UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA

READING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES AMONG STUDENTS OF KPANDO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

FRANCIS NEWTON AKURAH
(190011745)

A Thesis in the Department of Applied Linguistics,
Faculty of Foreign Languages Education and Communication,
submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education
(Applied Linguistics)
in the University of Education, Winneba

**DECEMBER, 2020**

DECLARATION

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, FRANCIS NEWTON AKURAH, declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works, which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

SIGNATURE: ………………………………

DATE: …………………………………………

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work was supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of Dissertation as laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.
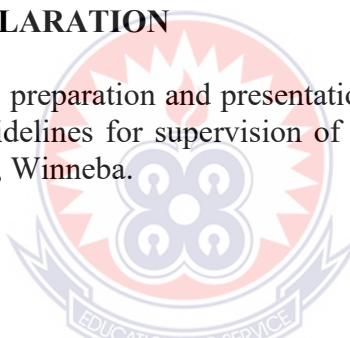
NAME OF SUPERVISOR: DR. CHARLOTTE FOFO LOMOTEY

SIGNATURE: ………………………………

DATE: …………………………………………

DEDICATION

To the memory of my beloved father, the Late Presbyter Samuel Nelson Akurah (1952-2019 AD)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENT

ABSTRACT

This research is a qualitative study on reading difficulties among Senior High School students. The study sought to identify the causes of these difficulties, the effects on the students, and ways language teachers can help learners to overcome these challenges. The study used sixty-seven students and five teachers as respondents. Interview and observation were used to collect data for the study. From the study, it was revealed that poor reading speed which is caused by the difficulty level of the texts, Negative attitude of language teachers, ineffective teaching approaches, are some of the major causes of reading difficulties among Senior High School students. Some of the effects of reading comprehension difficulties on the academic performance of the students include: Failure in West African Secondary Schools Certificate Examinations, inability to communicate effectively, <u>fear</u> of reading subjects. Some strategies suggested to enhance students' abilities in reading and comprehension include: Equipping students with reading and comprehension skills, using modern approaches to teach reading and comprehension, using texts from the learners' environment. The findings of this research will help shape the comprehension skills of the leaners as well as direct teachers on the various techniques to employ in teaching reading comprehension.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0   Introduction

For most people living in this modern world, reading is an everyday ordinary task to which little thought is given; yet it is one of the most important skills that learners acquire at school as it forms the foundation for all further learning. Unlike the ability to speak, the one to read is not inborn, and a learner does not acquire it simply by watching and listening to others reading. Many of our day-to-day tasks require reading, and a person who can read well can function more effectively in everyday activities; yet for an illiterate person, many of life's seemingly mundane and ordinary tasks which many literate people take for granted can become insurmountable hurdles (Darrel, 2005). The four basic skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing- are all very important skills of humans. Though all the skills are important, learning to decode a message that has been encoded plays a crucial role in a person's life. As an aspect of English language education, reading and comprehension play a crucial role in a person's education as it is seen as the pillar of education. For one to study any subject and flourish, one needs to be familiar with the right reading skills as it will aid in the comprehension of any written text. Reading comprehension is thus an aspect of a child's literacy life that needs to be developed to its fullest. This study is designed to identify students' reading and comprehension challenges and to suggest ways of dealing with them.

1.1   Background to the study

In recent times, reading comprehension, like any other child's literacy skill, has become a major problem in our institutions of learning. Traditionally, literacy

1

was perceived to be the child's ability to read and to write in the target language. Recent studies however have revealed that child literacy looks at all aspects of knowledge that will lead to the total development of the child, both in school and out of school. To function well in our developing literate communities, one needs to be able to read, write, and understand whatever material that is read and written.

Reading and comprehension have been serious problems among both students and teachers in all levels of education in Ghana. Most students find it difficult to relate whatever they read to the intent of the write-up. This makes it difficult for them to supply accurate answers to questions based on materials they read. The 2018 Chief Examiner's Report on English language revealed that students with poor skills in reading and comprehension performed badly in the subject while those with good reading skills have limited challenges in areas such as speaking and writing.

Meanwhile, according to Oberholzer (2005), reading is a cornerstone of the child's success at school and throughout life. It is also noted that basic education in Ghana seeks to produce students who can read and write. This means that people who undergo series of instructions should be able to communicate effectively through reading and writing. It is therefore envisaged that an individual student should be able to read and understand any material written in English language. Based on this reason, reading and comprehension is taught in our institutions of learning as an aspect of the English language course in order to enhance students' abilities in reading and understanding. The ability of students to read and understand is very vital in the literature environment. With the upsurge of computers, our society is surrounded by written information in every corner of our lives. It is therefore a big

challenge to realize that students have difficulties in reading and understanding what is read.

Reading involves the construction of meaning of a written or spoken communication through a reciprocal, holistic interchange of ideas between the interpreter and the message in a particular communicative context. Meaning is constructed when readers make connections between what they know (prior knowledge) and what they are reading (the text) (Duke and Pearson 2002). The teacher must be informed about the social constructivist nature of reading and comprehension that stipulates that reading comprehension is a multi-faceted process. Factors such as constructivist beliefs, influential teacher, active readers, text and type of instruction play very crucial roles in the construction of meaning.

The social constructivists' view of reading and comprehension postulates that classroom cultures that foster reading and comprehension are characterized by a teacher who acts as a reading model, a back-rich classroom environment, opportunities for choice, familiarity with books and literacy related incentives that reflect that value of reading (Gambrell, 1996).

This study will look at reading and comprehension difficulties among students of Kpando Senior High School. Kpando Senior High School is one of the four Senior High Schools in the Kpando municipality of the Volta Region of Ghana. It is a mixed-sex school established on the 26th of January, 1953 to cater for the learning deficit of the indigenes of Kpando. With the computerized placement system in Ghana, the school usually receives students from the basic schools in the Kpando catchment areas-Gbefi, Anfoe, Vakpo, Dambai, Kwamikrom, and the likes. These are all farming communities. Whereas some of these people are engaged in

food crop production, others are engaged in animal production and fishing. The school, Kpando Senior High School, lies in the central part of these communities. For most of the students, running to town is their hobby. Most of them do not know that the time they have in their side for senior high education is so limited. Instead of them sitting down to read their books and make meaning out of them, they rather take delight in running to town and engaging in unprofitable arguments with their peers.

Currently, the school has a total population of two thousand two hundred and sixty-two students. With this number, most of the classes are chocked. With the large numbers in the various classrooms, students are expected to make judicious use of the school's library during their free periods or during their leisure. However, students of Kpando Senior High School do not show any sign of seriousness towards reading and studying as a whole. These may be said to be some of the possible causes of reading comprehension difficulties among the students, which the researcher intends to look at.

Reading, according to Aziz (2011) is an exercise that trains students understanding completely and be aware of situations, facts, and information. He argues further that comprehension is the ability to understand what is read. One can build one's own vocabulary through reading. One becomes fluent in speech and it makes one to develop the ability to think critically before taking decisions, making analysis or drawing conclusions.

Unfortunately, there are a number of problems associated with teaching reading comprehension in our schools. Most schools lack libraries, even if they have at all, are poorly equipped. The kind of literature that students would like to read and enjoy are not available. Most students consider reading as tedious skill and so are not

4

interested in reading. It makes students abilities in reading very weak and that makes it difficult for them to enjoy reading with their poor vocabulary. It therefore becomes difficult for them to either understand or appreciate whatever they read. Most English as a second language teachers in Kpando Senior High School put up negative attitudes toward the teaching of the subject and most of them also use ineffective teaching approaches in their lesson deliveries. These also account for the students' difficulties in reading comprehension since a skill of the tutor in guiding students in reading comprehension is very important in language teaching and learning. The second language teacher needs to motivate the learners to read with understanding so that they can enjoy what they read.

The study therefore aims at finding out some of the possible causes of reading comprehension difficulties among students of Kpando Senior High School, the effects of the reading comprehension difficulties on the students and suggesting certain measures to curtail these difficulties.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Bohlman and Pretorius (2002) infer that reading is essential for learning and that if learners have not properly mastered this learning tool, their potential for success in the learning context is handicapped. Reading comprehension is an important basic skill that every individual student needs so as to function effectively in our present literate society.

The importance of equipping our students with this requisite skill in the classroom to enable them read and comprehend cannot be overemphasized. Thus, reading is central to a successful literacy development. However, it is observed that the reading habits of students of Kpando Senior High School is nothing to write home about. This may partly be due to the ineffective teaching methods by the

language teachers, the students' inability to comprehend or make meaning out of the texts read as a result of their attitude towards reading, the culturally biased texts available for students, and the inability of the students to make meaning of texts read. Again, it was realised that students in Kpando Senior High School do not have the interest in reading. That is, they lack reading cultures.

The Chief Examiners Report of 2018 indicated that the failure of most students in Core English Paper is as a result of poor reading comprehension skills. This statement is as the result of the very low scores scored by students under the comprehension section of the core English Paper. Despite the perceived importance of reading and considerable efforts of teachers and other stakeholders across the country, research findings indicate that there are many learners who experience reading difficulties. It is against this background that the researcher decided to investigate the causes of reading comprehension difficulties among students of Kpando Senior High School in order to suggest possible measures to address the problems.

1.3   Purpose of the study

As already stated, the study aims to basically look at some problems associated with reading and comprehension among students of Kpando Senior High School, the effects of the reading comprehension difficulties on the students and suggest certain possible measures to the problems. The study also aims to outline some of the underlying principles regarding the teaching of reading comprehension at the senior high level of education and to give the language tutors of the school a new dimension to teaching of reading comprehension.

1.4   Research questions

The following questions will guide me in the conduct of my research;

1. What are some of the possible causes of reading comprehension difficulties among students of Kpando Senior High School?

2. What are the effects of students' difficulties in reading comprehension?

3. What strategies are useful to teach students to read and understand?

1.5   Significance of the study

That learners should perform well is an undisputable wish of every stakeholder in education. Comprehension lies at the heart of a good interactive teaching and thus helps improve students' performance. For this reason, the results of this research will help shape the comprehension skills of the leaners as well as direct teachers on the various techniques to employ in teaching reading comprehension.

Also, the research will help the teacher training centers to factor the right strategies of handling reading comprehension lessons into their curriculum. Finally, the research will serve as a springboard for other researchers. Any other researcher who will like to embark on a similar study in future can use this material as a source of reference.

1.6   Limitations of the study

This work could have produced a better result if it were conducted in the whole school and for that matter, in all the four second cycle institutions in the Kpando Municipality. This was however not possible following a number of challenges: there was limited time available for the researcher to gather information from the respondents, the COVID-19 pandemic which saw a lot of lock downs and

social distancing protocols, leading to the closure of school for almost five (5) months, and the heavy work schedule of the researcher.

Another major challenge was the cooperation from the respondents. On most occasions, the teacher respondents failed their appointments for the research interview. This made the researcher to trace them on countless occasions before conducting the interview. Some of the student respondents also felt reluctant in giving accurate responses to some of the interview questions. This is because some of the questions sound a bit sensitive to some of the respondents therefore strategies such as strict assurance of confidentiality of information will be provided and the protection of the participants' anonymity. These made the study a herculean one. Despite the many challenges that were encountered by the researcher in conducting the research, the research was successfully carried out through skills, efforts and techniques that the researcher used.

1.7   Delimitation

The study is basically a qualitative study of problems associated with reading comprehension among students of Kpando Senior High School. Thus, the importance of reading, the problems of students' inability to read and understand texts as well as the effects of these problems on the academic performance of the students. In addition, it would address concrete measures and strategies that will instill essential elements and skills required for reading comprehension in students.

1.8   Organisation of the study

The study is in five chapters. Chapter one, which is the introductory chapter, comprises background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitation, delimitation and

organization of the study. Chapter two looks at the review of related literature. It places the study within the context of previous research. It involves theoretical and empirical findings from related studies. Chapter three looks at the methodology. It includes research design, population, sample and sampling procedure, research instruments, data collection procedure and data analysis procedure. Chapter four presents the results of the study. In this chapter, data collected are interpreted and findings are discussed. Finally, chapter five comprises the summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0   Introduction

In this chapter, works of authorities that are related to the study are reviewed. The works are reviewed under the concept of reading, importance of reading comprehension, causes of reading comprehension difficulties among students, teaching strategies that can enhance reading comprehension skills among students and some theories of comprehension.

2.1.   The concept of reading

Meaning, learning, and pleasure are the ultimate goals of learning to read. Although fundamental skills such as phonics and fluency are important building blocks of reading, reading comprehension is the "sine qua non of reading" (Beck & McKeown, 1998). Reading is a multifaceted process involving word recognition, comprehension, fluency, and motivation. Reading is making meaning from print. It requires that readers identify the words in print (word recognition), construct an understanding from them (comprehension), coordinate identifying words and making meaning so that reading is automatic and accurate (fluency) (Leipzig, 2001).

Smith and Elley (1997) conceive of reading as first and foremost language process and suggested that it is language that makes learning possible. In a world full of reading materials, reading is an indispensable skill. For now, it is no longer a preserve of the educated; rather it is a life skill. One just needs to consider the advent of technological advancement where each and every one in one way or the other is using phones. According to Sparks and Pattons (2006) children, in their attempt to learn how to read, 'begin by acquiring word decoding skills in which they map

10

letters' (p.17). To them, when decoding becomes automatic, it is then that meaning can be obtained from the text. They further indicated that reading is an interactive process where various skills are employed in the act of understanding what is read. Thus the interactive nature of reading is shown in the relationship between the reader and the text, and the reader depends on his idea of the relationship between letters, words and sentences. From this, it is obvious that the meaning that is derived from a text does not only arise out of just a word or a sentence. In fact, it is the cumulative effect of the various elements in a text that gives a text its meaning. It is thus very clear that 'The long term aim of reading instruction is not to give the child the ability to recognize letters and words in isolation; rather, it is to ensure that the child is able to gain meaning from the text' and that children have the propensity to process texts which they are more familiar with than texts with which they have no familiarity (Smith & Elley, 1997).

Regarding the orthography of English, Sparks and Pattons (2006) postulated that English is a language with a deep orthography in which the spelling of words is represented by sound-system relationship that is often irregular. The often irregular nature of the English orthography has the propensity to make reading an arduous task for young readers, particularly those for whom English is a second language or a foreign language.

According to Sekyi-Baidoo, (2003) reading is a way of decoding, interpreting or making meaning from written symbols. He further explains that reading is not only a physical or visual contact with symbols which are written down but reading involves extracting meaning from the symbols. Reading can thus be considered effective when meaning is generated from the material read and the reading goes with a level of speed. In effect, making meaning out of a text is one thing and the

11

speed at which the meaning is made is another and this is what students of Kpando Senior High School lack. The students do not possess the skill in making meaning out of the written symbols. This situation retards their ability to understand whatever text that they have read as well as the speed they need to read a text. The researcher aims to use ideas from different scholars to assist the students to develop the concept of reading and understanding what is read.

Aziz (2011) considers reading as an ability to decode meaning from a printed text. He further argues that reading is a kind of exercise that trains students to understand completely and be aware of situations and facts. From this, reading can be seen as an exercise to test a student's ability to figure out facts and information from a given text. This could also imply that one can take up reading as a form of exercise which could train the mind and make the mind smarter and faster.

2.2   Importance of reading comprehension

Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four basic skills of a language. Of these four skills, listening and reading are the receptive skills while speaking and writing are the productive or the expressive skills. Through the teaching of a language, these basic skills are acquired by the learner. No matter how good or brilliant a student is, it is only good reading skills that can help him to perform in other subject areas effectively and accurately. Effective learning of other school subjects with great understanding depends on how far the learner develops the reading ability. For a learner to progress or move higher in academia, he or she must first progress in reading ability and skills, hence the need for more attention in developing this skill in the learner. Baatjies (2003) states that the most important element of high quality education is literacy and that without the ability to read,

12

learners are denied pertinent information about health, social, cultural and political issues, as well as sources of pleasure and enrichment.

Wilson (1968) posits that nothing happens within an institution, organization or society unless we use communication. This is in line with the idea that without communication, there could be little or no group action, sharing of information and transactions, and societies could not have functioned effectively. Rules, regulations, practices are all forms of communication that have been formulated primarily to control and direct the affairs of people in a given society. Many of these are written documents which must be understood through reading. It is therefore a fact that we communicate through reading.

One of the basic reasons why reading is important is because it helps the reader to grow mentally, emotionally and psychologically. Every book gives the reader an opportunity to learn new things and explore new ideas. Reading books increases one's knowledge and makes you smarter (Sharma, 2018). It could be deduced from this that reading thus makes one a leader. The more one reads, the more information one gathers and the more information you have, the more eloquent you become. Reading is important for learning as it gives learners independent access to a vast world of information as well as fulfilment and enjoyment (Gunning, 2007)

The ability to read and understand is very crucial in this technological era. It is therefore important for teachers to demonstrate to students how to read and comprehend within their environment (Burns, Roe, & Ross, 1999). They further indicate that every aspect of our lives including the use of road signs which help in directing users on how to effectively use the road involves reading.

Comprehension enables us to develop critical thinking skills. Conley (1992) complements this by saying without the ability to use reading to engage in a variety of ways of thinking, our students will be incapable of communicating and surviving in our print-based society.

Reading, again, improves the writing skills of the learner. As students read wide, they are improved in both vocabulary and the word power of the second or target language. This improvement enhances the way they organize ideas to convey meaning in texts. Their writings are thus devoid of petty errors and they are able to organize their thoughts very well on paper.

Reading comprehension increases the enjoyment and effectiveness of reading and helps not only academically, but professionally, and in a person's personal life. (Rutzler, 2017). When one reads and one is able to make meaning out of the text, there is always the motivation to read more words and enjoy whatever thing or theme that follows. Once one is not able to make meaning out of the material being read, the material will definitely not be enjoyed.

It is very important for learners in a school environment to have excellent comprehension skills. Reading comprehension is used in other subject areas such as science, mathematics, and history. In science as a subject, learners read and learn about many scientific related topics throughout their studies. Proper reading comprehension will have them read and understand facts about animals, plants, the Solar System, the scientific method, and many more. In Mathematics, learners are given a lot of word problems.

Without reading comprehension skills, children will struggle determining what is actually being asked and said. In history, learners are taught about many

significant leaders and events throughout history like Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, The Constitution, and Ghana's struggle for independence. In order for the learners to succeed at reading about history, they must understand what is being read and said. Reading comprehension will help them understand and process the information in the text.

Reading comprehension helps the learner to understand and enjoy any message of any printed word and apply that understanding to novel experiences. Without understanding, readers are described as "word calling"; that is, naming words without gleaning any meaning from them.

2.3   Causes of reading comprehension difficulties among students

There have been many hypotheses as to why children have comprehension problems. Oakhill (1993) identified three main theoretical approaches explaining factors that account for comprehension problem that children have. First, children have comprehension deficit because they have serious problems at the single word level. This problem arises chiefly because the children's stock of vocabulary is very limited. It therefore goes without saying that a child or student who does not understand the individual words in a passage or text is more than likely not going to make meaning of the text as a whole, since we cannot dispute the fact that decoding the meaning of the individual words of a passage will lead to decoding the passage as a whole.

Secondly, Oakhill (1993) states that poor comprehenders have difficulty in the syntactic and semantic analysis of text. To this end, poor comprehenders are not able to break sentences into bits in order to make meaning out of them, while good readers, on the other hand, are able to use the process of chunking, which involves

15

grouping of words in a sentence into short meaningful phrases instead of trying to do word-by-word reading. Chunking thus helps in aiding comprehension (Oakhill, 1993).

Thirdly, 'poor comprehenders have difficulties with higher order comprehension skills: making inferences from text, integrating ideas in it, and monitoring their own comprehension' (Oakhill, 1993, p. 224). This presupposes that, while good readers move beyond the level of knowledge and understanding, poor comprehenders are usually stuck at those levels, and thus have difficulty in the way they understand a given text anytime it is required of them to apply higher order thinking to make meaning of a given text.

In spite of the aforementioned, Oakhill is of the view that 'poor comprehenders' problem cannot, it seems, be attributed to any straightforward decoding or memory problems' (p.227). She thus posits inference and text integration as major areas of problem. To her, less skilled comprehenders have an arduous task when it comes to making inferences from text, as they find it difficult '(a) inferring information that is only implicit in a text, (b) making inferences to connect up the ideas in a text, and (c) inferring the meanings of particular words from context', and that 'the less-skilled comprehenders were poor at answering inferentially-based questions even when the text was made available to them' (Oakhill, 1993. p. 227).

In the same vein, Smith and Elley (1997) also identified some barriers to reading comprehension. To Smith and Elley, lack of relevant schema is a very great source of difficulty for students when it comes to reading comprehension. They, therefore, are of the view that textbook writers, and in fact, some teachers are under

16

the erroneous impression that students have the relevant experience required to make meaning of a text. Also, in line with this assertion, Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey and Anderson (1982) contend that 'readers acquire meaning from text by analyzing words and sentences against the backdrop of their own personal knowledge of the world' (p. 354). In furtherance, they also postulated that 'culture influences knowledge, beliefs, and values; and that knowledge, beliefs, and values influence comprehension process' (p.354). This assertion brings on board the importance of relevant previous knowledge in the process of meaning of any given text and thus the schema theory. The schema theory, according to Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), holds that reading comprehension is an interactive process that involves the text and the reader's prior background knowledge. They further contend that 'the process of interpretation is guided by the principle that every input is mapped against some existing schema and that all aspects of that schema must be compatible with the input information' (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 555). Zhang (1993) also toed this same line when he indicated that

> 'comprehension is an interactive process which involves assimilation of new knowledge into existing schemata and accommodation of existing schemata to fit new knowledge' (p.5). He further identified the fact that '(a) lack of schemata or failure to activate an appropriate schema can significantly impair comprehension, (b) appropriate content schema application can increase comprehension, and (c) comprehension is facilitated by explicitly introducing schemata through pre-reading activities' (p. 5).

There are also times when students possess the relevant schema but fail to use it when they encounter a passage that requires its usage. Other times, there might arise the situation whereby an irrelevant schemata will prevent the student from getting the

17

meaning that the writer of a text intended and it is the duty of the good teacher to recognize what might have precipitated an interference (Smith & Elley, 1997).

Moreover, lack of vocabulary on the part of students also results in the situation where students find difficulty when it comes to comprehending a given text. To this end, Smith and Elley (1997) postulate that there might be times when students possess the required schemata necessary to facilitate comprehension, however the author's language, especially the choice of vocabulary and the use of technical terms can really hinder a child from understanding the given passage. In similar vein, Feldt and Moore (1999) concluded that technical terms may make it difficult for comprehension to take place.

Next, Smith and Elley (1997) observed that there is dearth of strategies for dealing with passages. This squarely lays the blame on the teachers, in the sense that teachers do not equip their students with the relevant strategies to cope with the aforementioned barriers of comprehension. Among the strategies many teachers adopt to help students include taking children through words which the teacher believes will pose some level of difficulty to them. However, pre-reading vocabulary activity does little or nothing in helping students to understand a given passage since the key words that are taught repeatedly to kids carry cultural meanings (Zhaohua, 2004, p.59). In contrast Zhaohua (2004), contends that:

> Pre teaching vocabulary in reading pedagogy is that vocabulary pre-teaching should not be based on lexical difficulty or frequency, as is often the case in China. Instead, vocabulary items selected for pre-teaching instruction should be specialized vocabulary which teachers predict will cause difficulties for most students, or words that carry cultural meanings relatively unfamiliar to most Chinese students (p.59).

18

2.4   Effects of reading comprehension difficulties on academic performance

Most of our students complete their senior high education but cannot perform meaningful reading activities like scanning a phone or a printed material for emergency numbers or a quick notice. Conley (1992) argues that a decline in students' ability to comprehend written information is a worry. If students are unable to engage in a variety of ways of thinking and analyzing, they will not be able to communicate effectively. Their survival in our print based society will be nothing to write home about.

2.5   Teaching strategies that can enhance reading comprehension skills

Modern day reading tasks, unlike the traditional materials, involve three phase procedures: pre-, while-, and post- reading stages. Zhang (1993) posits that "comprehension is facilitated by explicitly introducing schemata through pre-reading activities." Thus the pre-reading stage helps in activating the relevant schema - the background knowledge or what is referred to as the previous knowledge of the learner. In most of our schools nowadays, majority of our teachers have neglected the pre reading activities which involve the activation of previous knowledge. By this, most learners are unable to connect the passage to their everyday lives hence, the learners read in vacuum without understanding the texts read. It is therefore worth noting that pre-reading activities whet students' appetite before the actual reading takes place. This goes a long way to get the readers glued to their sits to enjoy the texts. To this, Drucker (2003) suggests the following procedure that teachers can emulate before reading a text: The teacher should relate the passage students are going to read to something that is familiar to them. That is, the passage should be narrowed down to the environment of the learners and what they are familiar with.

Next, the teacher should provide a brief discussion question that will engage the students and, after that, provide an overview of the section they are about to read. Name the selection, introduce the characters, and describe the plot (up to, but not including, the climax).

Last, the teacher should direct the students to read the story and look for particular information. Similarly, Abraham (2002) states that an interactive approach "demands that the teachers activate the students' schema" during the pre-reading phase by helping "students recognize the knowledge that they already have about the topic of a text." This, he also said could be done through discussion of titles, subheadings, photographs, identifying text structure, previewing, etc. Such activities are called "pre-reading strategies".

2.6   Theories of comprehension

For Pardo (2004), comprehension is 'a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text' (p. 272). Smith and Elley (1997), noted two main models for understanding the reading process. These are the 'bottom up' model and the 'top down' model. Theorists who lean more to the bottom up model are of the view that there should be deliberate teaching of letters, sounds and how these are blended to children. This is usually done through the use of flashcards, drills, dictations etc. until the children have mastered the act of reading.

To the bottom up theorists, these processes lead to the situation where the decoding process becomes automatic because children through this process are equipped with the skill required to attack unknown words. Thus, advocates of the 'bottom up' theory believe that 'good readers do not guess, or predict upcoming text,

20

but translate the visual aspects of print directly into sounds, and subsequently into meaning' (Smith & Elley, 1997).

The top down theorists, on the other hand, argue that intentionally teaching children the basic elements such as letters, sounds, blends and words makes the learning process very cumbersome and denies children the pleasure that should be derived from reading. Besides, it is an undeniable fact that the English language does not have a consistent letter to sound correspondence and children who merely depend on the 'bottom up' are likely to be 'correct less than 50 percent of the time because there are so many exceptions to the English phonic rules' (Smith & Elley, 1997).

Sparks and Patton (2006) further state that one effective approach to reading is the Simple View of Reading (SVR). To them, 'The SVR proposes that reading is the product of word decoding and language comprehension. Word decoding requires knowledge of the speech sounds (phonemes) in words (phonemic awareness) and the alphabetic system in which those sounds are represented' (p.18).

Let us quickly turn our attention to the SQ3R method, which was developed by Robinson (1970). It is one of the models which had achieved a considerable level of popularity and success in the teaching and learning of reading comprehension. The SQ3R is a reading formula which was developed with the aim of helping readers to process written information more efficiently and to make sure that what is read is retained.

SQ3R can be broken down into many different and separate skills, which are necessary for successful implementation. The letters have their corresponding meanings as is indicated by Brown (cited in Al-ghazo, 2015, p. 94)

Survey: skim the text for an overview of min ideas.

21

Question: the reader asks questions about what he or she wishes to get out of the text.

Read: read the text while looking for answers to the previously form questions.

Recite: reprocess the salient points of the text through oral.

Review: assess the importance of what one has just read and incorporate it into long term association. (Brown, as cited in Al-ghazo, 2015, p. 94

2.7   Related Studies

This section looks at similar works conducted by earlier researchers. A study conducted by Jane Oakhill on Children's Difficulties in Reading Comprehension and published by *Springer* in September 1993 reveals that poor comprehenders have difficulties at the level of sentences, failing to make use of the syntactic constraints in text and tend to read word-by-word, rather than processing the texts in meaningful units, and failure on the part of learners to make inferences from texts read. The study also attests that poor comprehenders are slow decoders.

Another is a study conducted by Bella Dudula Hlalethwa on Reading Difficulties Experienced by Learners in the Foundation Phase in Inclusive Schools in Makapanstad, South Africa in2013. The researcher used a qualitative method for the study. The case study research design was adopted for the study where three schools in Makapanstad, South Africa, were sampled for the study. The study reveals a lack of dedication amongst educators to teach reading as well as a lack of experience and expertise and skill to teach reading. It also shows that poverty and school conditions contribute immensely to reading difficulties experienced by the learners; parental involvement is still lacking, especially in rural schools; inclusive education is not

22

well cascaded to lower levels (schools); educators need intensive training to become experts and specialists to improve teaching skills and to keep pace with innovation in education; classes are overcrowded and there are continuous interruptions that prohibit quality teaching and learning; and teachers lack experience and support in their profession.

Also, a study conducted by Anahor Isaac in 2012 on Improving Reading Comprehension Among Teacher Trainees In Ghana; A Case Study At St. John Bosco's College of Education, Navrongo, Ghana reveals that reading comprehension difficulties are usually caused by the readers' inability to study how reading materials are organised, poor reading and comprehension techniques on the part of the learners, and unsophisticated language teachers among others.

2.8   Conclusion

The related review was centred on the topic "Reading Comprehension Difficulties Among Students of Kpando Senior High School. The review considered both empirical and theoretical evidence on what others said on the topic under the following headings:

i.   The concept of reading

ii.   Importance of reading comprehension

iii.   Causes of reading comprehension difficulties among students

iv.   Effects of reading comprehension difficulties on academic performance

v.   Teaching strategies that can enhance reading comprehension skills

vi.   Theories of comprehension

vii.   Related studies

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.0   Introduction

This chapter deals with the methods and procedures used by the researcher to collect data for the study. It also discusses how the data is analysed and presented. The chapter is sub-divided into sections. These sections include research design, population, sampling technique, sample size the research site, data collection strategies, data analysis and data presentation.

3.1   Research design

Taking into consideration the objectives of the study, I adopted qualitative approach for this research since qualitative research allows the researcher to be personally involved with the research (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). For flexibility as far as sampling technique is concerned, the qualitative research design has been employed. Qualitative research involves data collection procedures that result primarily in open-ended, non-numerical data which is then analysed primarily by non-statistical methods (Dornyei, 2007).

It is a case study of third year students of Kpando Senior High School, designed to solicit accurate information from two or more respondents. This design allowed me to operate in a natural setting where learners or teachers were not coerced to give inappropriate responses but data was collected in the natural setting. I also chose this design since it accorded me the opportunity to be involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants thereby making me the key instrument. Finally qualitative design was chosen given the fact that it also allowed

the researcher to use multiple methods to collect data (Halliday, 2002). Consequently, I employed the use of interviews and observation in this study.

3.2 Population

The study focused on the Senior High Schools in the Kpando Municipality of the Volta Region. Kpando is a town which is located at the central part of Volta Region. It is the first district capital in the Volta Region. Specifically, Kpando Senior High School has been chosen for the study.

Kpando Senior High School is located at the outskirt of the town on the Kpando - Have main road. It is a mixed school. Currently, the school has a student population of two thousand two hundred and sixty-two. (One thousand one hundred and seventy-three boys and one thousand and eighty-nine girls). The population of teachers of the school is one hundred and thirty-five (135).

The researcher chose Kpando Senior High School for the research because he is a member of staff and teaches in the language department. This will aid in accurate and reliable data collection and analysis.

3.3 Sampling technique and sampling size

The final year class (SHS Three) students have been chosen for this study. I chose the final year class of the school because currently, they are the only year group that will be readily available for the researcher. The second and first year students are running the double track system which will make it difficult for the researcher to get access to them when and where necessary. Also, since the third-year group is getting ready to write the West African Senior Secondary Schools Certificate Examination, the strategies will help them to perform well in the comprehension paper. This will go a long way to prepare them to do well in the other

subject areas as well as make them fit into the larger community after Senior High Education. The population of the third year group is six hundred and nine. Out of this, I, through the use of simple random sampling, selected sixty-seven students for this research. The teachers who teach these students were also considered. For the teachers, I used purposive sampling to select teachers who have had more than five years teaching experience teaching at the Department of English at the school. In all, five (5) teachers were used for the research. In all, fifteen (15) students were picked from four (4) classes and seven (7) picked from one class.

3.4   Research site

The research was conducted in Kpando Senior High School. The school is located in Kpando town which is in the Kpando municipality of the Volta Region. The school is located about seven hundred (700) meters away from the main station on the Kpando-Accra road.

Kpando Senior High School is a mixed sex school which was established on the 26th of January 1953. Currently, the school has a student population of two thousand two hundred and sixty-two. One thousand one hundred and seventy-three boys and one thousand and eighty-nine girls. This emanates from six hundred and nine students in the third year, nine hundred and fifty-three students in the second year and seven hundred students in the first year. The school also has a teaching staff population of one hundred and thirty-five.

3.5   Data collection strategies

This deals with the various procedures employed in collecting data for the study. The researcher employed interviews and observations in order to obtain reliable and accurate data for the study.

3.5.1 Interviews

Leedy & Ormrod (2005) and Creswell (2008) write that interviews in a qualitative study are rarely structured but rather are either open-ended or semi-structured. Open-ended questions are asked so that participants can best voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspective of the researcher. De Vos (2003) is of the opinion that semi-structured interviews are used by the researcher to gain a detailed picture of participants' beliefs, perceptions or accounts about a particular topic. Potter, as cited in Polkinghorne (2005), defined interviewing as a "technique of gathering data from humans by asking them questions and getting them to react verbally". I used a semi structured interview, whereby I specified the issues and topics in the form of an outline and decided the sequence in the course of the interview. I therefore employed well prepared questions that allowed for flexibility and follow up questions. This was done after establishing friendly atmosphere with the respondents. This aided in the attainment of reliable information. The use of interview ensured the privacy of respondents and created room for any form of responses from the respondents. Interview also ensured accurate and reliable information from the respondents. The accurate information includes that of student respondents and teacher respondents.

3.5.2 Observation

Creswell (2008) defines observation as a process of gathering open-ended first-hand information through observing people and places at the research site. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), observations in a qualitative study are intentionally unstructured and free flowing. Nutal (2005) opined that observation is an important way of establishing whether or not people do what they say they do. It involves a critical look at a phenomenon to ascertain a scenario.

I first established a report from the subject teachers and the students and employed the direct observation technique in observing two comprehension lessons of each teacher. Even though all the students in each of the five classes were not sampled for the research, the fifteen (15) from the four (4) classes and the seven (7) from the fifth class were all observed with the lager groups with critical attention on the sampled respondents. Though the purpose of the study was made known to the teachers and the students, detailed explanations of the study were kept with the researcher. This was to prevent the participants from acting and for the researcher to obtain accurate information.

I then used audio visual materials to record the observation as well as made written notes of some responses made by the participants. Employing observation as a tool helped the researcher to use his personal knowledge in the interpretation stage of the analysis.

3.6   Data collection protocol

After permission was sort from the school's administration by the researcher to conduct the research, the researcher used contact hours and leisure periods to conduct the interview. Some students were interviewed during normal class period while others were interviewed when they were having their regular after-class activities. This was done for the students to feel relaxed while responding to the questions. The interviewees were interviewed one after the other in order to observe critically and also to have accurate recording of responses. The researcher also observed reading comprehension lessons of each of the five classes during contact periods. The observations were done during the normal lesson periods and because the researcher did not use the whole classes, special attention was placed on the

sampled students in each of the classes during the lesson observation periods. The answers of the sampled responders were later analysed and represented.

3.7   Data analysis and presentation

De Vos (2005) explains that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Data collected was edited and transcribed into text and categorised in relation to the research questions raised. In categorising the interview data in this manner, I was able to eliminate all irrelevant materials. After this, I used thematic analysis for the analysis of the interview data, and this was done in a descriptive form and was from time to time supported with verbatim extracts from the respondents. Regarding data from the observation, I used narrative notes to analyse patterns in the observation. In all these, I relied on inferences from literature and other relevant studies to support the findings. That is, data collected from the respondents were analysed and presented qualitatively in the form of a narration.
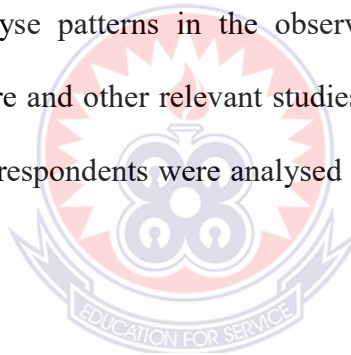
3.8   Conclusion

The chapter three discussed the methods and procedures used by the researcher to collect data for the study. It also discussed how the data was analysed and presented under the sub-sections; research design, population, sampling technique, sample size the research site, data collection strategies, data analysis and data presentation. The next chapter, Chapter Four will present the findings and discussions.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0   Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected for the study and how the collected data for the study is analysed. In order to present a vivid description and a comprehensive account of the research findings, the researcher has presented the data qualitatively. McMillan & Schumacher (2006) describe qualitative data analysis as being primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns among them.

Furthermore, they state that data analysis is a continuing cyclical process that is integrated into all phases of qualitative research. De Vos et al (2005) state that the process of data analysis and data interpretation can best be represented in a spiral image whereby the researcher moves in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) concur that data analysis, as a spiral that is in view, is equally applicable to a wide variety of qualitative studies.

4.1   What are the possible causes of students' difficulties in reading and comprehension?

From the data gathered, the following have been identified as possible causes of reading comprehension difficulty among students.

4.1.1   Poor reading speed which is caused by the difficulty level of the texts

Poor reading speed which is as a result of the difficult level of the texts students are presented with is a major contributing factor to reading comprehension difficulties among senior high school students. A clear response from a student says "sir, some of the passages are too difficult". A look at this response revealed that

though the students wish to do well in their reading comprehension exercises, the difficult level of the texts cause them to perform poorly. Reading involves using the eye level as one perceives and decodes written words as they are used in sentences. To be able to read and understand any written work, there is the need to go by the normal reading speed. Word by word reading of a text does not foster students' ability to understand and assimilate whatever information that is being relayed by the text. Every idea in any given text is expressed in words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs so that the reader understands completely what is being relayed. A better understanding comes when the reader is familiar with the grammatical devices and can thus relate them to the message that is encoded in the text.

During a reading comprehension lesson of all five sampled teachers lessons on *Invention of the Aeroplane*, the researcher observed that a total of forty-eight (48) students representing seventy-two percent (72%) out of the sixty-seven (67) sampled students were not able to read quickly and fluently. The researcher observed that the students had difficulty in pronouncing certain words in the text. This caused them to read slowly as they pause to pronounce these difficult words. The effect of the poor reading skills by the learners was that they performed abysmally; scoring below average in the comprehension exercise that was given to them. Out of the sixty-seven (67) sampled students that took the comprehension exercise, two (2) scored eighteen (18), four (4) ranged from fifteen (15) to seventeen (17), eleven (11) ranged from twelve (12) to fourteen (14), twenty-three (23) ranged from nine (9) to eleven (11), eighteen (18) ranged from five (5) to eight (8) and nine (9) scored below five (5). In all, fifty (50) students scored from eleven (11) and below. This represents seventy-five percent (75%) failure. Seventeen (17) students scored above eleven. This also represents twenty-five percent (25%). This poor performance of the students is in

31

line with what Langan (1997) posits. Langan (1997) posits that when text structures are difficult, poor readers find it difficult to read fast and fluently. The difficult nature of the text made it difficult for the students to decode the encoded message from the text. This is also in line with what Jordan (1997) argued. According to Jordan, when the text is naturally difficult, readers' reading rates are lowered. This is because the new vocabularies in such texts may be difficult for the students to pronounce let alone to make meaning out of them. The inability to make meaning from the key words in any given text leads to total failure in understanding the encoded message from the text. Most second language (L2) readers would assert that their main obstacle to reading is their lack of vocabulary. They feel that they must frequently stop reading and look up words (whether in a dictionary, a corpus, or elsewhere) before they can continue. As Yameh (2001) argued, fluency is a bridge between students' ability to decode words and to comprehend a text.

My findings point to the fact that some texts are more compact and constructed around a great deal of new ideas and technical words. As a result, the findings revealed that unfamiliar vocabularies and complex sentences are some of the factors contributing to the reading comprehension challenges that students are faced with. Another student's response states that "sometimes they use big words in the passages". This response points to the fact that the students are sometimes not familiar with the vocabularies used in the texts and once the words are not understood, the texts become difficult for the readers to understand. The difficulty in understanding and interpreting the text is as the result of factors such as decoding difficulty and difficulty of the text. These go a long way to impede students' understanding of the text which leads them to construct answers that are deviations from the text. According to (Oakhill 1993), 'poor comprehenders have difficulty in

the syntactic and semantic analysis of text' (p.224). To this end, poor comprehenders are not able to break sentences into bits in order to make meaning out of them. An evidence of this is when during the observation lesson and later the comprehension exercise, students gave wrong answers to given questions because those answers were ideas outside the given text. This is because students find it difficult to decode the encoded texts by making meaning of certain vocabularies which formed part of the main idea in the text. They thus tend to respond in ways that are deviations.

4.1.2 Negative attitude of language teachers

During the interview I conducted with the student respondents on the number of times they were taught reading and comprehension in a class, thirty (30) responded that "once in two weeks", another thirty (30) responded that "we learn reading and comprehension scarcely", and the rest, seventeen (17) responded that "once in a month. This observation revealed that the language teachers do not take the reading comprehension aspect of the English Language teaching seriously. From the interview I conducted on the teacher respondents regarding their qualification, it was realised that only a teacher holds second degree in English and has been teaching in the school for ten years. Three teachers hold first degree in English out of which two have been in the school for five years each and the third, in the eleventh year. Teacher five (5) has been teaching English language in the school for fifteen years and holds first degree in Guidance and counselling. This revelation lends itself to the argument made by Mosenthal (1984) that students' difficulties in reading and comprehension could be the factor of situation organizer; what he refers to as the second language teacher. Is the second language teacher conversant with the new approaches to teaching the language? Does the second language teacher have any

33

positive attitude towards the teaching of the target language? My interview with the teacher respondents confirmed that some tutors who are handling the language find it very challenging to handle the reading comprehension aspect of the subject. It is evident that some of the teachers are also not serious when it comes to handling the subject.

My findings also revealed that some of the teachers in the school have little knowledge in second language teaching and as a result, students are not being taught with the new approaches to literacy. This leads to their poor performance in reading comprehension during examinations; both in internal examinations and in external examinations.

Observations revealed that most teachers face challenges in handling reading comprehension lessons comfortably. They rather devote little or no time to the teaching of reading comprehension in the classroom. This is in relation with the argument made by Mosenthal (1984) that students difficulties in reading and comprehension could be the factor of the teacher who teaches the second language.

It is however worth mentioning that the only teacher who upgraded herself in the study of language at the higher level, does her best to use the new approaches to second language teaching hence, helping the students to perform very well in the subject.

4.1.3 Ineffective teaching approaches

Another cause of students' difficulties in reading comprehension is ineffective teaching approaches which are employed by language teachers in teaching reading comprehension lessons. This study has revealed that teachers in the school do not use effective approaches in teaching reading and comprehension

34

lessons. They rather rely on the traditional approaches as the sole approach to presenting textual information. Findings during my interview session with the teacher respondents revealed that teachers use stereotyped questions during reading and comprehension lessons. They do not look at strategies of teaching reading comprehension lessons especially in guided comprehension.

Finally, the teachers are ill-informed about the theoretical influences in literacy development. Teachers are unaware about the changing faces of language pedagogy. As stated by Goodsman (2005) "teaching and learning will change and traditional practices and assumptions must be re-examined" (p 4). This is evident from my interview question on how to use the internet to teach reading and comprehension. Out of the five teacher respondents, only one of them could give clear explanations. The other four teacher respondents maintained that there are lots of past questions on reading comprehension which they use to prepare their students for their end of term / end of semester examinations and their West African Secondary Schools Certificate Examinations (WASSCE), which is organized by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). One serious observation which was made on this is that most language teachers, for lack of pedagogical skills, tend to teach to test – teach to prepare students towards examinations. The teach to the test strategy turns learners into rout learners as they focus on passing their examinations rather than acquiring knowledge that will take them for a life time. Again, teach to the test strategy narrows the scope of the learners. This strategy leads students to failure as what is usually taught by some of the teachers do not come in the examinations.

35

4.1.4   Lack of culturally sensitive texts

My study also revealed that students' difficulties in understanding what goes into reading comprehension passages is the foreign background nature of the existing texts. For one to decode comprehensively what is encoded in any given text, the reader must be familiar with the background from which the text is coming. Once the reader is unfamiliar with the background, understanding of the text becomes so difficult. As such, local writers who write with foreign background or language teachers who use foreign background texts for their reading comprehension lessons pose lots of challenges to their students. The text then becomes culturally biased-they could only be understood by people from the west. For Pardo (2004), comprehension is 'a process in which readers construct meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the stance the reader takes in relationship to the text' (p. 272).

A student respondent confirmed this when he stated that "sometimes, I don't know the things that are mentioned in the passages". From this response, it is evident that the students read for the sake of reading and for the sake of examination, without knowing what is being discussed. A Ghanaian student could be more familiar with a passage on orange farming rather than a passage on apple farming. To this, Reynolds, Taylor, Steffensen, Shirey and Anderson (1982) contend that 'readers acquire meaning from text by analyzing words and sentences against the backdrop of their own personal knowledge of the world' (p. 354). In furtherance, they also postulated that 'culture influences knowledge, beliefs, and values; and that knowledge, beliefs, and values influence comprehension process' (p.354).

My observation in a reading comprehension which was taught by one of the sampled teachers revealed that the students found it difficult to read and to

36

understand the passage entitled *Invention of the Aeroplane*. It was observed in this lesson that out of the whole class of thirty students, not one of them was able to explain the ideas in the various paragraphs of the text. This made it difficult for the teacher to discuss the text with the learners. When the teacher enquired about the problem, most of the students replied that the passage was difficult. Some language teachers also supported this by saying that students usually score low grades in reading and comprehension exercise when the content and the context of the materials are foreign to them. This observation is in line with what Quagi (2009) has postulated when he argued that contents and contexts of materials to be read pose challenges to students. When materials are fused with foreign background, it makes it difficult for readers to decode the encoded message easily.

4.1.5   Negative attitude of students towards reading

To many students, reading is not a pleasant experience to be engaged in at every free moment. From the responses of the teacher respondents, it was revealed that poor concentration on the part of students contributed to the difficulties in reading and understanding what is read. This was unanimous from the teacher respondents. "You hardly find our students reading" was the response from all the teachers. It also came to light that students' dislike for reading also causes the students to perform abysmally in reading comprehension exercises. During my interview with student respondents on the number of story books each student reads, apart from their core literature books, in a semester, only nine (9) respondents confirmed reading a story book each. The remaining fifty-eight (58) had not read a single novel. With this, it was also realized that even in the case of the core literature books, some of the students find it difficult to just pick the books and read on their own. This is in line with Baleeta (2004) whose argument states that the negative

attitude is unfortunately found even among students of literature who look at reading as a burden.

4.1.6 Lack of discipline among learners

Three teacher respondents remarked that some learners in their classes were un-controllable, doing as they pleased and hampering effective teaching and learning at schools, which influence low reading levels: "Educators send offenders to the office, parents do not respond when called, it is just a mess. Learners cannot be coerced to read because of the laws barring teachers and educators from punishing learners. Though other forms of punishment could be employed to correct and lead learners to read, their effect is not as drastic as activities that will coerce the learners to read instantly.

4.1.7 Impairment

Teacher respondents in the school pointed out that in most instances, learners experienced reading difficulties as a result of their impairments such as auditory impairment, visual impairments and speech problems. The teachers revealed that learners come to school with various impairments, which are sometimes discovered at later stages: "Children of this day and age are all included in mainstream institutions/schools with major physical defects and need to be handled with care which is a challenge for most educators".

4.2 What are the effects of poor reading skills on students' performance?

4.2.1 Failure in West African Secondary Schools Certificate Examination

One of the summative assessment forms in Ghana is the examination conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) at the end of the senior high education. For the student to do well in the examination, there is the need

to master reading and understanding of the materials read. If students are unable to make meaning out the questions placed before them, answering of the questions become so difficult thereby leading to failure in the examinations. Summary alone, as part of the Core English Language Paper, is as a result of reading and comprehension. When the student cannot understand the summary passage, the right answers cannot also be provided by the student. Baatjies (2003) states that the most important element of high quality education is literacy and that without the ability to read, learners are denied pertinent information about health, social, cultural and political issues, as well as sources of pleasure and enrichment. It then behooves on the students to read and understand in order to unveil the meaning encoded in every passage in order to perform well in examinations.

4.2.2 Inability to communicate effectively

Students' difficulties in reading comprehension has adverse effects on their communication skills. My findings are closely related with the findings in the literature review that indicate that when students have difficulty in reading and comprehension, it affects their communication competence and limits vocabulary development in them (Conley, 1992). During my interaction with the sampled teachers, a teacher said "reading and comprehension difficulties restrict students of Kpando Senior High School from using language effectively". Another teacher remarked that once communicative competence rests on one's ability to decode meaning quickly from a text, so it will even be difficult for learners to function in our print-based societies of today when they have difficulties in reading for understanding. This is also in line with findings in the literature review by Burns, et al (1999) who posit that communication depends on comprehension, which is affected by all aspects of the reading process.

4.2.3   Fear of reading subjects

The study, again, identified fear of reading subjects – subjects that require the learners to do more reading rather than the sciences and calculations. For instance, the humanities – as one of the effects of reading and comprehension difficulties on the academic performance of students. Students' difficulty in reading for understanding makes them to develop the fear for subjects that have to do with reading.

During my interview with student respondents on the programs they will like to read in the university as a follow up question, only twenty-three (23) out of the sixty-seven (67) mentioned literature in English and art related courses. The remaining forty-four student respondents mentioned science and mathematics related courses. Of course, the selection of courses at the tertiary level is also based on their elective subjects in the school. This observation clearly shows that most students habour fear for the reading courses. At the higher level, the language which is used in writing is a little complex hence this fear. A teacher respondent added that most students are afraid to take courses like Literature in English and other art related subjects due to their poor reading cultures. Even some of the current so-called Literature in English students do not read so it is always difficult for them to read and appreciate texts.

Apart from the fear, most students have made their minds up not to pursue the study of languages as a course at the higher levels. Some study it just for the purpose of examinations. One of the student respondents responded to my question "would you like to pursue languages as a course at the higher level? "Some of us are just managing to find our way out. We cannot study languages as a course at the higher levels" came the response.

4.2.4 Poor performance in other subjects

Another effect of reading comprehension difficulties among students is the poor performance in other subject areas. The study revealed that students performed abysmally in many reading related subjects as they found it difficult to read which usually leads to difficulty in understanding texts. Failure to read and understand certain questions during examinations will lead to deviations in providing answers. In many subject areas, reading and comprehension is a necessary factor in aiding the learners' understanding of the various concepts. During my interview with teacher respondents, the teachers confirmed that thirty (30) students failed in an examination in other subject areas due to their inability to read and understand the demands of the question. Koranteng (2011) confirmed this when he posits that learners' performance in other subject areas depend on their ability to read and understand a text. This is also with Darrel (2005) when he opines that early and sustained failure in reading has devastating consequences in the lives of low readers, their families and in the socio-economic life of the community.

4.2.5 Low scores in reading and comprehension tasks

The research findings also revealed that students' performance in reading and comprehension as an aspect of English language was bad. In the analysis of the data, it emanated that difficulties in reading and comprehension affected students' performance. I observed that students performed badly in English language as a subject just because most of them could not do well in the reading comprehension aspect of the paper. A teacher respondent confirmed this by adding that most of the students scored below five (5) out of the total of twenty (20) in the previous end of semester's examination. This however resulted in most of the students having very low grades in the English language course.

Many children who experience reading difficulties are unable to find appropriate ways of learning and overcoming their constant failures. According to Lerner & Johns (2009), constant repeated failures make learners to become more conscious of their poor performance which ultimately results in emotional, social and self-concept problems (p.18).

4.2.6 Incompetence in reading and comprehension

My findings also revealed that students' difficulty in reading for comprehension made them incompetent readers in their communities. This was revealed during the observation in one of the classes. Students find it very challenging to read freely and flexibly and they find it a daunting task when they try recalling information after the reading. This is in contrast with Gunning (2007). Reading is important for learning as it gives learners independent access to a vast world of information as well as fulfilment and enjoyment (Gunning, 2007, p. 3). A student respondent maintained that "usually, you forget what you read by the time you are done reading the entire text". A teacher respondent also remarked that students become incompetent readers in the society for lack of reading comprehension skills. This is in line with Maduekwe (2007) who argues that a poor reader has problems of fixation, back skipping or regression as well as visual wondering. Thus, a poor reader is likely to read and understand if only his memory is tasked to.

4.3 What strategies are useful to assist students to read and understand?

The following strategies have been identified to be used to assist students to improve upon their reading and comprehension skills:

4.3.1   Equipping students with reading and comprehension skills

Findings of the study have revealed that in order to assist students to do effective reading and comprehension, they should be assisted to internalize the underlying strategies in reading for comprehension. Such skills include the ability to scan, the ability to skim, the ability to do both intensive and extensive reading as well as the ability to do close reading. During my interaction with student respondents, fifty-six (56) out of the sixty-seven (67) students did not know how to read and understand a text. This was realized when students responded to my interview questions "What are the techniques you employ in undertaking your reading comprehension exercises?" and "How many times do you read a text before answering the questions?". To these, the students responded that they usually look for answers in the passages they read since they are required to answer questions and they only look for areas where they think answers could be located. When it came to how they are able to suggest meaning of underlined words in a text, most students confirmed basing their responses on dictionary meaning of the words rather than looking at the words in context. It was also observed that students responded to questions that required specific information with volumes of words. This also shows their lack in skimming and scanning skills.

These findings are in line with what Yemeh (2011) suggests that the process of reading with understanding is more complex than what students may realize. Complexity does not mean difficulty. To simplify a concept, it is needed to be broken into its component parts. Sekyi-Baidoo (2003), Aziz (2011), and Kinzer (2003) are also of this view.

4.3.2 Using modern approaches in teaching reading and comprehension

The study has also identified that it is appropriate when language teachers employ modern approaches in teaching reading and comprehension in their classes. This will go a long way to boost the development of students' knowledge in reading and understanding. Baleeta (2004) suggested this by saying reading and comprehension, like any other literacy skill, could be enhanced when teachers use varied teaching methods in handling it. Modern method like scaffolding could enhance the reading skills of learners. Reading and comprehension should be seen as aspects of learners' literacy skill that can be enhanced through multiple roots.
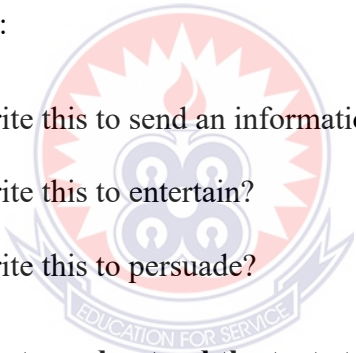
In a reading comprehension class, I observed that a teacher used predictive activities like relating meaning of pictures, illustrations to text meaning, using meaning of titles and topic sentence as well as discussing the text before reading the text. After the lesson, it emerged that fifty-six (56) of the student respondents, representing eighty-four percent (84%) of the students scored eighteen (18) and above out of twenty (20). The remaining eleven (11), representing sixteen percent (16%) of the student respondents scored marks from ten (10) and above. Fifty-two (52) of the students, representing seventy-eight percent (78%) were able to give a summary of the text. This is in line with what Standford (1995) argued that when readers are able to understand a text, they are able to summarize the main ideas and understand inferences by noting writer's choice of words.

4.3.3 Using texts from the learners' environment

As regards contents and contexts of the texts, the study has identified that in order to assist students to read and understand texts, we must choose passages and their materials within the cultural location of learners. Both the observation and the interview revealed that instead of using materials that are from the learners'

44

localities, teachers use materials that are of foreign background. Teachers should resort to using culturally friendly materials and texts for reading tasks. My discussion with all five teacher respondents pointed to the idea that culturally friendly books and materials will be more appropriate for reading and comprehension.

This will equip students with the rightful approach thereby aiding them to transfer knowledge when unfamiliar texts are given them later. This is in line with the idea postulated by Quagie (2009). Quagie argued that students' reading and comprehension challenges are as a result of foreign background contents and contexts of materials that are used. My findings are also in line with Mather and McCarthy (2004) who argued that the readers should ask themselves these questions when dealing with a text:

a. Did the writer write this to send an information?

b. Did the writer write this to entertain?

c. Did the writer write this to persuade?
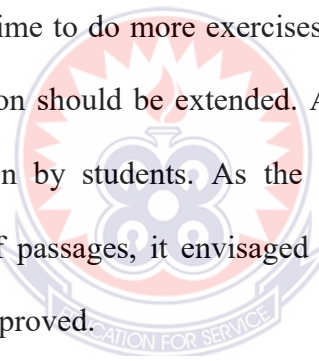
4.3.4   Helping students to understand the text structure

Students can become good readers for comprehension lessons when they are helped to understand the structure of a text. Students should be taken through different parts of a text so as to enhance good reading and comprehension abilities. The students should be assisted to identify titles, paragraphs and inter-paragraph connectors. With paragraph development, the student should be made to understand what the topic sentence is, what the major support sentence is, what the minor support sentences are. The learners should as well, be helped through the various types of sentences: functional and structural types.

During my interaction with the student respondents, it came to light that most of the learners are unable to identify what a topic sentence is in any passage as it was only thirteen (13) student respondents out of the sixty-seven (67), representing nineteen percent (19%) who were able to vividly discuss a given paragraph. The rest fifty-four (54), representing eighty-one percent (81%) were unable to identify topic sentences in the paragraphs.

4.3.5 Enough time to be allotted to reading comprehension practice

Time has also been identified as one of the factors that can enhance students' abilities in reading and comprehension. The study has identified that in order to assist students to develop the right skills in reading and comprehension, they (students) should be given enough time to do more exercises. The time (duration) for teaching reading and comprehension should be extended. A good number of comprehension exercises should be taken by students. As the students have more practices by reading different types of passages, it envisaged that their abilities in reading and comprehension will be improved.

As stated by behaviourists, as learners continuously practice what they learn, their level of understanding increases. It was also observed that reading comprehension was mainly taught in preparedness for examinations rather than equipping students with skills in reading and comprehension that will enable them to become experts in communication and for them to fit into their societies and function effectively.

4.3.6 Understanding word relations in a text

Another strategy that has been identified from the study is equipping students with the skills of understanding word relations in a text. With regard to the difficulty

level of new words, teacher respondents have suggested that students could be helped to improve their skills in word meanings by resorting to context clues that sandwich unfamiliar words in order to figure out meaning of those words as they are used in context.

During my interaction with teacher respondents, four out of the five teachers stated that students of Kpando Senior High School find it very difficult to find the contextual meaning of words. Students rather refer to dictionary meaning of words. Sixty-one students out of the sixty-seven respondents confirmed this by saying that they find it difficult to understand the words in context and as such resort to using the dictionary definitions. Contextual meaning of words will enhance understanding of the text. To this, Vacca and Vacca (1986) argued that an effective reading and comprehension requires that the reader recalls meanings of difficult vocabularies, draws inferences from context about meanings of those words and then weaving together ideas in the content.

4.3.7 Having prediction activities before reading

Another strategy identified by this study to be used in assisting students to read and understand is to take students through prediction activities before they go into reading the text. The study has identified prediction activities such as providing information on the author and predicting the form and the content of the reading text before reading. Teachers remarked that when they take students through prediction activities, they help solve comprehension problems in the classroom. Students' prediction activities will help them overcome reading and comprehension difficulties. All five teacher respondents remarked that prediction activities will help a lot once they are done well. The teachers continued by saying that pictures and illustrations as well as topic sentences and titles can help readers to understand the

message of a text. Sixty-four students exclaimed that whenever they are taken through prediction activities before the reading itself, they understand the passage better.

The prediction activities could be realized through questioning: why has the writer written this? What is the text about? What do you think will follow this? Does the text give information? Does the text entertain? It is therefore worth noting that pre-reading activities whet students' appetite before the actual reading takes place. This goes a long way to get the readers glued to their sits to enjoy the texts. To this, Drucker (2003) suggests the following procedure that teachers can emulate before reading a text: The teacher should relate the passage students are going to read to something that is familiar to them. That is, the passage should be narrowed down to the environment of the learners and what they are familiar with. Next, the teacher should provide a brief discussion question that will engage the students and, after that, provide an overview of the section they are about to read. Name the selection, introduce the characters, and describe the plot (up to, but not including, the climax). Last, the teacher should direct the students to read the story and look for particular information. Similarly, Abraham (2002) states that an interactive approach "demands that the teachers activate the students' schema" during the pre-reading phase by helping "students recognize the knowledge that they already have about the topic of a text." This, he also said could be done through discussion of titles, subheadings, photographs, identifying text structure, previewing, etc. Such activities are called "pre-reading strategies".

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter discussed how the collected data was analysed and vividly discussed. The next chapter, Chapter Five, presents the conclusion, summary and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

5.0   Introduction

This chapter draws the curtain on the study. It provides a brief overview of the study by highlighting the major findings to draw some lessons and to suggest possible recommendations for further studies. The chapter is divided into four sections: summary, implication of findings, recommendation and conclusion. The study aimed to:

i.   identify the reasons why students have difficulties in reading and comprehension.

ii.   identify the effects of reading comprehension difficulties on the academic performance of the students.

iii.   suggest certain strategies as remedies to these challenges.

5.1 Summaries

This section provides the summary of the methodology and the summary of the findings

5.1.1 Summary of the methodology

The study is a qualitative study; a case study of final year students of Kpando Senior High School. This design involves soliciting information from two or more people. Out of a total of six hundred and nine (609) third year students who were the target population for the study, through non-probability sampling and purposive sampling, the researcher selected sixty-seven (67) third year students for the study. Also, five (5) teachers were selected, making a total population of seventy-two (72) respondents for this study. The researcher used semi-structured interview for the

study. The researcher used well prepared interview questions that allowed for flexibility where non-verbal behaviours were used to identify the credibility of the interviewees' responses after establishing rapport with the respondents in order to obtain relevant information.

During the interview, the researcher used audio recorder with due permission from the respondents. The researcher conducted the interview during contact hours and after contact hours; after permission was sought from the school's management. The five teacher respondents were however interviewed during break and at their leisure. For the observation, the researcher used direct observation during reading comprehension lessons in the classrooms. Information obtained from the observation was recorded using pen and a note book. Besides, the researcher had a list of attributes to be observed and ticked against any attribute based on the respondents' response.

Data collected was later edited and transcribed to reduced form using categories against the list of attributes the researcher had prepared for the respondents for easy coding and analysis.

5.1.2 Summary of findings

The summary of findings of the study indicated the following as the causes of students' difficulties in reading and comprehension.

i.   Poor reading speed which is caused by the difficulty level of the texts

ii.   Negative attitude of language teachers

iii.   Ineffective teaching approaches

iv.   Lack of culturally sensitive texts

v.   Negative attitude of students towards reading

vi.   Lack of discipline among learners

vii.   Impairment

The effects of reading comprehension difficulties on the academic performance of the students include:

i.   Failure in West African Secondary Schools Certificate Examinations

ii.   Inability to communicate effectively

iii.   Fear of reading subjects

iv.   Poor performance in other subject areas

v.   Low scores in reading and comprehension tasks

vi.   Incompetence in reading and comprehension

Strategies to enhance students' abilities in reading and comprehension include:

i.   Equipping students with reading and comprehension skills

ii.   Using modern approaches to teach reading and comprehension

iii.   Using texts from the learners' environment

iv.   Helping students to understand the text structure

v.   Enough time to be given to reading and comprehension practice

vi.   Understanding word relations in a text

vii.   Having prediction activities before reading

5.2 Implications of findings

The study shows that education is a societal issue and everyone – students, teachers, parents, government- is a key player and that there is a helpful connection between learners' socio-economic experience and the learner's reading proficiency; learners from underprivileged home backgrounds and unstable environments experience more reading difficulties than those from good stable home backgrounds.

Negative attitude of language teachers coupled with ineffective teaching methods by some of these language teachers also affect the reading comprehension of the learners. Government on the other hand awards printing of textbooks to foreign publishing companies and this causes the student not to have the background knowledge of most of the texts they read in school. With this, the students lack understanding of the passages they read and this does not motivate them to read other texts. This further results in lack of understanding in passages read, failure in examinations, and ineffective communication among others. Ghanaguru, Liang, & Kit (2006:22) identify lack of motivation, unstable home environments, and prior knowledge as factors that constitute barriers to effective reading comprehension. The strategies that have been suggested in the findings, when implemented, will help improve the reading comprehension skills of the students. Once this is done, there will be improvement in the reading ability of the students, and improvement in the academic performance of the learners.

5.3 Recommendations for further studies

As every academic work is open to criticism and suggestions, I suggest that future researchers can as well investigate into the same topic but they should focus on investigating long term strategies for handling reading comprehension instead of short term strategies. This can go a long way to promote effective handling of the aspect as well as effective learning and love for extensive reading. I also suggest that future researchers could look into the teaching and comprehension using information, communication technology tools like moodle, hot potatoes and WebCT and any other tool that may be relevant at the time so as to enhance students' understanding in reading and comprehension.

5.4 Conclusion

The main aim of the study is to research on the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by learners of Kpando Senior High School. Reading difficulties, per the research findings, are caused by various factors such as poor reading speed which is caused by the difficulty level of the texts, negative attitude of language teachers, ineffective teaching approaches, lack of culturally sensitive texts, negative attitude of students towards reading, lack of discipline among learners, and impairment. The study aims to significantly improve learners' reading levels. Educators, as experts in their own field, need to alternate various methods for teaching reading depending on the learner needs. The chapter five draws the curtain on the work by highlighting the major findings to draw some lessons and to suggest possible recommendations for further studies.
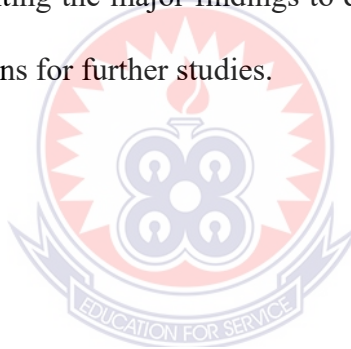
REFERENCES

Anderson, J. E. & Urquhat, H. (1984). Reading in a foreign language. Longman: Longman group limited.

Al-Ghazo, A. (2015). The effect of SQ3R and semantic mapping strategies on reading comprehension learning among Jordanian University students. *English and Education*, *4*(3), 92-106.

Aziz, E. S. (2011). Teaching and learning enhancement in undergraduate machine dynamics: Computer Application in Engineering Education/ Volume 19, Issue 2

Baleeta, M. (2004). Cultural differences in reading: reading processes and the development of a reading culture

Baatjies, I. (2003). Reading in South Africa: an overview of policy, programmes and campaigns since 1994. Innovation, 26 (June): 1-10.

Beck, I. & Mckeown, M. G. (1999) Comprehension: the sine qua non of reading: ResearchGate.

Bohlmann, C. & Pretorius, E. (2002). Reading skills and mathematics. South African Journal.

Burns, R. R. (1999). Teaching reading in today's elementary schools (7th ed). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Carrell, P. L., & Eisterhold, J. C. (1983). Schema theory and ESL reading pedagogy. *TESOL quarterly*, *17*(4), 553-573.

Conley, M.W (1992). Content reading instructions, A communicative approach. New York:McGraw-Hill Inco

Creswell, J. W. (2008). Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.

Darrel, M. (2005). The Howard Street Tutoring Manual: Teaching at-risk readers in the primary grades. London: Guilford Press.

De Vos, A. S, Strydom, H, Fouche, C. B. & Delport, C.S.L. eds. (2003). Research at grassroots: for the social sciences and human service professions. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Dornyei, Z. (2007). Research methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duke, N. K. & Pearson, P. D. (2002). Effective practices for developing reading comprehension: 35th Yearbook of the national reading conference, pp. 210-213.

Feldt, R. C., & Moore, R. E. (1999). Learning how to read empirical research articles: An application of a modified version of SQ3R. *Reading Improvement*, *36*(3), 102.

Gambrell, L. B. (1996). Creating classroom cultures that foster reading motivation. The reading teacher, 50, 14-25.

Goodsman, Y. M. & Burk, C. L. (2002). Reading miscue inventory. New York: Macmillan.

Gunning, T. G. (2007). Creating literacy instruction for all students. 6thed. New York City, N.Y.: Pearson Education.

Halliday, A. (2002). Doing and writing qualitative research. Thousand Oaks: CA: sage.

Jordan, R. R. (1997). English for academic purpose; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kinzer, K. C. (2003: 301). Effective literacy instruction: Implementing best practice.

Langan, J. (1989). Reading and study skills from A; New York: Monotypes Composition Companies.

Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J. E. (2005).Practical research: planning and design. 8th ed. Saddle River N.J.: Pearson Education.

Leipzig, D. H. (2001). What is reading? WETA.

Maduekwe, A. N. (2007). Principle and practice of teaching English as a second language. Lagos: Vision Xpress Sec. Service.

Mather, P. & McCarthy, R. (2009). The art of critical reading. Boston: McGraw-Hill, Higher Education.

McMillan, J. H. & Schumacher, S. (2006). Research in education: a conceptual introduction. 6thed. New York: Longman.

Mosenthal, P. (1984). Reading comprehension Practice for classroom programmes. New York: Del International Reading Association.

Nutal, C. (2005). Teaching reading in foreign language. Oxford: Macmillan Education.

Oakhill, J. (1993). Children's difficulties in reading comprehension. *Educational Psychology Review*, *5*(3), 223-237.

Oberholzer, B. (2005). The relationship between reading difficulties and academic performance among a group of Foundation Phase learners. Thesis. University of Zululand.Journal of higher education, vol 16 no3, 196-206.Washington D.C.

Pardo, L. S. (2004). What every teacher needs to know about comprehension. *The reading teacher*, *58*(3), 272-280.

Quagie, J. K. (2009). English, A tool for communication for universities and tertiary education (2nd ed). Accra: Hybrid H.

Reynolds, R. E., Taylor, M. A., Steffensen, M. S., Shirey, L. L., & Anderson, R. C. (1982). Cultural schemata and reading comprehension. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 353-366.

Rutzler, S. (2017, October 20). Importance of reading comprehension. p. 1.

Schmidt, R. J., Rozendal, M. & Greenman, G. (2002). Reading instruction in the inclusion classroom: research-based practices. Remedial and special education, 23 (3): 130-140.

Sekyi-Baidoo, Y. (2003). Learning and communicating (2nd ed.): Accra; Infinity Graphics Limited.

Sharma, S. (2018). Importance of reading books. GladReaders.

Smith, J., Smith, J. W., & Elley, W. (1998). *How children learn to write: insights from the New Zealand experience*. Longman.

Sparks, R., & Patton, J. (2016). Examining the simple view of reading model for United States High School Spanish students. *Hispania*, 17-33.

Standford, A. J. (1995). Developing connections: A writer's guide with readings. New York: Mayfield Publishing Company.

Vacca, T. R. & Vacca, A. J. (1986). Content area reading. Boston.

Wilson, H. (1968). Improving supervisory skills. California: An administrative research association publication, Inc.

Yemeh, N. (2011). Comprehension, summary, communication and essay writing skills for secondary and tertiary institutions. Winneba: Ask African Books and Company Ltd.

Zhang, Z. (1993). Literature Review on Reading Strategy Research.

Zhaohua, S. (2004). Effects of previewing and providing background knowledge on EFL reading comprehension of American documentary narratives. *TESL Reporter*, *37*(2), 50-63.

APPENDIX 'A'

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

1. How often do you encourage your learners to read?

2. What do you think are some of the common causes of your students' inability to read and comprehend texts?

3. What are some of the main factors you consider when teaching reading comprehension?

4. How important or critical is the vocabulary base of your students in your teaching of comprehension?

5. How do you develop broad vocabularies in your learners to aid in the teaching comprehension lessons?

6. What are the critical components of reading comprehension?

7. What strategies do you employ in teaching reading comprehension?

8. What practices do you employ to relate the text to your students' relevant previous knowledge?

9. How do you think the internet could be used in teaching reading and comprehension?

10. How often do you have in-service training on teaching the aspects of English language?

11. What assistance do you offer your learners to improve upon their reading abilities?

12. Which teaching methods do you employ when teaching reading comprehension?

13. Do the reading materials you give your students have any influence on their interest in reading comprehension?

14. How can the learner improve upon his or her skills in reading comprehension?

15. How do you think teachers can best teach reading comprehension?

16. What factors should curriculum designers, textbook writers consider in designing the texts for students.

APPENDIX 'B'

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LEARNERS

1. Which reading materials do you usually read during your free time?

2. How often do you read text?

3. Do you usually understand the texts you read?

4. Would you say you have enough vocabulary items to aid you in understanding the passages you read and in answering questions on them?

5. Do you often find reading comprehension texts comfortable?

6. What are some of your main challenges in reading comprehension exercises?

7. Do you like the way your teacher teaches reading comprehension?

8. What are the techniques you employ in undertaking your reading comprehension exercises?

9. How many times do you read a text before answering the questions?

10. Is reading comprehension given much attention as other aspects (eg composition, summary, speech work / orals, literature, grammar) of the English language by your teacher?

11. What do you think teachers must do to improve your performance in reading comprehension?

12. What do you need to do on your own to improve upon your performance in reading comprehension?

13. Would you like to pursue languages as a course at the higher level? (only General Art students)