

**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES USED BY TEACHERS IN TEACHING
READING COMPREHENSION TO GRADE FIVE AND SEVEN LEARNERS
IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN WINDHOEK, KHOMAS REGION, NAMIBIA**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA IN PARTIAL
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MASTER OF EDUCATION (LITERACY AND LEARNING).**

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BY

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APPROVAL PAGE

This research has been examined and is approved as meeting the required standards for partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of Master of Education.

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**Instructional strategies used by teachers in teaching reading comprehension to
grade five and seven learners in selected schools in Windhoek, Khomas region,**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Namibia in partial fulfilment

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ABSTRACT

Since 2009, Grade five and seven learners in Namibia have been writing the National Standardized Achievement Tests (NSATs), where one grade writes at the end of one year and the other writes at the end of the following year (Directorate of National Examinations and Assessment, DNEA, 2013). This study was conducted based on the performance of the Grades five and seven learners at selected schools in Khomas Region.

The purpose of this study was to find out which reading comprehension instructional strategies the teachers used to teach reading comprehension to Grades 5 and 7 learners in selected schools in Khomas region. The study used a mixed method research design, namely the qualitative approach and the quantitative approach. The quantitative approach was used to see which reading comprehension instructional strategies teachers used to teach reading comprehension, to what extent they used them, as well as whether there was a relationship between the instructional strategies the teachers used to teach reading comprehension and the performance of learners in reading comprehension tests. The qualitative approach was used to get information about the teachers' understanding of reading comprehension instruction, what teachers do during reading comprehension lessons, what they do to help learners comprehend texts better, as well as to gain information on the concerns they had about the learners' level of understanding comprehension tests.

The study aimed to answer these three questions; a) which reading comprehension instructional strategies do teachers use to teach reading comprehension to Grade five and seven learners in the selected schools in Khomas Region? b) To what extent do teachers use these instructional strategies to teach reading comprehension? c) What

relationships exist between the reading comprehension instructional strategies used by teachers and the learners' performance on reading comprehension tests?

The instruments used to collect the data were questionnaires completed by the teachers teaching English to Grades five and seven learners, classroom observational checklists used by the researchers during lesson observations and reading comprehension tests that were written by the learners. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive graphs, charts, and the SPSS programme. The qualitative data was analyzed using a thematic approach to analyze data collected through open-ended questions.

The quantitative findings of the study revealed that at Grade five, at 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance, the strategies did not contribute to the performance of the learners and their influence towards the performance of the learners was not significant. From that observation, as well as from the findings revealed by the qualitative data collected, the reading comprehension instructional strategies were known by the teachers but not used optimally so as to yield the desired results in reading comprehension tests.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late father Henry Engelhardt Garvey Zamuee, who departed from this earth on 9 May 2016. It is my sincere wish that his soul rests in eternal peace.

DECLARATIONS

I, Florence Kauami, hereby declare that this study is a true reflection of my own research and that this work or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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Table of Contents

APPROVAL PAGE	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
DEDICATION	vii
DECLARATIONS	viii
COPYRIGHT.....	ix
TABLE OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF ACRONYMS	xiii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Orientation of the study	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	4
1.3 Research Questions	5
1.4 Significance of the Study	5
1.5 Limitations of the Study.....	6
1.6 Delimitations of the Study	6
1.7 Definition of terms	6
1.7. 1 Reading Comprehension	7
1.7.2 Reading comprehension instructional strategies	8
1.8 Organization of the study.....	8
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	10
2.1 Introduction.....	10
2.2 Theoretical Framework.....	10
2.3 Literature review	13
2.3.1 Previous reading comprehension assessments	13
2.4 Research conducted on the instruction of reading comprehension strategies	16
2.5 Instructional strategies for teaching reading comprehension	22
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	44
3.1 Introduction.....	44
3.2 Research Design.....	44
3.3 Population	45
3.4 Sample and sampling procedures.....	46
3.5 Research instruments	49
3.6 Data collection procedures.....	49

3.7 Pilot study	50
3.8 Data analysis	51
3.9 Ethical Considerations	51
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS	54
4.1 Introduction	54
4.2 Data Presentation	54
4.2.1 Teachers' familiarity with the reading comprehension instructional strategies....	55
4.2.2 Frequency at which strategies were used	56
4.2.3 Descriptive statistics for Grade 5 learner's performance	58
4.2.4 Correlations between teaching strategies and English reading comprehension performance for Grade 5 learners	59
4.2.5 Descriptive statistics for Grade 7 learners 'performance	61
4.2.6 Correlations between strategies and performance - Grade 7.....	62
4.2.7 How the teachers rated learners' level of comprehension.....	63
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	75
5.1 Introduction	75
5.2 Discussions	76
5.2.1 Teachers' familiarity with the reading comprehension instructional strategies which formed part of the study.	76
5.2.2 The relationship between the reading comprehension instructional strategies and the performance of the learners.....	77
5.2.3 Frequency (in percentage) at which each strategy was used.....	78
5.2.4 Teachers' perceptions of reading comprehension instruction.....	79
5.2.5 Activities which teachers and learners engage in during reading comprehension lessons	80
5.2.6 Teachers' concerns about their learners' level of comprehension	80
5.2.7 How teachers rated their learners' level of comprehension	81
5.3 Conclusion	82
5.4 Recommendations.....	84
REFERENCES	86
APPENDICES	97
Appendix 1: Ethical clearance certificate	97
Appendix 2: Research permission letter	98
Appendix 3: Permission letter to the Khomas Regional Director of Education	99
Appendix 4: Permission letter by the Khomas Regional Director	100
Appendix 5: Teachers' questionnaire	101
Appendix 6: Observational Checklist	104

Appendix 7: Reading Comprehension Grade 5	109
Appendix 8: Reading Comprehension Grade 7	114

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1: Distribution of respondents (teachers).....	47
Figure 3.2: Teachers' qualifications.....	47
Figure 4.1: Strategies that teachers were familiar with.....	56
Figure 4.2 Frequency (in percentage) at which teachers used each strategy - Grade 5	57
Figure 4.3 Frequency (in percentage) at which teachers used each strategy - Grade 7	60
Figure 4.4: Learners' level of comprehension - Grade 5	63
Figure 4.5 Learners' level of comprehension - Grade 7	65

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Grade 5 learner's performance.....	58
Table 2: Relationship between strategies and learners' performance in reading comprehension - Grade 5	59
Table 3 Descriptive statistics for Grade 7 learners	61
Table 4: Relationship between strategies and performance in reading comprehension - Grade 7	62

LIST OF ACRONYMS

DNEA – Directorate on National Examinations and Assessment

NSATs – National Standardized Achievement Tests

NIED – National Institute of Educational Development

JSC – Junior Secondary Certificate

SACMEQ- Southern Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational
Quality

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the study by providing the orientation of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study, definition of the terms used in the study, and the organization of the study.

1.1 Orientation of the study

Since 2009, Grade five and seven learners in Namibia have been writing the National Standardized Achievement Tests (NSATs), where one grade writes at the end of one year and the other writes at the end of the following year Directorate of National Examinations and Assessment (DNEA, 2013). These tests are used to describe the achievement of learners in a curriculum in order to provide an estimate of the learners' achievement level in the education system and at specified grade levels nationally (Greaney & Kellaghan, 2008). At school level, NSATs serve, among others, to help diagnose difficulties of weaker learners for remedial action and also to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses in class (DNEA CIRCULAR NO17/2012). In general, Grade five and seven learners have consistently been performing poorly in NSATs, particularly in reading comprehension, where the majority of the test items are based on texts learners have to read and then answer questions.

In addition to the NSATs, the Southern and Eastern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ) conducted tests for Grade six learners in different Southern African countries, including Namibia, to test learners' literacy and numeracy skills. In the SACMEQ tests the majority of the test items are similarly based on texts which learners have to read and then answer questions. Although these tests have proven that learners' performances are not satisfactory, only a few studies were done in Namibia regarding the teaching instructions teachers used to

teach reading comprehension. One of the studies conducted focused on factors that inhibited learners' comprehension of the English language at secondary school level (Hilongwa, 2011). This study did not specifically focus on whether teachers taught learners reading comprehension strategies or not. In her study, Hilongwa's (2011) aim was to uncover why second language learners of English found it difficult to understand English written texts. The latter's main finding was that learners' difficulty in comprehending texts was attributed to the fact that they did not have much knowledge of the English language and also due to the fact that they had a limited range of vocabulary.

In the policy brief of the SACMEQ III report (Ndengeinge, Miranda & Shikongo, 2011) a suggestion was made to the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) and Regional Directors of Education that an investigation should be undertaken to explain the reasons for low reading comprehension among learners (Bruwer, 2013).

Although this current study focused on Grade five and seven learners, the problem of learners reading without comprehension was even observed at secondary school level as well as at Grade six level where learners wrote SACMEQ tests. The Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) examiners' reports emphasized that learners did not read comprehensibly (DNEA, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014). In all these reports, examiners urged the teachers to pay more attention to the teaching of reading comprehension. Reading comprehension therefore needs attention in Namibian schools. One of the main remedies for low reading comprehension among learners is sound instruction of the reading comprehension strategies, which according to Ruddell and Unrau (2008) is a powerful means of preventing reading comprehension problems, that is why there was a need to investigate if reading comprehension strategies are taught, and, if

so, which ones, how they are taught and whether there is a relationship between the way teachers teach reading comprehension, and the performance of the learners in comprehension tests.

This study addressed the problem by investigating the teaching of reading comprehension from the point of the instructional strategies employed by Grades five and seven teachers to teach reading comprehension. In a study conducted in Namibia, Bruwer (2013) looked at some of the strategies used by teachers to teach reading comprehension to Grade seven learners and found that teachers were not familiar with some of the strategies. The few strategies known, according to Bruwer (2013), were not explicitly used. This means that although teachers knew a few strategies, they did not directly teach them. The researcher did not know whether the strategies Bruwer (2013) found to be known by the teachers were used in teaching reading comprehension, hence the need to investigate whether teachers used the instructional strategies they knew in their teaching (in their teaching of reading comprehension) . Teaching comprehension strategies are an important aspect as they make a difference in the performance of learners in comprehension tests (Ruddell & Unrau, 2008).

Bruwer (2013) also found that there was a need for teachers to be trained and equipped with more reading comprehension teaching strategies. Although there was proof in previous research that some teachers used reading comprehension instructional strategies, Ness (2011) demonstrates that the limited scope of reading instruction strategies and the reliance upon single- strategy instruction should be addressed. Ness (2011) goes on to say that research has shown that learners who were taught reading comprehension strategies improved their reading comprehension scores in standardized tests (Ness, 2011) Teaching comprehension strategies should

be regarded as one of the important tools for teachers in teaching reading comprehension and should be implemented before, during and after reading as a way to help learners improve understanding of what they are reading (Madhavi & Tensefeldt, 2013).

Anecdotal evidence shows that before 2016, NIED was not explicit in the teaching strategies they would like teachers to use when teaching reading comprehension. NIED used to suggest a variety of instructional strategies, from which teachers could select and use in their teaching.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The NSAT reports provided to the Khomas Educational Region office every year give an overview of how a school, a region and the country at large performed in all sections of the tests (DNEA, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013). Reading Comprehension is one of the cognitive levels tested by the NSATs. Based on the results of the NSATs and SACMEQ, and given that the SACMEQ and the NSAT tests assess only particular skill areas, in this particular case, reading comprehension, but do not consider instructional strategies used to teach the skill areas they assess, this study was deemed necessary to investigate whether reading comprehension strategies were taught. Furthermore, given the fact that NIED did not prescribe or recommend specific strategies for the teaching of reading comprehension in the current syllabus which was implemented in 2010, this study investigated the kinds of instructional strategies employed by Grades 5 and 7 English teachers and, to see if teachers knew of any other strategies, rather than those referred to by Bruwer (2013) in her study. In this case, the study involved more teachers in order to get a broader picture. Although the focus of the study was on whether teachers taught reading comprehension strategies, learners formed part of the sample in order to confirm if

teachers use instructional strategies to teach reading comprehension in the selected schools in Khomas Region and if so, which ones. In as much as the researcher was aware of extraneous variables that could contribute to poor performance of learners in reading comprehension tests, the focus, in the case of this study, was only on the strategies teachers use to teach reading comprehension to Grades 5 and 7 learners at the selected schools.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What reading comprehension instructional strategies do teachers use to teach reading comprehension to Grade five and seven learners in the selected schools in Khomas Region?
2. To what extent do teachers use these instructional strategies to teach reading comprehension?
3. What relationships exist between the reading comprehension instructional strategies used by teachers and the learners' performance on reading comprehension tests?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of the study would be used to recommend which instructional strategies to drop and which ones to adopt in order to improve the teaching of reading comprehension. With the study the researcher wanted to point out the major impediments in the instruction strategies teachers use to teach Reading Comprehension to Grade five and seven learners in selected schools in Khomas Region.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted at 12 schools in Windhoek, Khomas Education Region. Although there was a need to include the schools outside Windhoek, which are also in Khomas Education Region, the study could only be conducted at schools in Windhoek due to a lack of funds and time. The selection of the schools was based on how they performed in the Standardized Achievement tests written in Grades 5 and 7. The schools that were included in the study are those that performed below the 50% average. The study involved teachers teaching Grades 5e and 7 and selected learners in those grades in the selected schools in Khomas Region. The study's main focus was the teachers but learners were included in the sample to get more information on whether the teaching of reading comprehension strategies is reflected in their performance in reading comprehension tests. As a result of this small sample, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other regions. Alternatively, such generalization must be made cautiously. Further studies could replicate this study but with a larger sample.

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

The study only concentrated on the instructional strategies employed by teachers in the Grade five and seven in the reading comprehension lessons. The study's main focus was the teachers but learners were included to gather more information through the way they performed in the comprehension tests, which would reflect whether certain strategies were used or not.

1.7 Definition of terms

Definitions of following terms or key concepts were provided to ensure uniformity and understanding throughout the study:

- Reading comprehension
- Reading comprehension instructional strategies

1.7. 1 Reading Comprehension

Although different definitions are provided for reading comprehension, they all have one thing in common, which is the fact that it is a way of making meaning from texts (Lehr & Osborn, 2005). For learners to comprehend texts in a meaningful way, a representation of a text that is accurate and coherent needs to be built (Hall, Goswami, Harrison, Ellis & Soler, 2010).

Some of the definitions guiding the terms in this study are the following:

Reading comprehension is described as extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language (Snow, 2002). Kirmizi (2011) defines reading comprehension as an act of thinking and constructing meaning, adding that it is done before, during and after reading where the learner integrates the information presented by the author to his background knowledge. According to Kirmizi (2011), comprehension involves constructing reasonable and accurate meaning of what has been read to what the learner already knows. If learners are taught to know how and when to use reading comprehension strategies, it will be easier for them to understand different text types such as stories, informal texts or poetry (Kirmizi, 2011).The words ‘constructing’ and ‘extracting’ are used to emphasize the importance and the sufficiency as a determinant of reading comprehension. According to Hall et al. (2010), reading comprehension is the process of getting meaning from written language, divided into four interrelating

elements, namely; the reader, the text, the purpose of the text and the sociocultural context in which reading takes place.

1.7.2 Reading comprehension instructional strategies

Instructional strategies, with specific reference to reading comprehension are defined as a deliberate goal –directed attempt to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode text, understand words and construct meaning from text (Mahdavi et al., 2013, Afflerbach, Pearson & Paris, 2008). The respective definitions of reading comprehension and reading comprehension strategies above were the ones adopted to define the concepts reading comprehension and reading comprehension instructional strategies in this particular study. The researcher’s understanding of reading comprehension and reading comprehension instructional strategies conform with the definitions given.

1.8 Organization of the study

The thesis consists of the following five chapters: Chapter one introduces the study by providing the orientation of the study, statement of the problem, research questions the study sought to answer, the significance of the study, limitations and delimitations, and definitions of terms and concepts used in the study and finally states how the rest of the study is outlined. Chapter two provides the theoretical framework that informed the study and gives a review of literature. Chapter three outlines the methodology, research design, population, sample and sampling procedures, data collection procedures as well as data analyses. In Chapter four the results are presented. Chapter five provides the discussion of the findings, conclusion and recommendations.

Conclusion

In this chapter the orientation of the study was provided, which was the background that necessitated the study. The problems associated with the performance of learners in the Standardized achievement tests were discussed. The questions that would be addressed during the study were stated in this chapter. The Chapter also included why an investigation of instructional strategies was necessary. Limitations, delimitations of the study, definitions of key terms used in the study, and description of how the study was organised, concluded the chapter.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a review of literature from previous studies related to the instructional strategies used by teachers in teaching reading comprehension. The chapter comprises of the following sections:

- a. Theoretical framework
- b. Previous reading comprehension assessments
- c. Research conducted on the instruction of reading comprehension strategies
- d. Instructional strategies for teaching reading comprehension
- e. Conclusions drawn by previous researchers on the teaching of reading comprehension strategies
- f. Conclusions drawn by previous researchers on the teaching of instructional strategies used to teach reading comprehension.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the schema and sociocultural theories (Schunk, 2009).

The Schema theory explains how knowledge is created and used by learners (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). This theory is widely accepted as playing a key role in reading comprehension (RC), and is based on the assumptions that the reader's prior knowledge directly impacts new learning situations. This means that readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in the text in order to comprehend the text. The theory is based on the belief that every act of comprehension involves one's knowledge of the world as well. Different theorists in reading view this theory as a framework that organizes knowledge in memory by putting information into the correct 'slots,' each of which contains related parts

(Gunning, 2010). These ‘slots’ are the schemata or knowledge structures into which everything readers know, is organized (Gunning, 2010). In these slots or schemata, mental representations of related information, ideas or actions are formed. The schemata are therefore the building blocks of thinking (Fisher, Frey & Lapp, 2009). According to Gunning (2010), every individual has schemata, which is why readers comprehend texts differently. Morrow and Gambrell (2011) note that every reader’s comprehension is determined by how elaborate their schema is on that particular topic that they are reading about. This explains why some learners understand some texts better than others; it is because some possess more knowledge on the topic than others. The lack of knowledge and the strategies used by the teachers are what, in part, lead to learners not understanding what they read, which consequently results in providing wrong answers to comprehension questions, hence the poor performance on comprehension tests. A good example of learners providing wrong answers is when Grade 10 learners had to write a letter of complaint about a power outage that took place while they were studying, in the Junior Secondary Examination Paper 2 of 2014 (DNEA, 2014). One learner referred to power failure as a person who came to their house and knocked on the door while he was busy studying. This was a clear indication that the concept *power failure* was not in the learner’s schema. This then, affected the learner’s performance on that particular item.

The other theory that guided this study is Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, a theory which posits that culture, the society and historical factors play a major role in one’s experience as a human being. According to this theory, one can understand children’s literacy development only if one explores the cultural, social and historical contexts in which they have grown (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). According to Schunk (2009), Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory advocates that one’s interaction with

the environment contributes to success in learning. Schunk (2009) states that the theory suggests the use of instructional scaffolding to help learners focus on and master the work quickly, which means the teacher has to provide support and extend the range of the learner's knowledge. In the case of this study, the researcher is of the opinion that if teachers support the learners by demonstrating or modelling to them how best they can use the strategies, they will perform well in reading comprehension tests, and this is why and how this theory best informs this study.

The sociocultural theory also suggests learning through the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which refers to the difference between what the learner can do independently or what he or she can do with the assistance of a capable adult (Schunk, 2009), in this case, the teacher. According to Antonacci (2000), the teacher should know the learners' level of development in order to shape the instruction slightly beyond their development. While providing the appropriate instruction to the learners, the teacher scaffolds the learners' performance until they are confident to function independently (Antonacci, 2000). This support, which the learner gets, can be done through giving the learner clues, reminding them about what they have forgotten, encouraging them or breaking down the problem into steps or providing them with examples (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). The ZPD is said to have four stages (Antonacci, 2000), of which the first stage is where the teacher carries out the task. Here the teacher models what is expected from learners. While modelling, the teacher provides explicit directions. Ness, (2011) motivates the importance of modelling strategies when teaching them. She argues that by modelling, teachers encourage their learners to become proficient and self-regulatory in the use of such strategies.

In the second stage however, learners become self- directed and can now partially do things themselves. The assistance the teacher provided in the first stage is minimal in this stage. In stage three learners are now confident and can do things themselves (Antonacci, 2000). Both theories that guide the study advocate for sufficient exposure for learning to take place and allow for assimilation and accommodation. These two theories also advocate the fact that learners need guidance to continue learning hence the ZPD (Fisher et al. 2009). The sociocultural theory informs this study because it advocates that learners need to be guided and supported through instructional scaffolding. The scaffolding provided by teachers has to take place within the learners' ZPD.

2.3 Literature review

2.3.1 Previous reading comprehension assessments

In countries such as the United States (U S) where there are learners from the mainstream and those from diverse backgrounds, disparities in performance exist. Mainstream learners are those who are mother tongue speakers of English and those referred to as coming from diverse backgrounds are learners who are not English mother tongue speakers and are from different language groups (Goldenberg, 2010). According to Afflerbach (2010), research shows that in comparison to their fellow learners in the mainstream, learners from diverse backgrounds receive most of the instruction in lower level skills and only little instruction in reading comprehension and higher level thinking about texts. This situation unfortunately results from lowered expectations for the performance of learners from diverse backgrounds. This means that learners from diverse backgrounds were taught at a lower level compared to those in the mainstream. This is fortunately not the case with learners in Namibia, as all of them ought to be taught at the same level, which is why there was a need to

find out why some schools perform poorer than others in reading comprehension tests.

In many of the US schools where learners from diverse backgrounds are taught, teachers seem to teach at lower levels. In some cases teachers appeared uncertain of how best they could teach learners to make them understand how strategies work together to enhance better understanding of texts (Afflerbach, 2010). This means teachers seemed unsure as to how best to teach learners the strategies.

According to the current state of reading assessment in the U S, learners are expected to identify details and main ideas of a written text and employ prior knowledge to construct meaning. In recent studies, Afflerbach, (2010) states when conceptualizing reading, comprehension of texts should be included. Afflerbach, (2010) asserts that in assessing learners, the type of assessment should be aligned to the way reading is conceptualized, so that the two go hand in hand, for example, if learners are expected to synthesize information from texts, then the test should assess whether the learners can synthesize.

The South Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring and Educational Quality (SACMEQ) conducted studies on literacy, which were carried out between 1995 and 1999, 2000 and 2008 respectively (Greany & Kellaghan, 2008). In both these cycles of the studies, Namibia was one of the countries where learners sat for these tests with countries such as South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Seychelles, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zanzibar. In all these countries, achievement of learners in reading comprehension was one of the main themes of the studies that were conducted (Greany & Kellaghan, 2008).

Despite the fact that SACMEQ refers to the English test as a reading test, the majority of the activities were comprehension tests, as learners were expected to read given texts and then answer questions based on them. The SACMEQ team had put eight reading competency levels in place, according to which they rated the performance of learners in the reading comprehension tests. The following were SACMEQ's reading competency levels from level one to eight respectively: pre-reading, emergent reading, basic reading, reading for meaning, interpretive reading, inferential reading, analytical reading and critical reading (SACMEQ, 2010). Although there were differences in the outcome of the tests, in many countries that participated in the tests, learners did not perform well in reading and responding to comprehension questions, as reports of SACMEQ III showed that almost 4 in 10 learners in the participating countries reached the minimum level of mastery, which according to the SACMEQ team was level three; namely *basic reading*. Based on the point scale that was used to distribute the points among the competency levels, at the basic reading competency level, learners were expected to have scored between 414 – 457 points, while the range for the highest competency level was from 703 and higher. According to the SACMEQ results of 2009, only 25.1% of learners in Namibia managed to obtain scores in that range. These findings motivated the need for this study to unpack the specific instructional strategies employed by the teachers during the reading comprehension lessons.

In Namibia, a strategic plan for the Ministry of Basic Education Sport and Culture was prepared in 2001, whose goal was that all learners should achieve basic competencies in the required subjects of the curriculum by 2005, and that all schools should improve the teaching and learning of English, Mathematics, and Science by 2006 (Amadhila, Dengeinge, Miranda & Nakashole, 2011). In achievement tests that

have been conducted before, the results show that learners did not do very well (Amadhila et al., 2011), specifically in reading comprehension, as per the requirements of the SACMEQ team. According to the SACMEQ results of 2009, only 25.1% learners in Namibia managed to obtain scores ranging between 414 and 457, which was the range for the *basic* reading level.

2.4 Research conducted on the instruction of reading comprehension strategies

Before looking at what researchers regard as best practices in the area of teaching reading comprehension, conceptualization of what researchers regarded as reading comprehension in the past is necessary. Research of the previous years was categorized into three major movements, namely: 1) *the pre- 1975 understandings*, 2) *understanding rooted in the cognitive revolution that first became prominent in the post- 1975 years*; and 3) *the research of the recent years that focuses on sociocultural and situative views* (Wyse, Andrews, & Hoffman, 2010).

1) The pre- 1975 understanding

During the first half of the 20th century, talks about reading comprehension was a rare phenomenon, as the general assumption was that if a learner was able to decode words, then it meant they automatically understood what they read (Wyse et al., 2010). This was a normal assumption then, because to be regarded as a reader, the emphasis was on how well a learner could recite and memorize text. The belief during that era was that comprehension could not be taught (Wyse et al., 2010). However, the pendulum swung in a different direction in the mid- twentieth century, comprehension was thought of as something that could actually be taught (Wyse et al., 2010). Comprehension was then viewed as a set of skills that had to be taught one

after another from a simple to complex sequence, which could require specific strategies as it is the case now.

2) *The post 1975 cognitive revolution*

This movement came into being when the psychologists began studying language and thinking. The movement was associated with the founding Centre for the Study of Reading (CSR), whose duties were rooted in developing the Schema theory. Later, as scholars observed lessons, it was found that teachers would ask learners comprehension questions without teaching them how to answer them. When studies were carried out on the teacher's role in teaching comprehension, the findings were that learners could understand texts better when their teachers made conscious efforts to draw their attention to different strategies (Pearson, 2009). As time progressed, Reutzel, Smith and Fawson (2005) went as far as studying whether strategies are better taught in isolation or combined and their finding was that strategies are better taught as a combination as they yielded better results. Based on these findings, these scholars derived strategies which they thought would help learners to comprehend texts. The strategies referred to by Reutzel et al (2005) are the ones this study focused on, with the objective to establish whether or not teachers knew of and applied them in their teaching of reading comprehension. *The research of the recent years*

In recent years, more focus is put on the benefits of reading with comprehension, the readers' desire to understand the reading material deeper and the ability to apply what they have read in other contexts. These movements note that focus is now geared towards ensuring that learners are taught to read with understanding, which calls for teachers to teach comprehension strategies (Wyse et al., 2010).

In as much as research shows that English language learners acquire the foundation skills in reading, there is often a breakdown when it comes to reading comprehension, which may be attributed to several aspects such as failure to understand word meanings, inadequate background knowledge, lack of interest in the text and lack of connection between the instruction, the text and the learner (Thompson & Vaughn, 2007). Thus a great need for learners to be taught strategies exists. Strategies aid learners in constructing meaning from text during and after reading, to recognize the purpose for reading, making inferences, drawing logical conclusions and interacting with the text in ways that blend knowledge and experience of the reader.

When teachers begin comprehension instruction, they should focus on techniques to model the comprehension strategies (Massey & Heafner, 2004). Ness (2011) demonstrates that one will best build the learner's understanding of text by explicitly teaching them reading comprehension strategies. By teaching explicitly the researcher means that teachers should directly and forthrightly provide learners with information and explanations regarding both how to comprehend and why it is important to comprehend (Wyse et al., 2010). According to Wyse et al. (2010), when teaching comprehension explicitly, teachers have to focus on large conceptual ideas, vocabulary and strategies. These ideas provide a foundation for understanding how comprehension works and also gives teachers an opportunity to be explicit about concepts such as why we read. There is a suggestion of four actions that teachers are expected to undertake when teaching strategies explicitly. Firstly, the teacher should be motivating. Secondly, teachers are expected to emphasize large conceptual ideas and strategies, while learners read, teachers make explicit statements about interconnections among processes and unifying processes. Thirdly, the teacher is

expected to model thinking or reasoning, the teacher should not only define the strategy but rather also demonstrate and model the strategies for the learners to understand them better (Wyse et al., 2010). Teachers are thus expected to teach learners cognitive strategies that will help learners to think strategically when encountering comprehension barriers. Teachers therefore have to teach reading comprehension strategies to help their learners to monitor and build their understanding of the text (Ness, 2011). To monitor comprehension, learners are expected to regulate their reading by planning, evaluating and using the information available to make sense of what they read (Kolic- Vehovec and Bajanski, 2006). According to Janzen (2008), effective reading strategies such as teaching learners how to deal with unknown vocabulary, utilize background knowledge and asking questions helps learners develop positive attitudes towards reading. Making use of these strategies leads to a better understanding on what one is reading. A learner's attitude towards reading helps him/her become a skilled reader, which then makes him/her able to read, understand and respond to texts better (Janzen, 2008).

Hall et al. (2010) question whether reading comprehension strategies should not be taught in isolation or as one package, as they are related to one another. They continue to state that although each strategy makes an individual contribution to the development of reading comprehension, each of them helps with the mastery of the other. Hall et al. (2010) are of the opinion that learners who cope well with making inferences tend to do well in comprehension monitoring.

Although teachers might know a good number of instructional strategies, learners are deprived of such instruction because teachers do not teach them (Ness, 2011). However, learners are expected to answer questions after reading, whereas they are infrequently provided with the strategies they need, to be able to answer the

questions (Cunningham, 1998). Mental modelling required in effective comprehension instruction poses a challenge for many teachers and according to Pressley (2006), it is a challenge for teachers to find appropriate texts. If texts are beyond learners' ZPD, they will have problems comprehending them.

Some teachers do not grant learners the opportunity to do things for themselves, they rather spoon-feed learners by reading texts to them. Other teachers do not do anything in order to aid learners with reading comprehension (Massey & Heafner, 2004). Another finding according Massey and Heafner (2004), is that teachers do not know how to help learners develop the strategies needed for reading comprehension, which results in the teaching of reading comprehension strategies not to take place in a way that can help learners to apply these strategies to help them in other situations (Dewitz, Jones & Leahy, 2009).

Hall, Burns & Edwards (2011) stress that learners are not necessarily taught how to apply the strategies they are taught when reading different texts but rather, engage in guided practice to use a particular strategy during a particular lesson, to complete an assignment. This means that in such cases learners use particular strategies, not necessarily to improve comprehension, but for completing a task that a teacher has assigned to them.

As much as different findings emerged as to why reading comprehension is not taught effectively if taught at all, it is pivotal that learners are taught how to use comprehension strategies. Strategies such as making connections with what learners already know, exploring inferences, analyzing text structures, determining important ideas and themes, re-reading and adjusting, evaluating and synthesizing help learners to develop into competent readers who will be in a better position in

responding to comprehension difficulties and thereby increase their understanding of texts (Hall et al., 2011). It is therefore the researcher's view that teachers should note that they should encourage learners to be active readers with clear goals for their reading right from the beginning. In addition to that, learners should be encouraged to look over the text before they read, in order to note the structure and also figure out whether there is relevance to their reading goals (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Research shows that learners who are taught strategies find it easier to connect with what they read; learners can recognize the structure and organization of the text with ease, they can create mental notes and evaluate their thinking of the text as they read (Hall et al., 2011);

It is, however, important to emphasize that according to the Schema theory, readers need to have the schemata or knowledge structures on a particular topic (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). Readers therefore need to have schemata for reading comprehension strategies as well, in order for them to be able to utilize them. The more elaborate learners' schemata are on strategies such as making connections, exploring inferences and so on, the better off they are in using those strategies to aid them in comprehending texts better (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011).

The point the latter scholars have just made is therefore, the fact that, without adequate existing schemata in the different strategies as well as on the topic of the text that learners have to read about, it is less likely for comprehension to occur. The same also applies for the strategies learners are expected to use in order to comprehend texts better. If they do not have the necessary schemata on the strategies, they will also not use them effectively. Besides the fact that learners have to have schemata on the topic they are reading, the type of texts learners read also determine their understanding thereof, as their understanding will also be determined by the

schemata they have on the content of that particular text (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). For learners to have the correct schemata, teachers have to give them a chance to connect what they already know to what is being currently learned. Alternatively, if the teacher realizes that the learners do not have the necessary schemata about what is being taught, he or she should introduce the topic in a way that will help the learners connect the new work to what they already know,, before covering that particular topic with the learners. Learners should also evaluate whether the text they are reading is meeting their goals for reading or not (Duke & Pearson, 2002). These scholars also state that learners should be encouraged to make predictions about what is to come while reading.

2.5 Instructional strategies for teaching reading comprehension

According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007) researchers such as Pearson, Dole, Duffy and Roehler (1992) took a lot of interest in investigating the strategies that proficient readers employ in order to understand what they read. After thorough investigation, researchers found strategies which they believed would aid learners in their reading. Pearson, Dole, Duffy and Roehler (1992) compiled a list of strategies believed to be used by proficient readers to make meaning from texts. They are the following:

- Making connections between what they know and the new information they find in the text they read,
- Asking themselves questions and asking questions about the author and about the text they read,
- Making inferences during and after reading
- Determining important ideas and themes in texts and

- being able to synthesize information within and across texts (Pearson et al, 1992).

In this study the researcher focused on six reading comprehension strategies, of which most were pinpointed by the latter researchers as crucial for comprehension, all of which are part of those from which teachers in Namibia can select, but which were not discussed by Bruwer (2013). The researcher deemed it necessary to include the strategies mentioned above as they are in line with those this study intended to find out whether the teachers use them or not. In as much as there is a need for teachers to teach learners comprehension strategies, it is a challenge for teachers how to implement strategy instruction (National Reading Panel, 2000 & Williams, 2005). According to Ness (2011) teachers might not be familiar with more comprehension strategies or might lack confidence to teach them and suggested that teachers must be informed about the variety and importance of reading comprehension strategies. The same can however not be said about the teachers who formed part of this study, as they indicated that they knew and used the strategies. Teachers are expected to read extensively and monitor own thinking processes to teach comprehension effectively (Keene & Zimmermann, 2013). Often, teachers test comprehension but seldom teach it. If reading comprehension activities happen to be done, teachers ask learners to answer questions on a passage or story they have read. Answering questions does unfortunately not teach learners how to comprehend (Shanker & Cockrum, 2009). Teachers should note that when they give feedback on the answers learners have provided by stating whether the answers are correct or incorrect, they only test comprehension. Shanker and Cockrum (2009) suggest that teachers should rather extend the feedback they give the learners by explaining why the answers learners have provided are correct or incorrect, by so doing they will teach comprehension

strategies (Shanker & Cockrum, 2009). It is therefore important that teachers focus on teaching learners strategies that will help them to comprehend texts better.

The following strategies to aid reading comprehension will be discussed in this study: *making connections* (Miller, 2012), *analyzing text structure, exploring inferences, determining important ideas and themes* (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007), *evaluating, summarizing and synthesizing, rereading and adjusting* (Boke, 2004).

In the *making connections strategy* (Miller, 2012) learners ought to be taught to connect new knowledge to the knowledge they already have. However, although teachers do ask about the connections of learners to texts, it is still their responsibility to see to it that the learners' connections enhance their understanding of the text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). The Schema theory highlights the role of existing knowledge as very useful in the instruction of reading comprehension (Morrow & Gambrell, 2011). As learners develop and expand their schemata, they construct meaning by drawing from various schemata and building connections among them (Cooper, Kiger, Robinson & Slansky, 2012). Building connections with the background knowledge, it becomes easier to learn new information. Making connections is regarded as the foundation of our thinking and the core of learning and understanding what we read (Harvey & Goudvis., 2007). Teachers should therefore ensure that learners' background knowledge is activated before they read, so that it becomes easier for them to connect the information and concepts in the text during reading (Pardo, 2004). In the case where the teacher suspects that learners might not have background knowledge on what they are about to read, the teachers can help them build that background knowledge using informational texts (Pardo, 2004). Teachers can also assist learners to acquire background knowledge by creating graphic organizers to help learners see new concepts and their relation to the

previously known concepts (Pardo, 2004). According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007), if learners have an abundance of background knowledge, they tend to become better comprehenders of texts. The strategy teaches that for learners to extend their understanding of the text, they need to connect the text to themselves, the text to text, and the text to the world. The way information is organized in schemas makes it easier for connections to be made between ideas, and making those connections allow learners to access their prior knowledge and experience (Fisher et al., 2009). A learner who reads with understanding should be able to make meaningful connections between the texts, see relationships and connect it to her background knowledge. The strategy is, therefore, important in teaching reading comprehension because if a learner has not had many experiences or comes from a background that is different from what is being read in the text or story, understanding usually becomes very difficult (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). By carefully setting the purpose for reading what they have to read, the teacher helps learners to focus their attention on the most important aspects of information they need (Massey & Heafner 2004). Lerner and Johns (2009) describe the making connections strategy as ‘activating background knowledge’ and according to their findings, this strategy alerts the learners to the background knowledge they need in order to comprehend the text they are reading. Under the strategy of making connections or activating background knowledge, Lerner and Johns (2009) highlight the following as sub-strategies; (a) Language experience strategy, which helps learners learn and understand better as they build on their own knowledge and linking of the different forms of language such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. When using the language experience strategy, learners use their own experiences and language as raw material. (b) The K-W- L strategy is helpful when learners have to study. The ‘K’ stands for “What I

know” Here learners think of and state the knowledge they already have on something. The ‘W’ stands for “What I want to find out”, here learners are expected to write down what they want to learn or get from what they are reading. The ‘L’ stands for “What I learned”. Here, after learners have read, they write down what they have learned from what they have read. (c) The strategy of building meaning with vocabulary and concepts. According to Lerner and Johns (2009), the strategy of building meaning with vocabulary and concepts is very crucial in reading comprehension. Lerner and Johns (2009) stress that for learners to read effectively and with comprehension, it is crucial to have knowledge of word meanings and of the concepts underlying the words. The latter sub- strategy emphasizes the fact that limited vocabulary knowledge can seriously hamper reading comprehension. The learners therefore also need to be taught the vocabulary that is to be used in a text.

In *Analyzing text structure* – Massey and Heafner (2004) found that there is a need for teachers to concentrate on explicitly teaching learners about the external features of a text. These are things such as table of contents, bold print and text patterns to help discriminate among fiction, non- fiction and comparative, etcetera. The structure of the text, which also includes its vocabulary genre and even the specific word choices, makes each text unique. The uniqueness also plays a role in making meaning of a particular text (Pardo, 2004). According to Massey and Heafner (2004), it is important for learners to be able to identify how a text is organized as this helps them to understand the content (Massey & Heafner, 2004). Many other studies also support the fact that when teachers teach text structure, it could benefit learners if teachers taught learners to recognize the underlying structure of text, which will help their learners improve their understanding of the particular text (Williams, 2005). Research has found that readers who understand the way the kind

of organization of a particular discourse find it easier to understand what they read (Hinkel, 2005). Teachers therefore select texts with an obvious structure and teach a variety of narrative genres and some expository text structures (Pardo, 2004).

Many learners struggle to identify structure in texts, which is an indication that more attention needs to be given to teaching the learners how to analyze texts (Massey & Heafner, 2004). For a teacher to be able to teach text structure to learners, the most important aspect is the fact that suitable texts must be selected (Reutzel et al., 2012, Donovan & Smolkin, 2002). Consideration on the type of texts teachers select for teaching reading comprehension is of principal importance, so when selecting texts, teachers ought to ensure that they identify the genres or text structures they believe that their learners will be able to comprehend with ease (Reutzel & Cooter 2011). To ensure that the type of texts one selects are suitable and interesting for learners, researchers suggest that the teacher does informal text structure assessments with their learners. These assessments help the teacher to get an idea of what type of texts his or her learners will be interested in, as that contributes to their understanding of the texts. According to Reutzel, Robert and Cooter (2012), many researchers attest to the fact that texts that are well organized contribute highly to learners' understanding of the texts. Teachers are, therefore, expected to select texts that provide clear examples of the text features and structures they intend to teach. Learners who are exposed to coherent texts with lots of signal words gain clear levels of comprehension because the signal words clarify the relationships between concepts (Fisher et al, 2009). It is imperative for learners to be taught how to notice and gain information from text features such as bold print, italics subheadings captions, titles and so on. Text features are proven to complement learners' understanding of the conceptual structure of the information. For example Surber and Schroder (2007)

found that the use of a title for a text that learners read helps learners to recall more information and spent more time on key information. Learners also need to be taught the purpose of the text in order to extend their knowledge on the topic they are reading about (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). According to Armbruster (1996), Meyer, (2003) and Boscolo and Mason, (2003) teachers should select texts that facilitate comprehension and learning. Armbruster (1996) termed such texts *considerate texts*. Armbruster (1996) suggested three features of text which she considers crucial for facilitating comprehension and learning: structure, coherence and audience appropriateness. Although these features were not part of what the study intended to find out whether teachers use them or not, they are an important contributing factor to the performance of learners. Let us look at each of these features of text;

Structure

According to Armbruster (1996) & Bakken and Whedon (2002), there is evidence that the ways in which ideas or topics are arranged and related greatly learners' comprehension of texts. When teachers select texts with features such as the most common informational text structures, it helps learners to read for information. These common informational text structures include

Description, which is a list of information, *compare and contrast*, which refers to the obvious similarities and differences between two concepts, *temporal sequence*, which refers to how events change or remain the same over time, *cause and effect*, which refers to causal relationships, and lastly, *problem and solution* which indicates a situation or an issue and how it is solved (Bakken & Whedon, 2002). The importance of text structure cannot be overemphasized. Fisher et al., (2009) advocate for the selection of texts with headings and subheadings or hints about how

a text is organized such as introductions, and texts that can be supplemented with graphic support such as the use of Venn diagrams, maps and so on.

Coherence

Texts should systematically and logically provide connections within themselves. Coherence plays a role in ensuring that learners comprehend texts and should be considered when teachers select texts for learners to read (Meyer, 2003). Before selecting texts therefore, teachers should ensure that the main ideas can be explicitly stated at the beginning of each chapter, second; the information found in each paragraph can be linked to the main idea of the text, third; that the events are following each other chronologically, fourth; the text should provide clear references and referents and lastly topics should be arranged in a way that will help learners to remember.

Audience appropriateness

Audience appropriateness refers to whether the text selected is suitable for that particular group of readers or not. Appropriate texts should correspond with the knowledge of the learners for which it is intended, otherwise it might either be too difficult or too easy (Fisher et al., 2009).

It should on the other hand be noted that the selection of text types is not only for the sake of being easy to comprehend but suitability for the kind of strategy one intends to teach during that lesson should be considered. It is therefore expected of teachers to select texts that are well suited for the specific type of strategies to be taught (Duke & Pearson, 2002). When a teacher, for example, wants to teach prediction, it would be best to use a text that learners have not read before, has a sequence of events and which provides sufficient clues about upcoming events (Duke & Pearson,

2002). Prediction, as referred to by Duke and Pearson (2002), is one of the strategies this study wanted establish as to whether or not teachers know about and apply in their teaching of reading comprehension.

Exploring inferences

When exploring inferences you make a good guess based on what the reader knows about the topic or based on some of the information in the text (Day & Ono, 2008). Teaching learners how to make inferences can be approached from different angles. One way learners can be taught to explore inferences is by using context clues found in the text (Walters, 2006). Making inferences allow readers to extend on the information that is provided in the text. This means that a reader can therefore derive new information from that which is provided (Ruddel & Unrau, 2008 & Cooper, Kiger, Robinson, & Lansky 2012). According to Harvey and Goudvis (2007), learners who make use of the strategy of making inferences are able to draw conclusions and make interpretations that the authors do not state explicitly in texts. These researchers point out that, readers who do not make inferences are faced with the problem of not grasping the deeper essence of the text they read. Anecdotally, in the selected schools from which the samples for this study were drawn, learners have not been presented with opportunities to learn about inferences in regards to reading comprehension.

Determine important ideas and themes

Here, learners have to identify important parts of text and distinguish among subplots, big ideas, examples and underlying themes. It is easy to tell learners to highlight important ideas and to identify themes as they read. However, it can be a challenge for learners to determine which parts of texts are more important than

others (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). In most situations when learners are reading, they are expected to pick out the most important ideas or to read in order to find specific information. Doing so is a strategy that learners need to learn in order to be able to determine which ideas and themes are the most important. This strategy is often used when learners are studying and is therefore more suitably used in nonfiction, where learners read to learn. Using nonfiction reading material makes teaching easier. In nonfiction materials there are specific features providing explicit cues to help readers determine which information to sift as most important (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). According to the scholars mentioned above, there are specific features one needs to pay attention to, in order to pick out important ideas and themes. These features are the following: fonts and effects, which include italics, captions headings and subheadings, bullets and labels; signal words and phrases; illustrations and photographs, graphics, text organizers and text structures.

Evaluate, summarize and synthesize

Here, learners have to construct new ideas from two or more pieces of text and reflect on the quality and relevance of the text. According to Fisher et al. (2009), summarizing and synthesizing complement each other but they are slightly independent of each other. Keene and Zimmermann, (1997) on the other hand are of the opinion that summarizing is related to synthesizing and define them as a process where one orders, retells and recreates the information he or she receives, into a coherent whole. When summarizing, readers focus on the gist of the reading and concentrate salient points and key ideas only. When synthesizing however, the readers now integrate the summary and adds information to it (Fisher et al., 2009). Learners are expected to combine the new information from the text they are reading with their existing knowledge to form original ideas or interpretations. Synthesizing

involves moments when the reader stops reading and just think and take stock of what they are reading (Goudvis & Harvey, 2000). When evaluating, learners are expected to stop and think whether they have accomplished their goal for reading or not, or whether they need to re-read for better understanding. Evaluating entails making informed judgements and learners are expected to think critically and to judge the quality of what they have read (Boke, 2004). Evaluation blends well with the monitoring process where learners have to monitor how well or not they have understood what they have read (Coiro & Dobler, 2007). At the selected schools however, anecdotal evidence again suggests that teaching of reading comprehension is focused more on asking learners to respond to reading comprehension questions without teaching them how to synthesize, summarize or evaluate.

Reread and adjust

The re-reading and adjusting strategy is used to support meaning making and is useful when the reader needs to regain momentum, take time to think and try to find meaning about what he or she is reading. Usually the reader goes back in the text or sentence that is unclear and adjusts the intonation to make it better for him or her to understand ((Lysaker & Hopper, 2015).

When rereading and adjusting, the reader is expected to take note of his lack of comprehension, stop reading, and reread in order to get a better understanding of what he reads (Boke, 2004). Although literature has identified a number of reading comprehension strategies that teachers can use to effectively teach reading comprehension and achieve good performance among their Grade 5 and 7 learners in

general, it is not known if the same would apply to Grade 5 and 7 learners in the selected schools. This is what the study intended to investigate.

Conclusions drawn by previous researchers on the instructional strategies used to teach reading comprehension

Although specific strategies were selected in this study, there are those themes that other researchers regard as important for comprehension. These themes were found to be the foundation for understanding how best to help teachers develop the comprehension abilities of learners. According to Shriver (2006), vocabulary instruction for example is one of the themes that contribute greatly to comprehension of texts. The other theme that is regarded as crucial is the fact that the reader and the text should interact in order to make understanding easier, and lastly, the teachers need to prepare in a way that will enhance learners' comprehension and equip learners with comprehension strategies that will enhance their understanding (Shriver, 2006). Let us now look at each of the themes separately.

Vocabulary instruction

According to Shriver (2006), teaching vocabulary through the use of computers is more effective than the traditional methods. Some teachers also teach new words first before the learners start reading, which was also found to be useful in reading comprehension. During the process of data collection, the researcher observed that vocabulary instruction was very common among the lessons of the teachers at the selected schools. The other finding about vocabulary instruction is that it should be taught both directly and indirectly (Shriver, 2006).

Text comprehension instruction

Shriver (2006) states that learners enhance their comprehension if they actively relate what they are reading to their own knowledge and experiences, and by so doing they construct mental images and representations in their memory. The teachers are generally expected to model such strategies until learners are confident to carry them out independently.

Research has found that the reading comprehension problem is observed even up to university and college level where some students do not understand what they read, neither do they grasp the essence of texts and use the information they extract in other contexts (Pasqual & Goikoetxea, 2011). The fact that the reading comprehension problems issue stretches up to tertiary level is indeed an indication that more needs to be done. This is why the researcher wanted carried out out this study to find out whether reading comprehension instruction takes place at primary school level in a way that it should. Pasqual and Goikoetxea (2014) noted that one of the factors contributing to backlogs in reading comprehension is the fact that students lack the literacy skills to keep up with the curriculum and are unable to comprehend complex texts. Another impediment to effective reading comprehension is the fact that most information has been made available in the digital way, causing students and learners to become distracted readers who just make use of the information provided to them. They are no longer challenged in such a way that they see the need to read deeper and enhance construction of meaning (Pasqual & Goikoetxea, 2014).

There is a need to teach comprehension strategies because readers find it easier to derive meaning from text when they engage in intentional thinking, meaning that, if

they encounter problems understanding what they read, the use of specific strategies enhances their understanding (Williams, 2005).

Dewits, Jones and Leahy (2009) attest to the fact that there is a plethora of skills and strategies to be taught for learners to use, in order to comprehend texts better. However, according to Dewitz et al. (2009), these skills and strategies are not deep and the structure of the curricular is often incoherent in such a way that it becomes a challenge for learners and teachers to figure out how they relate to one another or how acquiring these skills leads to a better reader. Very little time is therefore, if at all, spent on teaching learners how to understand what they read (Dewitz et al, 2009). According to Keene and Zimmermann, (2013) in some cases, emphasis is put on identifying and naming the strategies, instead of using the strategies as tools to help learners understand texts better and become good readers. In cases where teachers teach comprehension strategies, they do not teach learners in a way that helps learners internalize the strategic processing necessary to transfer what they learned to other contexts (Almasi et al., 2011). Research has pointed out the following advantages when teachers integrated strategy instruction in their teaching (Keene & Zimmerman, 2013): By becoming aware of the strategies in their own reading, teachers become more reflective in their own reading, which helps them create a framework for thinking and understanding as they read. Keene and Zimmermann (2013) attest to the fact that the uses of strategies by teachers helps them have a better understanding of what they, themselves read, which gives them more reason to teach learners to use strategies when reading. Keene & Zimmermann (2013) discovered that through the use of strategies, one becomes aware of them in ones' reading, the use of strategies makes the readers careful about their reading. The next good finding was that strategy use creates a common language between the teacher

and his or her learners. The awareness of the benefits when using reading comprehension strategies increased the amount of time for teaching the strategies. When learners use strategies while reading, they build content area knowledge and are more likely to remember and apply what they have read. Keene and Zimmermann (2013) state that strategy instruction help teachers raise expectations for learners. Strategy instruction helps learners to approach content strategically, which makes their chances of understanding what they read better, and enable them to retain and reapply the knowledge they have gained in other situations (Keene & Zimmermann, 2013). When reading strategically, learners will think in ways that enhance their learning and understanding of what they read (Harvey & Goudvis, 2013). The latter scholars encourage learners to have a strategic spirit, which involves the culture of thinking.

In addition to the advantages mentioned above, Keene and Zimmerman (2013) also point out that, learners who use strategies while reading tend to perform better in tests.

Despite the fact that Dewitz et al (2009) consider the available skills and strategies as not deep or are insufficient, Almasi, Palmer, Madden and Hart (cited in McGill-Franzen & Allington, 2011) see the need for them to be taught. In most of the research that has been conducted about the teaching of reading comprehension strategies, the general finding is that it is imperative that the strategies are taught, and that strategy teaching strongly learners' promote learners understanding of comprehension texts (Reutzel, 2012). (McGill- Franzen & Allington, 2011) concluded that, although the ability to decode and read fluently is important for successful reading, it is insufficient to ensure reading comprehension. This means that a child may be able to decode words and read fluently, but that does not mean

they understand what they are reading. Almasi et al. (cited in McGill- Franzen & Allington, 2011) state that in the 1990s, there was emphasis on ensuring that learners were able to read by third grade. The fact that they could read however did not yield good results, as the findings indicated that there was no significant impact for children in those grades (Gamse, Horst, Jacob, Boulay & Unlu, 2008). In order to gain meaning from text it is found that readers need to use strategies before, during and after reading (Davis, 2011). Research has found that through the use of reading comprehension strategies learners learn to master concepts about print, alphabetic principle and high frequency words. They also find it easy to work out the correct meaning from the context, understand sentences, paragraphs and whole texts better. These readers also become confident and comfortable in making conscious decisions about when and how to use and integrate strategies for comprehension (Davis, 2011).

Almasi et al. (cited in McGill- Franzen & Allington, 2011) stress that comprehension is best achieved if strategies are taught. In their recent research Almasi et al. (cited in McGill- Franzen & Allington , 2011) condemn the fact that instructional decoding by itself leads to significant effects on comprehension. According to the latter's finding, it is not the case. What they support to be working rather, is the fact that comprehension instruction must consist of explicit instruction which focuses on comprehension.

Another interesting finding that Morrow and Gambrell (2011) came up with was the fact that strategies were taught one at a time and in isolation. Morrow and Gambrell's (2011) teaching strategies helped learners to improve short- term comprehension and did not sustain the strategies they had learned to apply in other similar situations. Conversely, research points out that learners should be taught how to use combinations of comprehension strategies as they read and not in isolation

(McKeown, Beck & Blake, 2009), as multiple strategy instruction makes learners become strategic readers with improved comprehension (Butler, Urrutia, Buenger & Hunt (2010). Butler et al. indicate that the use of multiple comprehension strategies yield very strong results for improving learner performance in reading comprehension. These researchers have therefore found that teaching learners to use different strategies simultaneously help them to understand the texts better. Teachers should therefore encourage learners to use more than one strategy when reading (Reutzel, Smith & Fawson, 2005). Teaching learners how to use multiple strategies simultaneously is however not a quick process, it might take a while before learners can use multiple strategies (Duffy, 2003). The National Reading Panel (2000) is in support of multiple strategy teaching. The NRP (2000) states that strategies should rather be taught as a “set” or “family” of comprehension strategies (Reutzel et al., 2005). When strategies are taught as a set or family, learners learn how to coordinate the use of strategies when they interact with texts. It is through multiple cognitive comprehension strategy instruction that learners become good readers (Reutzel et al., 2005). Research points out that in order to use multiple comprehension strategies during reading, the following conditions need to be considered (Reutzel et al, 2012):

Firstly; teaching for self- regulation, which requires teachers to gradually scaffold the responsibility for determining what is worth knowing in a text or how the reader can interpret the text.

Secondly; focusing on how one goes about making decisions about what is worth knowing in a text or how the text can be interpreted. The most effective ways to teach learners how to use the strategies simultaneously is through modelling. Teachers are therefore expected to explicitly model how learners can strategically use multiple strategies while reading.

Teachers see strategies as things to be taught rather than as actions to be fostered. Learners should therefore not only be taught about the strategy but also about the conditions under which they can use the strategy (Almasi et al., 2003).

In another study, the researcher concluded that that in some cases where learners are taught how to use the reading comprehension strategies, learners chose not to use them, even if they know them and that they would increase their level of comprehension (Hall, 2009). The latter is due to the fact that learners are labelled as particular type of readers, which could be embarrassing to some, especially those labelled as struggling readers. According to some learners' responses, the use of reading comprehension strategies would slow them down when reading and would cause them to be identified as poor readers. This tells us that the stigma attached caused readers to avoid using the strategies. For teachers to ensure that learners comprehend effectively there should be plenty of text- focused dialogue among the learners. With that kind of dialogue, comprehension instruction becomes highly effective (Kelley & Clausen- Grace, 2007).

Reutzel et al. (2012) deem it necessary for teachers to have sufficient insight on the minimum learning outcomes or the basic competencies learners are expected to master by the end of the year. These are benchmark standards which the learners ought to be assessed on (Reutzel et al., 2012). Being familiar with the benchmark standards will serve as an essential road map to use when assessing each learner's level of development of their comprehension. When teachers know what competencies learners are expected to achieve by the end of that particular year, they will adjust their lesson plans accordingly, in order to ensure that these learners' needs are addressed (Reutzel et al., 2012).

Apart from the fact that teachers have to teach reading comprehension strategies, learners' use of reading comprehension strategies also need to be assessed. In doing so, metacognition comes into practice. Metacognition here involves two crucial concepts which have a close relation to reading comprehension (Reutzel et al., 2012). The first concept is the learner's awareness of own understanding what is being read. The second concept is the reader's ability to control his or her own thinking and how they use the comprehension strategies to help them understand the text, for example deciding to reread in cases where the reader's mind wandered while reading, which might have caused a comprehension breakdown (Reutzel et al., 2012). In the case of comprehension breakdowns, the NRP (2000) postulates that learners should be taught to monitor the status of their own comprehension. The NRP (2000) notes that learners who do not detect their own comprehension breakdown usually do not make an effort of correcting it, which results in a lack of comprehension, and which leads to such learners performing poorly in comprehension tests or tasks.

Even though an understanding exists that comprehension involves three essential elements namely; the reader, the text and the activity embedded within a sociocultural context, the reader at primary school level has not been considered (Reutzel et al., 2005). This implies that there has been little emphasis on teaching reading comprehension strategies to learners a primary school level. According to Reutzel et al. (2005), very few studies were conducted on the teaching of reading comprehension strategies at primary school level. Since learners at primary school level are mostly exposed to narrative texts, research has shown that some action needs to be taken, that will expose primary school learners more to reading and writing information texts.

According to Yang (2006), the essential elements involved in comprehending texts are the determinants of the type or types of strategies the learners use. This is due to the fact that according to her, reading is a highly individual activity in nature, where most readers will use a unique combination of strategies. This leads to the view that teachers can only teach the strategies but not prescribe to learners which strategies to use when reading (Yang, 2006). Yang (2006) notes that strategies that help one learner comprehend a text may not necessarily help the next learner. For a strategy to be successful in aiding learners to comprehend a text, it depends on the learner as the reader, the particular text which the learner has to read, and the context in which reading is taking place. For teachers to ensure that teaching of reading comprehension strategies yields strategic readers, we should make sure the learners know when, why and how to use the strategies appropriately and effectively (Yang, 2006).

Many research findings included in the literature review of this study mostly portray how best learners can be taught the strategies and what teachers should do in order to improve the learners' comprehension of texts. Scharlach (2008) reports that many teachers complain that they are not able to teach all of their learners to become metacognitive strategic readers. According to Scharlach (2008), research has found that very little reading comprehension instruction takes place in classrooms on a daily basis. From this researcher's experience, the same is necessarily true about reading comprehension instruction at the selected schools that participated in the study. In as much as they indicated that they were familiar with the strategies and used them, the results of the learners in the reading comprehension tests reflected differently. According to the results, it could be that even if the teachers claimed they taught reading comprehension, it was perhaps not done on a daily basis or

regularly. It is a challenge for teachers to teach reading comprehension strategies because they find designing purposeful comprehension strategy instruction to be complex. Teachers reported that they find comprehension strategy instruction so challenging that they are not able to learn how to teach the strategies effectively. The teachers therefore requested for the simplification of the models of comprehension strategy instruction to make them more comprehensible for teachers for effective implementation (Scharlach, 2008).

One of the many things that teachers can however do is to motivate learners when it comes to reading comprehension, as they do not have much control of the plethora of individual reader factors (Pardo, 2004). As has been stated above, reading and comprehending what one reads is an individual matter. Learners' cognitive development and culture differs from learner to learner, which is why motivating them is one of the best things teachers can do. Pardo (2004) states that as part of motivation, teachers provide learners with texts they think are interesting and helping learners to set authentic purposes for reading such as generating reports or writing letters.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the theories that guided the study have been described, namely the Schema and Sociocultural theories. The discussions in the chapter are linked to these theories. Comments on the performance of learners in previous tests are also discussed. The chapter also discussed research conducted, the findings of different studies on reading comprehension strategies instruction, and the conclusions drawn from their research. The chapter also includes the previous beliefs regarding reading comprehension instruction and how it was done, how it has been done in recent

years, and what researchers regard as most effective in teaching reading comprehension strategies. The chapter also discussed a number of instructional strategies on which the study was based, looking at how best they can be taught and how they improve learners' reading comprehension. Finally, the challenges teachers encountered according to previous research are also highlighted in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design, the population and the measures and procedures that were employed to collect the data and the information about the manner in which the data was analysed. This chapter also provides the instruments that were used to collect the data. The very important aspect of ethical consideration that forms part of every research is also discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Research Design

Different scholars described research design in the following ways:

Leedy and Omrod, (2005) consider a research design to be the procedure a researcher follows, the data he/she collects and the analysis the researcher comes up with. De Vos, Strydom and Delport (2000) on the other hand defined a research design as the plan a researcher uses to collect data and using that collected data to come up with the desired information.

The study used a mixed method research design because the two methods would complement and supplement each other in answering the research questions while the qualitative data solicited the views of the teachers on their understanding and use of reading comprehension strategies, the quantitative methodology sought to quantify the learners' reading comprehension skills so as to determine whether or not their performance in reading comprehension would meet the required passing standards as stipulated by the Namibian government.

The quantitative approach was used to see whether there was a correlation between the strategies used by teachers to teach reading comprehension and the learners' performance on reading comprehension tests. A correlation according to Best and

Kahn (2006) is how two or more paired variables relate to each other. The Spearman correlation coefficient was used to measure the degree of relationship between the variables. A survey design was also used to determine the reading comprehension strategies used by teachers. The qualitative approach was used to get information about the teachers' understanding of reading comprehension instruction, what teachers do during reading comprehension lessons, what they do to help learners comprehend texts better, as well as the to gain information on the concerns they had about the learners' level of understanding comprehension tests.

3.3 Population

Best and Kahn (2006) describe *population* as any group of people sharing one or more characteristics, and who the researcher is interested in. The characteristics of that group distinguish that particular group from the rest. The population of Grades five and seven learners in Khomas would encompass a very big group of learners, which would make it impossible and cumbersome to assess. The population thus needs to be narrowed in order to obtain a target group to whom the findings can be generalized (Best & Kahn, 2006).

Generally, there are 45 primary schools in Khomas Region. The total number of Grade five learners in the government schools in Khomas Region are 5 606 and the total number of Grade seven learners in the government schools in Khomas region was 5 285. The total population of Grade 5 and Grade 7 learners therefore amounted to 10 891. The teachers teaching English to Grade five were 54 and those teaching English to Grade seven are 48, making the total population of Grades 5 and 7 teachers for the purposes of this study 102. (This information is according to the fifteenth day school statistical records of 2015).

3.4 Sample and sampling procedures

Purposive sampling was used to select only 12 schools from the total population of 45 schools in Khomas region. The study sample of Grades 5 and 7 learners was drawn from these 12 schools, based on the poor performance of Grade 5 and Grade 7 learners in the NSATs through the years. Best and Kahn, (2006) define a sample as a small proportion that a researcher selects for observation and analysis. The selected schools, teachers and learners would be the ones to whom the findings would be generalized. From the 54 Grade five and the 48 Grade seven English teachers in Khomas region, all the 16 teachers teaching English to Grade five and all the 17 teachers teaching English to Grade seven at the 12 selected schools in Khomas region were included in the sample. The total number of Grade five and seven teachers from the selected schools in Khomas that were used in the study were therefore 33. Figure 3. 4.1 and 3. 4.2 below show the biographical characteristics of the participating Grades five and seven English teachers. For both grades, the females were the dominating gender. Although this information did not respond to the research questions, the researcher was interested in getting more information about the teachers teaching English to Grades five and seven at the selected schools in Khomas region.

The graphs below show the biographical characteristics of the participating Grades 5 and 7 English teachers. For both grades the females were the dominating gender.

Figure 3.1: Distribution of respondents (teachers)

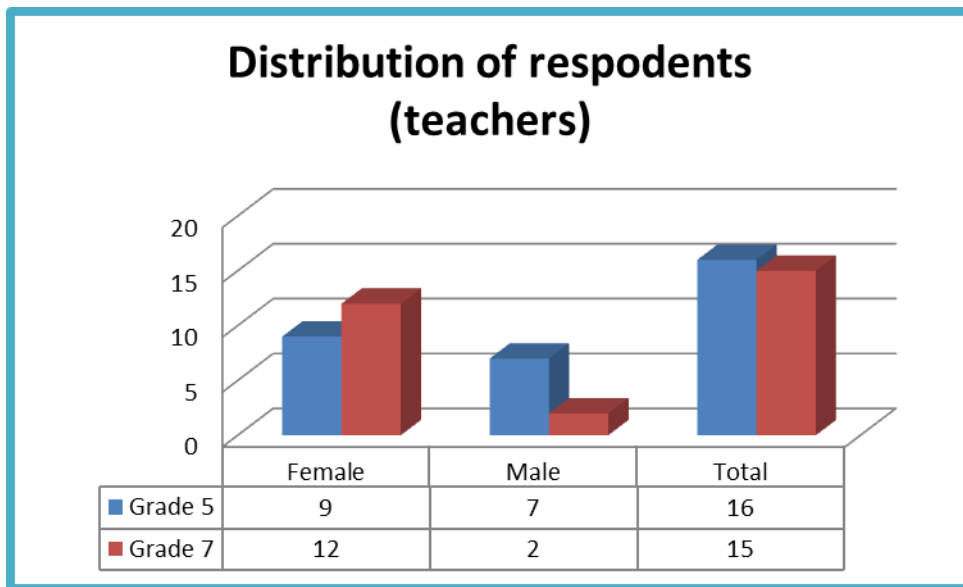
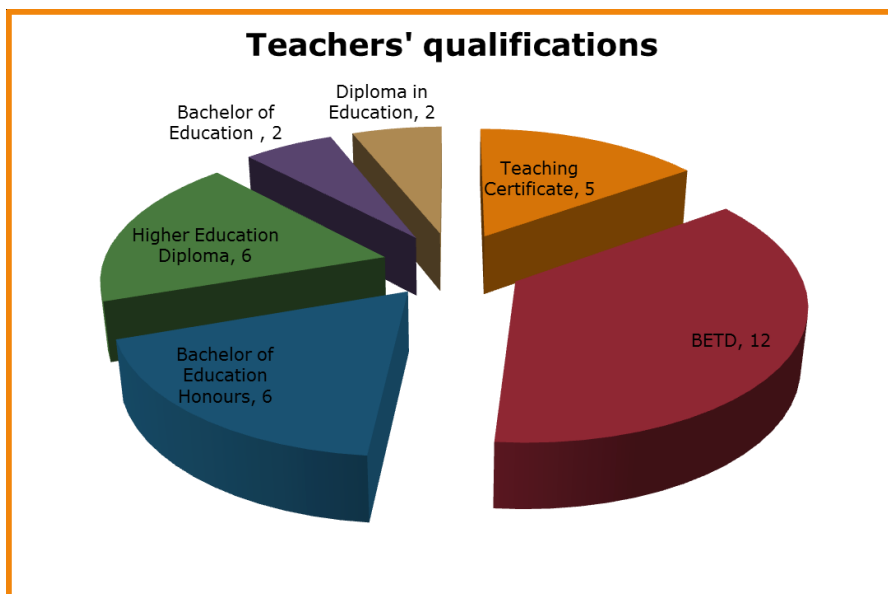


Figure 3.2: Teachers' qualifications

Key: the numbers represent the number of teachers with those qualifications



The positive outcome that emerged from the first section of the questionnaire was that all respondents involved had a teaching qualification. Their qualifications ranged from a teaching certificate to an honours degree in education. The findings about the

level of qualification of the teachers provided the assurance that all participants teaching English to the selected learners were professionally trained and qualified which is one of the requirements for a teacher to be able to teach learners and produce good results. The fact that these teachers were qualified put them in a position to teach English to the Grade five and seven learners at the selected schools. This information was therefore added to the study to proof that the teachers that participated in the study were indeed qualified to teach.

From the 5 606 Grade five and 5 285 Grade seven learners in the government schools of Khomas Region, a random sample of 5% of the 1116 Grade five learners from the selected schools, which was 56 learners and a random sample of 5% of the 1063 Grade seven learners from the selected schools, which was 53 learners made up the sample. Learners' names from each participating school were thrown in one basket and draws were made until the needed number was obtained. For this study, gender and the age were not taken into consideration during the selection of participating learners because the interest was not in comparing male and female performance in reading comprehension. Rather, the focus was on grade level performance in reading comprehension as indicated by the poor performance of learners in the Standardized Achievement tests. Only 5% of each of the two grades was used, as Creswell (2009) recommends that a sample size of thirty participants for a correlational study is sufficient. The choice of a 5% representative sample therefore conforms to the recommendation since the study will partially follow a correlational design.

3.5 Research instruments

Data for this research was collected through the use of questionnaires which were administered to do a survey on teachers' knowledge of instruction strategies as well as to investigate which instruction strategies they use in teaching reading comprehension. Questionnaires are useful instruments which are widely used and regarded as very useful for collecting structured data which is in most cases the numerical type of data (Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K., 2007). The questionnaires consisted of structured and open-ended questions. The open-ended questions give the participants a chance to write what they think freely, without being limited by pre-set categories of responses (Cohen et al., 2007). Observational checklists were also used to record how the teachers used the instructional strategies. A Likert type of scale was used in the checklists. A reading comprehension test was administered to assess learners' performance in reading comprehension, whose outcome would be correlated with the teachers' use of comprehension strategies.

3.6 Data collection procedures

A Likert – type of observational checklist with numerical values, designed by the researcher was used for classroom observation to obtain data on how teachers used the instructional strategies they know for teaching reading comprehension, how often they used them and whether the use of these strategies would help learners comprehend texts better or not. The scale was a four-point scale which ranged from one, which was the lowest, to four, which was the highest (see appendix 5). The researcher, who was an objective observer in this case, would observe and then tick off on the scale whether a strategy were being used always, often, sometimes or whether they were never used. Clough and Nutbrown (2012), define observation as the act of looking critically and openly for specific information such as evidence

(Clough & Nutbrown, 2012). Although the focus of the study was on the instructional strategies, reading comprehension tests, of which some of the reading texts and questions were taken from Wechsler (2005), were administered for learners to obtain scores that were correlated with how the teachers used the purported strategies to determine the size of the correlation between these two variables in the selected schools in Khomas Region (see appendices 7 and 8). In addition, a questionnaire was also used to survey the teachers' knowledge of the kinds of reading comprehension instructional strategies and, the specific kinds of instructional strategies teachers use in the classroom when teaching reading comprehension (see appendix 5). Questionnaires are widely used instruments that researchers use to collect survey information, provide structured data which is in most times numerical. They are used when the researcher desires factual information (Best & Kahn, 2006). Questionnaires are straightforward instruments to analyze (Cohen et al., 2007).

3.7 Pilot study

The questionnaire, classroom observation and the learners' comprehension tests were piloted at one school in Windhoek, Khomas Region. This school was not part of the selected schools but had the same characteristics as those that were selected, (Cohen et al., 2009). The purpose of the study was to ascertain questionnaire items were clear; to gain feedback on the validity of the questionnaire items; eliminate ambiguities and to identify omissions; redundant and irrelevant items (Cohen et al., 2007). The validity of the questionnaire items here refers to the attributes of the test and the uses to which it is put (Best & Kahn, 2006).

By piloting the questionnaire, the researcher wanted to increase the validity, reliability and practicability of the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2007). The researcher's objective for carrying out a pilot study was to ascertain through the

outcome, that all items were clear, to ensure that the researcher would get the desired outcomes. The outcome of the pilot study helped the researcher to make the necessary changes to ensure that every item would yield the expected results.

3.8 Data analysis

The questionnaire for teachers had some questions which yielded quantitative responses, as well as some that yielded qualitative responses. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to determine the correlation between the instructional strategies used to teach reading comprehension and learners' performance in the reading comprehension as well as to run descriptive statistics. The researcher went through qualitative responses and based on the differences in the responses, the latter then classified these responses into themes, guided by the most recurring responses.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the study, a letter was written to the Education Director of Khomas Region requesting for permission to conduct research in schools in the region. After permission was granted by the education director, further permission was sought from principals of the selected schools to conduct the study at their schools, which was granted. Furthermore, a one- on – one discussion with each of the teachers was held to seek for their permission.

When planning research that involves people, it is important to consider the ethical guidelines that are designed to protect the subjects (Best & Khan, 2006). The following ethical considerations were taken into consideration:

Informed consent

A letter of consent was written to the parents of the selected learners from those grades. These letters were sent to the parents to sign, as an indication that they had

granted their children permission to participate in the study. The researcher also provided her contact details for the parents to call if they did not understand why their children were selected. The researcher explained the purpose of the research further to the parents telephonically. During the discussions with the respondents, the researcher clearly outlined the purpose of the research to the respondents. The respondents were also informed about how the outcome of the research would help their schools.

- *Right to privacy*

The researcher assured the participants that their anonymity and confidentiality would be guaranteed. They were also assured that their names would not be used in the research. Every respondent was assigned a code, which was used instead of their real names.

- *Protection from harm*

The respondents were assured that they would be fully protected from any harm during the time of participation in the study. The researchers explained to them that the responses they gave would not be counted against them; neither would they be exposed for example by publishing who that particular information came from.

- *Protection from deception*

The researcher assured the respondents that no deliberate effort would be made to deceive them. Right from the onset, the respondents were informed about the purpose and objectives of the study, and how they would benefit from the study. This helped to build a positive relationship between the researcher and the respondents.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methods that were used to analyze the data. In this chapter the researcher explained the type of study which was conducted, stating that it was quantitative in nature. The population from which the sample was drawn was also discussed in this chapter. The researcher also discussed the different instruments that she used for collecting the data, as well as the procedures that were followed to collect the data. The pilot study that was carried out was highlighted in this chapter, as well as how the collected data was analyzed. Finally the researcher pointed out the ethical issues that were considered during the study.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four was used to present the findings based on all the data collected. The instruments used were; questionnaires which were completed by the participating teachers and observational checklists that were used to gather information while observing lessons. The other instruments which were used to collect data were comprehension tests which the selected Grade five and Grade seven learners wrote. The tests were adapted to the format that is used in the Standardized Achievement tests that are administered to the Grade Five and Grade seven learners on an annual basis in Namibia. In this section, the following results, which emerged from the teachers' responses to the questions in the questionnaire were presented through graphs and tables: the teachers' familiarity with the instructional strategies which formed part of this study, The relationship between the strategies and the performance of the learners, the frequency at which each strategy was used, teachers' perceptions of reading comprehension instruction, activities which teachers and learners engage in during lessons, teachers' concerns about their learners' level of comprehension and lastly, how teachers rated their learners' level of comprehension.

4.2 Data Presentation

The quantitative findings from the learners' comprehension tests are presented by means of graphs and descriptive statistics; the teachers' quantitative responses are also presented through graphs. Teachers' qualitative findings are presented in simple tables according to the themes that emanated from their responses.

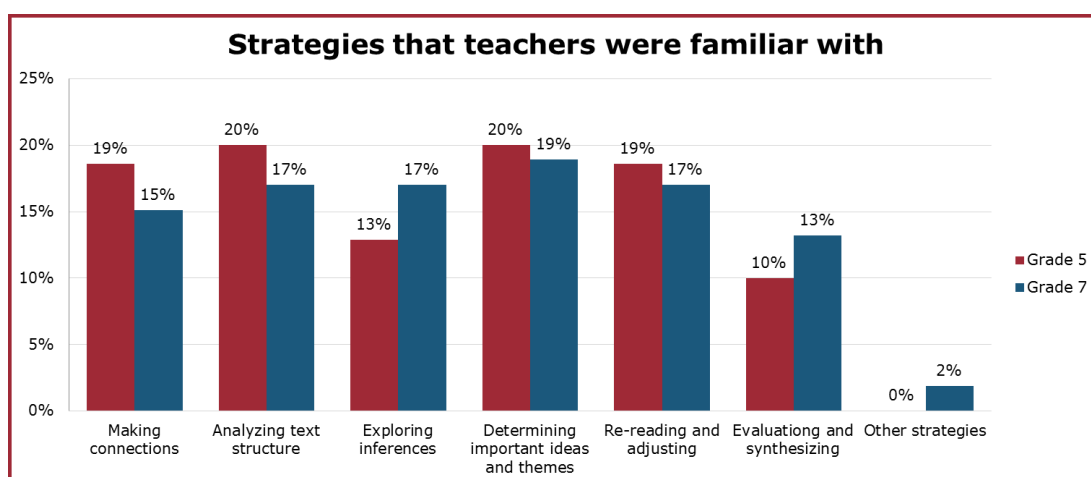
The Grade seven teachers that were initially included in the test were 17 and unfortunately 2 of them withdrew from the study. The researcher was therefore only left with 15 participants for Grade seven instead of 17. The Grade five teachers participating in the study were 16 and they all continued and this showed a 100% participation rate which was very good. Although there were some sections which some teachers left open, all the questionnaires had to be used, as they had responded to other questions as well. The questionnaire was divided in two sections namely; (A) the biographical information and (B) Structured questions.

The researcher categorized information obtained from the questionnaires as indicated in the graphs and tables that follow.

4.2.1 Teachers' familiarity with the reading comprehension instructional strategies

Figure 4.1 presents the reading comprehension instructional strategies the respondents were familiar with. The figure also shows the extent to which the respondents used the reading comprehension instructional strategies. Thirdly, the percentage of respondents who used each of the reading comprehension instructional strategies in their teaching is also shown.

Figure 4.1: Strategies that teachers were familiar with



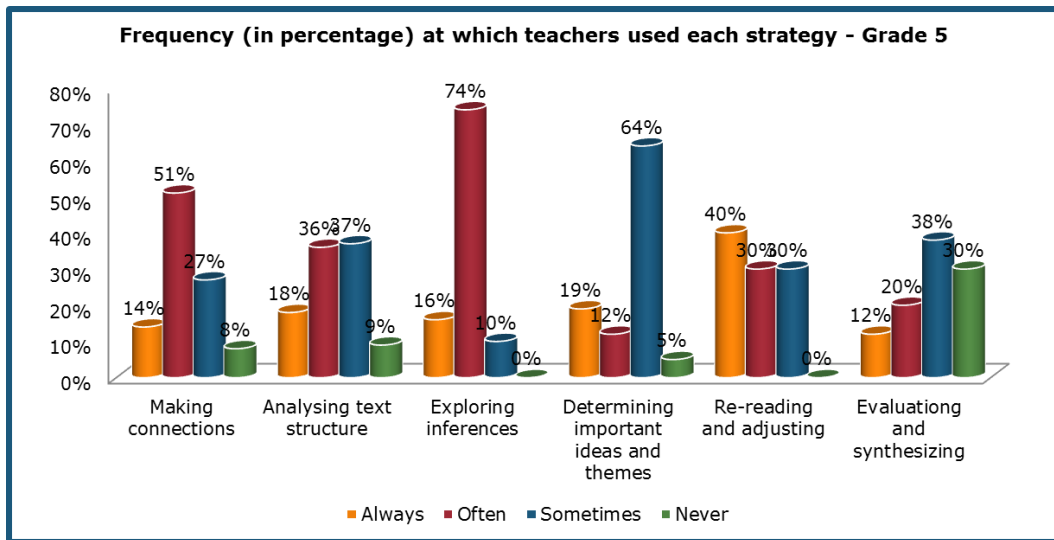
According to figure 4.1, the most familiar reading comprehension instructional strategies to the Grade five teachers were *making connections*, *analyzing text structure*, *determining important ideas and themes* and *re-reading and adjusting*. The percentage of familiarity of these strategies ranged between 19% and 20%. Strategies that the teachers were not so familiar with were *evaluating and synthesizing*, which only 10% of the teachers indicated they were familiar with.

As for the Grade seven teachers, the most familiar reading comprehension instructional strategies were *determining important ideas and themes*, which 19% of the teachers were familiar with, as well as, *exploring inferences* and *re-reading and adjusting strategies* which 17% of the teachers were familiar with. The strategy which the Grade 7 teachers used least was *evaluating and synthesizing strategy*, which was only known and used by 13% of the Grade 7 teachers.

4.2.2 Frequency at which strategies were used

In response to how regularly the teachers used the selected strategies in their teaching, the teachers had to show they used each strategy by way of ticking in the appropriate box on a Likert type of scale.

Figure 4.2 Frequency (in percentage) at which teachers used each strategy - Grade 5



Among the Grade 5 teachers, the strategy that was always used was *re-reading and adjusting*, which 40% of the teachers indicated they used. The strategies that were often used were *exploring inferences*, which 74% of the teachers indicated they used and *making connections* which 51% of the teachers reported as using. The strategy which was used only sometimes was *determining important ideas and themes* which 64% of the teachers reported to have used. Generally, teachers were familiar with and used almost all strategies. Only 8% teachers indicated that they never used the *making connections* strategy, and 5% which indicated that they never used the *determining important ideas and themes* strategy.

The overall conclusion here is that teachers use all instructional strategies when teaching reading comprehension to Grade five learners. This is evident in the fact that there is a certain percentage indicated on each of the bars in the graph.

The percentages on the graph indicating the number of times teachers said that they never used reading comprehension instructional strategies were low, which is an indication that the majority of strategies are used by most of the teachers.

4.2.3 Descriptive statistics for Grade 5 learner's performance

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for Grade 5 learner's performance

Descriptive Statistics Grade 5					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading comprehension performance	56	0%	70(%)	34.11(%)	21.890

The table above presents the descriptive statistics for the performance of the Grade 5 learners in the reading comprehension test. The test was out of ten marks. The raw scores that learners obtained ranged from zero to seven.

Fifty six Grade 5 learners took the English reading comprehension test. The mean performance level was 34.11% with a standard deviation of 21.89. About 79% of Grade 5 learners have a raw score between 0 and 5 (between zero and 50%) and about 21% got a score above 5 out of 10 (above 50%).

Although the teachers indicated that they were familiar with the strategies and used them in their teaching, the mean score of 34.11 indicates poor performance. The scores of the majority of learners were below average, which means that more needs to be done by teachers regarding the teaching of reading comprehension strategies. Thompson and Vaughn (2007) emphasize the making connections strategy as an important strategy that helps learners to comprehend texts.

4.2.4 Correlations between teaching strategies and English reading comprehension performance for Grade 5 learners

Table 2: Relationship between strategies and learners' performance in reading comprehension - Grade 5

Reading Strategies variables	r = Correlation coefficient	p = Significance Value
Making Connection	-.140	.303
Analyzing Text	-.165	.225
Exploring	-.135	.320
Determining Important ideas and themes	.159	.242
Re-reading and Adjusting	.051	.708
Evaluating and synthesizing	-.155	.255

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data as per the table above, showed that the performance of learners in reading comprehension and the *making connections* strategy are not significantly related ($r = -0.140$, $p = 0.303$). Similarly, all other strategies like analysing text ($r = -0.165$, $p = 0.225$), exploring ($r = -0.135$, $p = 0.320$), determining important ideas and themes ($r = 0.159$, $p = 0.242$), Re-reading ($r = 0.051$, $p = 0.708$) and evaluating ($r = -0.155$, $p = 0.255$) did not indicate significant association with the Grade 5 learners' performance in comprehension performance in Grade 5 learners.

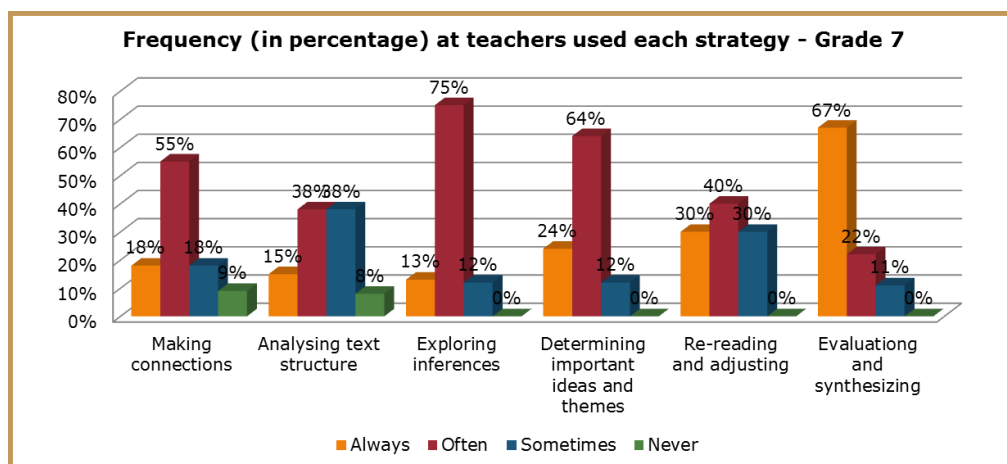
The results, therefore, imply that all the strategies did not contribute to the performance of the Grade five learners. The *evaluating and synthesizing*, *exploring inferences* and *analyzing text structures* strategies have a negative correlation to the learners' performance in the reading comprehension test, the rest of the strategies show a positive correlation to the performance of learners in the reading

comprehension test but they do not have a significant influence on the performance of the learners at 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance.

The results revealed that the strongest significant correlation was between the learners' performance and *analyzing text structure* ($r = -0.165, p = 0.225$), whereas the lowest but not significant correlation value was between performance and the re-reading strategy ($r = 0.051, p = 0.708$). Therefore, the teachers' use of reading comprehension instructional strategies has no significant impact on the performance of the learners in the reading comprehension test.

Grade 7 Data presentation

Figure 4.3 Frequency (in percentage) at which teachers used each strategy - Grade 7



Among the Grade 7 teachers, the strategy that was always used was *evaluating and synthesizing* which 67% the teachers indicated to be using. The strategies they used most often were *exploring inferences* which 75% of the teachers reported to use, *determining important ideas and themes* which reflected 64% of teachers use and *making connections* which 55% of the teachers indicated to use. Strategies that

teachers indicated they only used sometimes ranged from 11% to 38% of the teachers.

4.2.5 Descriptive statistics for Grade 7 learners 'performance

Table 3 Descriptive statistics for Grade 7 learners

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading comprehension performance	53	0	80(%)	45.47(%)	20.622

The table above presents the descriptive statistics for the performance of the Grade 7 learners in the reading comprehension test. The test was also out of ten marks. The scores that learners obtained ranged from zero to eight.

Fifty-three Grade 7 learners took the English reading comprehension test. The mean performance for the test was 45.47% with a standard deviation of 20.62. Grade 7 learners who took the test, 58% have scored between 0 and 5 marks out of 10 (between 0 to 50%) and 42% of the learners have scored above 5 marks (50% and above) out of 10. The results have shown that more than half of the learners have scored below 45.47%, which implies that although teachers indicated that they used reading comprehension instructional strategies investigated in the study in their teaching, more needs to be done for these strategies to have an impact on the learners' performance in reading comprehension.

4.2.6 Correlations between strategies and performance - Grade 7

Table 4: Relationship between strategies and performance in reading comprehension - Grade 7

Reading Strategies variables	r = Correlation coefficient	p = Significance Value
Making Connection	-.302(*)	.028
Analyzing Text	-.118	.401
Exploring	-.309 (*)	.024
Determining Important ideas and themes	-.184	.187
Re-reading and Adjusting	-.208	.136
Evaluating and synthesizing	-.194	.165

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

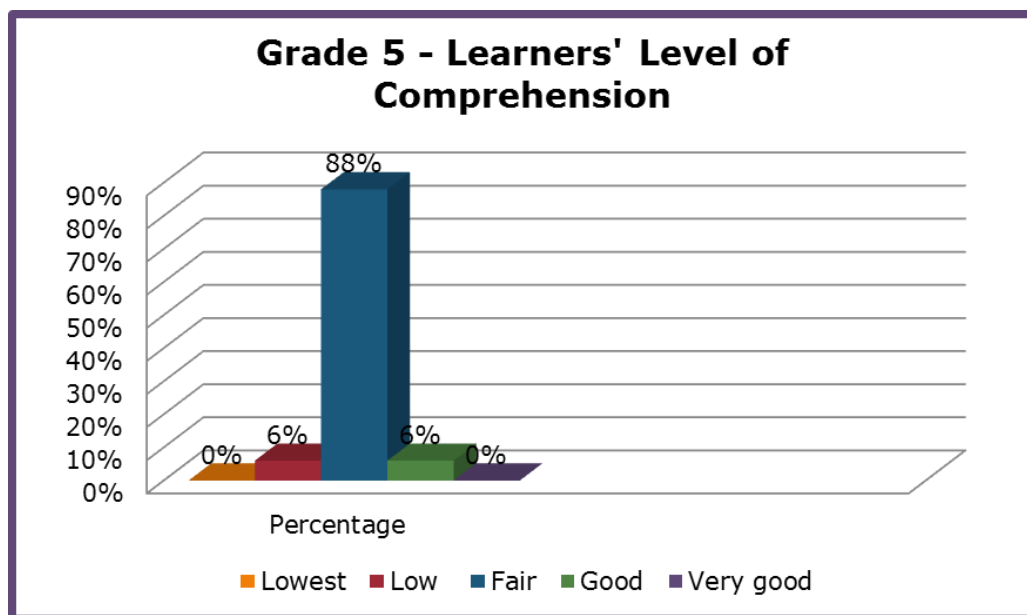
As table 4 above shows, that there is a significant but negative relationship between reading comprehension performance and strategies such as *making connections* ($r = -0.302$; $p = 0.028$) and *exploring inferences* ($r = -0.309$; $p = 0.024$) among Grade 7 learners. This means that although the teachers used these strategies often, they did not necessarily influence or yield good performance in reading comprehension. All other strategies were not significantly correlated with the performance of Grade 7 learners (all α 's (significance 2-tailed tests) are > 0.05). The performance of learners in the reading comprehension test as indicated here show that the teaching of strategies does not take place in a way that can help learners to master them and help them when they have to write comprehension tests on their own. It is of great importance that learners are taught how to use reading comprehension strategies. If they learn how to use them, learners will find it easier to connect to what they are reading and will even be able to recognize the structure of texts with ease (Hall et al., 2011).

4.2.7 How the teachers rated learners' level of comprehension

On the question that asked how the teachers teaching English to Grade 5 would rate their learners' level of comprehending texts, 88% of the teachers rated their learners' reading comprehension level as fair. Those that rated their learners' level of understanding comprehension texts as *low* were only 6% and those that rated them as *good* were also only 6%. None of the teachers rated their learners as *very good* when it comes to comprehending texts.

Figure 4.8 below present the ratings of the teachers.

Figure 4.4: Learners' level of comprehension - Grade 5



Interestingly, while the teachers rated the learners as fair, 9 of the 16 teachers said that learners just read for the sake of reading and not to comprehend what they have read, which contradicts the fact that the teachers said their learners' comprehension level was fair.

Teacher 1 said:

“My learners can sometimes read a text and not get an idea what it is about, meaning that they are struggling to understand written English stories or texts, which makes it difficult for them to understand the questions posed to them based on the texts.”

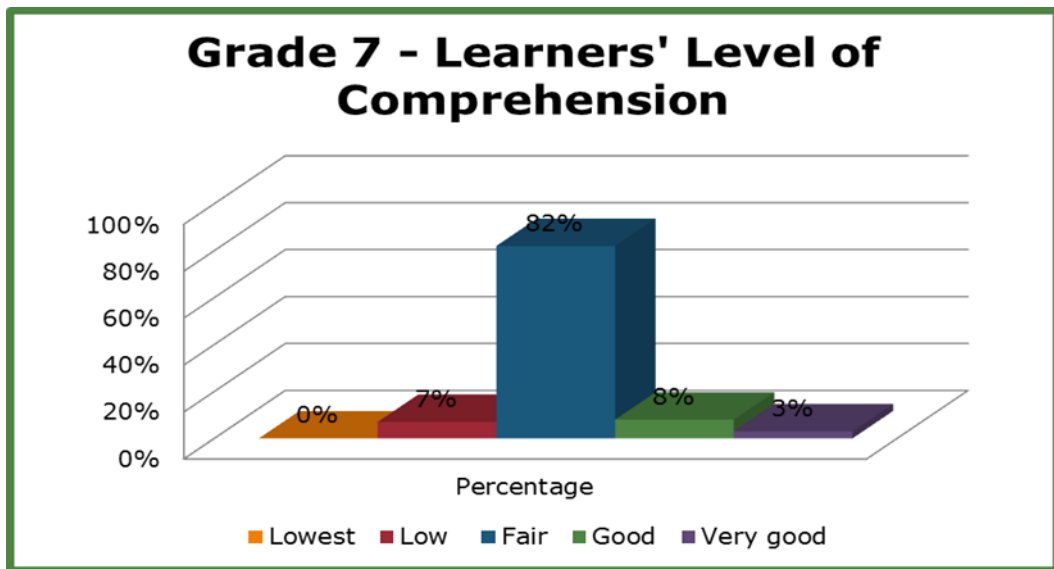
Among the respondents who responded to this question, only one teacher said there was no concern because according to her the subject matter was relevant to their level. The rest indicated that they indeed had concerns regarding the learners' level of understanding comprehension texts.

Form the responses to these questions, the theme that emerged strongly was:

Learners did not read with understanding.

According to the respondents, even though some learners can read, they do not read for the sake of understanding of what the text is about. They read for the sake of reading and this hampers them from providing the correct answers. Due to a lack of understanding, learners cannot single out the correct answers and in some cases therefore just write down verbatim simply because they could not tell which the correct answers were. Two of the respondents indicated that learners cannot read and that is why it is difficult for them to provide correct answers.

Figure 4.5 Learners' level of comprehension - Grade 7



Among the Grade seven teachers, 82% of them rated their learners' level of comprehending texts as *fair*. Only 7% of the teachers rated their learners' level of comprehension of texts as *low*, 8% of the teachers rated the learners as *good* and only 3% of the teachers rated them as *very good*. Although 82% of the teachers rated their learners' level of comprehension as *fair*, in their responses to whether they had concerns about learners' level of comprehension the responses were almost similar to those given by the Grade five teachers.

Teacher 2 said:

“There is a big concern regarding learners' reading with comprehension. Learners seem to read just for the sake of reading. Learners do not seem to understand the comprehension content. This results in learners missing both the instructions and the desired answers for the different questions.”

Grade 5

Teachers' perceptions on reading comprehension instruction

In response to the question which asked teachers about their perceptions on reading comprehension instruction, although stated differently, four of the teachers indicated that to them it was the teaching of reading comprehension, aiming at making learners understand what they read. According to these teachers, when one teaches reading comprehension, teachers have to make sure learners understand the content of the text. These teachers tend to conform with Reutzel et al. (2012), who are of the opinion that teaching should be done gradually, through scaffolding, for them to be able to determine what is worth knowing in a text and to be able to interpret a text.

The rest of the teachers had a different understanding of reading comprehension instruction, which was partially an indication that they did not have much insight of the concept of reading comprehension instruction. Among their responses were statements such as: *'it is when a teacher gives learners a reading comprehension activity to do.'* This statement does not include what happens before the learners get activities to do. Other teachers responded to the question saying that the concept meant that readers have to have deep understanding of what they are reading. To one teacher, reading instruction was the instructions teachers give learners when carrying out a reading comprehension task, while another referred to it as the instructions that help learners to comprehend a text.

The responses teachers gave were an indication that the majority did not quite understand what reading comprehension instruction was. The only recurring item that the researcher came across and regarded as a theme was the fact that reading

comprehension instruction according to the first four of the responses had to do with teaching learners skills that would help them understand texts better.

Among the different definitions teachers gave was the fact that reading comprehension instruction was teaching learners to understand what they are reading through demonstrating to them what they should do while reading, which will help them to understand what they are reading. This in other words means that through modelling the use of a particular strategy, the teacher teaches the learners what to do in order to understand a text better. Conversely, other teachers defined reading comprehension instruction differently, saying that it is an act of giving learners a reading comprehension activity to do. Others on the other hand defined it as “*the instructions a teacher gives learners when carrying out a reading comprehension activity to do.*”

The only recurring item that the researcher came across and regarded as a theme was the fact that reading comprehension instruction according to the first four of the responses had to do with teaching learners the reading comprehension strategies that would help them understand texts better. In this particular study the researcher referred to the reading comprehension strategies such as making connections, exploring inferences, determining important ideas and themes, re-reading and adjusting and evaluating and synthesizing. The rest of the responses were each explaining reading comprehension instruction in a different way and their responses were an indication that the majority did not quite understand what reading comprehension instruction was.

Activities teachers and learners engage in during reading comprehension lessons

When asked to share the activities they engaged in during reading comprehension lessons, various activities were shared but among those, the one that emerged to be the most common was focusing on vocabulary. Different outcomes emerged from teacher to teacher, indicating how they personally did it with their learners. Some indicated that they jotted down all new words, defining them and then providing synonyms for them. The definitions of these words were mostly dictionary meanings but teachers would then also, in their explanations, refer to the context in which the words were used, and explained them as lexical items. Learners use the new words to formulate sentences. Another teacher indicated that they first discussed the vocabulary, after which they had discussions based on the text. The next teacher said they first read before they started discussing the new words in the text. The most recurring responses were the focus on the vocabulary and reading. The teachers' main focus was for the learners to understand the meaning of the words, which without additional strategies might not be very effective in assisting learners to understand the entire text and respond to questions successfully. Other teachers indicated different approaches of teaching reading comprehension and the activities they engaged in during such lessons. One such example was this response given by teacher one:

“We discuss the strategies of how to read a piece of writing in order to understand and we practice on a selected text.” The themes that emerged from the responses to the question were vocabulary, reading and answering questions.

Vocabulary

The respondents believe that teaching lexical items helped learners to understand texts better. They therefore first teach the lexical items before learners can even read the text or attempt to answer the questions. Vocabulary alone however does not guarantee complete understanding of the text.

Reading

The respondents indicated that the learners should read, starting with the new vocabulary, then read the text paragraph by paragraph, with discussions in between to ensure learners understood.

Answering questions

After learners have had enough practice of reading, vocabulary explained to them, they could then answer questions.

On the question whether there were concerns regarding their learner's level of comprehension of texts, the teachers had different opinions, where two Among the respondents who responded to this question, only one teacher said there was no concern because according to her the subject matter was relevant to their level. The rest indicated that they indeed had concerns regarding the learners' level of understanding comprehension texts. Form the responses to these questions, the themes that emerged strongly was:

Learners did not read with understanding.

According to the respondents, even though some learners can read, they do not read for the sake of understanding of what the text is about. They read for the sake of

reading and this hampers them from providing the correct answers. Due to a lack of understanding, learners cannot single out the correct answers and in some cases, therefore, just write down verbatim simply because they could not tell which the correct answers were. Two of the respondents indicated that learners cannot read and that is why it is difficult for them to provide correct answers.

What teachers do to help learners comprehend texts.

As a follow up question, the teachers were asked how they help the learners to comprehend texts when they had challenges. Again the focus on vocabulary and reading dominated in the teachers' responses to the question. The teachers indicated that they introduce their learners to as many words as possible on a daily basis. Learners are encouraged to look words up in the dictionary. Another teacher on the other hand said that he explains the main idea to learners and guides them on how to identify the main ideas in a text. Learners were exposed to more practice through being given many questions to respond to from a given text. Some of the teachers also said that after reading they asked learners to narrate the story, through which they demonstrate their understanding of the text. The teacher also shared that they pre-teach the lexical items by giving explanations according to the context in which they were used, give learners skimming and scanning activities, and lastly, the teachers indicated that they encourage learners to respond to questions in their own words as much as possible. The most recurring theme that emerged from responses to this question was the fact that teachers expose learners to more reading in order to improve their reading comprehension skills.

Grade 7

Teachers' perceptions on reading comprehension instruction

The Grade seven teachers were also asked the same questions as the Grade five teachers. In response to the question on their perceptions on reading comprehension instruction the teachers shared their different views such as: *“An exercise testing how well someone has understood what they have read.”* *“It is the ability to read and understand a text.”* Other teachers continued to explain reading comprehension instruction as the type of questions, commands or requests posed to learners to prompt their comprehension or their understanding of aspects in the text. Most of the teachers' responses were not directed to the teaching of reading comprehension, but focused rather more on testing learners' reading comprehension. Which was an indication that some teachers either did not quite understand what it was or they did not teach it. There were however those whose responses gave an indication that they knew that reading comprehension has to be taught and not just tested. Among such responses was this: *‘to teach learners in a way that will enable learners to comprehend texts and answer questions with ease.’* The theme that emerged from the responses to the question was the fact that teaching should be of such nature that it helps learners to comprehend what they read and become independent readers who can help themselves to comprehend what they read.

Activities teachers and learners engaged in during reading comprehension lessons

The teachers were asked to deliberate on the activities they engaged in during reading comprehension lessons, as well as what they do to help learners comprehend texts better. In response to the question, the teachers shared number of activities.

One teacher said: *“First, I explain the strategies of reading comprehension and then discuss the difficult words in the text that the learners will read.”* They discuss the topic, where learners tell what they know about the topic. This means that teachers activate learners’ prior knowledge on the topic. The teachers said that their learners work in groups to share knowledge about the topic. The teachers also indicated that they cover the vocabulary with the learners as well. Some of the teachers said they first go through the questions with teachers then read the text aloud.

The themes that emerged were:

Doing pre, while and post- reading activities

The responded indicated that they do pre- reading activities to stimulate learners’ interest before they start with the actual reading.

Reading the story

The story or text was then read in different ways, namely by the teacher, individual learners and then learners read in a chorus.

Reading and answering questions

When teaching reading comprehension, teachers ask learners questions to arouse their interest. They would then ask learners to read and answer the questions posed to them.

Teachers’ concerns regarding their learners’ level of comprehension (short comings that lead to learners’ poor performance in reading comprehension test)

The teachers were asked if they were concerned about their learners’ level of understanding comprehension texts, with a follow up question which required them

to indicate what the concerns were. In responding to the question, the majority of the teachers indicated that they indeed had concerns about the learners' level of comprehension. They raised concerns such as learners not reading to understand where one of the teachers blamed it on a lack of appropriate vocabulary to understand the content. The lack of vocabulary, according to the teachers is one contributing factor to learners not being able to respond to questions based on the texts appropriately. Other factors that were raised were that: *"Some learners cannot read at all, which makes it difficult for them to respond to questions correctly." Some learners struggle to understand what is expected of them. Language is often a barrier for some learners.*" The following themes emerged from the responses of the teachers:

Learners do not read with understanding

According to the respondents, the learners who could actually read did not read to comprehend. The fact that learners did not read with understanding, resulted in them not answering the questions correctly. In some cases according to the respondents, learners struggle to understand what the questions require of them.

Lack of vocabulary

Learners lack the necessary vocabulary to help them understand the texts, which leads to providing wrong answers to the questions posed. This means the questions might not be clear to them, as they might not understand all the lexical items used.

What teachers do to help learners comprehend texts.

With this question the researcher wanted to hear from the teachers what mechanisms they had in place to help their learners comprehend texts better.

The themes that emerged were the following:

Focusing on vocabulary

The respondents indicated that they make sure learners understood the lexical items that appeared in the text to be read. They encouraged the use of the dictionaries to ensure that learners looked up the new words.

Helping learners by explaining and reading to them

Respondents stated that they helped learners by reading the text, reading questions one by one and even explaining what the items or questions mean and require from them.

Conclusion

In this chapter the findings of the study that emanated from the different instruments used to collect data were presented. The profile of the teachers that participated in the study was presented. The teachers' level of familiarity with the reading comprehension instructional strategies and how regularly each strategy was used were pointed out. Descriptive statistics were run to get a picture of how learners performed in the reading comprehension tests. Correlation tables were presented to show the correlation between the performance of learners and teachers' use of the RC instructional strategies. The chapter also presented the teachers' perception of reading RC instruction, their concerns about their learners' level of comprehending texts, what they do during RC lessons and how they help learners to comprehend texts better.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The study investigated the instructional strategies teachers use to teach reading comprehension to Grade 5 and 7 learners. The results of the study showed that the teachers use the reading comprehension strategies which the study investigated. However, a discrepancy was noted between the learners' performance on reading comprehension tasks and these methods as the teachers used them in their teaching of reading comprehension. This discrepancy suggests that teachers used these methods ineffectively. The aim of the study was to find out whether the teachers teaching English to Grades five and seven learners were familiar with the reading comprehension instructional strategies, whether they used them when teaching reading comprehension to Grade five and seven learners. The teachers responded to questions posed to them by means of questionnaires, lesson presentations were observed in order to see whether reading comprehension instructional strategies were used to teach reading comprehension. Learners also wrote comprehension tests, whose results were correlated to the teachers' use of the instructional strategies

Although the main focus of the study was the teachers' use of reading comprehension instructional strategies when teaching reading comprehension, the learners formed part of the study because they had to write a reading comprehension test that was correlated with the teachers' use of the RC instructional strategies in their teaching. The results of the learners' tests were then correlated to teachers' use of reading comprehension instructional strategies.

The study yielded the findings discussed below;

5.2 Discussions

5.2.1 Teachers' familiarity with the reading comprehension instructional strategies which formed part of the study.

The teachers' responses to the questionnaire were a clear indication that they were familiar with the reading comprehension strategies in question. The extent to which teachers indicated that they knew and used the strategies could not be seen in the way the learners performed reading comprehension tests. This means that if these strategies were taught effectively, learners' results could have been much better (the researcher is cognizant of other potential factors that influence and, could have influenced the learners' performance on the reading comprehension tasks investigated here). The fact that the study revealed that the teachers were more familiar and used some strategies more than others, could have caused learners not to perform well due to a lack of knowledge of using the other strategies which were also equally needed, but were not taught. The results showed that that reading comprehension strategies such as evaluating and synthesizing were not taught much and means that there would be a gap in the learners' knowledge of those particular reading comprehension strategies.

The discussion however does not exclude the possibility that learners' poor performance could be attributed to other factors as well and not necessarily the lack of knowledge of the reading comprehension strategies.

5.2.2 The relationship between the reading comprehension instructional strategies and the performance of the learners

Although the teachers' responses revealed that they knew and used instructional strategies, the results of the learners' comprehension test results gave an impression that teachers did not enough to help the learners perform better.

The Grade five learners obtained a mean of 34.11 and a standard deviation of 21.890. This shows that somewhere, learners are struggling. That is why it was difficult for them to obtain an average of at least 50%. At 0.01 and 0.05 levels of significance, the strategies did not contribute to the learners' performance and their influence was not significant. The majority of Grade five learners that wrote the test obtained scores below 5 out of ten. Among these learners, there were those who did not manage to score a single mark. In Grade seven some strategies show that they make a contribution to performance but their influence is negative. The Grade seven learners obtained a mean of 45.47, with a standard deviation of 20.622. Although the average mark was slightly over 50%, with proper guidance on how to use the strategies, learners could have performed better. Learners can perform better in reading comprehension tests if they are taught ways that can help them to apply the strategies to help them in other situations (Dewitz et al., 2009).

Another finding by Hall et al. (2011) states that teachers do not necessarily teach learners how to apply the reading comprehension strategies they are taught when reading different texts but rather engage in guided practice to use a particular strategy during a particular lesson to complete an assignment. In such cases then, learners do not necessarily use a particular strategy to improve comprehension but to complete a task the teacher has assigned to them

5.2.3 Frequency (in percentage) at which each strategy was used

The Grade 5 respondents were observed and the frequency at which they used each of the reading comprehension instructional strategies was recorded by way of ticking off on the observation checklists. A Likert type of scale was used to indicate whether the strategies were used always, often, sometimes or never. The interesting fact about the findings here is that - it was evident that the teachers used the strategies quite well in their teaching. The findings revealed that the highest percentages of Grade five teachers used almost all the strategies. There were, however, some teachers who never used some of the strategies. These were strategies such as - making connections, where 8% of the teachers never used it, analysing text structure, where 9% of the teachers never used it, determining important ideas and themes, where 5% of the teachers never used it, and evaluating and synthesizing which 30% of the teachers never used, had the highest percentage. Here, the findings answered the research question where the researcher wanted to find out to which extend the reading comprehension strategies were used during reading comprehension lessons in the Grades five and seven classes.

This means that the percentage of teachers who did not use these strategies at all might either not have been familiar with them or did not know how to teach them. This leads us back to the fact that readers need to have the schemata or knowledge structures on a particular topic in order to build on (Morrow et al., 2011). This statement refers to the fact that if teachers themselves do not have knowledge about a particular strategy, then there is no way they will be able to teach it. Teachers therefore need to have the necessary schemata for instructional reading comprehension strategies in order for them to use them in their teaching. The more elaborate the schemata of the teachers are, the more they will be in a better position

to use the strategies in their teaching. This applies to the learners that they will only be able to use strategies of reading comprehension if they are taught how to use them. Reading comprehension instructional strategies such as re-reading and adjusting and exploring inferences were used by all teachers teaching Grade five learners.

The Grade seven teachers used *exploring inferences, determining important ideas and themes, re-reading and adjusting* and *evaluating and synthesizing* either always, often, or sometimes. There was no indication that teachers never used any of those strategies. The strategies which some Grade seven teachers never used were *making connections* and *analysing text structure*.

Learners need to be taught how to identify how texts are organized, as it helps them to understand the content (Massey et al., 2004). Many studies also support the fact that if learners are taught to recognize the underlying structure of the text, they will improve their understanding of the text (Williams, 2005). When teachers do not teach the strategies, they deprive the learners of knowledge that can help them become better comprehenders of texts.

5.2.4 Teachers' perceptions of reading comprehension instruction

The recurring item that the researcher found and regarded as a theme was that teachers said that reading comprehension instruction had to do with teaching learners the skill that would help them to understand texts better. This conforms to the findings of other researchers such as Ness (2011) who is also of the opinion that teachers should teach learners reading comprehension strategies that will help learners to monitor and build their understanding of the text. Ness (2011) continues to state that teachers need to model the reading comprehension strategies for learners

to know how to use them. Her argument in this case is that by modelling the strategies, teachers encourage their learners to become proficient and self-regulatory in the use of the reading comprehension strategies. Wyse et al. (2010) also advocate for the teaching of reading comprehension strategies saying that they help learners to think strategically when they encounter comprehension barriers. This means that there is indeed a need for strategies to be taught because they improve learners' level of comprehension when learners use them. In my view, when learners are equipped with the strategies to help them comprehend texts, they will be in a better position to understand what they read. For reading comprehension instruction to be effective, teachers should model the strategies they want learners to master and apply, until learners can confidently apply (Shriver, 2006).

5.2.5 Activities which teachers and learners engage in during reading comprehension lessons

When asked what they engaged in during reading comprehension lessons, the most prominent activity was to introduce learners to lexical items, before the actual reading took place. This was a way to ensure that learners knew the meanings of words which they hoped would eventually help the learners to comprehend the text that these words were used in. A lack of knowledge of the vocabulary used in a text greatly leads the reader to struggle understanding the text.

5.2.6 Teachers' concerns about their learners' level of comprehension

When asked if they had concerns about their learners' level of comprehension, the teachers indicated that they indeed had concerns regarding the learners' level of understanding comprehension texts. From the responses to these questions, the theme that emerged strongly was that learners did not read with understanding. According to the respondents, learners read for the sake of reading, which hampered them from

providing the correct answers. Due to a lack of understanding, learners cannot single out the correct answers and in some cases therefore just write down verbatim simply because they could not tell the correct answers. Two of the respondents indicated that learners cannot read and that is why it was difficult for them to provide correct answers. The other concern the teachers highlighted was that learners did not have the vocabulary needed for them to comprehend texts. Shriver (2006) is of the opinion that vocabulary instruction contributes greatly to comprehension of texts.

5.2.7 How teachers rated their learners' level of comprehension

The Grade five teachers were asked to rate their learners' level of comprehension by ticking off in the most appropriate block on a five point scale adapted Likert scale. None of the teachers rated their learners as the lowest comprehenders of texts; neither did they rate their level of comprehension as very good. The percentage of teachers who rated their learners as fair was 82%. The other teachers rated theirs as good, which was 8% and low, which was 7%.

When asked to rate their learners' level of comprehension, 82% of the Grade seven teachers rated their learners' level of reading comprehension as fair, whereas 7% of them rated their learners' level of comprehension as low, 8% rated them as good and only 3% of the teachers rated their learners' level of comprehension as very good. The general trend when one looks at these findings is that the biggest percentage of the learners' level of comprehension is more at a fair level. Conversely, while rated as average, some teachers revealed that learners do not seem to comprehend what they read; resulting in them not to comprehend the questions they have to answer and consequently missing the desired answers to the questions.

This study revealed that even though teachers knew and used the reading comprehension strategies, it did not reflect in the results of the learners, which gave an impression that other studies need to be conducted to investigate the learners' poor performance from a different angle. The new finding in this research therefore is that it is not necessarily how the teacher teaches, that leads to poor performance. The way the learners approach the comprehension tests could also be the root cause of their poor performance.

5.3 Conclusion

According to the annual results of Grades five and seven learners in the National Standardized Achievement tests, some schools were continuously rated at the bottom of the performance list. It is against this background that a study was conducted to investigate whether the learners' poor performance had anything to do with the way the teachers taught reading comprehension or not. The researcher's point of departure was to answer the following research questions: Which comprehension instructional strategies do teachers use to teach reading comprehension to Grades five and seven learners in the selected schools in Khomas Region? To what extent do teachers use these instructional strategies to teach reading comprehension? What relationship exists between the reading comprehension instructional strategies used by teachers to teach reading comprehension and the learners' performance on reading comprehension tests? The data collected and used in the study managed to answer all the research questions.

As a result of this study, many factors contributing to Grade five and seven learners' poor performance in reading comprehension tests came to light. One of the factors that stood out most was the fact that although the teachers were familiar with the reading comprehension strategies and used them in their teaching, there was still a

problem of learners not using the reading comprehension strategies when writing tests. This problem lies with the fact that studies focused on whether teachers taught the strategies and how they taught them, and not much on whether learners used reading comprehension strategies when writing reading comprehension tests or not. What the current study has added to what is known about the subject is that attention needs to be paid to whether learners actually do use the strategies the teachers demonstrate or not, when writing reading comprehension tests. One of the concerns that also emerged strongly from the teachers was that learners did not read with understanding, which was reason enough for the researcher to conclude that reading comprehension instruction is needed for learners to learn how to go about to comprehend texts better. The researcher's view that emanated from this study is that teachers do not teach learners how to apply and use the reading comprehension strategies in such a way that learners become confident to be able to use them independently. There was no correlation between the strategies used and the performance of the learners in the reading comprehension tests. This means that even if the strategies were used, they did not contribute towards better results in the learners' tests.

I deem the findings of this study important because they bring out the fact that even if teachers use the reading comprehension instructional strategies, learners will not perform if they do not apply the reading comprehension strategies in their tests. The results can thus be used to sensitize the teachers in ensuring that learners apply the reading comprehension strategies when doing reading comprehension activities.

The problem that was encountered while on the field was that some of the questions on the questionnaire, yielded qualitative responses, which resulted in a mixed methods study instead of a quantitative study as it was meant to be. Due to the fact

that two grades were involved in one study, it was too cumbersome and too much time was spent collecting and analyzing data. There was, however, a need to include both grades as the Standardized Achievement tests assess both fifth and seventh graders' reading comprehension skills.

5.4 Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are:

- When training teachers, the institutions of higher learning, should put emphasis on the need for reading comprehension instruction, as well as teach the student teachers how to teach reading comprehension strategies to their learners.
- Teachers should be developed through their clusters to share best practices. The focus on whether teachers teach reading comprehension strategies should run parallel with whether learners apply reading comprehension strategies when writing reading comprehension tests.
- The learners should be developed through all the stages and each stage should be given equal importance and time.
- Teachers should therefore not just demonstrate how strategies are used but should also closely monitor and scaffold the use of the strategies until learners can use them effectively on their own.
- This study took a narrow angle in investigating reading comprehension teaching strategies as factors affecting reading comprehension skills of the Grade 5 and 7 learners. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies investigate other factors impacting the performance not only of fifth and

seventh graders in reading comprehension but also other grades, especially at secondary school level.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethical clearance certificate



UNAM
UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

STUDENT ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: FOE/60/2015 **Date: 10 November, 2015**

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the Faculty/Centre/Campus Research & Publications Committee sitting with the Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Title of Project: INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES USED BY TEACHERS IN TEACHING READING COMPREHENSION TO GRADE FIVE AND SEVEN LEARNERS IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN WINDHOEK, KHOMAS REGION, NAMIBIA

Nature/Level of Project: Masters

Principal Researcher: F. Kauami

Student Number : 201129558


Host Department & Faculty: Faculty of Education

Supervisor: Dr. K.Veii

Take note of the following:

- (a) Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the UREC. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
- (b) Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the UREC.
- (c) The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the UREC (through the Chairperson of the Faculty/Centre/Campus Research & Publications Committee) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by UREC.
- (d) The UREC retains the right to:
 - (i). withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,
 - (ii). request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research.

UREC wishes you the best in your research.


Prof. I. Mapaure
UNAM Research Coordinator
ON BEHALF OF UREC

Appendix 2: Research permission letter

2

University of Namibia, Private Bag 13301, Windhoek, Namibia
340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneers Park
☎ +264 61 206 3111; URL.: <http://www.unam.edu.na>



Date: 16 November 2015

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

1. This letter serves to inform that student: **F. Kauami** (Student number: **201129558**) is a registered student in the **Faculty of Education** the University of Namibia. His/her research proposal was reviewed and successfully met the University of Namibia requirements.
2. The purpose of this letter is to kindly notify you that the student has been granted permission to carry out postgraduate studies research. The School of Postgraduate Studies has approved the research to be carried out by the student for purposes of fulfilling the requirements of the degree being pursued.
3. The proposal adheres to ethical principles.

Thank you so much in advance and many regards.

Yours truly,

Name of Main Supervisor: -----

Signed: -----

Dr. C. N.S. Shaimemanya

Signed: -----

Director: School of Postgraduate Studies

Tel: 2063523

E-mail: cshaimemanya@unam.na

Appendix 3: Permission letter to the Khomas Regional Director of Education

Box 98738

Pelican Square

Windhoek

17 November 2015

The Chairperson

The Training Committee

Khomas Education Directorate

Windhoek

Dear Madam

I am currently enrolled as a Master of Education student at the University of Namibia. I have already completed the coursework. I only have the thesis outstanding and that has to be completed in the course of 2016. The topic of my study is: Instructional strategies used by teachers in teaching reading comprehension to Grade five and seven learners in selected schools in Khomas Region.


With this study I want to investigate the causes of underperformance at specific schools that have been performing poorly in Standardized Achievement tests (SATs) throughout the years. The findings of this research will give me insight on how the teachers can be assisted in order to improve the performance of learners in SATs, particularly with the competencies in which they underperform.

Due to the nature of my job, I realized that it will be impossible to carry out the research while at work, as I will need to be at schools to observe lessons. The lesson observations will help me to collect the data I will need for the research.

It is therefore against this background that I am applying for study leave for three (3) months (February – April, 2016).

Attached please find my admission letter for this year. I will be able to provide you with the 2016 one next year after registration. From the rough calculation I made with an HR official, my credit leave days amounted to around 200, the number of days that I will need are around 64. I will provide the official letter from HR as soon as I receive it.

Yours faithfully



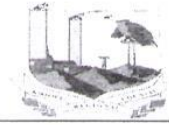
Ms F. Kauami

Senior Education Officer: English

Appendix 4: Permission letter by the Khomas Regional Director



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA



**KHOMAS REGIONAL COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE**

Tel: [09 264 61] 293 9411
Fax: [09 264 61] 231 367

Private Bag 13236
WINDHOEK

**Enquiries: Ms. Julia Sam
Our Ref.: SP**

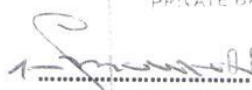
Mrs. Florence Kauami
Section Advisory Services
Khomas Regional Office
Private Bag 13236
WINDHOEK

Dear Mrs. Kauami

Kindly be informed that approval has been granted by the Permanent Secretary, in terms of the provisions of Chapter D.I/IX, Paragraph 4.1 that study leave on a 50/50 basis with full remuneration, be granted retrospectively as from 08 February 2016 until 29 April 2016.

It is trusted that you will make use of this opportunity to successfully carry out your research work / thesis in pursuance of your Master of Education Degree: Literacy and Learning at the University of the Namibia.

Yours faithfully


08 MAR 2016
MR. GERARD N. VRIES
HUMAN RESOURCE DEPARTMENT
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, ARTS AND CULTURE
KHOMAS REGION

Appendix 5: Teachers' questionnaire
Teachers' questionnaire

Section A: Biographical information

Tick where appropriate.

Gender: Male..... Female.....

Highest grade passed (fill in): Grade.....

Professional qualification: (tick where appropriate)

Teaching Certificate Degree..... Honours degree.....

Master's degree..... Other qualifications.....

Field of Specialization: (Tick where appropriate)

Junior primary..... Senior primary.....

Junior Secondary..... Senior Secondary..... None of the above.....

Major subjects?.....

Minor subjects?.....

Section B: Structured questions

1. Explain your understanding of reading comprehension instruction

.....
.....
.....

2. Give a short description of what you and your learners do when teaching reading comprehension.

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Which of these reading comprehension strategies are you familiar with?

Please put a tick next to the ones you know.

- a. Making connections
- b. Analyzing text structure
- c. Exploring inferences
- d. Determining important ideas and themes
- e. Evaluating and synthesizing
- f. Re- reading and adjusting

4. Do you teach your learners reading comprehension strategies?

If yes, write down the one/s you teach and indicate with a tick how often you teach it to them.

4.1.....
Always.....Often.....Sometimes.....Never.....

4.2.....
Always.....Often.....Sometimes.....Never.....

4.3.....
Always.....Often.....Sometimes.....Never.....

4.4.....

Always.....Often.....Sometimes.....Never.....

5.5.....

Always.....Often.....Sometimes.....Never.....

5. Is there a concern regarding learners' level of understanding comprehension texts?

5.1 If, yes what is this concern?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

6. What do you do to help your learners to comprehend texts?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7. How would you rate your learners' level of comprehension if you had to rate them out of ten (from 1, which is the lowest to 5, which is the highest? Tick where appropriate.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Appendix 6: Observational Checklist

Date & time of observation:

Grade: _____ School code:.....

Code of teacher observed:.....

Focus topic for lesson:.....

The observer will rate her observation of each of the questions listed below. She will also comment on what she saw the teacher do to encourage reading comprehension:

During observation, the focus will be on whether the instructional strategies are being used during the lesson, how they are being used and whether they help the learners to comprehend the text better.

- If a strategy is used, tick in the box next to it, if not put a cross in the box.
- Tick in the appropriate box rating from the lowest (1) to the highest (4) to show the extent to which the strategy is being used during lesson presentation.

1. **Making connections**

a. Helping the learners to connect the text to what they know

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

b. Connecting the text to themselves

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

c. Connecting text to the world

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

2. **Analyzing text structure** □

a. Teaching external features of the text (as table of contents, bold print and text patterns)

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

b. Teaching learners to identify how a text is organized

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

3. Exploring inferences □

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

a. Teaching learners how to make predictions

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

b. Teaching learners how to develop analogies

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

- c. Teaching learners how to merge new and known information to develop new understanding.

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

4. Determining important ideas and themes □

- a. Teaching learners how to identify important parts of the text

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

- b. Teaching learners how to make a distinction between big ideas and subplots

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

- c. Guiding learners in identifying underlying themes

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

5. Evaluating and synthesizing □

- a. Guiding learners into constructing new ideas from two or more pieces of text

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

6. Rereading and adjusting □

- a. Learners are permitted reread to get a better understanding

Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4

Appendix 7: Reading Comprehension Grade 5

Reading Comprehension

Name..... Grade 5.....

School.....

Read the text below and then answer the questions.

Toontime Tees

The Namibian Sports shop called ‘T- shirts for All’, has a promotion of different types of T- shirts. These T-shirts come in different sizes and descriptions. The T-shirts are all premium- weight and 100% pre-shrunk. Different athletic cartoon characters appear on their own personal T- shirts. Their names and famous faces cover the front of these T- shirts. The shirts are premium –weight, 100% pre-shrunk cotton. They can be washed by hand and in the washing machine. They come in these sizes: small, medium, large and extra-large. The characters appearing on these T-shirts are Baily Bunny, Harvey Hippo and Ollie Owl. However, these different characters only appear on specific T- shirts. The prizes for the T- shirts also differ. Baily Bunny’s cartoon character appears on 21HH short sleeved T- shirts only, costing N\$ 120. 00. Harvey Hippo’s character face appears only on 23 HH short sleeved T- shirts, costing N\$120.00. Ollie Owl’s cartoon character face appears only on 25 GG, costing N\$ 200.00 only.

Now answer the questions.

The T- shirts shrink when washed because

- A. they are different

- B. they are made of pre-shrunk cotton
- C. they are premium weight
- D. they are all the same size (1)

1. The T- shirts can be washed
- A. by hand only
 - B. in the washing machine only
 - C. by hand or in the washing machine
 - D. by vacuuming them (1)

2. The t- shirts are made of
- A. Cotton
 - B. Plastic
 - C. Vilene
 - D. Nylon (1)

3. Why does Ollie Owl's T- shirt cost more than the others?
- A. It is more colourful
 - B. Ollie Owl is handsome
 - C. It is long sleeved
 - D. It fits all (1)

4. The T- shirt on which Harvey Hippo's character face appears
- A. is long sleeved
 - B. Is the most expensive
 - C. Is only in one size
 - D. is costing N\$ 120. 00 (1)

Read the text below and then answer the questions.

A rescued project

It was Monday morning, and Kaatjee hurried down the corridor to her classroom. She was meeting her best friend, Ngayoo, to work on the Science Fair project. The two girls were excited because the project was going well.

Kaatjee and Ngayoo were testing various plant foods on the same type of plant. Their teacher, Mr Sam, let them use a table at the back of the classroom as a Science Lab. Each morning before school, the girls measured the plants. In the afternoon, the girls took turns watering the plants with different types of food mixtures.

When Kaatjee opened the classroom door, she gasped at the sight of their plants. They had been standing tall on Friday afternoon, but now they drooped dangerously low. Kaatjee touched the soil in the pots and discovered that it was almost dry. “oh, no!” she said to herself. “Ngayoo must have forgotten to water them on Friday!” She was staring at the plants in horror when Ngayoo came into the classroom.

Ngayoo saw the distress on Kaatjee’s face and felt awful when she noticed the condition of the plants. “I am so sorry, Kaatjee. I was in a hurry to get to softball practice Friday afternoon, and I forgot to water the plants,” Ngayoo said as she dropped her gym bag on the floor and walked over to the plants.

Kaatjee sighed. “What do we do now?” Kaatjee asked as she touched one of the sagging leaves. “Do you think our project is ruined?”

“Let’s try to save the project.” Kaatjee suggested. The girls smiled at each other with new enthusiasm. They quickly combined the different plant foods with water and carefully poured the mixtures into each of the pots.

Slowly the sagging leaves perked up, and by the afternoon the plants looked healthy again.

Now answer the questions.

1. In paragraph 3, the author uses the phrase “drooped dangerously low” to
 - A. describe the exact height of the plants for the project
 - B. tell how the plants will look at the end of the project
 - C. explain that the damage to the plants may be serious
 - D. suggest that the plants are harmful to other students (1)

2. What causes Kaatjee’s gasp in paragraph 3 of the story?
 - A. The empty classroom
 - B. Ngayoo’s lateness
 - C. The appearance of the plants
 - D. The missing mixture (1)

3. The girls’ problem is solved when they
 - A. find new plants for their project
 - B. mix their own plant food
 - C. seek advice
 - D. water the plants (1)

4. Ngayoo felt awful when she saw
 - A. the teacher entering the class

B. the friend's face

C. the condition of the plants

D. that her friend was sad

(1)

5. The girls saved the project by

A. giving the plants food and water

B. watching the plants come to life again

D. removing the sagging leaves

Total marks: 10

Appendix 8: Reading Comprehension Grade 7

Name..... Grade 7.....

School

Reading comprehension

Read the text below silently.

THE LITTLE BOY WITH A BIG HEART

People might think that Michael Swart would feel sorry for himself. The Primary School learner was born with a defect that prevents the bones in his face to form properly. He has had several

operations to try to help his face look normal and he will need more in future. But Michael does not feel sorry for himself. He has turned his energies outward toward people less fortunate than himself. "I don't want to think of myself first" he says. I can teach other people to care; maybe we'll grow up to have a better world.

When he was just three, Michael began raising money to help children at a local hospital. His efforts have been expanded to help many people who are suffering because of illness or tragedy in their lives. He even postponed one of his operations so that his fun-raising activities would not be interrupted. By the time he was eight years old, Michael had already raised N\$ 50 000 for charity. Some people might say that Michael's unusual appearance sets him apart. But those who know him believe it is his compassion that makes Michael stand out.

Now answer questions 1- 5 based on the text above, circling the letter with the correct answer.

1. Michael's age ranges between:

A. 4-7

B. 6 – 8

C. 7- 10

D. 7- 13

(1)

2. Michael's appearance differs from that of other people because

A. he is shorter than the rest

B. he has a defect on his left arm

C. the bones in his face could not form properly

D. he has no bones in his face

(1)

4. Michael wants to help other people because

A. he feels he is better off

B. they are his relatives

C. he is smarter

they are younger than he is

(1)

D. The word 'compassion' in this text means:

A. companionship

B. being caring

C. Self- esteem

D. Artistic (1)

5. What is the main idea of this text?

A. Michael wants others to have a better life

B. Michael feels sorry for himself

C. Fund raising for Michael's operation

D. Michael's operation (1)

Read the text below and then answer the questions.

A letter from Cape Town

Dear Aunt Julia

I have so much to tell you. I don't know where to begin! Remember last summer when I told you that I was planning to enter the annual SADC essay contest? Well, I entered, and my essay, "Improving Community Safety," won! The prize was a weekend trip to Cape Town, with a visit to the TeenSay offices where they publish the Teensay youth magazine. One of the main reasons for the trip was for us to see how they publish the magazine each month. Three of us were chosen to go from Windhoek: two other contest winners and myself.

My mom took me to the airport for the flight to Cape Town, and I have to admit I was nervous! I've flown before but not without my parents. When we got to the airport and met the other people in our group I relaxed. The group leader, Ms Thomas, was really friendly and easy to talk to. She is in charge of marketing and special promotions at TeenSay magazine. While we waited for our flight, she described the activities we would be participating in that weekend. She also

introduced me to the other contest winners. Irene is from Erongo region, and she is 13 years old like me. She won a prize for the photographs she took when her family drove across the country last summer. The other winner is a 15 year old – boy named Eddie. He won the TeenSay community spirit award for cleaning up and improving the neighbourhood parks in Ketmanshoop where she lives. Irene and Eddie both looked like a lot of fun. Before our plane even took off, we were laughing and telling jokes like we have known each other forever.

I was surprised at how quick the flight seemed. Since Ms Thomas and I were sitting next to each other, she told me a lot about herself, including how she ended up working at Teensay magazine. She said that as a young girl she had always enjoyed writing stories and interviewing people. She also loved planning and organizing events. She was always in charge of planning and organizing her school's dances and fundraisers, and even organized her family's big reunion party every year. After college, she got a job as a reporter at Teensay, and then she gradually moved into their marketing and special promotions department. She said that she still writes an article for them, but she loves what she does now. I told her that I was thinking about becoming a reporter someday, and she said that she thought I could do it if I really worked hard.

When I see you at Mom's birthday party next week, I will tell you about the sightseeing we are going to do tomorrow. I am enclosing a copy of my essay in this letter. So far it has been a great trip.

Love,

Kavena

Now answer questions 6- 10 based on the text above.

6. From whose point of view is this story told? Circle the correct answer.

A. Ms Thomas

B. Aunt Julia's

C. Kavena's

D. Eddie's

(1)

Kavena is in Cape Town because

A. she won a trip in an essay contest.

B. she is visiting her aunt Julia.

C. Ms. Thomas invited her to visit TeenSay Magazine.

D. she wants to be a reporter someday.

(1)

7. How would you describe Ms. Thomas?

A. Passive

B. Friendly and approachable

C. Arrogant

D. Irritable

(1)

8. What conclusion can you draw about Kavena and Aunt Julia?

A. They do not have a very good relationship

B. They are close and share their experiences with each other.

C. Kavena writes to her aunt because her mother wants her to.

D. Kavena and her aunt travel together frequently

(1)

9. Which of the statements below is an opinion?

A. Irene is 13 years old.

B. Irene and Eddie both looked like a lot of fun.

C. Ms Thomas loves organizing events.

D. Kavena was uncomfortable flying by herself. (1)

Total marks: 10