

A STUDY OF TEACHERS' AND LEARNERS' KNOWLEDGE AND
APPLICATION OF READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES IN
SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE KHOMAS REGION

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WILHELMINA MARIA BRUWER

STUDENT NUMBER: 8703485

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MAIN SUPERVISOR: PROF. M. L. MOSTERT

CO-SUPERVISOR: DR. D. WOLFAARDT

ABSTRACT

Reading with comprehension is a matter of concern in Namibian schools. To read with understanding, reading comprehension strategies should explicitly be taught to learners. Six reading comprehension strategies were identified by researchers as effective in improving reading comprehension. The purpose of this study was to find out whether teachers are acquainted with a range of reading comprehension strategies, whether they are explicitly teaching them and whether they are trained in these strategies. Grade 7 learners' application of reading comprehension strategies were also observed to see what strategies they apply.

Both the Social Cognitive and the Constructivist Theories formed the theoretical framework for this study. A qualitative research design was employed and respondents for the study were selected via purposive sampling from primary schools in the Khomas Region. The sample comprised of seven grade 7 English second language teachers, twelve grade 7 learners, one advisory teacher for European languages and one university lecturer for Teaching Methods of English. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Data analyses were done by coding and categorizing responses into themes. Results are presented based on the themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

The main findings were that teachers were aware of and teaching two of the six identified strategies and learners were also acquainted with these two strategies. Most teachers were not aware of three of the identified strategies and consequently

also did not teach them to learners. Clear differences were detected between top and low performing schools, for example the strategy of “summarizing” was practiced more by top performing schools than by low performing schools.

Table of contents

Abstract.....	i
Table of content.....	ii
List of tables.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Dedication.....	vii
Declaration.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction	
1.1 Orientation of the study.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	8
1.3 Objectives of the study.....	9
1.4 Significance of the study.....	9
1.5 Limitations of the study.....	10
Chapter 2: Literature review	
2.1 Theoretical framework.....	12
2.2 Defining reading comprehension.....	23
2.3 Reading comprehension strategies.....	24
2.4 A selection of factors that restrict reading comprehension.....	36
2.5 Explicit instruction in reading comprehension.....	40
2.6 Reading comprehension in the Namibian context.....	41

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research design.....	44
3.2 Population.....	44
3.3 Sample and sampling procedures.....	45
3.4 Research instruments.....	46
3.5 Data collection procedures.....	47
3.6 Data analysis.....	48
3.7 Research ethics.....	48

Chapter 4: Presentation of Results

4.1 Results based on teachers responses.....	50
4.2 Learners' responses and performance on interview questions.....	65
4.3 Lecturer's responses.....	74
4.4 Advisory teacher's responses.....	76

Chapter 5: Discussion of results

5.1 Teachers' awareness of the factors enhancing reading comprehension instruction.....78

5.2 Teachers' and Learners' knowledge and application of the strategies identified in the literature as effective.....85

5.3 Linkage of the findings to the theoretical framework.....92

5.4 Lecturer's and Advisory Teacher's responses.....94

Chapter 6: Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions.....97

6.2 Recommendations.....101

7. References.....103

8. Appendices

- A. The first set of interview questions to the teachers
- B. The second set of interview questions to the teachers
- C. Interview questions to learners
- D. Interview questions to the lecture and the advisory teacher

List of tables

Table 4.1: Teachers' perceptions on the reading comprehension problems of learner.....	51
Table 4.2: The teachers' perceptions on the causes of reading comprehension problems.....	53
Table 4.3: Reading comprehension strategies used by schools.....	57
Table 4.4: Teachers' and learners' knowledge and application of the reading comprehension strategies identified by the literature as effective	73

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I wish to extend a word of appreciation to the teachers and learners who welcomed me at the schools and shared their knowledge with me.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to the memory of my late grandmother, Elizabeth Diergaardt who loved reading and who showed me that a book is a person's best friend.

Declaration

I, Wilhelmina Maria Bruwer, declare hereby 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 institution of higher education.

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Appendix A

Set 1: Interview questions on reading comprehension to the teachers

Name of school:.....

Total of years involved in the teaching of English: 1-2 years.....; 3-5 years.....;

6-10 years.....; more than 11 years

Institution(s) where you were trained as a teacher. University.....;

Teacher training College.....; Level of training:

Diploma/Degree:..... Years of training: 1-3 years.....; 4 and more years.....

1. Do you regard reading with comprehension as a problem among the Grade 7-learners who take English as a Second language? What are the specific problems you found?
2. In your opinion, what factors contribute to reading comprehension difficulties of the grade 7- learners?
3. In your view what are the important aspects that a child should be aware of while reading a text?
4. A learner has difficulties to understand text. How can you assist him/ her step by step to increase his/her comprehension of the text?
5. In your opinion, what is the difference between persons with good comprehension and persons with poor comprehension?
6. What reading comprehension strategies were you taught during your studies as a student- teacher?
7. Do you think you have received sufficient training in reading comprehension strategies: (a) through your studies at institutions of higher learning? (b)Through in-service training?

8. When you complete lesson preparation forms do you specifically include the teaching of reading comprehension strategies that you intend to use during the lesson? Will you be able to provide me with copies of those preparation forms?
9. More or less how much time do you allocate specifically to the **teaching / instruction** of reading comprehension strategies during your English periods?
10. In case you do not explicitly teach reading comprehension strategies by allocating time to it or planning for it, what prevent you from doing so?
11. Apart from written reading comprehension exercises, what other activities do you do with learners to improve their reading comprehension abilities?
12. What are your needs regarding the teaching of reading comprehension strategies?
13. Do you make use of peer teaching to improve reading comprehension among learners? If yes, please explain how you go about to organise this.
14. From your experience, what really help learners with reading comprehension difficulties to understand text better

Appendix B

Set 2: Interview questions on reading comprehension strategies to teachers

1. Briefly explain how you understand each of the following reading comprehension strategies or aspects that are part of a reading comprehension strategy
 - a) Monitoring of own comprehension while reading
 - b) Semantic and Graphic organizers
 - c) Answering questions
 - d) Generating questions
 - e) Recognizing story structures
 - f) Summarizing
 - g) Finding main ideas
 - h) Drawing inferences and anticipating events
 - i) Ability to make elaborations
 - j) Ability to identify genres
 - k) Think aloud
 - l) Preview
 - m) Modelling a strategy
 - n) Visualizing a text

2. To what extent do you teach each one of them?

	Comprehension strategies	very little	little	some what	much	very much
A	Monitoring of own comprehension					
B	Graphic and semantic organizers					
C	Answering questions					
D	Generating questions					
E	Recognizing story structures					
F	Summarizing					
G	Finding main ideas					
H	Drawing inferences and anticipating events					
I	Ability to make elaborations					
J	Ability to identify genres					
K	Think aloud					
L	Preview					
M	Modelling a strategy					
N	Visualizing a text					

3. What learning support/ advise do you give to learners when they experience difficulties with the following while reading a text:

- a) Do not know a word in the text
- b) Do not know how one sentence or paragraph connect to the others
- c) Do not get the gist of a text
- d) Do not know how to deal with a lot of information in a text

4. Would you like to add some additional points regarding the specific difficulties learners have in reading comprehension (as was asked in question 1 of the first interview)

5. Do you use your own strategies, which were not mentioned in the interview, to help learners to comprehend text more easily? Please explain.

Appendix C

Questions to learners on reading comprehension strategies

1. If you look at the name of the passage, what comes to your mind? Does your teacher sometimes do an activity like that with you?
2. You have read the passage now. Was there anything that you did not understand? What can you do about it?
3. Answer questions from the passage.
4. Draw up two of your own questions. Do you sometimes do it in your English class?
5. (a) Who are the characters? (b) What is the event? Where is the story taking place?
6. Please write a summary of the passage.
7. What is the story about?
8. What do you think will happen in the future?
9. Please elaborate on this sentence in the passage.
10. What type of story is this?
11. What picture do you see in your mind now that you have read this passage?
12. What else did you do to make this passage easier for yourself to understand?

Appendix D

Questions to lecturer at UNAM and to the English Subject Adviser at the Khomas Region

1. How important do you rate the instruction that should be given to (student) teachers in Teaching Methods of English regarding reading with comprehension?
Please motivate your answer
2. (a) What do you regard as essential information and skills that (student) teachers must be equipped with in order to ensure that they will be able to teach learners how to read with comprehension?

(b) Do you think (student) teachers are equipped with this information and these skills that you have mentioned once they have completed their studies in Teaching Methods of English?

(b) Are all these skills and information included in the training currently? If not, what is missing?

(c) How much time is currently allocated to the instruction in reading comprehension/ reading with comprehension?
3. Do you think reading with comprehension is a problem at school level? Please motivate
4. Do you think (student) teachers are sufficiently equipped to address the needs of learners who have difficulties to read with understanding? If the answer is “no”, what can be done about it?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Orientation of the study

Reading is the focus in education; in fact it is the very process whereby a person learns at school. Reading is often thought of as “hierarchy of skills from processing of individual letters and their associated sounds to word recognition to text-processing competencies” (Pressley, 1999, p. 2). A person should know how to read before ¹he/she can understand what he/she is reading. Understanding, however, does not come automatically – some learners do not comprehend text although they have adequate word reading skills (Tong, Deacon, Cain, Kirby & Parrila, 2011). Comprehension of what you are reading is critical for modern life; “success in education, productivity in society and almost all forms of employment require rapid and thorough assimilation of information from text.” (Hogan, Bridges, Justice & Cain, 2011, p. 1), so all avenues should be explored to ensure that teachers and learners are adequately equipped to address the challenging task of making meaning out of a written text.

Reading is a two-level process. One level is made up of foundational skills, such as word recognition and decoding, fluency and vocabulary knowledge. The other level is made up of higher order reading processes, for example the procedures the reader uses to make meaning out of what he is reading, how he connects his existing

¹¹ He/she is used interchangeably in this document and refer to both genders

knowledge with new information and how he interprets what the author is communicating to him (Lehr & Osborn, 2005). Hogan, et al. (2011) mentioned language skills such as inferencing, comprehension monitoring and use of text structure knowledge that impacted on text comprehension. While the reader is reading, she has to think in such a way that she can make meaningful connections between the text, between parts of the text for example to see relationships, her background knowledge and her thinking processes. If a person is able to find and make these connections and she identifies the meaning or the message of the text one can say she reads with understanding. One can draw a conclusion that if a reader fails to make these connections and fail to see these relationships, she does not fully understand what the text is about. This person might end up feeling frustrated, discouraged and helpless. Pennington (2009, p. 3) summarized it as follows: “without reading comprehension, reading is a frustrating and pointless exercise in word calling.”

Lehr and Osborn (2005) pointed out that widely cited definitions of reading comprehension have one core aspect in common, namely to describe it as a way of making meaning from text. The ultimate goal of reading instruction is to ensure that children understand the text that they read fluently (Senechal, Quellette & Rodney, 2006). A major goal of reading comprehension instruction is to help learners develop the knowledge, skills and strategies they must possess to become proficient and independent readers and the teacher plays a significant role in equipping learners with these strategies.

Understanding a text is not always a straight forward process. In fact, the process of comprehending text is described as complex in nature since there are so many factors and processes involved in creating meaning. Some researchers described it as a crafting process (Block, 1999), a language- cognitive process (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2005), multi-dimensional process (Lehr & Osborn, 2005), a set of interactive processes (Stahl & Hiebert, 2005). It simply means that a variety of factors are influencing reading comprehension for example automated basic skills, such as decoding, vocabulary knowledge of the reader, the reading context, the motivation level of the reader, the background knowledge of the reader, the reader's interest in the topic, the reader's ability to apply strategies when he does not understand a text or part of it. All of these factors should be considered when providing reading comprehension instruction. Fortunately, strategies have being developed that can assist the person who have difficulties to read with understanding.

If one departs from this notion that reading comprehension is a higher level language process and that it is the core of reading, one would assume that deliberate actions will be taken in classrooms to ensure that learners are provided with the necessary tools to read with understanding. Hagaman and Reid (2008) mentioned studies which demonstrated that learners understanding of text can be enhanced through explicit instruction in comprehension skills. The problem, however, is that in spite of the results of the studies, very little time is spent on teaching reading comprehension. Research studies both decades ago by Durkin (Oakly, 2011) and recently by Pressley and others (Lehr & Osborn, 2005), found that comprehension was rarely taught explicitly, if at all, in classrooms. Pressley (1999, 95) also pointed out that little

instruction is occurring in the classroom and that “most teachers seem to operate by the theory that learners can learn how to comprehend simply by doing massive reading.” A study in the United Kingdom (Harrison, 2004) found that most effective schools taught comprehension through other subjects, usually in the humanities. In the ineffective schools, it was taught less frequently as a specific set of skills and in some lessons, teachers used written comprehension exercises simply as a time filler. Learners will not develop automatically all these strategies unless they are deliberately and explicitly taught. Explicit instruction means a systematic, structured and direct approach of teaching (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

In the light of the contrast of what is reported of the situation in the classroom, the question that arises is, if there is such overwhelming evidence that the instruction of reading comprehension strategies have such positive consequences, why are they not deliberately and intentionally taught in those classrooms mentioned in the studies? The follow-up question is, can this also be the case in classrooms in Namibia that instruction in reading comprehension is not explicitly taught? The main question, however, is whether teachers are aware of these strategies in order to teach them to learners? Fact is one cannot give what you do not have. This study seeks to find answers, among other, to these questions.

The observations that were done in the Namibian context identified reading with comprehension as a matter of concern. Firstly, for many consecutive years the Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) Reports on the Examinations (Ministry of Education, Namibia: 2007; 2008; 2009a) stated that “candidates do not know how to read with understanding.” Secondly, Policy suggestion 20 in the SACMEQ III Report (2011, p.

131) reads as follows: “NIED and Regional Directors should further investigate the reasons for the low reading comprehension among learners and help both teachers and their learners to overcome this deficiency in order to bring these learners to at least the advance reading level.” Thirdly, in a study that was done by (Imene & Van Graan, 1999), they found that the reading observed in the majority of classes in their study “was mechanical verbalising of the words, without establishing understanding of the meaning or context of the text.”

A crucial aspect to mention is that the way in which recommendations are made in some reports, for example JSC, Report on Examination (Ministry of Education, 2010) regarding the improvement of reading comprehension, gives the impression that teachers have the necessary information, training and skills to support learners who need to improve on their ability to comprehend text. Reports on the examinations (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2008, 2009a) year after year make the same recommendation on what teachers should do to improve reading comprehension and it reads as follows: “teachers need to teach candidates to skim and scan while reading.” Apart from the fact that they assume teachers will know how to teach these strategies, their suggestions are also very limited in the light of the many other strategies that research found to be very effective; in fact, skimming and scanning do not appear on the list of reading comprehension strategies that were found to increase the comprehension of a passage. This can be a dangerous assumption in the Namibian context if it is taken for granted that teachers will know how to instruct reading comprehension strategies and support learners with reading comprehension difficulties. It is thus important to do a study to find out which

strategies teachers are using, whether they are using a range and combination of strategies and whether they equip learners with those strategies that were identified by researchers as improving reading comprehension.

The recommendations that are made in these reports regarding the improvement of reading comprehension lay the responsibility to equip learners with the necessary skills, at the door of various stakeholders, such as the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED), the Regional Directors of Education and the teachers. Documents that are developed by the Ministry of Education (MoE), namely the Syllabus for English Second Language in the Upper Primary Phase (Ministry of Education, Namibia, 2006) which prescribe all the teaching and learning content, and the Learning Support Manual (MoE, NIED, 2009a) that provides teachers with additional information on how to support learners with various learning difficulties, are not very explicit on the teaching of reading comprehension strategies. One can see it as a form of mismatch of what the reports are suggesting and what information is channelled through to the teachers and this factor is identified as a gap in the Namibian education system.

Almasi and Hart (2011) mentioned that teachers often perform strategies, but do not teach learners how to use these strategies independently. The teacher set the purpose for reading rather than teaching the learner how, when and why they should set their own goals for reading. This results in learners not actively engaged in the decision making process regarding the usage of reading comprehension strategy. Smit (2007/2008, p. 7) made the following comment: “due to the way in which Namibian students were taught at school, they remain dependent learners, even at tertiary

level.” She further comments that learners come from a school background which does not encourage self-direction and introspection or independence of mind. The connection of this statement to reading comprehension strategies is that, if learners are taught reading comprehension strategies, it will contribute to making them more independent in their cognitive processes.

Pennington (2009) stated that teachers struggle with how to teach reading comprehension and Hagaman and Reid (2008) wrote that many teachers have not been trained in strategy instruction. He further mentioned that only if teachers can teach a strategy effectively, that learners with learning difficulties will get maximum benefit from these strategies. It is a matter of concern if teachers were not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to instruct their learners in reading comprehension strategies. Pressley and Hilden (2005, p. 308) are recommending that, since very little comprehension instruction is occurring in the elementary grades, “professional development geared towards increasing comprehension instruction should become a paramount target of reading researchers.” A gap that was identified in the Imene and Van Graan study (1999) is the fact that they have identified that learners are reading without making an effort to understand what they are reading, but they do not make specific recommendations regarding areas in literacy skills that need attention, such as ensuring that student-teachers should be equipped with specific, evidence based strategies that will increase literacy.

The processes underlying reading comprehension cannot be seen on paper, they are cognitive processes. Teachers should thus be aware of ways to get a bit of access to the thinking and reasoning processes of a learner. A research study done in Australia

(Oakley, 2011, p. 285) found that 44% of teachers did not feel confident to assess Reading Comprehension Cognitive Strategies (RCCS). That study also pointed out that teachers, “who graduated more than ten years ago appear to require some professional learning opportunities” to increase the range of RCCS being taught by all teachers. Could this also be the case in the Namibian context that teachers might need more training? This is what this study wants to establish.

If one considers the shortcomings suggested by researchers else where, namely (a) a lack of reading comprehension among learners, (b) the lack of explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies in the classroom, (c) teachers who might not be aware of a range of reading comprehension strategies and how to teach them, (d) teachers who might not yet understand the value of reading comprehension strategies, (e) the gap between research and what is being practised in the classroom. One can ask yourself whether this could be the case Namibia?

1.2 Statement of the problem

Reading with comprehension was identified as a matter of concern in Namibia. Learners, however, will not learn to read with understanding unless they are explicitly taught by their teachers on how to apply reading comprehension strategies.

Presently it is unclear whether teachers are well acquainted with a range of reading comprehension strategies, whether they are explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies and whether they are trained in these strategies. Furthermore, little is known about learners’ application of reading comprehension strategies and what strategies they are aware of.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The overall aim of this study was to identify what strategies teachers are using to teach learners who are struggling to comprehend text and to find out whether grade 7- English teachers in the Khomas Region are aware of reading comprehension strategies as identified by researchers as proven to increase reading comprehension.

The specific objectives are:

1. To determine teachers' knowledge of reading comprehension strategies supported by evidence based research studies.
2. To determine which reading comprehension strategies grade 7 learners know and use when doing reading comprehension activities.
3. To compare the knowledge and implementation of reading comprehension strategies for both teachers and learners at schools.

1.4 Significance of the study

Some evidence suggested that teachers do not have sufficient knowledge on reading comprehension strategies, and if this is the case in selected schools in the Khomas region, they could be made aware of the skills they still need to gain in order to support their learners more effectively. The findings can also be shared with the institutions responsible for the training of teachers as well as to bring it to the attention of various stakeholders in the Ministry of Education in the hope that they will attend to the recommendations. In such a way the gaps in knowledge and skills can be bridged and this may positively impact on education in Namibia as well as to

help the country in reaching her national goals such as Vision 2030, Education for All. Furthermore, since it seems that the teaching of reading comprehension strategies is not explicitly taught during teachers' training or specified in the syllabi, it could be brought to the attention of the relevant authorities for possible inclusion in future. Several studies pointed out that little research was done in reading comprehension and that most studies in reading focused only on the basic skills (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs & Barnes, 2007; Hagaman and Reid, 2008; Klingner, Vaughn, Arguelles, Hughes & Leftwich, 2004). The researcher wishes to contribute in this study towards information on higher level reading skills, specifically in the Namibian context.

1.5 Limitations of the study

The study was conducted only in six primary schools in Windhoek in the Khomas Region of Namibia: the three top performing schools and the three lowest performing schools were selected according to the 2010 Khomas Region NSAT internal ranking list (Ministry of Education, Khomas Region, 2011) in which grade 7- learners participated. However, since two of the three lowest performing schools were situated outside of Windhoek it was impossible to include them due to logistical constraints such as a lack of transport and limited financial resources. The next three lowest performing schools in Windhoek were thus included in the study. Another constraint was that the teachers forgot what reading comprehension strategies they were taught during their teacher training. The researcher tried to mitigate this limitation by asking some probing questions when it seemed they have forgotten what they were taught during their training.

Reading comprehension is not the concern of language teachers only. In fact, all teachers are responsible of teaching learners reading comprehension strategies, but this study has focused only on the English Second Language teachers. Furthermore, the reading comprehension strategies that apply to expository text were not studied in depth since teachers of content subjects were not included in the study. Berkeley, Marshak, Mastropieri and Scruggs (2011) mentioned that English teachers mostly focus on narrative text, but that content subjects, such as those for social studies, required more from learners on how to read expository text.

Due to the small sample size of the study the findings cannot be generalized to the whole population. Nevertheless valuable information of a qualitative nature was generated through the study.

To summarise, this chapter explained why reading comprehension is regarded as a matter of concern and why research is needed in this area. The problem of the study was stated as well as the objectives of the study. The significance of the study was explained as well as the limitations that were experienced. In chapter 2, the researcher will look at what different authors write about different reading comprehension strategies. Two theories will be used as the departure point for the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter the researcher will first outline the theoretical framework that forms the basis of this study. Secondly, reading comprehension will be defined and various reading comprehension strategies will be discussed. This is followed by a discussion on a selection of factors that restrict reading comprehension. Next the researcher elaborated on explicit instruction in reading comprehension. Lastly, the researcher focused on reading comprehension in the Namibian context.

Note: In this study gender terms will be used interchangeably and one gender presupposes the other.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study was informed by The Social Constructivist Theory, specifically by the ideas of Lev Vygotsky and the Social Cognitive Theory of learning. Basic ideas in both of these theories will be linked to the reading comprehension strategies identified. Central themes in both theories are the following: (1) people learn from their social environment, (2) the social environment influences cognition through its tools such as language and private speech, and (3) learning from others via modelling is highly recommended for instructional purposes. The link between these theories and reading comprehension strategies are the fact that reading comprehension is a cognitive process which takes place in the mind and it becomes overt when a person speaks about his thought processes. Lastly, a learner will not automatically be skilled

in all these strategies unless others, such as teachers and more capable peers show these skills to him.

2.1.1 The Social Constructivist Theory, with the focus on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Constructivists' central idea is that human learning is constructed (Hoover, 1996). They believe that people are active learners and must construct knowledge for themselves. Furthermore, new knowledge is build upon the current knowledge that a person has. For example, when a person reads, he can build a mental picture for himself of the scene that the author describes, for example that of a person staring over the ocean. Visual images in the reader's mind of the ocean immediately come forth, since his background knowledge is activated and he draws on the schema that he has regarding people at the ocean. The teacher can use the schema that the learner already has to help him to understand text better and also ask the learner to visualize. It is important that the teacher must engage learners in learning that will bring their current understanding to the foreground. They can check whether there are inconsistencies between the knowledge they have and the new incoming information while reading. They can try to see what causes any discrepancy and this understanding can help them to create new knowledge. A way of monitoring whether the new knowledge fits into your existing knowledge is through the use of a reading comprehension strategies such as "*preview*", for example to talk about a text even before it is read to give the learner the opportunity to tell about his assumptions and background on the topic or title of a text or to stop in the middle of the text and *predict* what will happen next. Vocabulary is an important part of reading

comprehension and by showing learners ways of using their existing knowledge of a word to read unfamiliar words can enhance their understanding.

The Constructivist theory further highlights the interaction of persons and situations in the acquisition and refinement of skills and knowledge. Vygotsky (Schunk, 2009, 243) stressed that “interaction with other people in the environment stimulates developmental processes and foster cognitive growth.” Apprenticeship is an example of how a more knowledgeable person shares his/her experiences and expertise with someone less experienced. For Vygotsky cognitive development is the result of the individual’s social interaction with the environment (Dixon-Krauss, 1996). As we speak with others, we come to know ourselves and the use of language gives us control over our mental behaviour. Vygotsky made a distinction between lower, natural behaviour and higher, cultural mental behaviour. Natural behaviour is what human beings share with animals such as elementary perception, memory and attention. Higher forms of human mental functions, such as logical memory, selective attention, decision making and comprehension of language, are products of mediated activity. The mediators are psychological tools or signs and a sign can be something such as a formula that you write down to remember the content of work that you have studied and this formula increases your natural ability to remember. By making this formula, and in such a way increasing your ability to remember, you have moved to a higher cultural form unique to humans. Vygotsky called this process semiotic mediation.

The implication for instruction in the classroom is that the teacher should provide opportunities for learners to communicate with others to develop their cognitive

abilities and the teachers should provide instruction that will move the learner to “higher forms of mental functions.” The constructivist teacher should create a context for learning in which learners can become engaged in interesting activities that encourages and facilitates learning, for example, if a learner has never been to the ocean, the teacher can encourage activities that help in the construction process, for example by inviting learners to talk in groups about their experiences at and with the ocean, smell salt water, look at pictures or at sea shells. These experiences should challenge their thinking and force them to look with new eyes at their beliefs. The reading comprehension strategies that can be applied here is for example to *generate questions* about a topic, such as how the resources in the ocean can move Namibia toward economic independence. Somebody might say something that will bring new insight to someone else’s understanding of this phenomenon.

The learner should be moved from concrete thinking to abstract thinking. Vygotsky (Dixon-Krauss, 1996) explained that there are four stages of concept development, namely spontaneous concepts, concrete concepts, potential concepts and scientific concepts. Scientific concepts are abstract and systematized knowledge that learners learn in school. In the transition from thinking in spontaneous concepts to scientific concepts, the teacher and the classmates play a vital role, because as they interact, the learner’s higher thinking abilities are developed. An example of how a teacher can develop learners’ thinking abilities is when the teacher teaches about shapes such as a triangle and mention that the word “tri” means three and allows the learners to discover together that there are other words with “tri,” such as tricycle, triplets, she opens up new pathways for future learning. The learner needs these higher thinking

abilities in order to comprehend text, because all the interpretations, knowledge of words and word meanings, and so on, are indeed higher thinking processes. Clearly, if a learner does not understand a key word in a passage or does not know what to do to access the meaning of that word, she might miss the message of that text. The Social Constructivist theory emphasizes the learner's active participation in this meaning making process rather than passive acquisition of these skills. The teacher has the role as a mediator in this whole process.

The role of the "more knowledgeable other" in the development of the learner is also a central theme in Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory. The more knowledgeable other could be adults or more capable peers. Vygotsky has developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is described as the area between a learner's present actual level of functioning (what the learner does on his own without help or support) and his potential performance level (the level in which the learner can perform with help and guidance). The implication of the existence of such a level raises the following issues, namely that the teacher should observe what the learner is currently doing and work on a plan of action to set a more challenging goal for the learner and provide him with the necessary skills that will enable him to be successful in achieving that goal.

In the ZPD, a teacher and a learner work together on a task that a learner could not perform on his own. The teacher or a more capable peer will share their skills and knowledge with this learner to help him understand it and do it on his own. For example if a learner has difficulties to read with understanding, the teacher could teach and model reading comprehension strategies such as how to make and use a

graphic or semantic organizer, for example if a learner learns about semi- precious stones this strategy can enable the learner to categorize, sort and view, and through this method have instant access to information on this topic. The learner constructs his own understanding as he reasons how to compile the graph or map that he wants to use. By showing the learner how to make that graphic or semantic organizer, the teacher builds a scaffold for the learner.

The concept “scaffolding” refers to the personal guidance, assistance and support that a teacher or more capable peer provide to a learner that will enable him to understand the work that he currently has difficulties with (Ellis & Larkin, 1998). The teacher’s instructional role is the key to learners learning, because just as builders erect a scaffold before they start to build, the teacher should erect a scaffold for the learner so that the learner can move to the next more advanced level. Dixon-Krauss (1996, p. 61) is of the opinion that “instruction must proceed ahead of development, much as a scaffold precedes the building of the house, providing temporary and adjustable support.” The provision of reading comprehension strategies can be described as scaffolds that the learner can use to read with better understanding. If these scaffolds are not erected, thus not provided to the learner, he cannot move to the next level. Furthermore, scaffolds are removed when a building can stand on its own. In the classroom it means that a strategy can be practiced again and again until the learner can do it independently, or for more at risk learners it can provide them with additional support that they can always return to and that can help them to operate more independently. Instructional scaffolding means that the teacher controls certain parts of a task that is beyond a learner’s capabilities so that he can

focus his attention on a specific task that he attempts to master. Hoover (1996) said that if new knowledge is to be actively built, then time is needed to build it.

It is not just the teacher, but also the more capable peer that is specifically mentioned in Vygotsky's theory. Dixon-Krauss (1996) explains that peer tutoring should be planned in such a way that both learners – the one who needs assistance and the one who is capable of providing the assistance – should learn from the process. She mentioned that social interaction does not always lead to cognitive growth and that learners must have the cognitive skills required to be successful in a particular activity. The implication is that one cannot assume that, for example, when learners do pair reading that the stronger reader will automatically know how to help the weaker one; the teacher should provide guidelines that will structure the process and set goals that can be evaluated later on.

Gindis (1998) wrote that the value of Vygotsky's work is the fact that he discovered the connecting link between cultural processes taking place in society and mental processes taking place in the individual. Language is the connecting point. Dixon-Krauss (1996) explained that the primary function of language is social communication. She further elaborated that a mediation model was developed on Vygotsky's ideas on language development and learning within the ZPD. The model has three components, namely purpose, strategy and reflection. In linking these components to reading comprehension strategies the following actions can be taken: the purpose depends on an analysis of characteristics that both the text and the reader bring to the activity. On ground of this analysis, the strategy is developed to help the learner to understand the text better. The reflection afterwards is to see whether the

learner comprehended the text. The teacher is continuously analysing how the learner thinks, what strategies he is using and on ground of this analysis, decide what type of support to provide further. For example, if the teacher observed that the learner has difficulty to interpret the questions, he should provide instruction that will help him to understand or read questions better. By doing this the teacher build a scaffold for the learner that will move him to a higher level.

Dixon-Krauss (1996) suggested three strategies for mediating concept development, namely: classification strategies, monitoring strategies, readers' response strategies. Classification strategies are designed to increase learners' vocabulary knowledge by reorganizing concepts they already know to include new concepts, ideas and information such as graphic organizers. Graphic organizers are visual diagrams that are often used to show the relationships among concepts and it was also identified by researchers as one of the highly effective reading comprehension strategies (Adler, 2001). It can be used in pre-reading and post reading activities. (More examples of graphic organizers will be provided when the identified strategies are discussed in more detail).

Monitoring strategies are designed to make readers actively think about the text information and to control their reading behaviour. Prediction is pointed out as the most common monitoring strategy and is specifically mentioned to help to develop readers' knowledge of story structural elements. The recognition of story structural elements was also identified as one of the most effective reading comprehension strategies. Prediction strategies can be used to determine a learner's existing knowledge on a topic, help him to set a purpose for reading and afterwards to reflect

on what he has learned. The K-W-L model is mentioned as an example that the teacher can use. The K stands for what you KNOW; the W for what you WANT to know and the L stands for what you LEARNED.

When using reader response strategies the learners can, for example, read an article and tell, write, draw or dramatize how they understand it. In such a way they give their unique interpretation to that article.

Dixon-Krauss (1996) explained that reciprocal teaching also reflects Vygotsky's ideas. Reciprocal teaching involves an interactive dialogue between a teacher and a small group of learners. Initially the teacher models activities, after which the teacher and learners take turns to lead discussions. If learners are learning for example about *story structures* during reading comprehension, the teacher will explain and demonstrate the strategy to the group and they will practice and discuss it, for example every learner gets a chance to speak about a different event in the story. There are both social interaction and scaffolding involved in this process. The peers are working together and they learn from one another. Reciprocal teaching is discussed in more details later in this chapter as a multiple strategy under the reading comprehension strategies.

In the Vygotskian view, self-regulation includes the coordination of mental processes such as memory, planning and evaluation. Self-regulation means to deliberately control ones actions; the individual monitor, direct and regulate actions toward goals. When Vygotsky used the term higher mental functions "he meant a consciously directed thought process." In this sense, self-regulation may be thought of as a higher mental function (Schunk, 2009, p. 262). The link to reading comprehension strategies

is that learners can learn how to *monitor their comprehension* while reading, for example he can stop and say “I don’t understand paragraph two, I need to reread it.” If the learner does something like that, he has internalized the strategy and it has become part of his self-regulatory processes. Vygotsky’s concept of internalization (Dixon-Krauss, 1996) refers to the transfer of knowledge from the social environment until it becomes part of the learner. The teacher can model the process, the learner observes and then he does it on his own.

Wilhelm, Baker and Dube (2001) are of the opinion that learners’ progress better when teachers’ model strategies and when the learners try to do the task in the same way the teacher did it. They wrote that support in the form of explicit teaching should occur over time till the learner can execute the task on his own. According to them, Vygotsky argued that “anything learned must be actively taught.”

2.1.2 The Social Cognitive Theory and its linkage to reading comprehension

According to Schunk (2009), the Social Cognitive Theory stresses the idea that much human learning occurs in a social environment. By observing others, people acquire knowledge, strategies, skills, beliefs and attitudes. Individuals learn from others the usefulness and appropriateness of behaviour and the consequences of modelled behaviour.

Cognitive theories place great emphasis on the learners’ information processing as a central cause of learning (Schunk, 2009). Almost all the reading comprehension strategies supported by research, for example, monitoring of comprehension and

graphic and semantic organizers are examples of how humans process information to make it meaningful. They emphasize the transformation and flow of information through the cognitive system. Lehr and Osborn (2005) explained that cognition refers to mental functions such as remembering, focusing attention and processing information. Schunk explained that a person learns these mental functions through some of the following ways: reciprocal interaction, modelling, drawing on your schema, mental imagery and metacognition. More information on reciprocal teaching, metacognition, activation of background knowledge and mental imagery are provided under the reading comprehension strategies. Modelling is explained under explicit instruction. If a teacher shows a learner how to process information while he is reading, through the application of reading comprehension strategies, the difficult task of reading becomes much easier. We do not know if teachers in the Khomas region have this knowledge and hence this study.

Knuth and Jones (as cited in Idol, 2010) also referred to the above mentioned cognitive functions which were included in a reading programme called: Reading Success Programme. They added the connection between reading and writing – they pointed out that reading and writing are integrally related since they have many characteristics in common. Lerner (2000, p. 443) supported this relationship between reading and writing since she talked about the “writing connection in the integrated language system,” which points to the fact that the processes used in speaking, reading and writing have many similarities. If you work in one area, you improve in the other. They can also be used to enhance each other, for example, by making notes while you read, you can improve your comprehension of the text. If a learner makes

notes while reading a complex research article, he might understand it better and if he studies how experienced researchers write articles, it might improve his writing abilities.

2.2 Defining reading comprehension

Lehr and Osborn (2005) pointed out that widely cited definitions of reading comprehension have one core aspect in common, namely to describe it as a way of making meaning from text. Various definitions also focus on the complexity of reading comprehension, since so many factors should be considered. The interrelatedness of the text, the reader and the context in which the reading occurs, make it a “multi-dimensional process” (Lehr & Osborn, 2005, p. 6).

According to Schunk (2009) comprehension involves attaching meaning to printed information and using the information for a particular purpose. He further explained that comprehension has three major components: perception, parsing and utilization. Perception involves attending to and recognizing an input. Parsing means to attach meaning to the printed word and to use it for specific purposes (utilization). There are different levels of comprehension: the basic level and more advanced level. The basic level is the understanding of a meaning of a word. On the more advanced level, the reader, amongst others, draws inferences, finds main ideas, anticipates how ideas will unfold, elaborates and evaluates.

2.3 Reading comprehension strategies

The National Reading Panel (Lehr & Osborn, 2005, p. 5) defined comprehension strategies as “specific cognitive processes that guide readers to become aware of how well they are comprehending as they read and write.” Afflerbach, Pearson and Paris (as cited in Almasi & Hart, 2011, p. 252) describe reading comprehension strategies as “deliberate, goal oriented attempts to control and modify the reader’s efforts to decode text, understand words and construct meaning of the text.” Almasi and Hart (2011, p, 252) describes strategies as “actions that are selected deliberately by an individual to attain a goal.” The implication of these definitions is that deliberate actions should be taken if a person wishes to understand text better.

Irvin, Meltzer and Dukes (2007, p. 59) explained that good readers take certain actions that help them in comprehending text better, such as plan for the demand of different kind of text, make connections with prior knowledge, evaluate understanding of ideas in the text, make inferences, visualize, ask questions, determine what is important, generate questions about the text, decipher the meaning of unknown words, organize knowledge and create connections between reading and writing. By studying all the actions taken by good readers, one becomes aware of the fact that they are using reading comprehension strategies all the time. The problem comes in when the person was never been told how these actions should be put into practice.

A number of reading comprehension strategies have been identified by studies as being effective. Adler (2001, p. 1) identified the following seven strategies as having

a “firm scientific basis for improving text comprehension”: (a) monitoring comprehension, (b) metacognition, (c) graphic and semantic organizers, (d) answering questions, (e) generating questions, (f) recognizing story structures and (g) summarizing. Each of these strategies will be explained in detail and how it should be taught in the classroom.

2.3.1 Monitoring comprehension and metacognition

Monitoring comprehension refers to a readers’ thinking about their comprehension processes as they read and it is a form of metacognition. Adler (2001, p. 2) wrote that metacognition is defined as “thinking about thinking.” Readers who are good at monitoring their comprehension know when they understand a text and when they do not understand what they are reading. The processes of thinking and monitoring cannot be separated. Due to the similarities between monitoring comprehension and metacognition, the two strategies will be discussed together. Almasi and Hart (2011) explained that learners are able to influence and make decisions about the reading process when they are able to evaluate their progress to determine whether their reading is successful or unsuccessful and make the necessary adjustments as needed in order to reach their goal. Comprehension monitoring instruction teaches learners to be aware of what they understand while reading, identify what they do not understand and use appropriate “fix-up” (Lehr & Osborn 2005, p. 18) strategies to solve the problems when they do not understand something they read. Among these “fix-up” strategies that learners learn are to point out where in the text the difficulty occurs, for example the learner can say to himself: “I do not know this word and consequently do not understand the paragraph.” A learner can try to find a synonym

for a difficult word and see if he understands the sentences better. He can also look back and forth in the book to understand a character's behaviour.

Teachers can teach learners to speak about their thinking and show them how to think aloud. The teacher should model to the learner how to do it by saying aloud those thinking processes she is using while reading, for example: "I did not understand this sentence, let me read it again and slower this time." This strategy can also be used for example when a learner arrived at the meaning of a word and the teacher asks him: "How did you think to get to that conclusion?"

The thinking processes that form the basis for reading comprehension are hidden processes. Ellis and Larkin (1998) explained that these covert processes such as visual imagery, relating new information to existing knowledge, and metacognitive strategies such as self-monitoring can be made more visible, for example through modelling how to think aloud and this increases the effectiveness of instruction.

2.3.2 Graphic and semantic organizers

Graphic and semantic organizers are visual diagrams that show relationships among concepts (Dixon-Krauss, 1996; Adler, 2001). It allows readers to organize the meanings and relationships of the ideas in a text. They may come in many forms such as maps, graphs, charts, frames, webs and clusters. The main value of these organizers to comprehension appears to be their ability to improve a reader's memory of the content of what they read (Lehr & Osborn, 2005). It also reduces the cognitive demands on the learner since he does not have to process so much information to understand it. Before the information is put into boxes, learners have

to engage in higher order thinking skills about the organization of the information, selecting the essential information, consolidate information and make decisions about the best way to structure the information. Semantic and graphic organizers can be used before, during and after a text is read. An example of a graphic organiser is “K-W-L. The acronym K-W-L” represents words for phases of an instructional strategy aiming to activate prior knowledge and to link existing knowledge and new information when reading. This teaching model develops active reading by involving readers in three steps; the first two are undertaken before reading and the third one after the reading. The three steps are as follows: Firstly, the reader can write down what she *knows* about a specific topic. Secondly, she can write what she *wants* to know about that topic and lastly, she can write what she has *learned* about the topic after she has read the book or article.

2.3.3 Answering questions

When it is required from learners to answer questions it gives them a purpose for reading and to focus their attention. Question answering instruction can help learners to get more from their reading by showing them how to find and use information from a text to answer questions. Teachers can also help learners to locate information in a text that is related to the question (Lehr & Osborn, 2005).

There are four different types of questions, namely “right there, think and search, author and you, and on your own” (Adler, 2001, p. 4). There are three levels of questions according to the Costa’s Level of Inquiry (2012): Level 1: text explicit questions, for example: name, list, define and describe; Level 2: text implicit questions where the learner should analyse, compare, group and Level 3: experienced

based questions where the reader should think beyond the text information and evaluate and judge the information in the text. The “right there” questions can be called text explicit questions. The answers to the questions can be found in the text. They are directly stated. One can say this information is on the surface. The learners can go back to the text and show the teacher where they found the answer, for example: In which town did they stay? The answers to text implicit questions can be found in the text too, but they are implied, not directly stated. One can say the information is between the lines or under the surface - these are the think and search type of questions, for example: Why were the people sad? The answering of questions on the text implicit level require from the learner to draw conclusions. The learners can explain to the teacher her reasoning and show the part of the story that supports her ideas. The third level of questions is experienced questions that require information outside of the text, these are “the author and you and on your own” questions. Drawing inferences is required when only a part of the information needed for a response is available in the text. Readers have to fall back on their background knowledge (or schemata) to find additional information and combine it with the information in the text. The learner can explain her interpretations and identify the other sources of information when she has to answer a question such as: Why did the author write this book?

The ability to draw conclusions and to make inferences require interpretive thinking and they are closely related. McCormick (1995, p. 398) stated that “both processes form the basis of, and are interrelated with other higher-level comprehension skills.” She suggested that these skills can be practiced especially during listening

comprehension exercises, since listening comprehension and reading comprehension are related.

In strengthening Costa's Level of Inquiry (2012) levels of questioning, Adler's (2001) recommendation of the Question-Answer Relationship strategy (QAR) will briefly be attended to. Learners are asked to indicate whether the information they used to answer questions about the text was textually explicit information (information that was directly stated in the text), textually implicit information (information that was implied in the text), or information entirely from the student's own background knowledge.

2.3.4 Generating questions

By generating questions themselves, learners learn to ask themselves questions that require them to connect different parts of the text, to think actively about the content and to relate new information to what they already know. Adler (2001) explained that, by generating questions, learners become aware of whether they can answer the questions and, thus, whether they understand what they are reading. As a means of training learners to ask questions, teachers can instruct learners to stop periodically while reading and ask themselves a series of questions for example who, what, when, where, why, how (Schunk, 2009). When a teacher works in the Zone of Proximal Development of the learner, an example of an activity could be that that the teacher wants to teach the learner how to generate questions that are not directly stated in the text. The current level of the learner might be that he only generates questions where the answers could be found directly in the text without much effort from the reader to think about the text.

Visualization, which has to do with the forming of visual images, might encourage learners to come up with more questions on a topic. McCormick (1995) mentioned several studies that have found that when learners do form mental pictures of the messages in the text, both their comprehension and recall are improved. Previewing activities can also be used to teach learners how to generate questions and they might later automatically ask those questions when they pick up any written text, for example: “What do you think will happen in this story when you look at the title?”

2.3.5 Recognising story structures

“Story structure” refers to the way in which an author organizes his or her ideas (Cooper, 1986). A story usually has the following components: characters, setting, a problem and a goal to resolve, events to solve the problem and achievement of the goal. Adler (2001) wrote that learners learn in story structure instruction how to identify these components. McCormick (1995) explained that, by helping learners to see how material is organized by the author into key ideas and supporting statements, familiarity with text structures are promoted. The importance of story structure strategy is to learn different reading strategies for different text types. A story can be narrative, or expository. Narrative text can be true or fictional stories. Narrative text is organized in a sequential pattern of a beginning, middle, and an end. Expository text presents facts and information organized into patterns that show relationships among the ideas presented. According to Cooper (1986), learners usually have more difficulties reading expository text than narratives since they have less experience with them and since expository text do not follow a set pattern like narrative text do.

Adler (2001) mentioned that story maps are often used in the story structure instruction process. McCormick (1995, p. 412) explained that “a story map is a sequential listing of the important elements of a narrative,” for example one can ask yourself: “What is the first scene in the story, what is the problem in that scene, how is it resolved and who are involved?” The reader can draw a graphic organizer to write down what is taking place in the different scenes. McCormick (1995) suggested that teachers use story maps to develop good questions. She suggested that questions on different levels are compiled for each element in the story map. Studies have shown that when questions are systematically focused on central story content, learners show better comprehension.

2.3.6 Summarizing

A summary is “an abridgement expressing the main ideas of a text passage through reported speech” (Newfields, 2001, p. 1). The person who does the summary should take out the main points and report about them. According to Adler (2001) instruction in summarizing contributes to comprehension by helping learners to identify and generate main ideas, connect the main or central idea, eliminate unnecessary information and remember what they have read. McCormick (1995) suggested the following steps that can be followed to teach learners how to make summaries: learners should omit insignificant information and redundant details from the text. They should find the overarching theme and identify the main ideas if it was not done by the author. To teach a person how to find main ideas, usually begins with a single paragraph in which the main idea is explicitly stated. In the second

phase, learners will work with paragraphs in which main ideas are not explicitly presented and they should try to find it.

2.3.7 Combined strategies

One of the latest approaches in the instruction of reading comprehension promotes that reading comprehension strategies should not be taught in isolation, but that they should rather be taught as a *set* of strategies. Almasi and Hart (2011) said that learners should be taught to be strategic - this means learners should be encouraged to make their own decisions about where, when, how and why they should apply a strategy. Learners should thus be taught how to recognise where and when to use a strategy, how to select from a variety of strategies and how to determine whether their choices are helping them to understand the text better.

Many researchers combine different strategies and attention to multiple-strategy instruction is of vital importance in the quest to find practical ways to increase comprehension. Lehr and Osborn (2005) mentioned that an effective strategy based instruction is instruction that teaches learners how to use and integrate multiple strategies flexibly. The following multiple strategy examples will be explained in detail: (a) the “RAP” paraphrasing strategy (Hagaman and Reid, 2008), (b) Reciprocal Teaching (Dixon-Krauss, 1996), (c) Transactional Strategy Instruction Reutzel, 2006) and (d) Collaborative Strategic reading by Klingner and Vaughn (Abidin & Riswanto, 2012). In studying these combinations of strategies it becomes clear, that all the strategies that were mentioned above, appear in one form or the other in the multiple strategies.

“RAP” paraphrasing strategy

Hagaman and Reid (2008) explained that the acronym RAP stands for **Read, Ask, Put**. They further explained the steps that the teacher should follow in teaching the learner to read with understanding. The learner should **read** silently and think about what the words mean. The learner should then **ask** him/herself the following questions: What were the main idea and details in this paragraph? The last step is to **put** the main idea and detail in your own words.

Reciprocal teaching

“Reciprocal” means shared. Dixon-Krauss (1996) explained that reciprocal teaching refers to the conversation between teacher and learner. Reciprocal teaching involves four instructional procedures: the explicit teaching of four strategies namely clarifying, question generation, predicting and summarizing. Learners should practice extensively to apply the strategies to real text. This strategy was designed to help learners to apply multiple strategies in order to gain meaning from a text and to monitor the success of their reading themselves. The teacher should provide the necessary support but release gradually as the learner progresses. The teacher should encourage cooperative learning and peer tutoring.

The procedure begins with the teacher and a group of learners discussing a text. The discussion is structured by the four strategies mentioned above. The teacher models each of these strategies. After the modelling, learners take turns leading the discussion about specific parts of the text. One learner serves as the discussion leader, asking questions about key ideas in the text, and the other learners answer the

questions and ask questions of their own. The discussion leader helps the group clarify difficult words or passages that might hinder comprehension. Next, the leader summarizes the text and predicts what might come next. The process continues for each part of the text, with learners taking turns leading the discussion.

Transactional Strategy Instruction (TSI)

TSI combines a number of strategies and instructional techniques. Reutzel (2006) explained that TSI is an instructional process for learners to use multiple comprehension strategies flexibly and interactively while reading. TSI is transactional in the sense that it concerns the transaction during reading of the reader, the text and the context. TSI includes eight reading comprehension strategies: activating prior knowledge, text structure, predicting, questioning, goal setting, imagery, monitoring and summarizing.

The teacher should explain to the learner what the strategy is about and when he should apply it; the teacher should model the strategy and work together with the learner to apply the strategy. The teacher will initially guide the learners, but gradually release his assistance until the learner can do it on her own.

Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR)

The CSR was found and developed by Klingner and Vaughn in 1987 (Abidin & Riswanto, 2012). It is theoretically grounded in cognitive psychology as well as sociocultural theory (Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed, Stillman-Spisak, 2011). CSR is a comprehension strategy which combines a modification of Reciprocal Teaching (RT) and Cooperative Learning (CL) strategy.

Vaughn, et al. explained further that the concept of this strategy is engaging learners to work in small cooperative groups (3-5) and apply four reading strategies: Preview, Click and Cluck, Get the gist and Wrap Up. *Preview* allows learners to generate interest and activate background knowledge in order to predict what they will learn. There are four activities build into the previewing: first, the teacher introduces the passage topic and pre-teaches any proper nouns or specialized vocabulary that may be difficult for almost all the learners in the classroom. Second, learners brainstorm what they already know about the topic. Third, learners are taught to preview the passage and attend to text features such as headings and graphics to learn as much as possible in a very short period of time. Finally, learners predict what they think they will learn from the passage.

Click and Cluck is a self-monitoring strategy which controls learners' understanding about words, concepts and ideas that they understand or do not understand or need to know more about. This stage is thus designed to help learners identify breakdowns or "clucks" in understanding, write it down and use the following fix-up strategies to find the meaning of a word in its context: (i) reread the sentences without the word and think about what word meaning would make sense, (ii) reread the sentence before and after the clucks, looking for clues to determine the word meaning, (iii) identify key elements in a word (for example prefixes, suffixes, known word parts, and (iv) identify word parts that may aid in the understanding.

To *Get the Gist*: the learners identify the main ideas from reading to confirm their understanding of the information. Learners are taught to write the most important points of a section in their own words. *Wrap-Up* provides learners with the

opportunity to apply metacognitive strategies (plan, monitor and evaluate) for further extended comprehension.

2.4 A selection of factors that restrict reading comprehension

There are many factors that impact on reading comprehension and some will be discussed since they are linked to reading, adolescent literacy (the average age of a grade 7- learner in Namibia is 13-14 years) and the specific environmental factors that impacted on the schools in the study. The acquisition of basic reading skills, word knowledge, background knowledge, motivation, development of a reading culture and socio- economic circumstances will be elaborated upon.

Lehr and Osborn (2005) explained that reading is a two-level process: one level consists of foundational skills, such as word recognition and decoding and the other level is made up of higher order reading processes such as evaluating the information that you are reading. Pressley (2000) pointed out that reading is a hierarchy of skills and that people cannot understand text if they cannot read the words. Hogan, et al. (2011) mentioned that about 10% of learners who can read well have difficulties to understand what they are reading. It is important that teachers should know that it is not only learners with inadequate foundational skills that experience difficulties with understanding of text, but also some of those with good word reading. There are grade 7-learners who cannot read on the level expected for his grade, since Namibia has a policy of automatic promotion after a learner was retained once in a school

phase (grades 1-4; 4-7; 8-10). Pressley (2000) mentioned that “Literacy coaching” is needed with older learners.

Word knowledge was identified by many researchers as having a positive connection with comprehension (Dixon-Krauss, 1996; Fisher, Frey and Ross, 2009). Lehr and Osborn (2005, p. 12) wrote that “the level of difficulty of a text’s vocabulary is a powerful predictor of that text’s comprehensibility.” There are many suggestions of activities that can enhance word knowledge and some of them are as follows: Cunningham (2009) is of the opinion that learners should be taught to find the morphemic link to the meaning, reading and spelling of “big” words. It means that teachers must teach learners that bigger or longer words have parts such as the root, a prefix and a suffix and that they should get into the habit of looking for patterns in words, for example when a word has the prefix “un” it shows to something that is not possible or absent such as unable, uncomfortable, uncontrollable, and so on. Tong, et al. (2011) did a study and found that instructions about morphological forms, particularly derived ones, might be a key to the remediation of reading comprehension difficulties. They also mentioned that educators are less familiar with morphological awareness than with phonological awareness and there is consequently a neglect of attention to instruction in the morphological structure of words.

Dixon- Krauss (1996) mentioned two methods that can be used to teach vocabulary, namely the provision of direct experiences (bring objects related to the theme and allow the learners to label them) and webbing and semantic maps (for example, try to write as many words as possible with the root word “custom”); as the teacher and

learner build the map together, they can discuss the words and how they relate to other words on the map.

Some studies found a link between background knowledge and comprehension, for example, The International Academy of Education (IAE) (2003) wrote that cultural knowledge affects reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is about relating prior knowledge to new knowledge in written text. The more experiences and exposure a learner has, the more his background knowledge will be developed. A learner with more exposure to books and various other media, to listening to stories, to go out to different places, and so on, will have a bigger reservoir of background knowledge to help him in the process of comprehension. There is not much a teacher can do about the knowledge that a learner has gathered over time, but the teacher can encourage them to read a lot to build their general knowledge in such a way.

According to Dunston and Gambrell (2009, p. 270), teachers consider motivating learners as “one of their primary and overriding concerns and that it is at the heart of many pervasive problems they face in education in today’s youth.” They explained that there are two broad categories of reading motivation - the first one has to do with competency and efficacy and the second one is the purpose for reading. This means that teachers should encourage learners to bring or tell about text that are interesting to them – in such a way the learner’s confidence is built since he can show the teacher his abilities in reading. The learner might feel inspired to read more challenging text when the teacher praises him. Furthermore, the teacher should give the learners a “real” purpose for reading, for example to read newspaper articles and to share their opinion on the matter at hand. Dunston and Gambrell also provided the

following reasons why learners must be motivated to read: the more you read, the better you get in reading and the more you have experiences with books and “book language,” the better your chances to achieve academic success. The learner will also be more motivated to read if he is exposed to literature that is of interest to him. Hall (2011) mentioned a study where the teacher inspired learners to read more by providing literacy suitable for young adults.

Ruterana (2012, p. 1) says “the cultivation of a reading culture among the youth boost their academic excellence.” One can conclude that the opposite is also true, namely that the lack of a reading culture among the youth influences their academic performance negatively. He identified a few reasons why people do not read much in Rwanda such as: reliance on verbal communication, limited access to reading materials, education systems that did not and still do not promote a reading culture and short term perceptions of literacy. He suggested a few ideas that can be implemented to enhance a reading culture, for example, start already at nursery schools to develop a love for reading, show people the value of reading.

Socio-economic and socio-cultural factors impact on the academic performance of learners. Gambrell, Malloy and Mazzoni (2011) as well as Aggarwal, Sharma, Steel and Bhilai (2012) mentioned factors such as the living conditions of the learner, the financial status of the parents, the home-learning conditions that might positively or negatively affect the learner. They mentioned that noisy places located near the houses can affect and reduce the concentration of learners. They also mentioned some ideas on how these conditions can be addressed, for example, proactive involvement of parents - they can be invited to witness the learning process in the

classroom, exchange information with the parent and encourage parents to assist learners with their schoolwork.

2.5 Explicit instruction in reading comprehension

Hagaman and Reid (2008) mentioned studies by various researchers which have demonstrated that learners' comprehension can be enhanced through explicit instruction in comprehension skills. Archer and Hughes (2011, p. 1) defined explicit instruction as a "structured, systematic and effective methodology for teaching academic skills." Ellis and Larkin (1998, p. 586) wrote that "explicit instruction means that the teacher ensures that learners are well informed about what is expected, what is being learned, why it is being learned and how it can be used." Archer and Hughes explained that the teacher will initially do most of the work, but as the learner becomes more competent the teacher gradually withdraws and the learner works more and more independently. The teacher is working in the ZPD of the learner since he provides scaffolds and takes them away as the learner progresses. Archer and Hughes explained that scaffolding instruction can be applied by using several elements of explicit instruction, for example the teacher can break down a complex skill into smaller pieces, demonstrate each step and provide a lot of hints and aids to help the learner to remember each step.

Modelling or demonstration of strategies is a key element in explicit instruction, and form an integral part of both the Social Constructivist and Social Cognitive theories, which form the theoretical framework for this study. Shumacher (as cited in Ellis & Larkin, 1998, p. 588) strongly argued that the modelling of important procedures and

processes should be considered the “heart of instruction.” Fischer, et al. (2009) suggested that the teacher must model thinking to give learners the opportunity to witness a skilled reader explaining ways that he or she uses to make meaning from the text. Learners need a number of examples of visualizing, predicting, determining importance, solving unknown words, reading graphs and charts, and so on, if they are ever to incorporate these behaviours into their reading repertoire. Dixon-Krauss (1996) agreed with this notion that teachers’ modelling of strategies is very important.

The implication of the above mentioned explanations to the teaching of reading comprehension strategies is to emphasise that the teacher should be goal oriented, model the strategies to her learners and practise the strategies with them until they can do it independently.

2.6 Reading comprehension in the Namibian context

References to reading comprehension will be highlighted from the following documents in the Namibian education system, namely The English Second Language Syllabus for Grades 5-7 (Ministry of Education, 2006), the English Second Language Teachers’ Guide, Grades 5-7 (Ministry of Education, 2009) and Module 2 of the Teaching Methods of English, Bachelor of Education (Hooi-Narimas, 2000). The first two documents focus on guidelines that teachers should follow in the classroom and the last document focuses on the training of student-teachers at university level.

The English Second Language Syllabus for Grades 5-7 (Ministry of Education, 2006) recognizes “reading and responding” as one of the five essential skills in the

learning content that should be acquired by all learners. The other four skills are (1) listening and responding, (2) grammar and usage, (3) speaking and (4) writing.

The learning objectives in the Syllabus for English Language Education for Grades 5-7 (Ministry of Education, 2006) are the following: (a) develop different skills in reading and understanding a range of authentic and non-authentic text, (b) develop insight in the use of different reading skills, (c) know the didactics of teaching different skills and sub-skills of reading, for example scanning and skimming, inference, and (d) develop skills to respond appropriately to various question types.

The competencies in the various learning objectives that relate to reading comprehension strategies are the following: to identify the main idea of a story, to identify different types of text, to read text to extract specific information, to infer the opinion of a writer, to identify the purpose of a text, to distinguish main points from supporting arguments, to retell a story, to respond to key aspects of text such as the plot and settings, sequence of events, story line and characters.

In the section that focuses on reading in the English Second Language Teachers' Guide, Grades 5-7 (Ministry of Education, 2009) there are referrals to skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive reading, top-down and bottom-up processing, stages of reading (pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading).

Many aspects that are related to the research-based reading comprehension strategies appeared in the syllabus. There is, however, no specific mentioning of aspects such as paraphrasing, summarizing, graphic and semantic organizers, activation of

background knowledge. The competencies identified are thus not covering all aspects that should or could be implemented to help the learner to read with understanding.

At university level, Module 2 of the Teaching Methods of English, Bachelor of Education (Hooi-Narimas, 2000) focuses on the following six components of reading comprehension: (a) automatic recognition skills, (b) vocabulary and structural knowledge, (c) formal discourse structure knowledge, (d) content/world background knowledge (e) synthesis and evaluation skills, (f) metacognitive knowledge and skills monitoring. According to the information in these documents, some reading comprehension strategies are included in the training of the student-teachers. The question is: Are the teachers equipping their learners with these strategies that they were taught?

This chapter focussed on the literature as it relates to this study. In the next chapter the researcher will describe the research methods and procedures that were followed to gather data for the study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used since the researcher wished to gain insight into the knowledge and application of reading comprehension strategies of teachers and learners. The researcher used qualitative methods to “interact extensively and intimately with participants during the study, using time-intensive data collection methods such as interviews” (Gay, Mills, Airasian, 2009).

3.2 Population

The population comprised all grade 7 English Second Language teachers and all grade 7 learners who take English as a Second Language in the Khomas Region. According to the 2011 Regional statistics, this involves 47 government primary schools, approximately 55 English teachers and approximately 4000 grade 7 learners. The reason why the seventh grade was chosen is because it is the last year of the primary school phase and by that time one would expect that learners have some mastery of language comprehension skills. Furthermore, lecturers at the University of Namibia (UNAM) who lectures Teaching Methods of English also formed part of the population. Lastly, the Advisory Teacher for European languages at the Khomas Regional Office was included in the population.

3.3 Sample and sampling procedures

Six primary schools were selected from the ranking list provided by the Khomas Regional Office on ground of the Grade 7- National Standardized Achievement Test of 2010 (Ministry of Education, Namibia, Khomas Region. 2011) via purposive sampling (Gay, et al, 2009, 7). The three best performing schools and the three lowest performing schools were selected. However, since two of the three lowest performing schools were situated outside of Windhoek it was impossible to include them due to logistical constrains such as a lack of transport and limited financial resources. The next three lowest performing schools in Windhoek were thus included in the study. All English Second Language teachers for grade 7, per selected school, were included in the study. In total seven teachers were interviewed since four of the six schools had only one teacher and two of the six schools had two teachers for English Second Language in grade 7, but one teacher was not available. This resulted in a sample of three teachers in group A and four teachers in group B.

Twelve learners were included in the study; two learners from each of the six schools. Learners who could read quite well, based on the teachers' perceptions, were selected. All these learners mastered basic skills of decoding, since the researcher wanted to eliminate the possibility that problems with decoding could be the cause of the comprehension problems.

One lecturer lecturing Teaching Methods of English was selected from the Faculty of Education at UNAM to participate in the study. There is only one Advisor Teacher

for European languages in the Khomas Region, and she was approached to participate in the study.

3.4 Research Instruments

- (a) Two sets of semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers. The first set of questions (refer to Appendix A) was open-ended questions to get more information on their opinions, views, observations and the reading comprehension strategies taught by them. The second set of interview questions (refer to Appendix B) contained both open-ended and closed questions. Those questions were related to specific reading comprehension strategies.
- (b) Semi-structured interviews (refer to Appendix C) were conducted with the learners to determine what strategies they use while doing reading comprehension. Each learner was asked to read a passage from the Neale Analysis of Reading Abilities – Revised (NARA II) (Neale, 1997) and to answer the questions following the passage. Passages from the Neale Analysis of Reading Abilities – Revised (NARA II) (Neale, 1997) were given to the learners to read for the purposes of this study. There are two equivalent sets of reading passages in the NARA II, namely Form 1 and Form 2 and both of them were used. There are six different levels of reading passages in the NARA II, from which the sixth level is the highest, and learners were given easier passages to read when they had difficulties to read passages on levels five or six. The aim of the exercise was to find out what reading comprehension strategies learners were

using, so the content and the reading level of the passages were not the main focus.

(c) An interview (refer to Appendix D) was conducted with one lecturer at the University of Namibia who was responsible for the training of student- teachers majoring in English, to enquire specifically about the training they receive in reading comprehension strategies.

(d) An interview (refer to Appendix D) was also conducted with the advisory teacher for European languages at the Khomas Regional Office to enquire specifically about the training teachers receive in reading comprehension strategies.

A pilot study was conducted at a school not included in the sample. One teacher and two learners were included in the study. The reason why a pilot study was conducted was to test the interview questions and the questionnaire. This increased the validity and reliability of the research. The researcher adjusted the questionnaires of both the teachers and learners, since the questionnaire of the teachers were very long and it was necessary to combine some of the aspects. More questions were added to the questionnaire of the learners in order to observe the application of more strategies.

3.5 Data collection procedures

A letter was written to the Khomas Regional Office to obtain permission to conduct the studies in the six selected schools. Telephonic contact was made with the principals of the different schools, to get their permission to speak to the grade 7- English teachers. The letter from the regional office was shown to each school.

Appointments were scheduled with the grade 7- English Second Language teachers of the selected schools to schedule for interviews.

Each of the six teachers was asked to identify two grade seven learners who could be included in the study. One should be a good reader with good reading comprehension according to the teacher. The second learner should be a good reader, but one with reading comprehension difficulties.

3.6 Data analysis

A thematic technique was used to analyse collected data. The researcher read through the notes she made during the interviews and constructed meaning from these notes. Data obtained from the interviews with teachers and their answers to the questionnaire were tabulated on a spread sheet according to their responses. The interviews with the lecturer, learners and the advisory teacher were also tabulated on a spread sheet according to their responses. All responses were categorized in themes. The thematic analysis is about “searching for patterns in data” (Shank, 2006) and the responses of the participants were grouped according to similarities and patterns that emerged. The strategies used by teachers of low and high performing schools were compared.

3.7 Research ethics

The researcher treated all information with confidentiality, which means that the information was not discussed with others and the names of participants do not appear on any of the paperwork. The researcher respected peoples’ rights to freedom

of choice and participation was on a voluntary basis. The names of the schools who participated do not appear in this document to ensure confidentiality. The letter of permission from the Director of Education, Khomas Region is not attached since the names of the schools appear in it.

In this chapter the researcher described the research methods and the procedures that were followed to gather data for the study. In the next chapter, the results will be presented.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Results

The results will be presented according to the teachers' responses, learners' knowledge and application of reading comprehension strategies, the lecturer's responses and the responses of the Advisory Teacher to the interview questions.

4.1 Results based on teachers' responses

The responses from teachers in the two sampled groups were compared. Group A were teachers from the three top performing schools and group B were teachers from the three lowest performing schools in Windhoek, Khomas Region in the NSAT of 2010.

After thorough investigation of all the questions in the interview guide, six themes emerged. Results are presented based on these themes and they are: (i) teachers' perceptions of the reading comprehension problems of learners; (ii) teachers' perceptions of the causes of reading comprehension problems of learners; (iii) strategies used by teachers to assist learners with reading comprehension difficulties; (iv) classroom practises; (v) teachers' reported needs regarding the teaching of reading comprehension strategies and (vi) teachers' knowledge and application of the strategies and abilities needed in reading comprehension identified in the literature as effective.

4.1.1 Teachers’ perceptions of the reading comprehension problems of learners

Teachers from the top performing schools reported, based on their experiences, that learners do not read text carefully and they lack concentration while reading. They also said that learners do not know how to answer questions. The following problems were reported regarding the answering of questions, namely that learners do not know where to find the answers, they miss the point in answering, because they fail to understand what the questions ask them to do and some learners have the tendency to read the questions first and just look for corresponding words in the text and assume that they found the correct answer.

Teachers from the lowest performing schools also reported the tendency amongst learners to read the questions first and looked for the corresponding words in the text and just copy that particular sentence in response to the question. The majority of the teachers said that the learners have problems to comprehend text, because many of them cannot read on the level expected from them. A summary of the reading comprehension difficulties as perceived by teachers are presented in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Teachers’ perceptions on the reading comprehension problems of learners

Top performing schools	Lowest performing schools
Learners do not read carefully and lack concentration while reading.	Learners cannot read on the level expected from them- some lack foundational reading skills.
Learners do not know how to answer questions and some are answering question without reading the whole passage first.	Learners are answering question without reading the whole passage first.

4.1.2 The perceptions of teachers on the causes of the reading comprehension problems of learners

The three top performing schools are situated in suburbs that can be described as affluent and the three lowest performing schools are situated in areas which are mostly inhabited by people with economic challenges. Teachers of the top performing schools were of the opinion that the following factors contributed to the reading comprehension problems identified by them: the English syllabus is too full and teachers do not have time to concentrate on reading comprehension instruction. Teachers in both groups further felt that there is a lack of a reading culture among learners and they said that most learners are more into electronic gadgets than books.

Teachers in the lowest performing schools felt that the very fact that many learners cannot read on the level expected from them automatically influences their comprehension of the text. One teacher said: “some even lack foundational reading skills.” Challenging home circumstances such as poverty and parents who do not motivate their children were mentioned as a factor that influenced reading abilities. They furthermore said that learners are unmotivated and have a careless attitude towards their school work (see table 4.2).

Table 4.2: The teachers’ perceptions on the causes of reading comprehension problems

Top performing schools	Lowest performing schools
Lack of a reading culture among learners	Lack of a reading culture among learners
The English Syllabus is too full and there is consequently not enough time to give sufficient attention to all domains.	Learners cannot read on the level expected from them- some lack foundational reading skills
	Learners are unmotivated and has a “careless attitude”
	Challenging home circumstances, such as poverty and parents who do not motivate their children.

4.1.3 Classroom practices and strategies used by teachers to assist learners with reading comprehension difficulties

The researcher asked the teachers how they assist learners who have difficulties understanding a text. In group A, teachers firstly said they teach learners skills on how to answer questions: “I go through the questions with the learners; make them aware of words in the question that might help with the answer.” One teacher had a list of clues for different questions, for example if the question starts with “when” learners should look for a time or date; and when it starts with “how many,” learners should look for a number. The second strategy that was mentioned was to teach learners skills to decipher unknown words. One teacher said: “I ask the learner to underline or highlight difficult words and see if they can find the meaning from the context.” Another teacher said she advises the learner to read on and see if an explanation of the word is provided further on in the text. All the teachers said they encouraged learners to use dictionaries and to keep a personal dictionary of new words learned and update it regularly. Teachers said they show learners how to break

up words into syllables. Teachers said they built learners' vocabulary by writing unfamiliar words on flipcharts and talk about the meaning of these words. Teachers mentioned that they do word search activities with learners. Thirdly, in cases where a certain part of the text is unclear, learners should identify where the problem is and read the sentence before and after that part that they do not understand. One teacher said she asked learners to tell in short what the story is about in order for her to understand the learner's reasoning. The fourth strategy that was mentioned was to give the learner easier text to read and then move to more difficult ones. The teacher mentioned that she only does that when she has a bit of time, but there is seldom time to do so. Fifthly, they advise learners to reread the passage. In the sixth place teachers said they do pre-reading activities such as talking about the title. Teachers mentioned that that they encourage learners to write short stories and lastly teachers discuss the reading comprehension activity afterwards with the learners.

The responses of the teachers in group B on how they assist learners who have difficulties understanding a text were as follows: Firstly, teachers created an interest in the story by doing a preview, for example by talking about the titles. Secondly, they teach skills to learners to decipher unknown words, such as to write new words on a poster beforehand to help learners understand the vocabulary that will appear in the text, to use dictionaries and to "break words up." One teacher said she advised learners to "try to replace the difficult word with a word that you think will fit in there." Another one said "try to understand what the context is about by reading, for example, the previous paragraph." A third strategy was to switch to mother tongue. One teacher said: "I switch to a language that the learner understands better...I often

do that and then the learners immediately understand.” A fourth strategy was to read the passage and questions for the learners and ask them after each paragraph if they understood. A fifth strategy was to pair weaker readers with stronger ones. A sixth strategy was to give learners “instruction” activities such as make an envelope. In the seventh place, they said they asked learners to bring their own text since learners are more interested to read text of their own choice. Furthermore, teachers allocated specific reading time at the reading corner. One teacher also mentioned that she reduces the size of a text if it is a long text. The last strategy was to read the passage up to “five times” before answering questions and to look at the introduction, main points and the conclusion.

The researcher asked the teachers about classroom activities executed by them that specifically enhance reading comprehension, such as the inclusion of strategies in their lesson preparation; time allocated to the teaching of reading comprehension; and peer teaching.

All three teachers in group A and three of the four teachers in group B reported that they do not specifically include reading comprehension strategies in their preparation. The teacher in group B who does it said she write phrases such as “dictionary work or new words on flipcharts” on the preparation form. All the teachers from both groups A and B said they discussed the answers of a reading comprehension exercises afterwards with the learners, and felt that in such a way the learners learn how they should go about in the answering of reading comprehensions. Two teachers from group B reported that they inform learners how to answer reading

comprehension questions in the beginning of the first trimester for one or two periods.

Teachers in group A provided the following reasons why they did not allocate a lot of time to reading comprehension strategies in their classes: There are many domains to attend to in English: one teacher mentioned that she prefers to focus on language, for example on the rules of the language, since “grade 7 is the last time that learners are really instructed in language.” According to this teacher, learners are not taught language at secondary school level. All teachers said they have limited time. One teacher mentioned that, if she had more time, she would give easier text more often to the learners who have difficulties to read with understanding and prepare them in such a way for a more challenging text. All the teachers in group B said that limited time is the reason why they do not allocate a lot of time to reading comprehension.

Teachers were asked whether they are making use of peer teaching (learners helping each other) to improve reading comprehension among learners. The responses from the teachers in group A were as follows: one teacher said she only make use of peer teaching occasionally, the second one reported that she does not make use of peer teaching and the third teacher said she has stopped doing it, because she wants the weaker learners to do the work on their own. Three of the four teachers in group B made use of peer teaching on a regular basis; especially the pairing of struggling readers with more advanced readers (“reading buddies”).

See table 4.3 for a summary of the above mentioned classroom practices and reading comprehension strategies used by the schools. From the table it is clear that some of

the strategies used were similar for both groups, but there were also clear differences in the strategies used.

Table 4.3: Classroom practices and reading comprehension strategies used by schools

	Top performing schools	Lowest performing schools
Similar strategies	Teachers provide learners with the following skills to decipher unknown words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use dictionaries and keep personal dictionaries to record new words - Break words in syllables - Try to find the meaning of unknown words from the context. 	Teachers provide learners with the following skills to decipher unknown words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use dictionaries and keep personal dictionaries to record new words - Break words in syllables - Try to find the meaning of unknown words from the context.
	Do pre- reading activities, such as a talking about the title.	Do pre- reading activities, such as a talking about the title.
	Encourage learners to reread the passage again.	Encourage learners to reread the passage again.
	Discuss the reading comprehension activity afterwards with learners.	Discuss the reading comprehension activity afterwards with learners.
	Teach new words beforehand on a poster.	Teach new words beforehand on a poster.
Different strategies	Read the sentences before and after the parts of the text that are difficult to comprehend.	Switch to mother tongue.
	Provide the learner with easier text to read and then move to more difficult text.	Read the passage and the questions for the learners.
	Teachers instruct learners on how to read and answer questions.	Give “instruction” activities where learners need to make something such as an envelope.
	Encourage learners to write short stories.	Ask learners to bring their own text to class.
	Do word search activities.	Reduce the size of the text to make it easier.
	Read to the learners for enjoyment purposes.	Peer teaching
	Read on and see if you find the meaning of the word further on in the text.	Allocate specific reading time at the reading corner in the classroom.
	Ask the learner to tell in short what the text is about.	Read text and learners answer orally.

4.1.4 Teachers' reported needs regarding the teaching of reading comprehension strategies

Teachers were asked whether they have any needs regarding the teaching of reading comprehension strategies and the question was specifically asked whether they think they received sufficient training in reading comprehension strategies during their teachers' training programme and through in-service training. All three teachers in group A said they needed training on reading comprehension strategies. One teacher expressed the hope that a booklet will be compiled on reading comprehension strategies. She further hoped that reading comprehension will get more attention in future. One teacher expressed the hope to get advice on how to inspire learners to become readers.

Three of the four teachers in group B said they needed more training on reading comprehension strategies, while one teacher felt she had sufficient training. Three teachers in group B said they needed more reading books on the level and interest of the learner and more "fun" text. One teacher mentioned a specific book about teenagers that she wished to obtain for her learners. She felt that some of the prescribed books are not interesting for learners.

4.1.5 Teachers' knowledge and application of the strategies identified in the literature as effective

In this section the teachers' knowledge and application of the six strategies identified in the literature as effective, namely monitoring of own comprehension and metacognition while reading, semantic and graphic organizers, answering questions,

generating questions, recognizing story structures and summarizing will be discussed.

Monitoring of own comprehension while reading and meta-cognitive skills

Monitoring comprehension, which is the reader's thinking about their comprehension processes as they read, and meta-cognition, which means "thinking about your thinking," were unfamiliar to two of the three teachers in group A. The third teacher said "it is when you expect something to happen", but she made a conclusion from the name of the strategy, and said "the learner must evaluate his own comprehension", but she did not know how it should be done.

Two teachers in group B also made conclusions from the name of the strategy. One said it means "to notice what it is you do wrong, for example jumping or mispronouncing a word." The other said "it means to see if the learner understands...does it make sense to him." One teacher said she does not know what it is. The fourth teacher in this group said "to write notes as you read", but when prompted if she taught it to the learners she answered "no."

This strategy was explained to the teachers afterwards. One teacher in group A, who said she does not know what this strategy entails, commented that she asked learners to underline unfamiliar words as they read and this can be part of the strategy to monitor your own comprehension.

Teachers were asked if they know what it entails to teach a learner to "think aloud."

All teachers were puzzled by this phrase. One teacher said "it is to read and say aloud what you think." Another said "if you don't understand what you read, read it out

loud.” A third one said “it is to ask: what do you think might happened next- you have to go in someone’s thoughts.” After it was explained to the teachers how it can be done, all of them said they don’t do it. One teacher in group B said that she sometimes does it when she reads passages during listening comprehension activities and would say “I did not understand this part, let me read it again,” but not with the aim to teach it as a strategy to the learners.

Semantic and Graphic organizers

Semantic and graphic organizers are visual diagrams that show relationships among concepts. All the teachers in both groups said that they did not know what this strategy was all about. The researcher prompted with the help of an article on various categories of food and asked about a possible way to help learners to understand the passage easier with such a lot of information. The researcher compiled a graph in the presence of the teacher to show how the information could be presented on one page and with headings for each of the different categories. All the teachers in both groups said they do not use or teach this strategy in reading. Two said they do it only in writing activities, for example how to order your thoughts in the different paragraphs when you write an essay. One said she uses “mind maps” in writing activities.

Answering questions

It is general practice in schools that a reading piece is followed by a set of questions that the learner should answer. All seven teachers in both groups knew this strategy very well, since most reading activities that they do are followed by a set of questions that learners should answer. All teachers were aware of the three different

levels of questions that should be considered when compiling questions for reading comprehension activities.

Drawing inferences and conclusions are expected from learners when answering questions. Most teachers did not know what was meant with “drawing inferences”, but had no problems to explain what is meant with “anticipating events.” After the researcher explained what drawing inferences meant, namely to fill in the missing parts that the author did not say in the passage, they all responded that it has to do with drawing of conclusions, for example “what will happen next”; “look outside the box- which mean: do not look at the literal meaning.” All teachers said they do predictions with the learners.

Generating questions

Teachers are usually compiling the questions following a text, but this strategy required from the learner to compile her own questions. All teachers in group A commented that it means that the learners come up with their own questions, since the name is self explanatory. Two of these teachers said that they don't do it in class, but they were enthusiastic to do it in future. The third one said she only does it orally.

In group B two of the four teachers thought they had to compile more follow-up questions to help the learner to understand the passage better and to guide him towards the answer. Two teachers also made conclusions from the name of the strategy. Three teachers said they did not consider asking learners to compile their own questions. One of these teachers said that learners can “hardly read the questions compiled by someone else, leave alone compiling their own questions.” One teacher

said she will ask the learners a question such as “if you were to meet that character, what would you ask him?”, but she seldom did exercises like that.

Visualizing activities can be used to help learners to generate their own questions. Teachers were asked whether they know what this strategy entails and if they do it in class. All teachers knew the essence of this strategy. Comments from teachers in group A were: “I read, learners close their eyes and I ask them: What do you see?” Another teacher said it means to form a picture or associate a word with a picture. The teachers in group B made the following comments: “imagination”, “to draw a picture based on what you have read”, “put words into pictures” and to “imagine that you are one of the characters...”

Previewing activities can also be used to teach learners how to generate questions. Teachers were asked whether they knew what previewing activities entailed and how to apply them in the classroom. All teachers knew what previewing means. The comments from teachers in group A were as follows: “to talk about the title with the aim to raise the learner’s interest in the passage”, “to predict the outcome”, “to bring the background to the forth.” Comments from group B were for example: “to make someone interested in the text and to motivate them to read the story further”, “to read the first paragraph to see what the story is all about”, “to tell learners beforehand why every grade 7 should read this text”, “I give learners words that they should study before we read the text.” All teachers, except one in group A, said that they often did previewing activities in class. One teacher in group A had a document

available on previewing which she received at a workshop one week prior to the interview.

Recognizing story structures

Story structures refer to the way in which an author organizes his ideas and when the teacher helps learners to see how material is organized by the author into key ideas and supporting ideas, their familiarity with text structures are promoted.

Teachers were asked what was meant with “recognizing story structure” and the teachers in group A responded as follows: One teacher said: “it is the style of writing, to whom it is written and the chronological order of the book. I teach it in literature, especially when we do book critics.” A second teacher said: “it means to look at the introduction, the main ideas in each paragraph and the setting of the story.” One teacher was uncertain when she heard the phrase “recognizing story structures”, but after it was explained to her, she said that they talked about characters and the settings a lot during literature lessons.

Two teachers in group B explained that it is the way in which a story is written. One of these teachers added that a story “has a beginning, the main story, the climax and the conclusion.” One teacher reported that they often do activities such as identifying the main character and drawing of a time line in book reports. One of the teachers said that the recognition of story structures is “the different happenings in the passage.”

The question was posed on whether they teach learners about different types of genres and the responses were as follows: All teachers knew that it meant different

types and forms of text, but most of them did it mainly during literature lessons and they did not normally raise awareness about types of genres when they discussed reading comprehension passages. Two teachers in group A and two teachers in group B said they often made learners aware of different genres, while one in group A and two in group B said they do not put a lot of emphasis on it.

Summarizing

A summary is a shortened version of a text and one uses the main ideas of the text to write it. All teachers in both groups correctly explained the essence of what a summary is by using the following phrases: “to decide what is most important and write it in your own words” and “focus on what is in the beginning, middle and the end.” Three teachers said it means to shorten the text by using the key or main points of the text. One teacher commented that it means to rewrite a text in your own words while using the main ideas. Another teacher said it is to “retell a story in short.” One of the teachers added that the passage should be shortened within a “set frame of words, for example write a summary of no longer than 100 words.” All three teachers in group A said they teach their learners how to make summaries. One teacher added that one of the methods that she often used to teach learners how to find the main ideas was by providing them with multiple choices and request learners to choose the main idea from these. Two of the four teachers in group B said they teach their learners to make summaries, while two said they don’t do it.

4.2 Learners' responses and performance on interview

questions

The responses of learners are presented according to two groups. Group A is the learners from the group of schools that were the three top performing schools in the Khomas Region in the NSAT of 2010. Group B is the learners from the three lowest performing schools in Windhoek, Khomas Region in the NSAT of 2010. Two learners from each of the six schools participated in the study. The English Second Language teachers who were interviewed, were asked to identify two learners whom they thought were very good readers in order to eliminate comprehension problems as a result of decoding problems. Each learner was asked to read a passage from the Neale Analysis of Reading Abilities – Revised (NARA II) (Neale, 1997) and to answer the questions following the passage. There are six different levels of reading passages in the NARA II, from which the sixth level is the highest, and learners were given easier passages to read when they had difficulties to read levels five or six. The aim of the exercise was to find out what reading comprehension strategies learners were using, so the content and the reading level of the passages were not the main focus. A variety of additional questions and activities were added to include other reading comprehension activities apart from answering questions. Learners were asked to do previewing of the title of the passage, to tell how much of the passage they understood after reading it, to make predictions on how the story could continue, to recognise story structures, to write a summary of the passage, to generate their own questions about the passage and to visualize the story. Learners were asked if their teachers do similar activities with them when they are reading.

4.2.1 Pre-reading and post reading activities to activate background knowledge

Before the passages were read, learners were asked: “What comes to your mind when you see the title of the passage?” All twelve learners could tell something about the titles of the passages they read. When they were asked whether they often do such an activity in class, the responses from two learners in group A were that their teachers do show the titles and ask them to tell more about it. The remaining four learners said their teachers did not ask them about the titles. Four of the six learners in group B said their teachers do ask them about the titles of passages. The remaining two learners, from the same school, said that their teacher did not do it.

After the passages were read, learners were asked to make predictions on what will happen further in the story. Five of the six learners in group A found it easy to make predictions, but one could not think about anything that could happen further in the story. Two learners from the same school said their teachers do this exercise in class. Two other learners said they generally do not do predictions in their class, but one said they only do it when they do poetry. One was uncertain whether they were doing it, but his schoolmate said that the teacher asked them to do predictions. Five of the six learners made predictions; only one said “I cannot think what will happen further.” Four of the six learners said their teachers did not ask them to make predictions on how the story would proceed.

4.2.2 Monitoring of their own comprehension and deciphering of unknown words

After reading the passage, learners were asked if there were anything in the text that they did not understand. All six learners in group A identified words that they did not understand. The responses of learners in group A on what they could do about the words that they did not understand were as follows: “I can highlight the words and come back to them”, “I can continue reading and try to find the meaning”, “I can read over and over”, “I can read the next sentence to see if I will find the answer there.” Three learners mentioned that they can look it up in the dictionary.

Two learners in group B showed one sentence each that they did not understand. Another two learners showed two and three words respectively that they did not understand. Two learners said that they understood everything. (All six of these learners had many more words which they did not understand when the questions were posed). Their responses on what they could do about the words that they did not understand were as follows: five out of six learners said they will look the words up in a dictionary. Three of the six learners said they would ask their teachers what the words meant. Two learners said they had no idea what they would do if they may not use a dictionary or ask the teachers.

4.2.3 Answering questions

Passages from the NARA II (Neale, 1997) were given to the learners to read. There are six different levels of reading passages in the NARA II, from which the sixth

level is the highest, and learners were given easier passages to read when they had difficulties to read passages on levels five or six.

Five of six learners in group A read the passage on level six and the sixth one read a level three passage. Four of the six learners experienced that unknown words were hampering their understanding. Three of them managed to work out the meaning for themselves after prompting by the researcher. Five out of six learners in group B read a passage rated level 4, and one read a passage on level two. Only one of the learners who read the level four passage could unravel the unknown word: “accustomed” to answer a specific question. Only two of these five learners, who read the level four passages could work it out for themselves what a key word “knight” meant after the prescribed questions were asked. Three of these five learners could locate the answers in the text, but could not formulate answers in their own words. They quoted directly from the text. The sixth learner, who read a level two passage, did not understand the meaning of a key word “strange” to assist her in the answering of the question.

4.2.4 Generating questions

Learners were asked to generate their own questions after reading a passage. All twelve learners could generate questions, but they were all literal or surface questions, except for one learner in group A, who posed an inferential question. Learners in group A responded as follows when they were asked whether they have opportunities to generate questions in their class: two learners from the same school said they are encouraged to generate their own questions. Two learners from another school had different opinions: one said the teachers would ask them sometimes to do

so, for example to find a synonym or antonym for a word in the text; the remaining two learners said their teacher did not ask them to do so. All six learners in group B said their teachers did not ask them to generate their own questions.

4.2.5 Recognising story structures and knowledge of different genres

Story structure refers to the way in which an author organizes his or her ideas. A story usually has the following components: characters, setting, a problem and a goal to resolve it, events to solve the problem and achievement of the goal. Learners were asked to tell what a character is and to identify the characters, to identify the central problem and the setting in their reading passage.

All six learners in group A could tell what characters are and identified them in the passages they read; they could also identify the central problem and the setting. Five out of six learners in group B could tell what characters are and identified them correctly. One learner was under the impression that characters are only people and that animals are not included. Four of the six learners identified the central problem and the setting correctly.

The importance of the story structure strategy is to learn different reading strategies for different text types. English teachers are mostly working with narrative text and knowledge on genres is usually taught in literature classes when stories are discussed. Learners were asked about the type of text that they read and their general knowledge on different genres was enquired about to find out if they are aware of different types of genres. All twelve learners correctly identified the type of passage they were reading.

The learners in group A mentioned the following types of stories namely: fiction, facts, fairy tales, fables, imaginary, “dramatic”, comedy, informative, adventure, “funny”, “sad.” Learners in group B mentioned the following types of stories, namely: fables, “evil”, “happy”, adventure, love, fiction and non-fiction (most of them switched the meaning of the two) and “stories of people and animals.”

4.2.6 Writing a summary of the passage

A summary is a shortened version of a text and it expresses the main ideas of the text. Learners were asked to tell what a summary was and to write a summary of the passage they read. All six learners in group A could explain what a summary was. Some of the phrases used are as follows: “explain in your own words what the passage was about”, “take out the main ideas and write them in a shorter form”, “tell what the story is all about”. All six learners could write a summary.

The learners in group B responded as follows when they were asked to define a summary: “it is when you are given something to write down- we do it in Social Studies, Science and Otjiherero”, a summary is “when you write something down that you can go study”, “to rewrite a story”, “to make a story shorter”, “I don’t know, Is it another story? Give me a clue.” All six learners could not write summaries; one learner copied a few sentences from the text when prompted to try and write a summary, but she could not explain why she picked out those specific sentences.

4.2.7 Identifying and conveying the gist of the passage in two sentences

While using simple terminology, learners were asked to identify and tell the gist of the passage in two sentences. The responses of the learners were as follows: all

learners in group A could identify the gist of the text. Three of the six learners in group B could identify and convey the gist of the story well, although one of them thought that a “knight” was the name of a man. Three learners gave very little information, for example: the story is about a dragon and a knight. They did not provide any further information out of their own.

4.2.8 Visualising

Learners were asked to tell about the pictures that came to their minds while they were reading the passages. All learners in group A could elaborate on the images in their minds. They all said that their teachers do exercises with them where they have to close their eyes and imagine that they can “see” the story. Four learners in group B could tell the researcher about their images. Two learners said their teachers didn’t do such activities with them and they also could not “see” any picture when asked to tell about the picture in their minds after reading the passage.

4.2.9 Learners’ own strategies

Two reading passages with a lot of information were shown to the learners and they were asked what strategies they would use when they only have a short period of time to read through them. The learners in group A responded as follows: “I will look at the back of the book to see if there is a summary”, “I will make a spider diagram” (The learner who said this heard about spider diagrams in the Life Skills and Science classes). One learner said she will scan through the document by looking at bold printed parts in the text, “because they want you to know that information.” (This learner said her Basic Information Science teacher provided her with this information). One learner mentioned that she has learned some of these skills in

Afrikaans during “soek lees” (“search” reading). Responses from learners in group B were for example: “I will read the title and all the other headings”. Another learner said that she will look at pictures if there are any. A summary of the teachers’ and the learners’ responses can be seen in table 4.4

Table 4.4: Teachers' and learners' knowledge and application of the reading comprehension strategies identified by the literature as effective:

Reading comprehension strategy	Top performing schools	Lowest performing schools
Monitoring of comprehension while reading	Teachers did not know the strategy and consequently did not teach it. Learners were aware to some extent of what they did not understand.	Teachers did not know the strategy and consequently do not teach it. Learners thought they understood a lot while they did not.
Semantic and Graphic organizers	Teachers did not know the strategy and consequently did not teach it. Some learners knew about spider webs that can be used- they used this information from other subjects such as Life Skills, Science, Basic Information science.	Teachers did not know the strategy and consequently did not teach it. Learners also did not know about it.
Answering questions	All teachers knew it very well and they taught learners key or guiding words to look for in the question, for example, when, why.	All teachers knew it very well. Learners often answer off the point since they did not focus on what the question was asking.
Generating questions	Teachers said they do not practice it and it was evident in the literal level of questions generated by the learners.	Teachers said they do not practice it and it was evident in the literal level of questions generated by the learners.
Recognising story structures	Teachers were quite aware of this since they teach it in literature. Learners could identify characters, the setting and the problem.	Teachers were quite aware of this since they teach it in literature. Learners could identify characters, the setting and the problem.
Summarizing	All the teachers knew it very well and all the learners could write summaries.	All the teachers knew it very well, but none of the learners could write summaries.

4.3 Lecturer's responses

The opinions of a university lecturer lecturing Teaching Methods of English at the University of Namibia were sought, since teachers are expected to be equipped with the necessary skills to teach English in this specific subject. Her responses will be reported under the following themes: her personal view on the situation of reading with comprehension in the Namibian education system, essential information and skills on reading comprehension that student-teachers must be equipped with and factors that influence the intensive instruction in reading comprehension strategies at the university.

The lecturer's personal view on the situation of reading with comprehension in the Namibian education system was asked. She regarded reading with comprehension as a problem at school and at university level. She explained that it is evident in the way students respond to questions, that they do not read with understanding and that they do not read questions properly and consequently do not follow the instructions. She further said that they only read the first two words of a question and assume that they know the answer.

She was of the opinion that student-teachers and teachers might not know how to teach reading comprehension since they themselves are not readers. She explained that students are not eager or comfortable to teach literature since those who did English Second Language on core level in the secondary school, were not exposed to literature studies. She felt that teachers are not eager to teach literature since they know it is not compulsory for formal assessment on second language level or on core level. She further mentioned that several attempts were made by her and others to

talk to people at the National Institute for Educational Development (NIED) about making literature compulsory but it was turned down due to a “lack of funds.” The study of literature improves a person’s understanding of how a text is structured and this can improve comprehension.

The lecturer was asked what she regarded as essential skills in reading comprehension that institutions of higher learning must provide to student-teachers. She said they should know the needs of the learners in front of them and they should know how to adapt materials to suit the needs of learners. They should teach the vocabulary that learners will encounter in upcoming reading material – she gave an example of “word walls” where groups of learners could use new words to write a short story and see how these words can be connected to the text. She continued to say that the student-teachers should know how to teach skimming, scanning, pronunciation and “text mapping” which she defined as pre-reading skills such as looking at the author, the title and headings. The lecturer also mentioned the following skills that student-teachers should be equipped with, namely how to teach learners to look at keywords, for example, instructional words such as list, compare and how to guess meanings of words from the context. She added that they study the syllabuses for English to see what is required from the teacher and focus on those prescribed competencies and equip student-teachers with those skills.

The lecturer was asked if she thinks (student) teachers are equipped with all the information and skills that they need once they have completed their studies in Teaching Methods of English. She responded negatively by providing the following hampering factors: some students are only coming for one year for teaching methods

in subjects such as English and it is impossible to teach them all they should know in one year and some classes have a lot of students and it is difficult to attend to the needs of all. She also mentioned that each student should be assessed twice per year and that the time is very limited. She felt that it is often difficult to establish whether students mastered the skills since the lecturer might not observe those specific skills during the teaching practise sessions. Students tend to focus more on areas that they are comfortable with during teaching practice time.

4.4 Advisory Teacher's responses

Advisory Teachers are appointed by the Ministry of Education in subjects offered at schools with the aim of supporting, advising and training teachers in their respective subjects. The opinions of the advisory teacher for European languages at the Khomas Regional Office were sought, since she is heading in-service training for English teachers in the region. Her responses are reported under the following themes: her personal view on the situation of reading with comprehension in the Khomas Region, essential information and skills on reading comprehension which teachers should have and must be trained on and factors that influence the intensive instruction in reading comprehension strategies at the university.

The Advisory Teacher's personal view on the situation of reading with comprehension in the Khomas Region was asked. She regarded reading with comprehension at schools as a big problem since she observed that learners cannot answer questions after they have read a passage. She only observed the answering of questions when she visited lessons where the focus was specifically on reading

comprehension. The learners were not provided with any strategies, not even on how to answer the questions. She mentioned that she never saw that teachers even try to teach reading comprehension strategies. The Advisory Teacher regarded the teaching of reading comprehension strategies of vital importance since “reading comprehension is the most important part that will help learners to cope in school.”

The Advisory Teacher was asked what she regarded as essential skills in reading comprehension that teachers should have and should be trained in. She felt that basic skills such as decoding should be attended to before the learner will be able to comprehend. She further said that the NSAT could be used as a guide and that the information could be used to train teachers in certain strategies.

The Advisory Teacher was asked if she thought there were any factors that influence the intensive instruction of reading comprehension in schools in the Khomas Region. Her responses were as follows: “Teachers themselves did not know many reading comprehension skills, because they were not trained in them.” She added that “it might be that they were trained, but seldom or never practice it.” She explained that there is no teachers’ guide yet that tell teachers how to teach reading comprehension skills. She mentioned a newly developed literature guide which was not distributed to all schools yet.

In this chapter the results of the findings were presented. The researcher will discuss and interpret the results in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussions of Results

In this chapter the researcher discusses and interprets the results that were presented in chapter 4. The researcher attempts to answer the research questions and also relates the findings to the literature and the theoretical underpinnings of the study as discussed in chapter 2. The first part of the chapter focuses on teachers' responses regarding the factors influencing reading comprehension as well as the needs of learners and teachers in this area. This is followed by a discussion on teachers' and learners' knowledge and application of the reading comprehension strategies identified as effective in the literature. Next the linkage of the findings with the theoretical framework is explained and lastly the responses of the lecturer and advisory teacher are discussed.

5.1. Teachers' awareness of the factors enhancing reading comprehension instruction

Literature points out specific factors out that enhance reading comprehension skills, such as: explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies (Hagaman & Reid, 2008); modelling of strategies by the teacher (Ellis & Larkin, 1998); acquisition of skills require time (Hoover, 1996); reading comprehension is a cognitive process and special effort should be made to bring the thinking processes into the open (Oakley, 2011).

According to Archer and Hughes (2011), the explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies require from the teacher to teach in a structured, systematic

and direct way. This entails that the teacher should have a plan of action on how she will teach reading comprehension strategies. It was evident in the results that reading comprehension strategies are not explicitly taught, for example: teachers did not make an effort to record strategies in their preparation, they could not mention specific time that is allocated to the teaching of reading comprehension strategies apart from when they discuss the answers to comprehension exercises after such activities were done. Hoover (1996) said if new knowledge is to be actively built, then time is needed to build it – unless time is set aside to equip learners with reading comprehension strategies, it will always be a hampering factor in their way to academic success.

The modelling of strategies can be linked to explicit teaching practises, because when the teacher demonstrates to the learner how to make a graphic organizer or write a summary, she has to show it in a structured, systematic and direct way. Fischer, et al. (2009) said that learners must witness a skilled reader explaining ways to make meaning from text. It is evident that, since the explicit instruction of strategies are lacking, the modelling of these strategies were also not done. The process of teaching strategies requires time, especially for modelling and practising purposes. One can conclude that little time is spent on the teaching of reading comprehension strategies and this supports the studies done by Pressley (Lehr and Osborn, 2005) and by Durkin (Oakley, 2011). The study done by Durkin was a few decades ago and it seems the allocation of time to reading comprehension instruction have not change since then.

The processes underling reading comprehension cannot be seen on paper, they are cognitive processes. A study in Australia (Oakley, 2011) showed that 44% of newly appointed teachers were not confident to assess reading comprehension cognitive skills. It was found in this study that teachers were the least aware of strategies that focuses specifically on the regulation of thinking processes such as monitoring your comprehension while reading and think-aloud - six teachers have almost no information or awareness of these two strategies.

Almasi and Hart (2011) reported that teachers knew about reading comprehension strategies, but they do not teach their learners how to use these strategies. The same observation was made in this study, for example, teachers at the lowest performing schools knew what summaries were, but they did not transfer that knowledge to their learners. Teachers in both groups said they taught their learners how to break words up in syllables, but learners did not show a tendency to break words up into syllables.

Pennington (2009) said that teachers are struggling with methods to teach reading comprehension strategies and Hagaman and Reid (2008) wrote that many teachers have not been trained in strategy instruction. The majority of teachers were not aware of what it entails to teach learners how to monitor their own comprehension or what semantic and graphic organizers are. Teachers did not realize that the generating of questions can be used as a strategy to enhance understanding of text. The answering of questions is the most used strategy in schools, but not much is done to show learners how to answers questions, for example, the learners in group B often answer off the point since they did not focus on what the question was asking. The only specific strategy observed to assist learners in the answering of questions was a

poster presented by one of the schools in group A that indicated how, when, where, how many, questions could be answered. The findings in this study supported Pennington's view that teachers are struggling to teach reading comprehension strategies and Hagaman and Reid's finding that many teachers have not been trained in reading comprehension strategies.

All teachers in group B mentioned that they often practised peer teaching, for example, learners read in pairs - weaker learners are paired with stronger readers. The schools with the lowest performance in English reported much more peer teaching than the top performing schools. Dixon-Krauss (1996) explained that peer tutoring should be well organised, that planning is essential and that tutors should be trained. According to the Social Constructivist Theory, the working together with more able people could move the weaker one to a higher level (Dixon-Krauss, 1996). It is noteworthy to mention that the top performing schools were not fond of pair reading, while the lower performing schools were quite keen on it. According to the Social Constructivist Theory, learners learn better when they learn through interaction with others. However, the "other" should be more knowledgeable on the topic being taught.

One teacher from group B mentioned that it is a rule at their school that all passages should be read to learners, even during examinations. The decision of the school to read for learners is a debatable one. On a temporary basis it might help the learner to progress, but once the learner moves to a less protected environment such as a secondary school, he might experience severe difficulties. Learners might become dependent on the reader. This practice of schools supports Smit (2007/ 2008) in her

opinion that learners are taught in such a way in the Namibian education system that they remain dependent.

5.1.2 Teachers' awareness of learners' needs and their own needs regarding reading comprehension

Teachers were asked what specific problems they observed in learners regarding the comprehension of text. Teachers in the top performing schools (group A) said that learners do not read carefully, lack concentration while reading and that they do not know how to answer questions. Teachers expressed the view that many learners do not read on the level expected from a grade 7- learner and that some even have difficulties with foundational skills such as decoding. One teacher mentioned that she did phonics with the learners who needed it. Literature states that reading is a "hierarchy of skills" (Pressley, 2000, p. 2) which implies that a person should at least be able to read before he can read with comprehension. Tong, et al. (2011) explained that some learners do not comprehend text although they have adequate word reading skills and this reality was not reported by the teachers. Teachers reported more specific needs of their learners regarding reading comprehension, namely that their learners do not read carefully and with concentration and that they do not know how to answer questions. One of the major challenges in the comprehension of text, namely the deciphering of the meaning of unknown words, was not mentioned by the teachers.

Teachers in group B were aware that their learners' lack of understanding can be linked to their limited knowledge of English and therefore decided to switch to their mother tongue. Code-switching can enhance learners' understanding, but it can also

make them dependent, since they do not have to make a special effort to understand the work – they might just learn to wait for the moment the teacher switches to the mother tongue. Code-switching could thus further contribute to the dependency that Smit (2007/ 2008) referred to.

Teachers were aware of the fact that a lack of a reading culture among the learners impacted on their academic performance. It concurs with the study of Ruterana and others (2012, p. 1) that says “the cultivation of a reading culture among the youth boost their academic excellence.” Dunsten and Gambrell (2009) found that motivation of learners play a key role in the reading process and Hall (2011) mentioned that teachers inspired learners to read more by providing literature suitable for young adults to them. The teachers in this study also knew that the motivation levels of the learners and their interest in specific literature plays an important role in the reading process and that action should be taken to address these aspects.

The teachers were aware that motivation from the side of the parents is important in the reading progress of learners. Teachers were aware that home circumstances such as parents who do not motivate their children can influence a learner’s academic abilities negatively. The three top performing schools are situated in suburbs that can be described as affluent and the three lowest performing schools are situated in areas which are mostly inhabitant by people with economic challenges. The views of teachers in this study concurs with various other studies (Aggarwal, et al, 2012; Gambrell, et al, 2011) that socio-economic factors impact on the academic performance of learners. The teachers in the lowest performing schools were aware

of the fact that the environmental factors, such as poverty and noise can negatively influence the academic progress of a learner. The learners in group B had the tendency to share the minimum of information when they were asked to make previews, predictions, to elaborate, while the learners in group A shared much more during the interviews. The socio-economic factors probably also play a role in this phenomenon.

None of the teachers mentioned that the causes of the learners' reading comprehension challenges could be linked to the lack of reading comprehension strategies taught in school. A possible reason for this can be that, since teachers' awareness levels on reading comprehension strategies were low, it did not come to their mind - this is evident in the little time that is allocated to reading comprehension strategies. The general observation made by the researcher was that very little thought is given to reading comprehension strategies as if it was not regarded as important or as if the value of it was not discovered by the teachers yet.

Teachers were asked about their own needs regarding the teaching of reading comprehension strategies and the following was reported: the teachers were aware that time is a hindering factor that prevents them from teaching reading comprehension skills, since there are many domains in English and they have limited time to attend to all. None of them came forth with a possible solution to address the issue of time.

Teachers said that they do not have sufficient knowledge on reading comprehension strategies and therefore requested for training. The one teacher that was of the opinion that she gained enough strategies over time, indeed mentioned many

strategies, but her learners, unfortunately, were not in possession of many of these skills.

Teachers mentioned that they needed skills on how to inspire learners to become readers and to develop a reading culture. Teachers further mentioned that they wish to provide learners with books that are more of interest to them. Literature supports this notion that the selection of text is a critical part of the classroom environment. Hall (2011) mentioned a study where the teacher inspired learners to read more by providing literacy for young adults to them. It is evident that teachers are aware of their lack of knowledge and that they know what might help them to overcome some of their challenges. Teachers realized that they need more training and written materials to enhance their instruction in reading comprehension strategies.

5.2 Teachers' and learners' knowledge and application of the strategies identified in the literature as effective

Teachers and learners were asked about their knowledge and application of the reading comprehension strategies identified in the literature as highly effective. The learners were only required to respond to some of strategies and not to all of them. For each strategy the responses of the teachers will first be reported on and immediately after that, the learners' responses will be discussed.

(a) Monitoring of own comprehension while reading

All teachers were not aware that they could deliberately teach a learner how to monitor his comprehension while reading. The teacher in the pilot study asked "is something like that possible?" The idea of teaching and demonstrating how to "think

aloud” was a new concept to all teachers. Learners from the top performing schools were much more aware of the parts of the text that they did not understand. Learners of the lowest performing schools were under the impression that they understood most of the text, which was not the case as revealed later on in the interview.

A correlation was found between what the teachers said, namely that this strategy was unfamiliar to them and evidence especially in the interviews with learners in the lowest performing schools, for example when asked what they did not understand after reading a passage, they reported just one or two words, but later on it appeared that there were actually many more words and phrases that they did not understand.

(b) Semantic and Graphic Organizers

This strategy combines reading and writing and it is evident that teachers do not promote writing during reading activities. None of the teachers suggested a graph or table that learners could use when confronted with a lot of factual information that the learner should master in a short period of time. Teachers did not reinforce it in learners that they should read with paper and pen to help them in the meaning making process. A correlation was found between what the teachers said, namely they were unfamiliar with this strategy and the responses of the learners. After an example were shown to them, they thought this could be a helpful tool.

(c) Answering of questions

This is the most used and known strategy. Teachers were very much aware of the different levels of setting questions. It was evident from the responses of especially learners in group B that they do not always focus on what the question is asking and

they should therefore be deliberately taught how to study and focus on leading words in the question to answer questions. Although the answering of questions is the most used strategy, some teachers, especially in the lowest performing schools did not teach learners explicitly how to study the questions before attempting answering. These teachers did not teach learners to focus on leading words in the question in order to answer what was asked.

To draw inferences, in order to answer questions, entails a variety of aspects that should come together to enable a person to do it, for example background knowledge, the reader's ability to make connections as he reads to understand the context of the story. These inferences will then also lead the reader in making certain predictions. Learners in group B found it more challenging to put one and one together and come to a conclusion, for example those who did not know what a steed and a knight were in one of the passages, did not link it to a specific sentence that appeared just after that- it read as follows: "Both horse and rider collapsed." The teachers do not have much control over the background knowledge of a learner, but they could make learners aware of the fact that they must read with a critical eye and ask questions such as "why does the author talk about a horse and a rider? Where do they fit into the story and how are they linked to the rest of the story?"

Finding meaning of unknown words seemed to be the biggest challenge when learners have to answer questions and they cannot do so due to the inability to understand a key word containing the answer. Teachers in group A had more suggestions on what learners could do if they have no access to dictionaries than teachers in group B. Learners in group A also applied more strategies when they

were confronted by unfamiliar words in the passages. Some learners in group B mentioned that they will ask the teacher if they do not know the meaning of words or had no dictionary and they had no other strategies in the absence of the teacher and a dictionary. Some of the learners in group A knew about breaking words in syllables, but they did not practise it when they were confronted with unfamiliar words in the passage. It was evident that learners were very used to dictionary work and to an extent too dependent on it, especially learners in group B – 50% of these learners could allocate the correct part in the text which contained the answer to the questions, but they could not explain what those selected parts meant. The usage of dictionaries is a valuable tool in finding the meaning of words, but learners should be taught how to cope in the absence of a dictionary, for example, during examination. Teachers, especially in the lowest performing schools, did not equip learners with a variety of skills when they are confronted with unknown words and their learners were consequently in many cases unable to figure out the meanings of key words, which they needed to help them comprehend the text. It seemed teachers did not show learners how to practice a skill that they have learned in one domain, for example the meaning of prefixes and suffixes, to other areas of learning.

Learners from group A relied more on their background knowledge of words to help them understand the text better, for example they would say “to conquer means to get the victory.” They also attempted more to find synonyms for words, for example many of them did not know what a crevasse was, but reasoned that if the person fell into it, it is most probably a hole.

(d) Generating of questions

It was evident that the majority of teachers did not ask learners to compile their own questions since they themselves were not aware that by doing this they could help learners to enhance their understanding of the text. Most learners in both groups said that their teachers do not ask them to generate their own questions. Most of the questions that were generated by the learners during the interviews were text explicit questions and this is an indication that they were not exposed to the generation of questions on an advanced level. Only one of the twelve learners came up with a question that required critical thinking. There is thus a correlation between the responses of the teachers and learners - both groups indicated that they did not practise this strategy.

Teachers could use previewing, predictions and visualization as strategies to teach learners how to generate their own questions, for example if the teacher regularly asks questions about the title before they read a text, the learner will get into the habit of asking himself certain questions before he reads a text. All teachers were well aware of previewing and said that they often do previewing activities. More learners from group B indicated that their teachers do previewing, but learners from group A were more able to express themselves during the interviews when given the opportunity to do previewing.

It was evident that teacher and learners knew what visualization was. All learners, except two learners from group B could describe their images of the passages they read. Learners in group A were more accustomed to visualization exercises than learners in group B. Learners in group A pointed out that their teachers are doing

visualization more in poetry, but not in other reading activities. It seemed teachers in the lowest performing schools did not give a lot of attention to visualization activities with learners to stimulate their ability to see images.

(e) Recognition of story structures

All teachers were well aware of story structures since it is required from them by the syllabus to respond to key aspects of text, such as the story line, characters, plot and setting. It seemed, however, that teachers do not generalize this information to all forms of reading for example to bring it to learners attention that they should also be aware that all the structures that can be found in a book, can be found in a short piece of reading and that they could look out for the same developmental pattern.

Regarding knowledge about different genres learners in group A had a bigger reservoir of types of stories to share in comparison to group B. Learners in group B provided a very limited number of different types of stories and they were less aware of the formal descriptions for these genres. In both groups some learners were confused between the terms fiction and non-fiction- they thought that fiction meant facts and that non-fiction were “made-up stories.” None of the two groups mentioned that text is categorized in two main forms, namely narrative and expository. McCormick (1996) pointed out that knowledge of these two types of text can help the reader to understand text better.

(f) Summaries

All teachers were well acquainted with what a summary was, but in the interviews with learners, only one learner in group B could explain partly what a summary

entails. The explanations that were provided by three of the learners in group B gave the impression that the word summary refers to notes that one should copy from the chalk board. When they were prompted to try and write a summary of the passage they read, it became evident that they did not have experience on how to do it. Although all the teachers in group B knew what a summary was and that some of them said they do it with the learners in the class, it was evident that their learners did not know what summaries were and they could not do it in practise. The teachers in the lowest performing schools did not explicitly teach learners how to make summaries and learners could consequently not do it. On the other hand all learners in group A knew what summaries are and they could write summaries.

Finding the main ideas in a text is the basis of strategies such as summaries, semantic and graphic organizers. The learners in group B were most probably not exposed much to finding the main ideas since they could not write summaries. Usually each paragraph has a topic sentence and if learners could be taught to consciously search for it, it will enhance their understanding of the text.

Learners own strategies

Learners in group A mentioned a big variety of strategies that they could call upon to assist them in the meaning making process. Learners in group B, in contrast, only gave a few ideas. It is evident that learners in group A were more exposed to a variety of ideas to go about when they are facing challenges than the learners in group B.

5.3 Linkage of the findings to the theoretical framework

According to the Social Constructivist Theory people are active learners and must construct knowledge for themselves. All the reading comprehension strategies require from the reader to actively and continuously make meaning out of written text. The little knowledge and application of reading comprehension strategies that were found, is an indication that the construction process was hindered due to the absence of strong scaffolds to stand on. The concept “scaffolding” refers to the personal guidance, assistance and support that a teacher or more capable peer provides to a learner that will enable him to understand the work that he currently has difficulties with – the teachers had limited knowledge of reading comprehension strategies and therefore could not transfer sufficient skills to the learners.

The Social Constructivist theory further mentioned that, in the construction of knowledge, new knowledge is built upon the current knowledge that a person has. Teachers provided a foundation in the form of previews that were done. However, another strategy such as predictions did not receive enough attention.

The Constructivist further highlights the interaction of persons and situations in the acquisition and refinement of skills and knowledge. Vygotsky (Schunk, 2009, 243) stressed that “interaction with other people in the environment stimulates developmental processes and foster cognitive growth.” The implication for instruction in the classroom is that the teacher should provide opportunities for learners to communicate with others to develop their cognitive abilities and the teachers should provide instruction that will move the learner to “higher forms of

mental functions.” The teachers of the lowest performing schools reported peer teaching (learners helping other learners) while the highest performing schools were not keen on doing it. It was beyond the scope of this study to find out about the effectiveness of the peer teaching. The role of the more knowledgeable other in the development of the learner is also a central theme in Vygotsky’s Social Constructivist Theory. The teacher should work in the Zone of Proximal Development of the learner. It was found in this study that the teachers did not observe what the learners were doing while busy with reading in order to equip them with the necessary skills to overcome their reading comprehension problems.

The Social Cognitive Theory stresses the idea that much human learning occurs in a social environment. By observing others, people acquire knowledge and strategies, but due to the lack of modelling of reading comprehension strategies observed in the classroom, learners did not learn from the teacher how to read with better comprehension.

The cognitive theories explain how humans process information to make it meaningful. Almost all the reading comprehension strategies supported by research, for example, monitoring of comprehension and graphic and semantic organizers are examples of how reading can be made easier with the help of strategies. Most of the learners lack the strategies that can help them to process written materials in an easier way.

5.4 Lecturer's and Advisory Teacher's responses

The views of a university lecturer, lecturing Teaching Methods of English, and those of the advisory teacher for European languages at the Khomas Regional office will be discussed.

5.4.1 Personal views on the situation with reading comprehension

Both the lecturer and the Advisory teacher agreed that reading comprehension is a big concern. The lecturer pointed out that student-teachers themselves have problems pertaining the comprehension of text, namely the incorrect interpretation of questions and that they themselves lack a reading culture. It cannot be taken for granted that years of answering of questions, automatically means a person knows how to answer questions.

The Advisory teacher mentioned that teachers do not teach reading comprehension strategies and that she only observed the answering of questions in reading comprehension activities. It confirms the concerns in this study, namely that teachers do not have enough strategies; they are consequently not teaching them and learners obviously lack a range of strategies since they were not equipped with them.

5.4.2 Essential information and skills that (student) teachers must be equipped with regarding reading comprehension strategies

Ways to deal with new vocabulary is essential, since the inability to make meaning from unknown words was already pointed out as a serious hampering factor and that learners should be taught how to go about it. "Word walls" is a strategy that will only

help the learner when he has access to a dictionary or to his peers or teacher. The strategy of “guessing the meaning of a word from the context” might help the learner when he should rely on himself as a source. Very few of the strategies that were identified by researchers as effective are taught at the university. Another matter of concern is the fact that the university use the syllabus as the guide to teach the basic competencies. The student-teachers should be provided with a wide range of skills far beyond the scope of the syllabus.

The Advisory Teacher basically focused only on the fundamental reading skills, and said she will have to “read up about the strategies,” which is an indication that it is not automatically in her reservoir of skills.

5.4.3 Factors that influence the intensive instruction in reading comprehension strategies

Limited time and full classes might prevent students from getting all the information they need to function as fully equipped teachers. The practicality of observing students implementing specific strategies might indeed contribute to students not mastering core skills, such as reading with comprehension. The university should find ways to ensure that essential skills such as the application of reading comprehension strategies are assessed- it can be practiced with other students and as an assignment with learners.

The Advisory Teacher agreed that teachers do not have enough skills and those that they do have, are not necessarily taught by them. She felt that teachers did not get

enough skills at institutions of higher learning and also not through in-service training. This confirmed the concerns in this study as mentioned previously.

In this chapter the focus was on the discussion of results. The linkage of the findings with the theoretical framework was discussed. The conclusions and recommendations will be made in chapter six.

Chapter 6

Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out whether teachers were well acquainted with a range of reading comprehension strategies, whether they are explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies and whether they are trained in these strategies. Furthermore, learners' applications of reading comprehension strategies were observed to see what strategies they are aware of and can apply.

All the teachers had limited strategies and it seemed they were trained only in a few strategies at their institutions of higher learning and through in-service training. The strategies they used were insufficient to address the comprehension difficulties of learners and in some cases made the learner even more dependent on the teacher such as the teacher switching to another language to help the learner to comprehend or the practice of reading the text for him. In cases where the challenges of learners were identified, for example, to find the meaning of unknown words or to read with concentration, they were not equipped with skills to overcome these difficulties. Teachers did not provide enough "scaffolds" for learners to make more meaning out of text, but it is because they themselves were not provided with sufficient skills. This confirmed literature by Pennington (2009) and Hageman and Reid (2008) that stated that teachers have difficulties teaching reading comprehension, that they do not teach it explicitly and that they were not sufficiently equipped to teach reading comprehension strategies.

As found by other researchers such as Pressley (1999) and Harrison (2004) very little time is spent on the teaching of reading comprehension strategies and this is evident in the responses of learners. All teachers seldom mentioned reading comprehension strategies in their lesson preparation.

Teachers knew and practised two of the six strategies to a large extent, namely, asking questions and teaching learners to recognise story structures. There are, however, factors that hinder the full implementations of these strategies. Some teachers do not teach learners how to read questions in order to answer them effectively.

The majority of the strategies identified by the literature – four of the six -were seldom practised by the teachers, namely to teach learners how to monitor their comprehension; generating questions; summarizing and preparing semantic and graphic organizers. From these four strategies summarizing was the most familiar one, and all teachers knew it very well, but not all teachers explicitly taught the skill to their learners. Teachers were used to generate questions, but did not think of asking the learners also to generate their own questions. Teachers knew about “spider webs”, but they were not using semantic and graphic organizers as a reading comprehension strategy. The idea of “monitoring your own comprehension while reading”, was a new concept to all the teachers. It is evident that a lot of training should be done to inform and practice these strategies with the teachers.

Significant differences were observed between the actions and reasoning of learners of top performing schools and learners of the lowest performing schools.

They were answering questions- the most common practise-, but it was evident that most learners in the lowest performing schools did not listen carefully to the questions and consequently did not answer what was asked. The biggest obstacle in comprehending text was the inability, specifically of the learners of the lowest performing schools, to find the meanings to unknown words in the absence of a dictionary. It was confirmed by the university lecturer that university students also have difficulties to read questions.

The strategies investigated by the researcher were previewing and activation of background knowledge, monitoring of their own comprehension, generating questions, writing summaries, recognising story structures, making predictions and elaborations as well as visualising. The majority of the learners from the top performing schools could execute almost all the strategies. It was evident that they were not used to generating their own questions. Learners from the lowest performing schools could not write summaries and they had difficulties to monitor their own comprehension (they overrated their understanding of the text). Activities that requested more verbal feedback, such as visualising, previewing, making predictions, were answered with the minimum words as if they were not very used to such elaborations.

The biggest differences observed between the actions and reasoning between teachers and learners of top performing and the lowest performing schools were the following: teachers in the top performing schools focused more on actions that will lead learners to independent operating, for example how to approach unknown words. Teachers in the lowest performing schools made learners dependent, for

example on dictionaries (which is a good strategy, but only to a limited extent) and by always reading the text to them, as it was the case at one school.

Teachers in the lowest performing schools were more progressive in their thinking regarding learner-centred approaches, such as peer teaching. They were more focused on the needs of the learners for example their levels of motivation, their interest in specific types of literature for their developmental level and the home circumstances of the learner. Teachers at these schools were in some cases more knowledgeable about strategies than teachers in the top performing schools. The biggest problem was however, that they did not always transfer their knowledge to their learners and previous research done by Almasi and Hart (2011) found the same tendency.

Learners in the top performing schools had a bigger reservoir of strategies to pull from for example they mentioned strategies taught to them in other subjects such as Basic Information Science, Afrikaans and Natural Science and Health Education that helped them in the comprehension of text. (None of the learners in the lowest performing schools mentioned skills acquired in other subjects.) The biggest challenge of learners in the lowest performing schools was their lack of skills to read unknown words and to interact with the text.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study the researcher wishes to make the following recommendations:

6.2.1 Training for teachers: Teachers, for language as well as for content subjects, should be equipped with more reading comprehension strategies and they should explicitly teach and model their knowledge and skills to the learners. Emphasis should be placed on the integration of knowledge to all aspects of learning (what is learned in one domain or one subject should be generalized to enhance learning) and the value of combining reading with writing. Teachers should continually be updated and have access to research journals to stay informed on the latest developments in research studies. The syllabi at tertiary level should include a range of strategies and lecturers should explicitly teach and model them and students should practice and use them in order to transfer it successfully to learners. Student-teachers should also be equipped with reading comprehension strategies so that they will be in a position to transfer that knowledge to their learners.

6.2.2 A document should be compiled that provide teachers with all the necessary information on how to teach reading comprehension strategies effectively. The Learning Support Manual compiled by NIED should be updated to include more reading comprehension strategies.

6.2.3 Provision should be made on administrative documents such as schemes of work to indicate the time allocated to the teaching of reading comprehension.

6.2.4 Specific time should be set aside for the explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies, because only the explicit teaching and practicing of reading comprehension strategies will ensure that learners master these strategies in order to function as independent readers who can transfer the skills to all spheres of life. Teachers automatically provide learners with critical thinking skills when they teach them reading comprehension strategies.

6.2.5 Literature should be provided to schools that are in line with the developmental stages of the learners, for example grade 7- learners are adolescents and the choice of literature should appeal to them and motivate them to read.

6.2.6 Specific actions should be taken to create a reading culture and reading “rituals” at the schools, for example always read with a pen and paper in your hand or slogans such as “read one book a month”. Schools can implement a reading period with specific objectives in mind.

6.2.7 Further research on reading comprehension should be done for example to evaluate how switching to the mother tongue influences the performance of learners regarding reading comprehension; to evaluate the effectiveness of the peer teaching methods in the enhancement of reading comprehension; and to investigating the teaching of reading comprehension strategies in content subjects.

The researcher expresses the hope that various stakeholders in education will read the study and implement the recommendations.

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