehension assessment, which forms an integral part of comprehension instruction, have been discussed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURE

3.1 AIMS OF THE STUDY

This study was aimed at seeking to facilitate and promote the development of reading comprehension competence among English second language high school learners in a disadvantaged community, in order that they will have the ability to read and comprehend any comprehension or written text with little or no assistance from a teacher.

3.1.1 Research questions

To this end the following questions were posed :

(a) Main question

Does the extensive reading of a variety of texts for different purposes, facilitated by the instruction of reading comprehension strategies, lead to a significant improvement in English second language high school learners' reading comprehension?

(b) Sub-questions

(i) Does the improvement in reading comprehension lead to gains in learners' achievement in English?

(ii) Does improved comprehension lead to higher achievement in learners' general academic performance in all their subjects?

3.2 Subjects

One hundred and sixty learners (boys and girls) of four Grade 11 (Standard 9) classes of Batlhaping High School were targeted for this study. All the learners were studying six subjects, namely Setswana, English, Afrikaans, Biology; and either History and Geography, or Physical Science and Mathematics, or Mathematics and Geography or Agricultural Science. They were given numbers from 1-160 and were thus referred to by their numbers. Of the one hundred and sixty learners, four dropped out of school and thirty-four were eliminated because they did not write all the tests for both the pre-tests and post-tests. Thus one hundred and twenty-two learners participated in this reading research study. The researcher, being an English teacher in the school, integrated this research study into her daily classroom teaching methods and practices.

3.3 Training Programme

All the one hundred and twenty-two learners who participated in this research study took part in the training programme. The training consisted of two parts, namely, the instruction/ teaching of reading comprehension strategies and extensive reading.

First, it was explained to the learners that some reading researchers have found that the use of reading comprehension strategies and extensive reading improve learners' comprehension ability and their general academic performance as a whole. So the study was aimed to find out whether they would also improve in their comprehension and in their general academic performance if they were taught some reading comprehension strategies and were guided to apply them by reading a variety of texts. They were also told that the programme would be vigorous because they would sometimes spend extra time at school. It was also explained to the learners that at the end of the research period, they would be divided into three groups of : extensive readers, less-extensive readers and non-extensive readers. The learners who would read ten or more stories a month, would be put in the group of extensive readers, those who would read between five and nine stories within one month would be classified as less-

extensive readers; and those who would not read any story at all or who would not read more than four stories in a month would be put in the group on non-extensive readers. A story of three typed pages was used as the length of measure of one story.

3.4 Reading comprehension strategies

Learners were taught the reading comprehension strategies of self-questioning, predicting, summarising and clarifying through the direct explanation approach/method (Roehler and Duffy, 1984). First the researcher explained the self-questioning strategy (teaching learners to ask their own questions while reading – see 2.4.1.2) to the learners and then demonstrated/modeled how they can apply this strategy by reading (one paragraph of a comprehension passage) and thinking aloud (pausing now and again to ask some questions) while the learners listened as they followed in their own copies of the comprehension passage. This process was repeated by reading one paragraph each from three different passages. Then the learners were asked to silently read one paragraph of another passage and to ask (in writing) three questions. Few learners were asked to read (that same paragraph) and to verbalise their responses/questions that they had asked. The various responses/questions were discussed whereby other learners expressed their opinions (in terms of agreement, disagreement, amendments etc) and the researcher also corrected misconceptions and provided additional explanations and modelling where necessary.

The same procedure was used to explain and model the strategies of predicting, summarising and clarifying. After each of the four strategies had been explained and modeled by using paragraphs, a full comprehension passage was used to demonstrate the use of all the four strategies at the same time by following the same procedure. Learners were then given the opportunity to practice all the four strategies in the context of real reading of comprehension passages while the researcher monitored their reading by providing additional explanations and modeling whenever needed. As the learners became increasingly independent in their

use of these strategies, explanations and feedback were reduced.

Lastly, learners were encouraged to read other written materials such as story books, magazines newspapers, newspapers, science fiction etc, and this leads to the next section, which is extensive reading.

3.4 Variables

The following variables were studied:

- (i) The reading comprehension competence of English second language high school learners in a disadvantaged community.
- (ii) The extensive reading of a variety of texts for different purposes, reinforced by instruction in reading comprehension strategies.

3.5 Measuring instruments

3.5.1 Reading comprehension

The reading comprehension competence of the one hundred and twenty-two learners was assessed. Two pre-tests, using authentic comprehension texts (matric comprehension passages), were administered to the learners in order to assess their level of comprehension. Two post-tests, using authentic comprehension texts (also matric comprehension passages), were conducted at the end of the research period. Each of the two pre-tests and the two post-tests was written out of fifty marks, thus the total mark for the pre-test as well as the post-test was one hundred per cent. The percentage scores for the pre-test as well as the post-test were compared. For the questions and memoranda for the pre-tests and post-tests, refer to Appendices A to H.

3.5.2 Extensive reading

Showers et al (1998) found that extensive reading of a variety of texts improves learners' reading comprehension ability and vocabulary development. So learners were encouraged to continue practicing the four reading strategies by reading a number of different texts/written material for different purposes outside of school. The researcher monitored the learners' reading by means of the reading chart, recitation chart and the reading notebook (For details refer to 3.5.2) Learners were taught, through direct explanation, certain reading comprehension strategies: self-questioning, predicting, clarifying, summarising, and other strategies that were known, as identified by this study, to aid reading comprehension; and they were then guided to apply these strategies in their own independent reading outside of school.

The following measures were taken to supervise and monitor the learners' independent reading.

- \$ The researcher created a class library which contained a wide range of reading materials, from magazines to fiction and non-fiction, from which learners were made to borrow books, magazines, newspapers and so on. These reading materials were given to the researcher by her supervisor, Prof L J van Niekerk, for the sole purpose of this study. The learners were also encouraged to read materials from the school library and other sources.

- \$ A reading chart was created by the researcher to monitor and record learners' reading in terms of the number of stories they read, and how they rated their own reading in terms of whether they completed reading the story or not and whether the story was enjoyable, boring or difficult. Below is a sample of the Reading Chart.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Title of story (book, magazine, etc)							
Author							
Learner's serial no							
Date borrowed							
Date returned							
Rating (A, B, C, D)							

Sample A : Reading Chart

Key to rating

- A: completed – enjoyable
- B: completed – boring
- C: did not complete – boring
- D: did not complete – difficult

\$ A recitation chart was designed to monitor as to whether or not learners had read the books they borrowed. Every other day, each learner was made to recite or memorise three lines or sentences from what he/she had read on the previous day. A tick (✓) indicated that the learner had successfully recited his/her three lines, and a dash (-) showed a failure to recite the three lines. A cross (x) indicated that the learner was not present in the class during that period. A sample of the Recitation Chart is shown below:

Learner's serial number														
1														
2	-													
3	X													
4														
5														
6														
7														
8														
9 etc														

Sample B : Recitation Chart

\$ To ensure that learners had really and truly read the materials they borrowed, they were made to keep a reading notebook in which they recorded their readings. This was supervised and monitored by the researcher, who recorded each individual learner's readings regarding the number of stories each learner read in the Reading chart.

<p>Learner's name : Back cover Serial number : Back cover</p> <p>Title of story (book, magazine, etc) : Author: Setting : Main character(s): Other characters: Most interesting episode/event (State briefly in few sentences) Rating (A, B, C, D)</p> <p><u>Key to Rating</u> A: completed – enjoyable B: completed – boring C: did not complete – boring D: did not complete – too difficult</p>
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Sample C : (Learners) Reading Notebook

3.5.3 Grouping/Classification of learners

From the information or record that was provided by learners were identified as extensive readers, less-extensive readers and non-extensive readers. Learners who read ten or more stories within a month were classified as Extensive Readers. Those learners who read five to nine stories in a month were classified as Less-Extensive Readers; and those who did not read any story at all or did not read more than four stories per month were classified as Non-Extensive Readers. Here, a story of about three typed pages was used as the length or measure of one story.

Learners who, according to were identified as Extensive Readers, were selected and grouped together; and those who were identified as Less-Extensive Readers or Non-Extensive Readers were also selected and grouped together respectively.

3.6 PROCEDURE

Both raw and percentage scores of the reading comprehension achievement of learners were obtained from both the pre-tests and the post-tests that were conducted at the beginning and the end of the research period respectively (see Appendix I).

Both the aggregate percentage marks for English and the overall aggregate percentage marks for all the six subjects the learners were studying were obtained from the school's records of the June and November 2001 examination schedules with the permission of the principal of the school.

3.7 SCORING

Raw scores in terms of percentages were accepted as a measure of the reading comprehension competence of learners in the pre-tests and post-tests. Aggregate

percentage marks were accepted as a measure of the academic achievement of learners in English and the learners' overall academic performance in all their six subjects in both the June and November 2001 examinations.

The data that were collected are analysed and discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 DATA ANALYSIS

4.1.1 Introduction

Out of the one hundred and twenty-two learners who participated in this reading research study, thirty-one of them were identified as Extensive Readers. These are the learners who read ten or more stories per month, and were thus categorised and grouped together as extensive readers, that is, those learners who proved to have the highest reading capacity. Thirty-two learners were identified and grouped together as Less-Extensive Readers, and these are the learners who read between five and nine stories in a month. Fifty-nine learners were identified and grouped together as Non-Extensive Readers, and these are the learners who either did not read any story at all or did not read more than four stories in a month. As stated earlier, a story of about three typed pages was used as the length or measure of a story.

4.1.2 Analysis of data collected

Percentage scores of the one hundred and twenty-two learners for their reading comprehension achievement, their achievement in English, and their overall, general academic achievement in all their other subjects are given in Appendices I, J and K respectively.

4.1.3 Research questions

The following research questions were posed:

(a) **Main question**

Does the extensive reading of a variety of texts for different purposes, facilitated by the instruction of reading comprehension strategies, lead to a significant improvement in English second language high school learners' reading comprehension?

(b) **Sub-questions**

- (i) Does the improvement in reading comprehension lead to gains in learners' achievement in English?
- (ii) Does improved comprehension lead to high achievement in learners' general academic performance in all their subjects?

4.1.3.1 **Extensive reading and learners' achievement in reading comprehension**

In an attempt to answer the above main question, two pre-tests (comprehension tests) were administered to one hundred and twenty-two learners and both their raw and percentage marks were recorded. Thereafter, the learners were taught certain reading comprehension strategies that were known, as identified by this study, to aid reading comprehension, and they were then guided to apply these strategies in their own independent reading outside of the school, by means of which they were made to read a variety of texts for different purposes. Finally, two post-tests (comprehension tests) were conducted and the percentage scores for both the pre-tests and post-tests were compared. The statistical details are given in Appendix I.

(a) **Extensive readers**

A close examination of the figures in Appendix I reveals that the reading comprehension of the

learners who were identified as Extensive Readers improved significantly more than the reading comprehension of the learners who were identified as Less-Extensive and Non-Extensive Readers. The reading comprehension of the Extensive Readers increased from between nine per cent (9%) and twenty-seven per cent (27%). This suggests that extensive reading of different texts, supported by the instruction of reading comprehension strategies can and does improve English second language high school learners' reading comprehension.

(b) Less-Extensive readers

It can also be observed from Appendix I that the reading comprehension of the group of Less-Extensive Readers improved significantly more than that of the Non-Extensive Readers. The reading comprehension of the Less-Extensive Readers increased from between two per cent (2%) to fifteen per cent (15%). This means that less-extensive reading by learners can lead to improvements in their comprehension competence. However, this improvement may not be significant enough to cause any improvement in the learners' general academic performance in their other subjects, as revealed by Appendix K.

(c) Non-Extensive Readers

A detailed examination of the learners who were identified as Non-Extensive Readers (Appendix I) shows that the reading comprehension of thirty-six of the Non-Extensive Readers increased from between one per cent (1%) to twelve per cent (12%). However, the reading comprehension of twenty learners in this group dropped by between one per cent (1%) and eleven per cent (11%), while the reading comprehension of three of the learners remained unchanged.

Further analysis of Appendices J and K, which indicate the learners' achievement in English and their general academic performance respectively, reveals that the increase of one to twelve per cent (1%-12%) in the reading comprehension of the thirty-six Non-Extensive Readers could not effect any improvement in their English and in their general academic performance in all their other subjects. This means that the lack of extensive and less extensive reading on the part of learners who use English as a second language can be detrimental not only to their reading comprehension, but also to their general academic performance as a whole.

4.1.3.2 **Extensive reading and learners' achievement in English**

To find an answer to the research question, sub-question (i), in other words, to determine whether the learners' gains in reading comprehension, as shown in Appendix I, were significant enough to have a positive impact on the learners' academic achievement in English, the learners' achievement scores (in percentages) in English in the June and November 2001 examinations were computed and compared. The statistical details are provided in Appendix J.

(a) **Extensive readers**

A detailed analysis of the figures in Appendix J reveals that the thirty-one learners who were identified as Extensive Readers showed improved academic achievement in their English examinations. The percentage marks that the thirty-one Extensive Readers obtained in the June 2001 English examinations improved by between eleven per cent (11%) and twenty-six per cent (26%) in the November 2001 examinations. Their improved performance as expressed in terms of symbols is indicated as follows: The symbol that one of the learners obtained in the June examinations improved from symbol C to A in the November 2001 examinations; six learners' symbols rose from C to B; two learners' symbols changed from D

to B, while the symbols of eleven learners improved from D to C. Seven learners' symbols moved from E to C while two learners improved their symbols from E to D, and the symbols of two other learners improved from F to E. This shows that the extensive reading of a variety of texts, supported by instruction in reading comprehension strategies can improve English second language high school learners' academic achievement in English second language high school learners'.

(b) **Less-Extensive readers**

A close examination of the group of Less-Extensive Readers (Appendix J) indicates that thirty out of thirty-two learners improved in their English examination.

The percentage marks that the thirty learners obtained in the June 2001 examinations improved by between two per cent (2%) and twelve per cent (12%) in the November 2001 examinations. However, the percentage marks that two of the learners obtained in the June examinations dropped by one per cent (1%) and six per cent (6%) in the November 2001 examinations.

The increase or drop in the percentage marks that the learners obtained in the June/November 2001 examinations affected their symbols in English as follows: The symbols that two learners obtained in June improved from D to C in the November examinations; nine learners' symbols improved from E to D, whilst the symbol of one learner moved from F to D. The symbols of eight learners changed from F to E; one learner's symbol rose from FF to E. Two learners' symbols of FF improved to F, and another learner's symbol changed from G to F. One learner's symbol of C, three learners' symbols of D, another three learners' symbols of E and one learner's symbol of F, all remained unchanged.

However, the improvement in these learners' English examinations was not significant enough

to effect any improvement in their overall, general academic performance in all their other subjects, as indicated by Appendix L. What this means is that for reading comprehension to have a positive effect on English second language high school learners' academic achievement in all their subjects across the curriculum, it is essential for learners to engage in extensive, and not less-extensive, reading of a variety of texts.

(c) **Non-Extensive Readers**

The performance, according to Appendix L, of the fifty-nine, Non-Extensive Readers in the June and November 2001 English examinations was as follows. The percentage marks that twenty-eight learners obtained in June increased by between one per cent (1%) and eleven per cent (11%) in the November 2001 examinations. Five learners' percentage marks remained unchanged, but the percentage marks of twenty-six learners decreased by between one per cent (1%) and ten per cent (10%).

The increase or decrease in the percentage marks of the learners affected the symbols they obtained in English as follows. One learner obtained symbol B in June and this remained the same in the November examinations. The symbol for one learner increased from D to C, four learners' symbols improved from F to E, two learners' symbols changed from FF to F and the symbols of two other learners also improved from G to F. However, the symbol one learner obtained in June dropped from B to C in the November examinations; the symbols of three learners decreased from C to D and four learners' symbols weakened from D to E. Four learners' symbols of C, seventeen learners' symbols of D, another nineteen learners' symbols of E and another learner whose symbol was F, remained unchanged in the November examinations.

The above analysis shows that only nine out of fifty-nine Non-Extensive Readers were able to improve their achievement in English; one learner's performance remained unchanged, whilst

the performance of forty-nine learners weakened. The improved performance of the nine learners, on the other hand, was not significant enough to cause any improvement in their other subjects, as can be observed in Appendix K. This means that the lack of extensive reading on the part of English second language high school learners, who also use English as the language of learning and instruction, will have negative effects on their academic achievement in English, and on their overall academic performance in all their subjects, as revealed by Appendix K.

4.1.3.3 **Extensive reading and learners' general academic performance**

In an attempt to answer the research question, sub-question (ii), that is, to find out whether the improvement in some of the learners' reading comprehension achievements, which in some cases resulted in an improvement in their academic achievement in English, will also lead to improvement in the learners' overall, general academic performance in all their other subjects, the learners' academic achievement scores (in percentages) in all their six subjects (which represented their overall aggregate percentage marks) in the June and November 2001 examinations were computed and compared. The statistical details are given in Appendix K.

(a) **Extensive readers**

A detailed examination of the figures in Appendix K reveals that the aggregate or the overall percentage marks which each of the thirty-one Extensive Readers obtained in the June 2001 examinations increased by between ten per cent (10%) and sixteen per cent (16%) in the November 2001 examinations. This improvement in the aggregate percentage marks of all their six subjects affected their aggregate symbols or general academic performance as follows: One learner's aggregate symbol rose from B to A; five learners' symbols improved from C to B; the symbols of thirteen learners moved from D to C, two other learners' symbols improved from E to C, while ten learners' symbols moved from E to D.

It is worth noting that the improved academic performance of the thirty-one learners who were identified as Extensive Readers has been consistent with their increased performance in their reading comprehension, higher achievement in English, as well as in their overall, general academic achievement in all their subjects across the curriculum. This suggests that improved or better comprehension on the part of English second language high school learners does lead to significant improvement in learners' general academic performance, as revealed by this study.

(b) **Less-Extensive Readers**

It can also be observed from Appendix K that the aggregate percentage marks which twenty-seven of the thirty-two Less-Extensive readers obtained in the June examinations decreased by between one per cent (1%) and seven per cent (7%), while the aggregate marks for the remaining five learners remained unchanged. The drop or otherwise in the aggregate percentage marks affected the learners' aggregate symbols as follows: the symbols that three learners obtained in June dropped from D to E in the November 2001 examinations; the symbols of six learners weakened from E to F; one learner's symbol also dropped from E to F; one learner's symbol dropped from F to FF; while three learners' symbols of D, nine learners' symbols of E, eight learners' symbols of F and two learners' symbols of FF remained unchanged.

The above analysis indicates that there was no improvement in the general academic performance of the Less-Extensive Readers. This clearly implies that although Less Extensive reading can result in the improvement of English second language high school learners' reading comprehension and to some extent, also in their academic achievement in English as revealed by Appendices I and J such an improvement, according to this study, may not be significant enough to lead to any improvement in the learners' overall general academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum.

(c) **Non-Extensive Readers**

A close analysis of the statistical details in Appendix K shows that the overall academic performance of the fifty-nine Non-Extensive Readers, that is, those learners who either did not read any story at all or who did not read more than four stories a month, did not improve. The aggregate percentage marks which fifty-seven of the learners obtained in June dropped by between one per cent (1%) and thirteen per cent (13%) in the November 2001 examinations; one learner's aggregate percentage mark increased by one per cent (1%) and another learner's percentage mark remained unchanged.

The decrease or otherwise in the learners' aggregate percentage marks affected their aggregate symbols as follows: of the fifty-nine Non-Extensive Readers, six learners' symbols dropped from C to D; one learner's symbol moved from C to E; the symbols of eighteen learners weakened from D to E; ten learners' symbols dropped from E to F, whilst two learners' symbols of F dropped to FF. Six learners' symbols of D, ten learners' symbols of E, two learners' symbols of FF, and another two learners' symbols of G all remained unchanged.

The above analysis shows that the fifty-nine Non-Extensive Readers achieved no improvement whatsoever, in their overall, general academic performance in all their six subjects, throughout the year 2001. In fact the general academic performance of thirty-seven learners dropped or deteriorated while that of twenty-two learners remained unchanged. The lack of improvement or the deterioration in the general academic performance of the fifty-nine Non-Extensive Readers can be attributed to poor reading comprehension ability on the part of those learners.

It can thus be summed up from the above analysis that it is not merely enough to teach English second language high school learners reading comprehension strategies, but it is also essential for the teacher to ensure that learners practice or apply these strategies by reading a

variety of texts; and by so doing the learners will not only improve their reading comprehension, but they will also be able to read and derive meaning from any written text, with little or no assistance from the teacher, and thereby improve their academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum.

4.2 FINDINGS PERTINENT TO THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The following outcomes or results have emerged from the study:

(i) **Extensive reading and learners' achievement in reading comprehension.**

It was found (Appendix I) that:

- (a) Extensive reading facilitated by reading comprehension strategies instruction does lead to high achievement in reading comprehension among English second language high school learners.
- (b) Lack of extensive reading, on the other hand, leads to low achievement in reading comprehension among English second language high school learners.

(ii) **Extensive reading and learners' academic achievement in English :**

It was revealed (Appendix J) that :

- (a) Extensive reading promotes high academic achievement in English among high school learners who use English as a second language.
- (b) Lack of extensive reading has a negative effect on English second language high school learners' achievement in English. Such learners demonstrate lower

achievements in English than their counterparts who read extensively.

(iii) **Extensive reading and learners' general academic performance.**

It emerged (Appendix K) that :

- (a) Extensive reading leads to high academic achievement among English second language high school learners' general academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum.
- (b) The absence of extensive reading leads to poor or very low academic achievement among English second language high school learners' general academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum.

4.3 **DISCUSSION**

Generally, the results of the study lead us to hold the view that extensive reading, supported by instruction in reading comprehension strategies, facilitates high achievement in reading comprehension among English second language high school learners as evidenced by post-test scores; and that the improved comprehension subsequently leads to :

- \$ significant improvement in learners' academic achievement in English; and
- \$ higher achievement in learners' general academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum, as revealed in Appendix K.

The lack of extensive reading, on the other hand, results in lower achievement in reading comprehension among high school learners who use English as a second language, as shown by post-test scores; and that the poor comprehension subsequently leads to :

\$ poor academic performance in English; and

\$ lower or very poor achievement in learners' overall, general academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum, as indicated in Appendix K.

This finding re-affirms recent findings (Bryant et al. 2000:248); Johnson-Glenberg, 2000:781; Brand-Gruwel et al., 1998:79; Dreyer, 1998:23; Showers et al., 1998:29-30; Swanson & De La Paz, 1998:217; Loranger, 1997:57; De La Paz & Graham, 1997) which indicate that comprehension strategy instruction improves the reading comprehension of learners, particularly those with reading and learning disabilities. It (this study) also concurs with some earlier research studies on second language reading, which have found that reading strategies can be taught and that such strategy instructions are effective and, therefore, can help learners to become better readers and better achievers (Phillips, 1984; Sutton, 1989; Klinger & Vaughn, 1996; Boyle & Peregoy, 1990; Hernandez, 1991; Padro, 1985). In this study, learners were taught the strategies of predicting, questioning, clarifying, summarising and other strategies such as note taking and becoming aware of themselves as readers through direct explanation and modelling, and thereafter they were guided to apply these strategies in their own independent reading outside of school. The results indicate that the Extensive Readers, that is the learners who could read more than ten stories in a month, obtained significant gains in reading comprehension; while the Non-Extensive Readers, that is those learners who could not read any story at all, or who could not read more than four stories in a month, had no significant gains in reading comprehension as shown by post-test percentage scores.

Showers and colleagues (Showers et al, 1998:30) report that the national studies of reading competence have found that extensive reading outside of school is a high correlate of both vocabulary development and reading comprehension. This is evidenced by their own

(Showers and colleagues, 1998:29-30) research study, which showed that students gained in vocabulary development and in reading comprehension after they were trained in a reading programme. In this study the Extensive Readers who could read ten or more stories in a month, consistently showed high achievement in reading comprehension and in all their other subjects across the curriculum; while the Non-Extensive Readers, who could not read any story at all, or who could not read more than four stories per month, consistently performed poorly in reading comprehension and in all their subjects across the curriculum as evidenced by Appendices J and K.

Other researchers have also ascertained that English proficiency or effective reading is central to academic success, particularly for second language learners in academic contexts (Kilfoil, 1999:46, 50, 52-53; Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:165; Hugo, 1993:56; Snow et al., 1998:48; Dreyer, 1998:24; Carrell, 1989; Lynch & Hudson, 1991). Dreyer (1998:24) further notes that it is not enough for learners to know about the different reading strategies, but that they must also know how and when to use them; and above all, they must want to use them, for 'facility with strategies comes from using a variety of them under different task conditions in a variety of subject areas. In this study all the one hundred and twenty-two participating learners were taught the same reading comprehension strategies and were guided to use them in their own independent reading outside of school. However, it was only thirty-one learners, who were identified as Extensive Readers, who really used these strategies by engaging themselves in extensive reading of a variety of texts, and as a result, they benefited from the positive effects of both the use of reading comprehension strategies and of extensive reading - they consistently improved in their reading comprehension, English examinations and in their general academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum, as revealed by Appendices I, J and K respectively.

On the other hand, the fifty-nine Non-Extensive Readers who never or rarely used these reading comprehension strategies, because they did not do any or much reading on their own,

never benefited from the strategies they were taught - they consistently obtained lower academic achievement in their reading comprehension, English examinations and in their general academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum, as shown by Appendices I, J and K.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 SUMMARY OF AIMS, METHODS AND FINDINGS

This research study investigated the relationship of the use of reading comprehension strategies and extensive reading outside of school to the reading comprehension achievement of English second language high school learners in a disadvantaged community. The study also examined the relationship of improved or better comprehension with learners' academic achievement in English and with their general academic performance in all their subjects across the curriculum.

The data for measuring the comprehension achievement were based on pre-test/post-test percentage scores. The data for academic achievement in English and general academic performance were both based on official academic records which represented the learners' examination marks in the June 2001 and November 2001 examinations. The findings indicate that extensive reading, which is reinforced by the instruction of reading comprehension strategies, improves reading comprehension and facilitates high academic achievement among English second language high school learners, while lack of extensive reading leads to lower or poor achievement in both reading comprehension and learners' general academic performance.

5.2 CONCLUSION

In sum it can be stated that there is a significant effect of both the reading strategies used and extensive reading outside of school on both the reading comprehension and the general academic achievement of high school learners who use English as a second language. The sustained or consistently improved academic achievement in both reading comprehension and general academic performance in all subject areas of the learners who were identified as Extensive Readers, as evidenced by Appendices I, J and K, throws some light on the actual strength of the use of reading comprehension strategies and of extensive reading on the academic performance of high school learners who use English as a second language.

The study also re-affirms the findings that :

- \$ the instruction and use of reading comprehension strategies improves reading comprehension, particularly among learners who use English as a second language.
- \$ extensive reading outside of school increases reading comprehension.
- \$ improved reading comprehension or efficient reading improves learners' ability to study other subjects.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS

The following implications can be drawn from this research study :

Since instruction in reading comprehension strategies and the guided use of such strategies through extensive reading have a very significant and positive effect on the academic performance of high school learners, particularly those who use English as a second language, education authorities should ensure that reading comprehension strategies instructions are taught not only in a high school, but also in the beginning stages of schooling, particularly in disadvantaged communities.

5.4 SUGGESTIONS

In order to investigate the situation more thoroughly, future research could be conducted by :

- \$ taking samples from a wider population
- \$ using specific strategies instruction approaches
- \$ conducting classroom observations of comprehension instruction, during reading lessons.

KEY TERMS

Reading comprehension; Developing reading comprehension competence; Comprehension achievement; Academic achievement in English; Academic performance; Extensive reading; English second language; High school learners; Factors affecting reading comprehension; Tools for teaching reading comprehension; Strategies for learning comprehension; Reading strategies.

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