THE EFFECT OF CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH TEXTS BY SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the mini-dissertation hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of Master of Education in Language Education has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of cultural background on comprehension of English texts by second language learners. The study specifically aimed at determining whether cultural background had any effect on comprehension of English texts by second language learners and whether the second language learners' cultural background could help them comprehend unfamiliar texts. The background of the study in this mini dissertation was followed by the discussion on the literature available on this topic. This study followed a case study design which utilized 89 respondents from the Further Education and Training band of a rural secondary school in the north of Limpopo province. Data was obtained through the completion of questionnaires and answering of questions from a comprehension test based on English culture. The findings showed that there was no total comprehension of the text by learners who use English as a second language. Learners of English as a second language need to possess specific cultural schemata to comprehend texts that are unfamiliar to them. This study was informed by the schema theory. There is a significant effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English text by second language learners.

KEY WORDS

Schema theory

Culture

Comprehension

Cultural background

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL   -English as a Second Language

L2   -Second Language

L1   -First Language

EAL   -English as an Additional Language

FET   -Further Education and Training

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1. 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Learning in South Africa is a challenge to most learners of English as an additional language because there is a collage of languages coupled with different religions, ethnic groups, races and obviously cultures. Although this mosaic of cultures and languages has been recognized by the South African Constitution and adopted as official, a few languages, more especially English, is regarded as the locally and internationally used language in education, commerce and even in the government. Ramphele (2009:11) states that South African Constitution fudged the language issue by declaring all eleven languages as official. This allowed for English to be the *de facto* dominant official language and English has the advantage of being the international language of commerce and politics. In the classroom situation, learners who are taught English as an additional language should adhere to the standards and demands set for the language in order to be regarded competent and compliant to the rules and principles of language teaching and learning when they read texts. They experience a different linguistic environment in the classroom when they learn English because they come to the classroom with the cultural and linguistic baggage of their own home language. It is explicit that they are continuously presented with two languages and two cultures at the same time, their home language and that of English.

Seeyle and Wasilewski (1996:46) mention that language is the key to opening the culture's coffers of interrelationship and knowledge riches. They mention that in learning a language one directly and indirectly learns culture which is the symbolic quality of language and language has a tremendous implication for the transmission of culture. Erten and Razi (2009:66) state that cultural familiarity helps readers to reconstruct the story referring to more personally and culturally relevant scripts.

Erten and Razi (2009:66) mention that the role of cultural membership is needed to fully comprehend meaning that is intended by the writer. So teaching and learning in English as an additional language can sometimes be unreliable because language cannot be detached from

culture as the learners already possess the cultural background of their own home language and culture. The teacher, the learners as well as the written texts have certain cultural content that is embedded in the written or spoken language. The cultural background that the readers possess assists them to comprehend, recall and communicate with the world because the readers use information stored in the memory not only to think and remember, but also to comprehend and interpret intended meaning. Ramphele (2009:11) mentions that there is overwhelming evidence that learning through the first language or mother tongue helps to anchor learning in the child's immediate environment: family, community and everyday interactions.

The importance of cultural background in reading is central to the schema theory. This theory, according to Xiao-hui (2007:18) stemmed from Bartlett (1932) in his writing "Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology" which claimed that an active organization of past reactions of past experiences must always be supposed to be operational in any well adopted organic response. The schema theory states that every reader possesses schemata. According to Huang (2006:139) these schemata are cognitive constructs which allow for organization of information in the long-term memory and they are sometimes culture-specific. In reading, a text only provides directions as to how readers should retrieve or construct meaning from previously acquired knowledge. Much comprehension is determined by the readers' cultural background. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983:8) mention that one of the reasons why a particular schema fails to exist for a reader is that the schema is culturally-specific and is not part of a particular reader's cultural background. Without that there would not be any comprehension experienced.

Swaffar (1988:123) states that in the past comprehension was often equated with a reader's capacity to replicate a text, which is different now because he says that research suggests that in second language or first language learning, what is understood depends on the reader rather than the text. Comprehension has been replaced by a conceptual model influenced by research on memory and recall. Comprehension is seen as a two-way process. The process of interpretation is realized by the employment of two basic models of information processing, namely, bottom-up and top-down. The two models promote interaction between prior knowledge and prediction, to facilitate the processing of input from the text. Owens (1996:402) mentions that these processes are parallel because they provide information simultaneously at various levels of analysis to

facilitate comprehension. Written texts do not carry meanings by themselves; the readers have to be familiar with the content of the text in order to comprehend it. If the two processes of comprehension are not active, it indicates that the readers lack culture-specific schema for the particular text, so comprehension will fail. Huang (2006:139) adds that in schema theory, any text, spoken or written, does not by itself carry meaning. This study investigated the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts by learners of English as an additional language. It aimed at finding out the role of schemata in the comprehension of written English texts.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Reading in an additional language requires cultural background specific to the type of texts for learners to comprehend. The comprehension of English texts will depend on the availability of cultural schema on that particular content of the text. If the texts are not familiar to the learners, comprehension can fail. It may not always be practicable for learners of English as an additional language to comprehend every text like their counterparts, that is, those who use English both at home and at school. English language in schools assesses certain standards and learners are required to reach certain levels or achieve certain outcomes. This is sometimes not applicable because learners hail from different home backgrounds, hence different approaches to reading and interpretation of texts occurs.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts by learners of English as an additional language. An investigation was done to find out whether the cultural background possessed by learners could assist them to comprehend texts of English cultural content.

1.4 OBJECTIVES

- To determine the extent to which learners' cultural background can or cannot assist them to comprehend English texts.

- To establish the extent at which learners' familiarity with the English text can or cannot affect their comprehension.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent can the learners' cultural background have an effect on their comprehension of English texts?
- Does the learners' familiarity with the cultural content affect their comprehension of the text?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study has theoretical, social and educational significance. Since it is embedded in the investigation on cultural and language issues, it can be relevant to the education fraternity, especially to language policy makers. It can also benefit the English teachers and further be contributory to more research pertaining to the topics based on comprehension, relationship between language and culture and the schema theory.

7.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

7.1.1 The Schema theory

This study looked at the extent to which cultural background could influence comprehension of English texts read by learners of English as an additional language. Language cannot be divorced from culture, so it is important to note that when learners learn a language, culture is also acquired. This study is theoretical in nature since it is informed by the schema theory which illustrates that background knowledge is important in comprehension of texts. Scott (2001:10) describes schema theory as the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text. He states that all readers carry different schemata (background information) and these are also often culture-specific. Huang (2006:139) describes schemata as cognitive constructs which allow for the organization of information in long-term memory. Huang (2006:139) distinguishes among content schema and formal schema. Content schema is the reader's background or world knowledge that provides readers with a foundation, a basis for comparison. It is also called cultural orientation. Formal schemata, often known as textual schema refers to the organizational form and rhetorical structures of written texts. He says cultural schema in particular is factor that influences learning of languages such as English as an additional language.

According to Marshall (2001:81) schemata function as a checklist for the readers. The readers use the schemata to confirm that they have understood the message in the text. Thus, schemata are crucial to comprehension. This is the important concept in English for second language teaching because in the process of reading, comprehension of texts entails drawing information from both the texts and the internal schemata. Swales (1990) in Scott (2001:10), explains that the reading process involves identification of genre, formal structure and topic, all of which activate schemata and allow readers to comprehend the text. Scott (2001:10) explains that readers sometimes feel that they comprehend the text, but have a different interpretation from the author.

Lyons (1981:329) states that someone from a different cultural background might interpret the statements differently from implied meaning. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983:80) point out that

themost obvious reasons why a particular content schema may fail to exist for a reader is that the schema is culturally specific and is not part of a particular reader's cultural background.

7.1.2 Culture

Both linguists and anthropologists have described the concept of culture as a pattern of behaviour and others as a pattern of thought and feelings. Harris (1993:3) mentions that culture can be continued by means of enculturation and diffusion, where enculturation is the passing of cultural traits from one culture to the other. Culture is therefore pertaining to a particular society. The language a particular society uses forms part of their culture. It is thought that the readers' cultures can affect everything from the way readers view reading itself, the content and formal schemata they hold, right down to their understanding of individual concepts. It is apparent that language is interwoven with culture. The culture that a learner acquires from home will be part of the background that he brings into the learning environment. Al-Issa(2006:41) mentions that the reader brings information, knowledge, emotions and culture in a text. A text by its own does not carry meaning. When a reader and writer share cultural assumptions and knowledge about social system and rituals, there is much higher level of interaction of the reader with the text, than occurs when such assumptions and knowledge are not shared.

7.1.3 Comprehension

According to Coleman (2003:13) the new view to reading places emphasis on the process rather than the product of comprehension, it also places the learner at the centre of the whole reading process. Coleman (2003:13) mentions that the process in which the learner searches for information is interactive in that the learner's prior knowledge and experience continuously interact with the information in the reading process. Comprehension, according to Wainwright (2001:42) refers not only to the process of reading, but also more specifically to the quality of reading comprehension.

When we read we should be able to recall information afterwards. What we recall depends on many factors including cultural background. Huang (2006:1-2) states that the importance of background knowledge in reading is central to schema theory which claims that reading a text implies an interaction between the reader's background knowledge and the text itself. The reader

uses schemata to confirm that she or he has understood the message in the text. Thus, schemata are crucial to comprehension. It is thus prevalent that the role of cultural background as a factor in reading is a crucial one. Much research has been conducted on this issue. Some researchers (Wodak, 1996; Owens, 1996; Urquhart & Weir, 1998; Xiao-hui, 2007) believe that comprehension is the product of two interactive processes which take place simultaneously, namely, bottom-up and top-down. These processes, according to Owens (1996:402), are parallel. They provide information simultaneously at various levels of analysis to facilitate comprehension. It is believed that for comprehension to be reached these processes take place due to background knowledge stored which is compatible to new information to be read.

According to Al-Issa (2006:7), a study was conducted by Prichard (1990) to examine the process of how readers activate and utilize the relevant schema to facilitate comprehension. More specifically the study aimed to identify the strategies to develop their understanding of culturally and unfamiliar passages, or to examine those strategies in relation to cultural background of the readers and the cultural perspective of the reading materials. Prichard (1990) in Al-Issa (2006:7) utilized two different reading passages: a culturally familiar passage and a culturally unfamiliar passage. Participants in the study were American and Palauan students, and the two passages used were a letter from a woman to her sister describing events surrounding a typical funeral in each of the two cultures. Prichard (1990) in Al-Issa (2006:7), found that the American students used a wider variety of strategies than the Palauan and they also reported using the strategies more often. He proposed that in both cultural groups, significantly more idea units were recalled from the culturally familiar text, and subjects made more appropriate elaborations when recalling the familiar text.

The findings suggested that "reading is a content-specific activity; that is, when the content of reading materials changes, processing behaviour changes as well." The aim of this study was also to attempt to close the gaps of using unfamiliar reading content to learners who learn English as an additional language. This study investigated whether learners who read unfamiliar English texts mediated in the culture, were affected although they possess different cultural backgrounds.

8.1 METHODOLOGY

8.1.1 Research methodology

Bailey (1987:33) explains that by methodology we mean the philosophy of the research process. This includes the assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for research and the standards or criteria the researcher uses for interpreting data and reaching conclusions. Bailey (1987:34) also explains that a researcher's methodology determines such factors as how he or she writes hypotheses and what level of evidence is necessary to make the decision whether or not to reject a hypothesis. Methodology can be in the qualitative, quantitative or both of them. In this study both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used. It followed the mixed method approach to attain quality of data.

8.1.2 Research design

Babbie (1995:83) explains that research design addresses the planning of scientific inquiry. The research design is all about asking, finding, observing and analyzing. Research designs can be qualitative, quantitative or both. The plan for this study followed both quantitative and qualitative pathways.Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002:29) define research design as a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution or the implementation of research. Research design refers to the form or structure that the research takes. It gives research a direction. This study followed a case study design. Payne and Payne (2004:31) describe a case study as a detailed study of a single social unit. The social unit is usually located in one physical place. This study followed a case study design.

McBurney (1994:169) explains that the case study investigates a particular existing situation that comes to the attention of the researcher. The situation may be a practical problem that must be solved as soon as possible, or it may be an event that intrigues a researcher. McBurney (1994:179) states that the case study is different from other non-experimental method because in the case study design multiple approaches are used.

The case study had been chosen in this study firstly to investigate the cases or respondents in a wider spectrum in order to get more information concerning the research problem. Secondly to investigate whether the existing studies done on the same topic were prevalent in the population

the researcher had selected for this study. Thirdly the aim was to get rich data to attempt to find answers to the questions to the problem which is social. Two methods of data collection, namely, questionnaire and comprehension test were used to get more information from the respondents on the effect of cultural background on comprehension of texts by English as an additional language learners. The purpose of selecting and using a questionnaire was to ensure that relevant information regarding the cultural background of the respondents was gathered. The comprehension test examined the respondents' comprehension on unfamiliar English text. Questionnaires were completed and comprehension test was offered in the form of an unfamiliar text which the group read and responded to questions in written form. The two above-mentioned methods were executed in order to collect sufficient data to solve the problem.

8.1.3 Population

Neuman (2006:201) mentions that the term population can be used interchangeably with universe. He says to define population the researcher specifies the unit being sampled, the geographical location, and the temporal boundaries of populations. The target population was a group of learners of English as an additional language in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase from a school in Limpopo province. They did not use English as a home language but only for teaching and learning purposes. A single unit was studied for this study.

8.1.4   Sampling

The sampling was purposeful in nature. That route was appropriate in this study because the researcher selected the respondents with a specific purpose in mind. The researcher wanted to investigate about reading and comprehending in English as an additional language among the learners who did not use English in their homes. So it would be appropriate to seek for a sample that would suit the study. Neuman (2006:198) explains that purposive sampling is appropriate in the following three situations; first, a researcher uses it to select unique cases that are informative. Second, a researcher may use purposive sampling to select members of a difficult-to-reach, specialized population. Another situation for purposive sampling occurs when a researcher wants to identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation. In this study it was applied because the sample was a unique and informative to the study. Purposive sampling is also called purposeful or judgmental sampling.

8.1.5 Data Collection

In this study data was collected using a questionnaire and a comprehension test. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gather information pertaining to the cultural and language background of the respondents, in this case the learners of English as an additional language. The aim of the comprehension test was to find out the effect of the respondents' cultural background on the comprehension of English text. The learners were presented with the test with the content mediated in the English culture. The respondents were asked questions to test their comprehension of the text.

8.1.6 Data Analysis

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002:179) mention that data analysis is always guided by the purpose of the study. Data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Data was coded and categorized by the number of variables involved. Univariate variables were described by means of frequency distribution and graphical representation of bar graphs and pie charts. The researcher also used narrative method to interpret data collected from the questionnaire and the comprehension test. The relationship between the two variables, cultural background and comprehension, was not only be done graphically, but also in a narrative way.

9.1 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Application for permission to conduct research was made at the Provincial Office of Limpopo. The University of Limpopo also granted the researcher a letter for undertaking research. The permission to conduct research at a school was also offered by the principal of the school. Learners were informed by the researcher on confidentiality and anonymity of their involvement in the investigation. The principal of the school was given assurance to receive a copy of the dissertation after completion. The documents used in the research process are appended.

10.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted in one institution (school) in the Capricorn district of Limpopo Province (South Africa) on learners who study English as an additional language. It cannot be generalized to other learners of English as a first additional language in the whole South Africa. Since the study is a case study type, one cannot generalize after the investigation that the case represents every school in Capricorn District.

11.1 CONCLUSION

It is an apparent susceptibility that learners who study English at school only, have a substantial knowledge of their own home languages and culture. However, they are expected to comply with the rules of the language like the first speakers of English do. We accumulate and acquire culture through language and vice versa. Learners presented with English texts. The way learners interpret the texts will apparently differ according to their cultural background. As long as learners differ in background knowledge, they will automatically have different schemata. The study investigated whether learners who use other languages apart from English in their home are able to comprehend English texts.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The use of English by second language learners has become a challenge to them as well as to their teachers. English is broadly used in schools as a language for teaching and learning. It is not the only language that could be used as there are eleven official languages recognized in South Africa, which can be used for learning and teaching. People understand and can clearly express themselves when using the language they best understand. The learners of English as an additional language cannot comprehend what is divulged to them the same a way as their counterparts, that is, the first language speakers of English. The cultural content they have from their background would either help them comprehend the texts or dissuade them. Actually, the learners who learn English as an additional language have a baggage of cultural content about their homes and their home languages per se. There is no other way they can discard them automatically when they start to learn English.

The use of English to learn content subjects is one thing and the learning of texts mediated in English culture is another. Several ethno-linguistic investigations have been conducted to research how the Second Language learners of English are impacted by their own cultural background in comprehending English texts. This chapter aims at generating literature available to motivate this. It seeks to demonstrate the quintessential concepts of culture and comprehension. Moreover, the chapter will not only dwell on these important concepts, but will also provide the empirical studies done on the same topic. It intends to also provide a framework for future studies on the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts by second language learners.

The current situation in South Africa has diverse cultural and linguistic implications that need to be established to make all learning of English as an additional language a success. Learners of English as an additional language encounter English culture mediated in these texts when they read them while they simultaneously have their own cultural background. They carry their own

baggage of home language structures, norms, values, customs and traditions that they unconsciously apply in the classroom. These bits of information they have in their minds cannot be in English. Their names, thoughts, concepts and images are vital to the acquisition of their home language and their environments because language is essential for attaining both the cultural and linguistic readiness and proficiency, which would apparently be the resultant of what they comprehend and know. It is thus vital that learners should have some schemata to back them up to fully comprehend what is presented to them in English texts. English as an additional language (EAL) learners live in an environment that is not English, and they cannot spontaneously switch to English language geniuses without any efforts taken to make learning meaningful to them in a language classroom.

In most South African schools and universities, English is regarded as an important subject to teach content subjects, to communicate and to run daily routines like completing assignments and projects. Reading and writing skills are essential for success in English learning. That is where the issue of comprehension comes in. Comprehension is an aspect that needs to be recognized in the teaching of reading. Although school beginners in South Africa assume their learning and education through their home languages, there will always arise a learning phase when they are introduced to English as a language for learning and teaching. It is not always effective for the teacher to link his or her new material to the previous lessons, to start from what learners already know to the unknown. It is complex to just begin offering subjects in English while learners do not even have the background of the English language and culture, because what is learnt needs to be understood and known. Without comprehension there is no learning. We expect that learners should be able to put what they have learnt into knowledge, skills and values.

2.2 CONCEPTS DEFINED

2.2.1 Culture

The notion of culture is a universal concept. Everybody has a culture that makes them to have a different view of the situation in which they find themselves at a certain period. Haviland (1996:32) mentions that the concept 'culture' was first developed by anthropologists towards the end of the nineteenth century. The first clear and comprehensive definition was that of the British

anthropologist Sir Edward Burnett Taylor in 1871 who defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man or member of society. Haviland (1996:32) continues to note that since Taylor's time, definitions of culture have proliferated, that by the early 1950's North American anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn were able to collect over a hundred definitions of culture from literature.

Kriger and Zegeye (2001:45) explain that culture is derived from the Latin *colo, colere* which means to "tend", to "look", to "live in a place." The actual word "culture" comes from the past perfect participle of '*colo'* and this might be said to refer to the accomplishment to date of some business or tending, looking after and living in a place. The significance here is that when one speaks of culture, one may think of way of life of a particular group of people. Culture is not an individual thing that one is born with; it pertains to a group of people. Harris (1993:104) mentions that the definition of culture consists of behaviour as well as patterns of thought and feeling. Harris mentions that many anthropologists prefer to review culture as a purely mental phenomenon consisting of how we should think and act. He states that culture is a pattern of thought because it consists of thoughts that takes place inside people's heads, plus the behaviour that people engage in.

As human beings, learners of English as an additional language have their own patterns of thinking and behaving, which may be the result of their upbringing. Their cultural context is relevant to the way they can behave and relate to other people and circumstances, and the way they interpret whole pictures. It can be exhausting for learners to challenge the cultural context which they are accustomed to, because culture is something shared by members of a society. Harris (1993:325) states that culture consists of socially acquired ways of thinking, feeling and acting of the members of a particular society. This idea is supported by Haviland (1996:32) that a set of rules or standards shared by members of a society, which when acted upon by the members produce behaviour that falls within a range of variation the members consider it proper and acceptable. Learners who are faced with the learning of a second language like English also have their own set of such standards of living from their own cultural background. The knowledge of the home language, skills, common undertakings they share with the society are part of the

cultural background. The language that they share with their people becomes the powerful tool of communication and they would honour the language and cultural expectations because of the ideas that they mutually share with those around them. Culture is therefore a characteristic of a particular society. Lyons (1981:302) holds the same idea that culture is the knowledge that someone has by virtue of being a member of a particular society. He says this knowledge is both practical and propositional, that is, both knowing how to do something and knowing that something is or is not so. He stresses that one's knowledge of one's native language is culturally transmitted: it is acquired though not necessarily learned, by virtue of one's membership of a particular society.

Ember and Ember (1981:21) add features like religion, food, beliefs, preferences, music, work habits and taboos as some of the compositions of culture of a social group. They say the things that we grow up with become the normal things, and ways we use them become the natural ways. So, the things and ways of other people are strange in proportion to the degree of contrast with ours. It is worth mentioning that culture is not inherited, it is acquired from the environment in which one finds one grows up. There are also elements such the way one dresses, what one eats and the way one eats. McLeod (2002:15) says these things can also include the elements like one's attitude to time, work and colleagues, communication and attitudes. The way in which people behave and act out these things are similar in many respects from one generation to the next. The cultural traits are transmitted and diffused among members of societies.

Park (1950:03) mentions that every individual is the inheritor of a double inheritance; physical and moral, racial and cultural. He says, however, that one becomes the bearer of cultural heritage by association, education and fundamentally by possession. In his opinion, culture is neither an artifact nor something that can be bought, sold or distributed. It is not even something that can be collected, classified and exhibited in anthropological museums or in art galleries. Cultural traits cannot be exported or transported - as units of cultural description and analysis, they can only be transmitted or diffused in the form of processes like enculturation and diffusion. Enculturation as described by Harris (1993:105) is partially conscious and partially unconscious; it is the learning experience whereby the older generation invites, induces and compels the younger generation to

adopt traditional ways of thinking and behaving. In the case of diffusion, cultural traits are passed from one society to the next.

In these ways culture is unconsciously preserving things like knowledge and values. People who contribute to culture believe that there is a meaning that is worth transmitting to others. Geertz (1973) in Ortner (1999:85) describes culture as the "webs of meaning" which people live in, encoded in symbolic forms like language, artifacts, etiquette, rituals, calendars etcetera, that must be understood through acts. He says we live in these webs, when you leave one, you get into the other but it depends if you are encultured in that web. Ideas and values that are not valuable will not be transmitted culturally within the group and eventually they would disappear. Tompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998:20) indicate that culture has three layers: namely; inner, middle and outer. The outer layer: they say, consists of explicit products. The explicit culture in this layer is observable reality of the language, food, buildings, homes, monuments, agriculture, shrines, fashion and art. These are symbols of deeper culture. These factors have more to tell about where a learner comes from than the community and the language he or she is judged about. The middle layer is of norms and values. The deeper layer of culture consists of norms and values of an individual. Norms are the mutual sense group has of what is wrong and right. Tompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998:21) say norms can develop on a formal level as written laws, and on an informal level as social-control. Values on the other hand, determine the definition of good and bad and are therefore closely related to the ideas shared by a group. While norms consciously or subconsciously give us a feeling of 'this is how I normally should behave', values give us feeling of 'this is how I aspire or deserve to behave.'

The researcher will summarize the concept the culture, according to Haviland (1996:32-33). He says culture is shared, learned, integrated and it is based on symbols. There can be no culture without a society. Cultures have maintained some differentiation of gender roles in some societies more than in others. Haviland (1996:33) mentions that in pluralistic countries such as South Africa, people operate by different sets of rules. This can create problems in learning a foreign language, because one sub-group may not comprehend the standards by which another operates and which leads to misunderstandings, even in the teaching-learning environment.

Culture is learned. Haviland (1996:37) explains that culture is not biologically inherited. One learns one's own culture by growing up with it, through enculturation; the process by which a society's culture is transmitted from one generation to the next. Culture is integrated. The aspects of culture function as an interrelated whole. The integration includes aspects such as economy, politics, education and other social aspects. Culture is based on symbols. The most symbolic aspect of culture is language in which objects are substituted by words. Through language, humans are able to transmit culture from one generation to another. Lyons (1981:324) mentions that one's linguistic competence, regardless of its biological basis, comes within the scope of our definition of culture. Most languages, if not all, exhibit distinctions in their grammatical or lexical structure that derive what meaning they have by virtue of their correlation with functional distinction in the culture, or subculture, in which language is used. Cultural background is a catalyst for comprehension of texts. Language is a way of marking cultural identity of a particular group of people. The meanings of a particular language point to the culture of that particular social group, and the analysis of those meanings and comprehension by bring meaning to their social interactions.

2.2.2 Comprehension

Any child, including the EAL learner should show comprehension in what is learned by acquiring knowledge and skills that will be utilized in relevant situations. The skills in English include reading as an essential one because much information is gathered through reading. One of the components of comprehension in reading is the cultural background and how the knowledge is activated by reading. Reading should be meaningful to learners and they should show understanding of the texts by interpreting them relevantly according to the intentions of the writer. The role of cultural background as a factor in reading comprehension has been an issue for some time. Fries (1945, 1963) in Carrell, Devine and Eskey (1988:02), states that reading comprehension occurs when the total meaning of the passage is fitted in ways meaningful to the society. Since the 1970's, the effect of cultural background knowledge upon the comprehension, memory and recall of texts have been investigated. It has been shown that when a reader and writer share cultural assumptions and knowledge about social systems and rituals, there is a much higher level of interaction of the reader with the text, than occurs when such assumptions and knowledge are not shared. River (1968) in Carrell, Devine and Eskey(1988:02) mentions

that strong bond between culture and language had to be maintained for a non-native reader to have a complete understanding of the meaning of the text.

Carrell et al (1988:01) say for many students reading is by far the most important of the four skills in a second language, particularly in English. Certainly, if we consider the study of English, as second language or foreign language around the world, it is mainly learned through reading. Every text is incomplete, and has to be converted into meaningful discourse by the reader. Candlin, cited by Urquhart and Weir (1998:111),explains that texts do not have unitary meanings potentially accessible to all, they rather allow for variety in interpretations by different readers, governed by factors such as purpose, background knowledge and the relationship established in the act of reading between the reader and the writer. This view is also shared by Devine, Carrell and Eskey (1987:02) that everything about the reader's background, especially culture-specific knowledge and experiences, is relevant to successful reading and reading comprehension. Reading may differ in case of readers from different cultures, either ethnic or professional or in the case of the same reader at different times, different knowledge or different preoccupations. It is through reading that we gather information and enrich our minds so we should be able to interact with what we read. Reading comprehension thus involves being able to relate meaning to purpose of the text. In order to get anticipated meaning from written texts, we should comprehend them.

Tonjes and Zintz (1987:176) state that when we speak of reading we automatically assume that there is comprehending because the act of reading implies that readers understand the message implicitly or explicitly stated in the text. Tonjes and Zintz (1987:181) differentiate between comprehending and comprehension by mentioning that the process of comprehending refers to how, not what, we comprehend. It is what we actually do to get at the needed meaning. They state that comprehension refers to facts, meanings or knowledge gained from reading, regardless of how this was gained. Comprehension is the end-result of what is understood, remembered or used while comprehending is the process of getting there. Comprehending is seen as a three-ponged process of active readers who tie new information to what they already know. Tonjesand Zintz (1987:181) compare teachers to tour guides of the terrain in print, and the text itself as a blue print for meaning. According to Tonjesand Zintz (1987:176) comprehending is a complex

interactive process which involves building a bridge between what is being read and what we already know in the real world; predicting, interpreting, relating ideas into some sort of organizational pattern deciding what strategies or skills are needed for a given purpose, revising when necessary and finally evaluating the worth of the messages.

Muller (1982:117) describes comprehension as a means to understand, to include, embrace, comprise, to acknowledge (without accepting) the views of others. He mentions that comprehension means understanding fully, wholly and comprehensively, it is an enlightment that comes like a revelation that excludes all doubt; it is an imaginative understanding. It thus means that comprehension is a result of a certain antecedent occurrence. When L2 learners of English are presented with texts, they put in a certain amount of cultural knowledge into the text to try and grasp its meaning. If the texts are based on the learners' culture-specific knowledge, they will easily comprehend the text. According to Kant (1781; 1963) in Carrell et al (1988:73) new information, new concepts, new ideas can have meaning only when they can be related to something the individual already knows. They mention that traditionally in the study of L2, comprehension has been the emphasis on the language to be comprehended and not on the comprehender, listener or reader. Learners have to be equipped with schemata which will act as catalysts of reading, to make them comprehend written material.

Tonjes and Zintz (1987:183) mention that knowledge structures or schemata (which stem from Bartlett; 1932) refer to what is already in our long-term memory and how that information is organized. For example, in terms of knowledge of a topic, readers may trigger what they already know about the topic in a variety of ways, the more they will be able to recall on appropriate knowledge structures in which to tie the new information. They will be able to comprehend, integrate and recall the necessary information which is needed. Anderson (1977) in Xiao-hui (2007:18) claims that schemata, which the reader brings to the text are far more important than structures and patterns which are in the same sense in the text. He goes on to say that schemata by which people attempt to assimilate the text will surely vary according to age, subculture, experience, and education, interest, and belief systems.

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Xiao-hui (2007:19) explains the three types of schemata which are linguistic schema, formal schema and content schema. He says linguistic schemata are the reader's existing language proficiency vocabulary, grammar and idioms. They are the foundation of other schemata. Without linguistic schemata it is impossible for he reader to decode and comprehend a text. The more the linguistic schemata, the better the comprehension of texts the reader may get. Formal schemata are organizational forms and rhetorical structures of written texts. They include knowledge of different types and genres and also include the knowledge that different types of texts use text organization, language structures, vocabulary, grammar and level of formality differently. Content schemata refer to background knowledge of the content area of a text, or the topic a text talks about. This includes topic familiarity, cultural knowledge and previous experience within a field of study. Content schemata deal with the knowledge relative to the content domain of the text, which is the key to the understanding of texts. The familiarity of the topic has a direct influence on reader's comprehension. From the analysis of the types of schemata above, Xiao-hui (2007:20) concludes that schema plays an important role in reading comprehension.

Wodak (1996:113) also points out that the predisposition of each reader or listener is defined in the light of their individual schema-orientate prior knowledge of the formal structure of the text. She states that the starting point of text comprehension is, on the one hand, the text presentation (for example legal texts, news broadcast) and on the other hand, the reader or listener with his or her individual social, socio-psychological to the institution and its products. According to Roberts, Davies and Jupp (1992:07), the notion of schema (which was called culture-specific knowledge) refers to the accumulated cultural and social knowledge and structured experiences which individuals bring to any interaction. Some of this knowledge is facts about the world, but most of it is the baggage of beliefs, values and interactional knowledge learned through growing up, living and working in particular cultures and through routine social contacts at personal and institutional levels.

Social and cultural knowledge and attitudes may surface explicitly in the meaning attached to particular uses of language. It is important to understand that the L1 majority speakers of English will easily perceive and evaluate any text better than L2 speakers.

This is simply due to the quality of language and exposure from their homes. Malave` and Duquette (1991:121) mention that it means when some efforts are made to consider the child's background, existing practices will show that assessments are often done haphazardly by non-native speakers of English through tests that have not been carefully weighed as to questions of cultural and linguistic authenticity, statistical validity and reliability. Culture may be to language what language is to speech because they each involve a process of understanding our world and expressing ourselves within that world. Learners of EAL who are not entirely exposed to the cultural content and context of the English language would be the greatest sufferers of the language learners in the classroom.

Carrell, Devine and Eskey (1988:80) support the view that one of the most obvious reasons why a particular content schema may fail to exist for a reader is that the schema is culturally specific and is not part of a particular reader's cultural background. Learners of ESL would find it difficult to try and formulate meaning of the texts whereas they have never had such cultural background information in the long-term memory. According to Carrell et al (1988:80), studies done by Steffensen, Joag-Dev and Anderson (1979) and Johnson (1981) have shown that the implicit cultural content knowledge presupposed by texts, interact with the reader's own cultural background knowledge of content to make texts whose content is based on one's own culture easier to read and understand than syntactically and rhetorically equivalent texts based on a less familiar, more distant culture. They mention that no matter how good our reading skills are in the L1, or how expert we are in the content area, we are not likely to make much of a text in a language which is totally unknown to us. This indicates that background knowledge plays an important part in the reading process. According to Devine, Carrell and Eskey (1987:02) everything about the reader and the reader's background especially culture-specific knowledge and experience is relevant to successful reading and reading comprehension.

Most reading experts (Xiao-hui, 2007; Li, 2006; Owens, 1996; McCarthy, 1998; Cook, 2001) believe that reading consists of processes; bottom-up and top-down, that are interactive. These processes according to Owens (1996:402) are parallel. They provide information simultaneously at various levels of analysis to facilitate comprehension. It is believed that for comprehension to be reached these processes take place due to background information stored which is compatible

to new information that is read. Wodak (1996:13) mentions that comprehension is valid for the interaction between text and context (socio-psychological influence) as well as for top-down and bottom-up cognitive processes (depth of comprehension). They believe that reading is an interactive process.

Carrell et al (1988:02) mention that earlier reading was seen as a passive decoding process where one reader builds up a meaning by recognition of printed letter and word from the smallest unit (word) to the top (phrase). Thus reading was seen to be a bottom-up process. There was also recognition of the importance of background knowledge and in particular the role of socio-cultural meaning in L2 learning comprehension. According to Owens (1996:388) the bottom-up theory of reading is translating written elements. Hence bottom-up theories emphasize lower-level perceptual and phonemic processes of their influence on higher cognitive functioning. McCarthy (1998:26) adds that the bottom-up process is the decoding of the text step-by-step from small textual elements such as words and phrases. Readers start to read at the lowest level and the meaning of the text comes naturally as it is based on reader's prior knowledge of linguistic units like vocabulary, grammar and syntax.

According to Carrell, Devine and Eskey (1988:11-12) say that several reading experts like (Anderson, 1978; Cziko, 1978) in McCarthy (1998:28) have characterized the top-down theory as basically concept-driven, in which higher-level interact and direct the flow of information through lower level processes. Although this type of theory was modeled by Goodman (1967), he did not characterize it as top-down. Readers reconstruct meaning from written language by using the graphophonic, syntactic and semantic systems of the language, but they merely use from these three levels of language to predict meaning, and most important confirm those predictions by relating them to their past experiences and knowledge of the language. In the top-down view of L2 reading, not only is the reader an active participant in the reading process making predictions and processing information, but everything in the reader's prior experience or background knowledge plays a significant role in the process. According to Owens (1996:388), top-down approach or problem-solving emphasizes the cognitive task of driving meaning. Higher cognitive functions such as concepts influence a level of meaning and the

processing of lower-order information. It means that the reader comes to the text with something from the previous experiences and uses that which is relevant to what is being read.

The expectations of the reader, according to Urquhart and Weir (1998:61) play a crucial role in the processing of the text, and using the next data to confirm or deny the hypothesis. (Rumelhart, 1980) in Xiao-hui (2007:21) states that interactive reading processing, both bottom-up and top-down processing should occur at all levels simultaneously. Readers may employ bottom-up process as a base for comprehending and text and then turn to top-down process to execute high-level interpretation of the content of the text. The interaction reading process of the combination of bottom-up and top-down models can be confirmed or rejected depending on the reader's cognitive structures. Vacca and Vacca (1999:5) mention that these reflect the experiences, conceptual understanding, attitudes, values, skills and strategies brought to a text situation. The EAL learners have the cultural background about their own home language that will surprisingly help them comprehend texts. It is much likely that the texts will not be understood because the learners do not have particular content schemata for the English language.

Tonjes and Zintz (1987:186) mention that comprehension occurs under the following conditions; what we know will determine what we learn, how we perceive the structure or overall plan (schema) of a topic and a text will also determine meaning. The more we can elaborate and draw inferences and relate ideas to each other, the more we will be able to recall from the text. The perspective we bring to the text influences the meanings we will get out of texts. There are reasons why we fail to comprehend texts, some of them being that unfamiliar or ambiguous words may be used in the texts over-reliance on listening and being unable to see relationships between and among sentences or how the whole text fits together.

The lack of cultural knowledge concerning the texts that are read can affect the performance on reading comprehension, because the learners' background is reflected on what they read. If the relevant schemata are not activated, the texts are culture-specific and that will not be forming part of the EAL's cultural background. Devine et al (1987: 10) mention that authentic texts are often more difficult to comprehend than simplified ones. Things like syntax, vocabulary, cultural content can make texts complex. Yet comprehension in reading is a complex, cognitive process

which greatly requires interaction of prior knowledge and newly read material. It also needs the EAL reader to be able to read and interpret in accordance with the intentions of the writer. Carrell et al (1988:81) hold the belief that reading comprehension depends crucially on the reader's being able to relate information from the text to already existing background knowledge.

Pienaar (1989:13) mentions that the native-speaking reader who has the same cultural background as the writer will readily comprehend the associations intended and will have an advantage compared to reader from a different culture. Literature requires an understanding of the cultural background from which it derives. Most writers assume that their intended readers exist in their own societies and will thus largely share cultural knowledge therein. To know the language in toto, one should be assimilated to the culture of the language. Carrell et al (1988:85) also noted that no author can compensate for the individual variation among readers, especially readers from different cultural backgrounds. Each learner of EAL should interpret the text on his or her own. Analyzing a text is not the same as interpreting; for the simple reason that interpretation involves a human subject with a set of beliefs, values, prejudices and ideologies, all of which can influence how a particular text and the language use ascribed within it are read. These influences on the interpreter are socially constituted and culturally conditioned.

The study done by Anderson and Urquhart in Carrell et al (1988:168) concluded that if readers bring their background knowledge to the comprehension process, and this knowledge is bound to vary from reader to reader, then there can be no single text-bound comprehension, but rather a host of interpretations. This may not be a problem when all the readers, together with the tester, belong to the same cultural background and share a large number of cultural presuppositions. Steffensen and Joag-Dev (1984) in Carrell et al (1988:170) have shown that comprehension can be radically affected by the reader's cultural background. In general, they say, the increased recognition of the importance of background knowledge may lead us to doubt the existence of any text which is 'neutral' across a wide range of readers. Grellet (1981:07) concedes that reading is a constant process of guessing, and what one brings to the text is often more important than what one finds in it. This is why, he says, from the very beginning the students should be taught to use what they know to understand unknown elements. Meek (1982:47) mentions that all good readers learn to predict both words and events. All these cannot be realized if the reader

brings nothing to the text. That is the reason readers have different interpretations of texts. McCarthy (1998:26) states that making sense of a text is an act of interpretation that depends as much on what we as readers bring to a text as what the author puts in it. So, cultural background is to a large extent, an important factor in English language comprehension.

Learners usually remember what they have heard, seen or observed. They can explain better the things that they are involved in their daily experiences. Their knowledge from their background necessitates their comprehension on linguistic matters pertaining to their culture. Mchazime (2001:81) mentions that background knowledge plays and important role in reading comprehension. He argues that in English as a second language, culture has been examined within the context of reading materials and comprehension. Within this context culture has been viewed as background knowledge (or schemata) that readers bring to the written text in order to understand the text.

It is well noted that relationship between language and culture cannot be overlooked since some languages gain power every day, and learners should assimilate to these cultures and language changes even though they are second language and second culture learners. This statement will be elaborated in the following section which deals with the relationship between language and culture. In the following paragraphs the concept of comprehension will be illuminated.

2.3 THE IMPACT OF SCHEMA AND CULTURAL BACKGROUND ON COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH TEXTS

Xiao-hui (2007:18) mentions that readers' schemata influence their reading comprehension. The familiarity of the topic has a direct influence on readers' comprehension. Comprehension is thus an important aspect of learning a language. Scott (2001:13) mentions that schema theory describes the process by which readers combine their own background knowledge with the information in a text to comprehend that text.

In learning to read, ESL learners are usually asked to recall on texts with English context in which their culture is not encapsulated; as a result, distortions and unexpected interpretations are found when the texts are read and responded to. One study conducted showed that cultural background is a fact to be considered when reading was necessary. The respondents were the learners who were presented with two passages to read. The passages were based on the religious practices of each group. The findings support the claim that cultural background is a factor to be considered when reading. In another study done by Anderson and Gipe (1984), cited by Salim (1996:81) it was found that a strong relationship exists between cultural group membership and inferential measures for passages within twelve familiar and twelve unfamiliar schemata for each group. They, in addition, found that creative children took more risks making inferences. Johnson (1982) carried out a study on the effect of the cultural origin of prose on reading where comprehension was in focus. The respondents were 46 Iranian intermediate advanced ESL students at the university level. Half of the respondents read unadapted English texts on stories from Iranian folklore and one from American folklore while the other half read the same stories in adapted English. The respondents' reading comprehension was tested through multiple-choice questions. The recall questions were also given to 19 American respondents for comparison purposes. Results revealed that the culture origin of the story had a greater effect on comprehension than syntactic or semantic complexity of the text. The culture of origin of the story shows that it is cultural for a particular cultural group. The cultural content of the text cannot be comprehended if such type of knowledge was never transmitted to the ESL learners. It is possible that the ESL learners cannot socially gather English content or be in all English contexts in order to gain knowledge of such unfamiliar words.

In another study by Johnson (1982), a comparison was done on ESL students to recall a reading passage on Halloween. Seventy-two ESL students at the university level read a passage on the topic Halloween. The passage contained both unfamiliar and familiar information based on the subjects' recent experience of the custom. Some studied the meanings for unfamiliar words in the text. Results of recall protocols suggested that prior cultural experiences prepared readers for comprehension of the information about Halloween in the passage. However, exposure to the unfamiliar words did not seem to have a significant effect on their reading comprehension. Many of the studies onthe of cultural background knowledge upon comprehension, memory, and

recall of texts, involved a written procedure in which subjects were instructed to recall the entire text in wording as close to the original as possible. Anderson and Barnitz (1984) in Devine, Carell and Eskey (1987:47) stress that importance of building background knowledge in language learning. They mention that the development of the experiences should be discussed before they are given to learners in reading comprehension.

Another study which evidenced this was shown by Goodman and Goodman (1978) in Devine, Carrell and Eskey (1987) that EAL learners do not have highly articulated cultural schemata, (whether cultural background has an impact on comprehension of English texts). They selected subjects from diverse cultural backgrounds. They studied eight groups of children, four composed of students who spoke a language other than English as their mother tongue before entering school – Navajo, Samoan, Arabic and Spanish; the other four groups were composed of students who spoke different dialects of English; Down east Maine, Appalachian white, rural Back and Hawaiian Pidgin. Each respondent reads two stories; one was a standardized story and the other represented more closely the cultural background of the subjects' own group. All the children were first asked to retell the story, and then answered level open-ended questions which were to provide further evidence of comprehension. The miscues that the readers produced as they read were recorded. The analysis of the miscues indicated the influences of social context on reading the common experiences, concepts, interviews and life-styles of readers with common social, cultural background will also be reflected in how and what people read and what they take from their reading. It was found that the knowledge and background experiences that readers brought to their reading were related to their construction of the meaning of the text. Furthermore, they found that cultural effect was more pronounced in the higher than in the lower grades, supporting the claim that schema development is correlated to age.

Steffensen and Joag-Dev (1984) in Alderson and Urquhart (1992:49), conducted a study using two descriptions of wedding both written in English. One was a description of an American wedding, while the otherwas of Indian (subcontinent) wedding. Both the Indian students, for whom English was a second language, and the American students, for whom English was first language, read the description and were asked to recall the descriptions. It was found that readers comprehend texts about their own cultures more accurately than the others. While the readers

indicated that the words were easy to understand; the unfamiliar cultural protocol of an Indian wedding made the passage more difficult to remember. It can be concluded that learners understand texts that have content of their culture. In some instances learners use direct translations from their L1 and which sometimes do not bear any significance to the text read.

Yakhontova (2001:397) concluded in his study that although the appropriateness of a textbook needs the socio-cultural context of English use which is important to maintain the standard requirement, these features can be violated. Texts present different cultural settings to those L2 learners. Pienaar (1989:13) also mentions that there are words that have a culture-bound meaning and denote concepts that are perculiar to a particular culture. Language, through its lexicon reflects the particular and always unique way of its speakers. There are some degrees of culture-specificity, some items being more culture-bound than others. She mentions that it is the culture-specific words that often create problems for the learner. According to Bamberg (1997:183) these words which are culture-specific in English should be translated to words that are culture-free and language-independent to curb culture-specific interpretations that cause interference.

Adeyeye (1999:17) concluded in his study that languages are deeply cultural and it is difficult to introduce the child to English language, because it bears the trait of its own culture, and in its cultural imperialism bids learners shed the cultural habits and attitudes they bring into the learning situation and adopt those of the new language. In his study, Salim (1996) investigated the effects of the attitudes and culture of Israeli-Jewish students learning English on their comprehension, using familiar and culturally unfamiliar stories. The participants were 83 Jewish 8th graders from two schools in Southern Israel. The instruments were an attitude questionnaire, stories in Hebrew and English and multiple-choice questions about the stories. The students who read culturally familiar texts received higher reading comprehension scores than the students who read culturally unfamiliar texts. The Jewish students' motivation for learning a L2 was instrumental rather than integrative. This indicates that cultural background of EAL learners should be acknowledged in the classrooms. Studies reveal that background knowledge is important in reading comprehension and that learners of EAL readers will be affected by knowledge structures or schemata that they possess.

2.3 CONCLUSION

Reading is a quintessential process in learning a language. South African also recognizes reading as a skill which should be developed in learners. In the manual from National Curriculum Statement, Department of Education, (2003:24-25) for English as an additional language, reading is specified as one of the outcomes for learning English as an additional language. According to this statement, learners in the Further Education and Training band (grades ten to twelve) should be to be able to read and view for understanding and to evaluate critically and respond to a wide range of texts. They should be able to recognize and explain the sociopolitical and cultural contexts of the written texts. The outcome indicates that there is a strong bond between the language in written texts and the culture mediated in the texts themselves. Learners are then expected to comprehend the texts. Learners could experience difficulties when the writer has the different background to theirs.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methods that were utilised when the research process was undertaken on the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts by second language learners of English. It describes the concept of methodology and further outlines the instruments that were used to collect data in the research process. Consequently, the researcher describes the analytical process that was followed after the completion of data collection. A conclusion is drawn about this particular chapter and its purpose.

Every researcher whether a novice or active researcher, has to use relevant tools to gather information required in order to find solution to the research problem. The researcher does not only look for suitable equipment, he or she also looks for something available. So without the availability of resources like relevant material, for example, the researcher will not be able to find anticipated answers to the research problem, or the research problem cannot be addressed without the use of appropriate sampling methods, research methods or techniques and the effective procedures. The respondents that the researcher selects provide possible solutions to the research problem. It should not inconvenience the researcher because interest can be lost and the research question might not be answered. The methodology and the instruments that the researcher opts to use should provide solutions. Above all information should be valid and reliable.

In this study the research problem is the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts by second language learners. In this instance, the researcher used appropriate sample, instruments and analytical and interpretative processes that are relevant to the research question. The methods that were used are the questionnaire and the comprehension passage.

The comprehension of texts was looked at as a variable influenced or influencing the cultural background of the learners. The way in which learners responded to the comprehension passage

was analyzed in comparison with their cultural background, biographic and demographic factors stated in the questionnaires they would have completed.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is key to all research. It is the scientific way of investigating and solving problems which will benefit the whole universe because one research gives room for further research. It is proper that the research method is in line with the research problem. Methodology can be either qualitative or quantitative. A brief discussion of the two types of methodologies is done in the following paragraph.

3.2.1 Qualitative and quantitative methodologies

According to Neuman (2006:51) qualitative and quantitative research differ in many ways, but they complement each other. All social researchers systematically collect and analyze data and carefully examine the patterns in them to understand and explain social life. De Vos (1998:46) says that in qualitative methodology inductive logic prevails. Categories emerge from informants, rather being identified by the researcher and those they study, whether this interaction assumes collaboration or not. Distance between the researcher and those being researched is minimized. The qualities of a researcher are value-laden. The researcher reports his or her values and biases, as well as the nature of information gathered from the field. Qualitative research is interpretative. As such, biases, values and judgments of the researcher become explicitly stated in the research report. Such openness is considered useful and positive.

The quantitative researcher, on the other hand, reviews the literature and related research to get a clearer understanding of the nature and meaning of the problem identified. The problem is reformulated in the form of testable hypothesis. Then the selection of the most relevant data collection methods and measuring instruments from those available is made. A pilot study is conducted. The sample is made which is representative of the whole population. Neuman (2006:51) states that one of the differences between the two styles (quantitative and qualitative methodologies) comes from the nature of data. Soft data, in the form of impressions, words, sentences, photos, symbols and so forth, dictate different research strategies and data collection techniques than hard data in the form of numbers. Other differences are different assumptions

about social life and different objectives. They follow a linear research path. Quantitative researchers emphasize precisely measuring variables and testing hypothesis that are linked to general casual explanation. Neuman (2006:53) mentions that quantitative research addresses the issues of integrity by relying on an objective technology such as precise statements, standard techniques, numerical measures, status and replication.

In this study both approaches, namely, quantitative and qualitative, were used in data collection and data analysis process to investigate whether cultural background has an effect on comprehension of English texts by second language learners. The instruments that were used for data collection are the questionnaire and the comprehension passage.

3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:63) say that a research design has two meanings. It can be understood as the planning of any scientific research from the first to the last step. In this sense, it is a programme to guide the researcher in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting observed facts. It is a specification of the most adequate operations to be performed in order to test specific hypothesis under given conditions. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:63) mention that research designs have three categories, namely, pre-experimental designs, experimental designs and quasi-experimental designs. They mention that the central aim of research design is to establish a relationship between the independent and dependent variable with a higher degree of certainty. Neuman (2000) in De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002:38) distinguishes between quantitative and qualitative research designs. The quantitative category includes experiments, surveys and content analysis. Types of experiments described are the classical experimental design, pre-experimental designs such as the one-shot case study, the one-group pre-test-posttest design and the static group comparison. Creshwell (1998) in De Vos et al (2002:272) identifies five strategies of inquiry that could be used to design qualitative research as the biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study. This study followed a case study design. Leedy (1997:157) states that a case study is conducted to shed light on a phenomenon, be it a process, event, person, or object of interest to the researcher. The case study design was opted for because it allows the researcher to use multiple methods to ensure rich information is gathered in the process of data collection. According to Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:43) a case

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study is the detailed and thorough investigation of a few cases, each case being investigated only on the particular aspect under consideration. De Vos et al (2002:275) states that a case study can be regarded as an exploration or in-depth analysis of a "bounded system" (bounded by time and/or place). They say the exploration and description of the case take place through detailed, indepth data collection methods, involving multiple sources of information that are rich in context. These can include interviews, documents, observations or archival records. Payne and Payne (2004:31) describe that the key characteristic of a case study is that the social unit selected is a single example of the many cases that make up the type of unit in question. According to Baker (1994:299), a case study is not a specific method of social research, but a research strategy which focuses on a single organization, institution, event, decision, policy or group. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) in Leedy (1997:157) researchers generally do case studies for one of three purposes, namely, to produce detailed descriptions of a phenomenon, to develop possible explanations of it, or to evaluate the phenomenon. The cases which were used in the study were the group of learners from a school in the Capricorn district of Limpopo province.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Data is empirical information that can be collected for a particular topic, followed in either qualitative research, quantitative research or both. In both approaches, data is empirically collected for a particular topic using special methods or techniques. Mouton (1996:52) prefers using the term "generating data" to data collection. Mouton (1996:52) mentions that data collection involves applying the measuring instruments to the sample or cases selected for the investigation. Seliger and Shohamy (1990:155) state that the procedure will often depend on the nature of the research problem and the design of the research. The researcher should have a thorough knowledge of the research question and decide on the kind of subjects he or she should sample. In qualitative data, research requires that data collected must be rich in description of people and places. Qualitative researchers present data in narrative ways although some studies use numbers to summarize, findings and data take the form of field notes, documents, interview, tape recordings and artefacts.

In quantitative inquiry, researchers do not reach to the process of analyzing data until they have collected all of the data. Data is condensed into numbers. This study followed a case study design where a sample was selected from Further Education and Training group, (that is, grades 10 to 12) and studied in depth. The sample was selected from a rural school in the Capricorn district in the far north of Limpopo province The respondents were learners who did not use English as a home language.

They use English as a medium for learning at school. These types of learners are expected to have acquired certain outcomes and standards of English at that level. This study investigated whether or not their cultural background enhanced their comprehension of the written English texts. Therefore, the variables for the study were comprehension and cultural background. That was done to investigate if such learners' cultural background would have an effect on their comprehension of English texts presented to them. The instruments that were used were a questionnaire and a comprehension passage. The aim of using a questionnaire was collect as much information as possible on the exposure and frequency of English language used by the respondents in their homes. It was also a feasible way to gather relevant information to address the research question. Since the aim of the study was to investigate the effect of cultural background on comprehension of English texts, the questionnaire was used to acquire the biographic, demographic and linguistic information of respondents. That was used to assist to correlate the performance of respondents based on comprehension of texts to their cultural background. In the case of a comprehension test, respondents were presented with a passage to read and responded to it by answering in a written form. The passage was based on cultural content of English. That tested whether learners with a different cultural background were able to respond positively, that is, to comprehend and interpret the message in the text as anticipated by the writer.

3.5 SAMPLING

Mouton (1996:10) mentions that sampling is the process of selecting which aims to get a sample that is as representative as the population. Two basic methods of sampling are probability sampling and non-probability sampling. The former method, according to De Vos (1998:105 is based on randomization while the latter is on non-randomization. Some examples of probability

sampling methods are random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling and panel sampling. Examples of non-probability sampling are self-selection sampling, quota sampling, convenience sampling, volunteer sampling and purposive sampling. For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling was used to select the respondents. Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005:69) mentions that purposive sampling is the most important type of non-probability sampling since researchers rely on their experiences, ingenuity and or previous research findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis in such a manner that the sample they contain maybe regarded as being representative of the relevant population. Mason (2002:24) mentions that purposive sampling means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions, the theoretical position and analytical framework, the analytical practice and most importantly the argument or explanation that you are developing. Since the purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of cultural background on comprehension of English texts by second language learners, as a researcher I thought that it was relevant to select the sample the from learners as target cases who could provide desired information to address the research question. The population that the researcher targeted is a school in the Bochum (Senwabarwana) area in the north of Capricorn district of Limpopo Province. The school is predominantly rural. It is a secondary school and my cases belong to FET phase. The learners use African languages at home Sepedi and English are used as a medium for teaching and learning.

3.6 INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

As mentioned earlier, the instruments used for data collection in this study are a questionnaire and a comprehension test. A questionnaire was structured to ask respondents a series of questions. These questions entailed their biographic information and exposure to English language. The aim of this instrument is also to gather information on their home background as far as the use of language is concerned.

3.6.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed by the researcher to collect data. It was structured in order to acquire only relevant information. The questionnaire was personally delivered by the researcher and it was filled in by the respondents themselves. Questions were close-ended to allow room for

willingness, explicitness and efficiency to furnish information. It was selected as an instrument to collect data in this study because it provides the respondents with a sense of confidentiality and freedom to independently disseminate information for the success of the study. Apart from the information to be provided in the biographic section, other questions dwelt on the categories such as communication, culture, reading, exposure to media and frequency of English language use. The questionnaire was first piloted.

3.6.2 Comprehension test

The notion of language here is vital because it is with the language that learners learn and comprehend what they are presented with in the classroom. This is why the researcher utilized the comprehension test as the second instrument of data collection. Fielding (2006:439) states that comprehension stresses understanding. He mentions that comprehension tests test peoples' ability to grasp the theme of the passage and to understand what words mean in the passage. The comprehension test was designed to test the learners' comprehension of the passage that they would have read. The test aimed at investigating whether the learners possess enough or relevant schemata to be able to comprehend English texts. The text that was used was mediated into English culture. As comprehension was tested, it means the linguistic background and cultural background of the respondents were automatically connected to the text. What the respondents have from their background would either trigger their schemata to comprehend the text, or it may not. According to Al-Issa (2006:41) research on the theory of schema had a great impact on understanding reading comprehension in the first and second language. It is what this study suggested to find out. The test was designed by the researcher. Therefore, it was pretested.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002:222) state that data analysis is always guided by the purpose of the study. De Vos et al (2002:222) mention that analysis itself does not provide the answers to the research question. Data can be qualitatively and or quantitatively analyzed. Traditionally qualitative data analysis involves an inseparable relationship between data collection and data analysis. The data analysis in qualitative inquiry involves data analysis away from the site following a period of data collection. The second aspect is conducted between site visits prior to, as well as after completion of data collection. Quantitative data analysis refers to

the categorizing, manipulation and summarizing of a data to an intelligible and interpretable form so that the relationship of research problems can be studied, tested and conclusions drawn.

In this study data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Mixed methodologies were used. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002:342) refer to this as triangulation of methods. It means mixing qualitative and quantitative styles of research data analysis. After collection data was broken into constituent parts according to the responses to each variable. The summary of variables relevant to the answering of the research problem was presented in frequency distribution tables. Bar graphs and pie graphs were used to illuminate the findings. Qualitatively, the researcher would present data in a narrative form to indicate the depiction of graphs and secondly, to narrate about the relationships found among the variables and the responses from both sources.

3.8 CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts by second language learners. This study intended to find answers for this research problem from respondents who use English only in their school for learning in their homes. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, relevant methods and instruments for data collection were used. Relevant steps throughout the research process were followed.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to present, interpret and discuss data. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002:239) describe data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2002:340) elaborate that qualitative data analysis is the search for general statements about relationships among categories of data, it builds a grounded theory. Data from this approach have no arithmetic operations. It is also called qualitative data categorical data. De Vos et al (2002:340) mention that the numerical values are usually obtained by measuring and counting. For the purpose of this study, data was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. De Vos et al (2002:341) term this triangulation of methods which means mixing of both qualitative and quantitative styles of research. Data for this study was collected by means of two methods, namely, a questionnaire and a comprehension test. Data to be presented in this chapter had been collected from the two sources to address the research problem that the cultural background can have an impact on the comprehension of texts by second language learners of English and to find answers to the research questions. Research questions were stated as follows:

- To what extent can the learners' cultural background have an effect on their comprehension of English texts?

- Does the learners' familiarity with the cultural content affect their comprehension of the text?

The study was guided by the schema theory which holds that the role of background knowledge in language comprehension is important. Carrell (1984:332) describes that the role of background knowledge in language comprehension has been formalized as schema theory. That theory holds that any text, either spoken or written, does not carry meaning by itself, rather, a text only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own, previously acquired knowledge. Such knowledge is called the reader's background knowledge and the previously acquired knowledge structures are called schemata.

Before data is presented, the researcher gives a description of the sample used for the study. The purposive sampling method was used to select the cases. De Vos et al (2002:334) mention that in purposive sampling a particular case is chosen because it illustrates some features or processes that are of interest for a particular study. A case study design was followed for the study. The researcher decided to follow this route in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the cases selected. Henning (2004:41) mentions that while case studies can be qualitative and can test a theory; in education they are more likely to be qualitative. The sample for the study was a group of learners from a rural secondary school in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province. The school is situated in the north of the province and it is found in a village. It serves communities surrounding it. The community is rural and the learners share the common linguistic and cultural roots.

The particular cases selected were from the FET band. The reason for choosing this band was that learners in this phase are expected to have acquired substantial degrees of competencies and skills to use English as a second language. The study was to test whether their cultural background would or would not affect their comprehension of English texts. The second reason for choosing these cases was that they use English as a language for teaching and learning. It is not their home language. The cases were deemed relevant due to their linguistic and cultural status. The communities surrounding the school are not conspicuously exposed to Western culture, and that factor contributed highly to address the problem that the cultural background has an effect on the comprehension of texts by learners who are not first language speakers of English.Data presented, as mentioned earlier on, was elicited from the questionnaire and the comprehension test. Data from the questionnaire would be presented first. The paramount objective of utilizing the questionnaire was to gather sufficient information concerning the cultural and linguistic identity of the cases. It was employed to empirically confirm that they are not the English home language speakers. Out of the 82 cases who responded, two learners speak Xitsonga, one speaks isiZulu, one speaks isiNdebele and one speaks Afrikaans in their homes. The rest, referring to seventy seven (77) learners, use Sepedi as their home language. The questionnaire was divided into sections to generally address the following; biography of the respondents, their culture and language issues, communication, reading habits, media use and

exposure to English language. Data from the questionnaire will first be presented and interpreted using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

4.2 QUESTIONNAIRE

The biography section comprised variables of gender, age, nationality, race, ethnicity, home language and residential information. Not all the aspects asked in the questionnaire were analyzed, only those which showed significance in addressing the research question. In this first section on the biography of the respondents, the data on home languages and their ethnic groups, race and residence was discussed. These factors have an impact on one's upbringing, language, culture and education. The descriptor for home languages is first presented in tabular and graphical form to indicate the frequency of the variables, and the discussion is done thereafter. The distribution of the values are indicated in a frequency table and on a double bar graph to show the types of home languages spoken by the respondents and their levels.

4.2.1 Home languages

Table 4.1: Distribution of home language

Languages:	Afrikaans	IsiNdebele	IsiZulu	Sepedi	Xitsonga
Males	00	01	01	30	01
Females	01	00	00	47	01
Total	**01**	**01**	**01**	**77**	**02**

This linguistic information is graphically presented below.
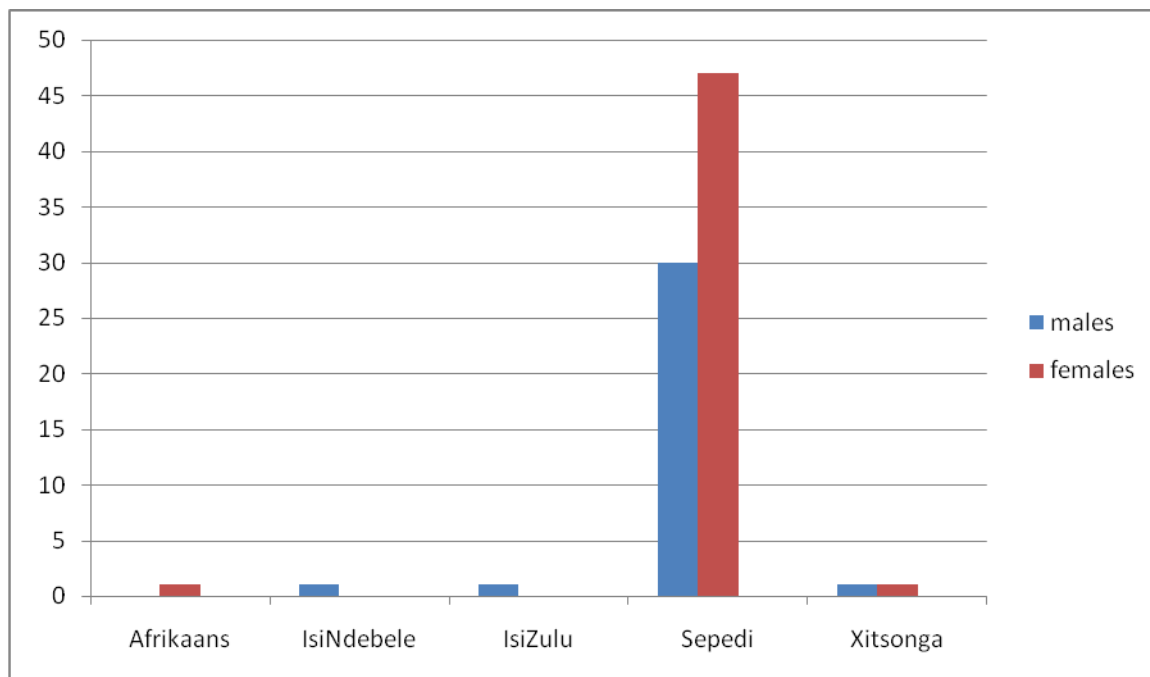
Graph 4.1: Home languages

The distribution of values representing the spread of home languages for the respondents shows that 77 respondents (94 %) do not use English as a home language. Their home language is predominantly Sepedi and there is an indication that there are no respondents who use English at home. The graph above depicts that Sepedi language is predominantly used in almost all homes of the respondents. This illustrates that respondents' language is rooted in Sepedi vocabularies and concepts. Ember and Ember (1981:21) mention that the symbolic quality of language has tremendous implication for the transmission of culture. It is through their languages that the respondents build culture, and that forms their cultural background. Ember and Ember (1981:19) mention that the culture of a society is composed of its language, general knowledge, religious belief, food preferences, music, work, habits, taboos, and etcetera. Language and culture are interdependent of each other. When one learns a language, it contributes to culture acquisition. This clearly indicates that the respondents are English second language learners. According to Al-Issa (2006:23), English second language learners background knowledge appropriate or necessary for many texts, since they come from native speakers of English. Thus, learners who use English as a second language are more likely to have low reading comprehension owing to lack of background knowledge that may be essential for certain texts. The type of schemata that

they possess is apparently culture-specific and based on the language and culture based of their home languages. Data based on the ethnicity is illustrated below.

4.2.2 Ethnicity

Table 4.2: Ethnicity

	Ndebele	**Zulu**	**Pedi**	**Tsonga**	**Total**
Males	00	01	30	01	**32**
Females	01	00	48	01	**50**
Total	**01**	**01**	**78**	**02**	**82**
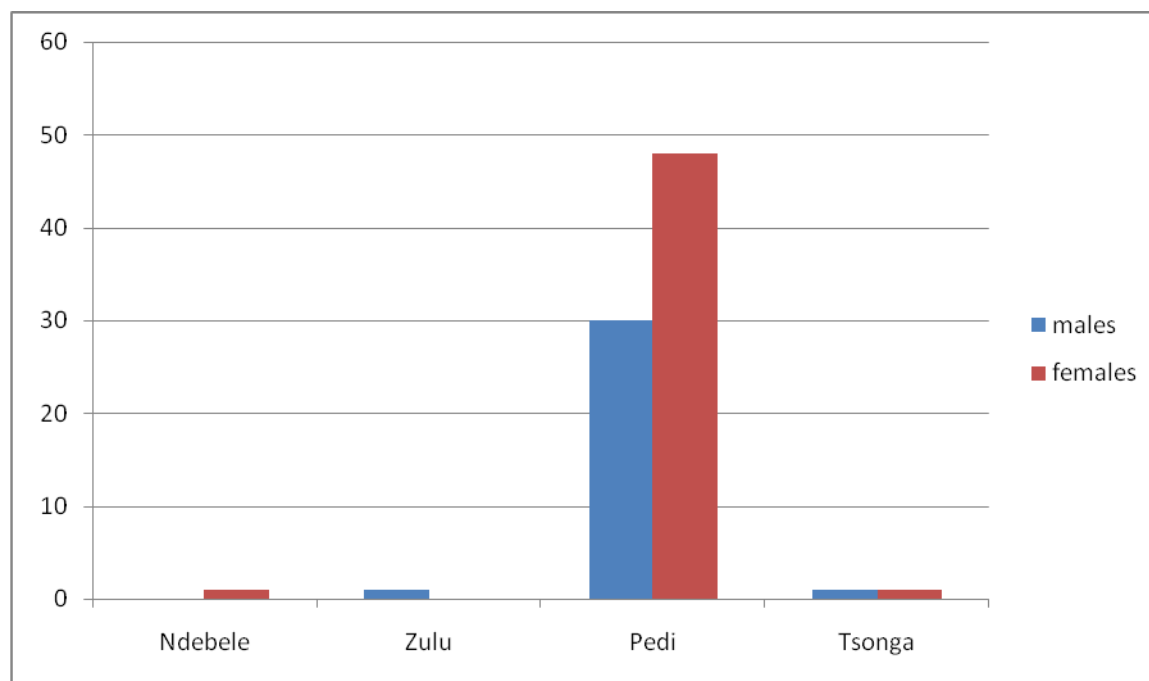
Graph 4.2: Ethnicity

The graphs (4.1 and 4.2), above depict that the cultural background of the respondents is predominantly based on Pedi culture and language. It is significant that if 95% of the respondents are attached to Pedi culture and Sepedi as a home language, their cultural background was based on the customs, traditions and rituals that they are involved in on daily basis. The four respondents who stated in written form that they belong to different ethnic group actually communicate well in Sepedi and they resided in the same community as the other Pedi-speaking

respondents. They have been attached to the same school from senior phase and enrolled for Sepedi as a home language.

The information sought from the above biographic aspects was to get an insight on language and cultural profile of the respondents to ascertain that the study is carried out on the relevant sample. There was prevalence according to the graph that the respondents were not accustomed to any western language and culture at home. It confirmed that their socio-cultural community was predominantly of African black culture, that is, their cultural landscape was predominantly African and black. Learners shared the common aspect of language. They had the common attitudes, beliefs, customs and habits. They derived meaning and learned from that context which was void of Western culture. So there was no possible association or diffusion, or any exchange of cultural traits from any white English community. The respondents learned all those things in their own home language, which, of course, was brought to the classroom. Learning a language is learning culture. The one respondent who mentioned that her home language was Afrikaans was actually staying in a black environment. It was learnt that her father who passed on some time ago, was an Afrikaans-speaking farmer who preferred staying within the black communities. The cultural background that the child had acquired was based on the culture and language of the mother who was a Sepedi speaker and the community they lived in is predominantly of Pedi culture.

4.2.3 Race

All respondents belong to a black community. People of the same race would share common aspects of language and culture. Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995:18) mention that these aspects include vocabulary of the language, kinship systems, perception of colour, the organization of society, religious beliefs and taboos. All these relate to aspects of culture which are embedded in language. In this case, learners of English as a second language would not possess linguistic knowledge like their counterparts who on daily encounters expand their schemata in their language.

4.2.4 Residence

Respondents have indicated that they all live in a rural area. The revelation is that all respondents shared cultural homogeneity. Goodenough, in Hymes (1964:32), mentions that a society's language is an aspect of culture. The relationship of language to culture is that of part to whole. These respondents share the same customs, language, traditions and apparently enjoy the same celebrations, rituals and registers.

The descriptors that were discussed hereunder were meant to be used to get the respondents' exposure to English language use. The respondents were residing together and as such they passed their cultural traits from one to the other. Language also, as an aspect of culture is also shared among them. They build the cultural background based on their own culture and language. The following presentation and discussion were based on the descriptors used to gather information concerning the exposure of respondents (learners) to the English language. These factors have an impact on one's upbringing, language, culture and education.

4.2.5 Communication

The other questions that were asked from the respondents were based on communication. In this case, communication refers to the way they use the English language to communicate verbally with the families and friends. Although 49 respondents indicated they had friends who use English to communicate with them, it was however, not used in daily encounters. Language is a communicative vehicle through which people not only communicate, but also bring meaning among themselves. Learners communicate in most cases in Sepedi in their home environments. This implies that learners have to require substantial content of English at school. They do not encounter different ways in which first language speakers of English use on daily basis. According to Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995:15), language can be studied not only with reference to its formal properties, but also with regard to its relationship to the lives and thoughts and culture of the people who speak it.

Teachers also use the home language, Sepedi, to clarify subject content to the learners. Respondents mentioned in the questionnaires that they did not have friends who are first language speakers of English and as such they were not acquainted to the social and cultural

ceremonies or celebrations of their counterparts. Keats (1997:2) states that today children of different cultural background meet in many social situations by schooling, travel and tourism, international media (television & film). They bring vicarious experiences of other cultures and wield a powerful and intrusive influence. He continues to mention that not all children are exposed to these. They are used to their own natural and cultural life experiences based on their home language and culture. Xiao (1977:159), cited by Lin (2008: 4) mentions that language contains not only the historical cultural background of the nation, but also the view of life, the way of life and the way of thought of the nation. Keats (1997:2) states that many children of different cultural background find it difficult to cope with the demands of English as a second language which they come across in the classroom.

4.2.6 Media

Respondents were asked questions based on their use of newspapers as one type of media people can access information from. The researcher was also attempting to investigate whether the respondents had any knowledge that they could gather from the use of newspapers. Reading is a skill through which much knowledge is acquired. Lin (2008:30) states that much knowledge is acquired through reading during and after school years. He also states that in English reading, cultural barriers and language cannot be separated. He argues that language is carrier, which not only carries the information of language, but also carries the information of culture. Anderson (1977), in Lin (2008:3), states that every stage of comprehension involves reader's background knowledge of culture. Among other questions respondents were asked whether they are generally interested in reading. Although 81 respondents (98, 8 %) indicated that they enjoyed reading, and one (1) respondent, (1, 2%), that he did not, 48 of them which is equivalent to 59% only read for school work purposes. The other 31% and 10% read leisurely and for projects respectively. Respondents did not display sufficient reading level and interest. Newspapers include plenty of material on contents that are essential for school going children. They are good sources of print media that are accessible, cheaper and interesting because they contain a variety of texts including texts on visual literacy like cartoons and advertisements. These aspects are always found as part of assessment in external question papers of English for FET phase. If learners develop a habit of reading, that they could acquire valuable information in this language, their

competence and proficiency might be improved. Concerning the theme of reading, respondents were asked to mention the frequencies of reading newspapers. The table is shown hereunder.

Table 4.3: Frequency of newspaper reading

	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	When avail	Never	Total
Males	02	05	01	24	0	**32**
Females	01	07	00	42	0	**50**
Total	**03**	**12**	**01**	**66**	**0**	**82**
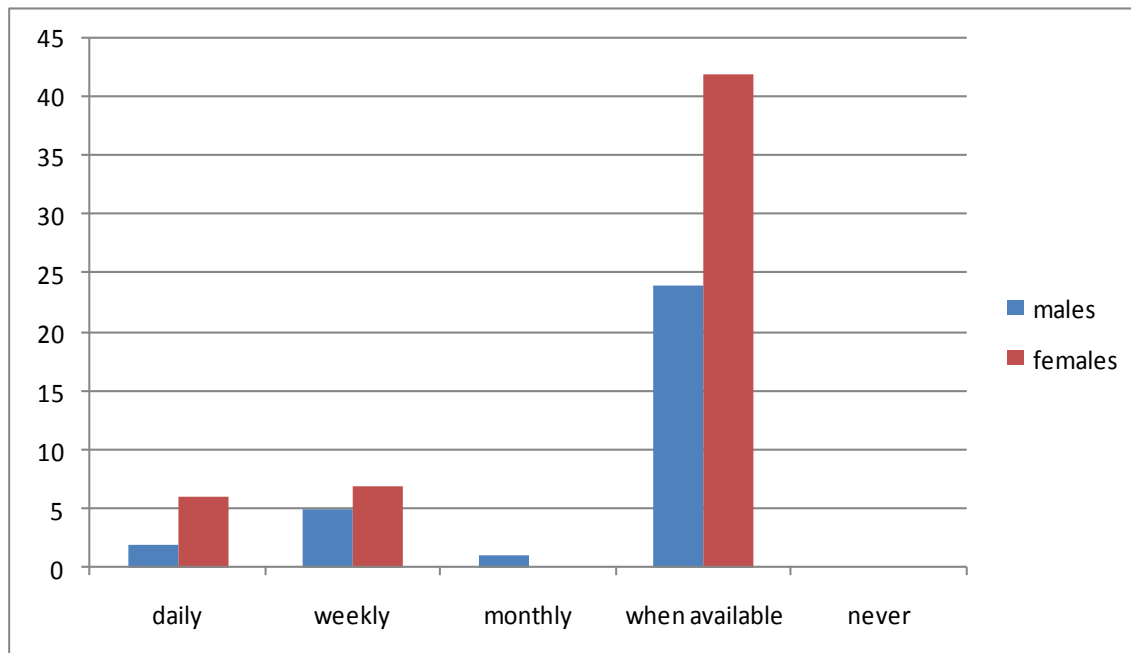
Graph 4.3: Frequency of newspaper reading

The table reveals that of the 82 respondents, only 8 of them could read a newspaper on daily basis. The exposure to media is a challenge to the learners of English as a second language in this population. About 80% (24 males and 42 females) of the population in FET phase only read a newspaper when it was available. The lack of intervention or association with their counterparts (English-speaking people) as evidenced above, should have been substituted by the use of printed media like reading material. The respondents were at a distance from the physical resources of English, whereas it is common knowledge that language is learnt through culture.

The availability of a media centre (library and related facilities) at the school was also questioned. From the response of all learners, it was found that the school did not have a media centre. The researcher was of the opinion that the unavailability of a media centre was also contributing to incuriosity and incapacity in reading. It was prevalent by the responses of the learners that the contribution as far as reading was concerned was overlooked. The unavailability of the resource centre might as well contribute to limited reading material exposed to learners.

Coleman (2003:11) mentions that for learners to be efficient readers or to achieve academic success it is essential for them to be able to interact with a variety of written texts in a communicative manner. Wittrock (1990), in Coleman (2003:13) mentions that to comprehend what they read learners must organize the information in the text according to their own prior knowledge or experience in such a way that it will make sense to them. South Africa is a multicultural and multilingual country. The researcher believed that the easiest way to access information that is continually available and exposed is to make use of television. According to the questionnaire responses, all but one respondent answered that although they had televisions at home, many did not watch programmes based on issues of culture and language. Much interest was shown in watching movies. That was depicted in the table and pie chart hereunder.

Table 4.4: Television watching

	males	females	total	%
News & info	5	6	11	13
Movies	5	17	22	27
Cartoons	1	8	09	11
Musicals	8	8	16	20
Sports	10	1	11	13
Documentaries	1	2	03	4
More genres	2	7	09	11
No watching	0	1	01	1
Total	**32**	**50**	**82**	**100**
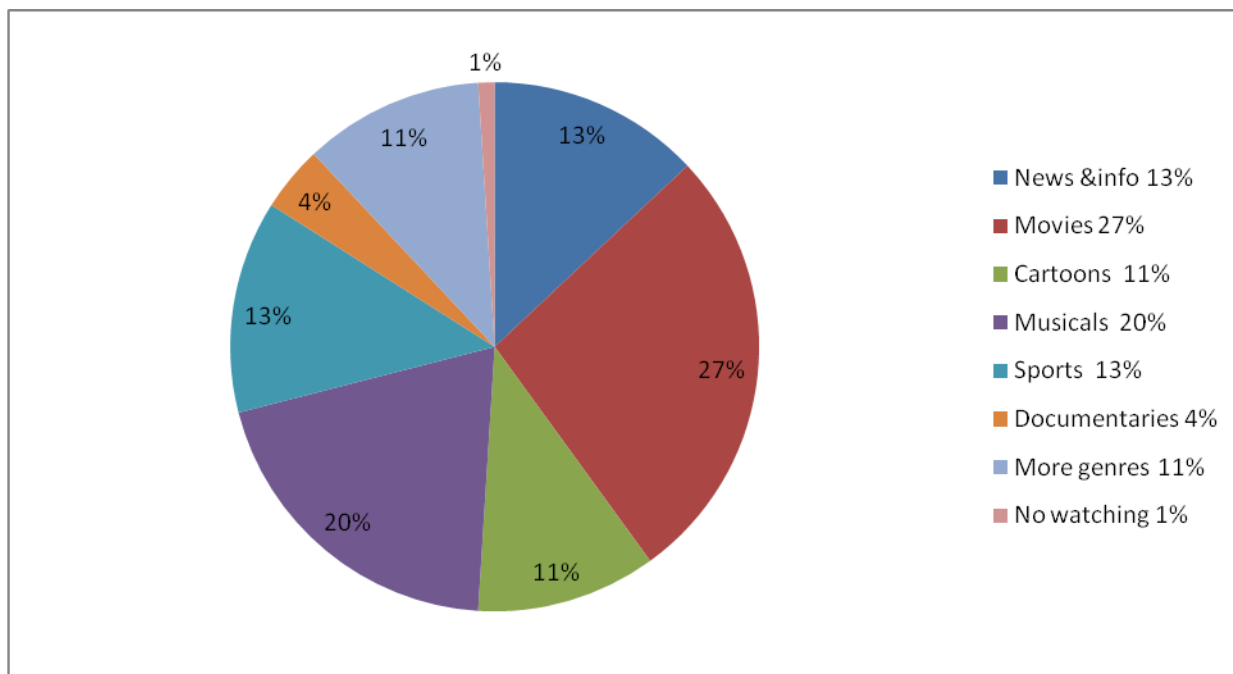
Graph 4.4: Genres in watching television

The pie chart depicts that the biggest portion of time was spent on watching movies, that was 27% of the respondents were interested in the movies than any other genre. The least watched was the genre for documentaries which is generally real, informative and factual in nature. Respondents also displayed interest in musicals, which was more entertaining than informative. Tools like television do not only offer pictorial information where viewers see live images, it also offers rich material and variety of languages, predominantly English in the South African context. By looking at the figures above, it serves a point to be illustrated that learners in this sample, do not utilize television as learning measure, whereas their social background itself is not linguistically and culturally westernized. The third section of the questionnaire pertained to the classroom activities.

4.2.7 Classroom activities

Respondents were asked to mention their interest and their involvement of reading aloud in the classroom. Muller (1982:117) states that reading is essential for developing comprehension.

The resultant product of good reading is comprehension, but it is important that the pre-existing knowledge should be linked with the new information. Otherwise there will not be comprehension. The relevant schema should be triggered to enhance comprehension. According to Urquhart and Weir (1998:72), no matter how good our reading skills are in the first language

or how expert we are in the content area, we are not likely to make much of a text in a language which is totally unknown to us. The purpose of using this criterion was that reading is recognized as a tool to gather knowledge. According to Devine, Carrell and Eskey (1987:1) without solid reading proficiency second language readers cannot compete with their native English-speaking counterparts. 23% of the respondents indicated that they do not prefer reading aloud in the classroom. Devine et al (1987:2) say everything about the reader and the reader's background, especially culture-specific knowledge and experiences is relevant to successful reading and reading comprehension. This is supported by Urquhart and Weir (1998:2) that reading may differ in the case of readers from different cultures, either ethnic or professional, or in the case of the same reader at different times with different knowledge.

Respondents were also questioned on their level of performance in the classroom in the subjects in this institution are taught in the medium of English. Respondents were given the opportunity to assess themselves according to their usual reporting that they received on their performance. They were asked to rate themselves on the following descriptors: below average, average, above average and exceptional. 21% indicated that their usual performance can be rated as below average and 48% as average. The indication was that learners in these two areas had a possibility of not performing well in English. Coleman (2003:27) mentions that apart from prior knowledge, the idea of learners understanding themselves as readers, that is, knowing their strengths and weaknesses in relation to reading has an effect on comprehension. However, Kowsky and Willows (1980), in Coleman (2003:27), contend that this and the learners own feelings of failure in reading often cause such learners to have poor opinions of themselves as readers. The focus of this study was to find out whether the cultural background of the second language learners of English can help them comprehend the English texts. Respondents were asked to state their opinions on the problem. They were asked whether they think their cultural background impact on their comprehension of English. Their responses were as follows.

Table 4.5: Opinions of learners on their performance

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree
Number	8	9	56	9
Percentage	10	11	68	11
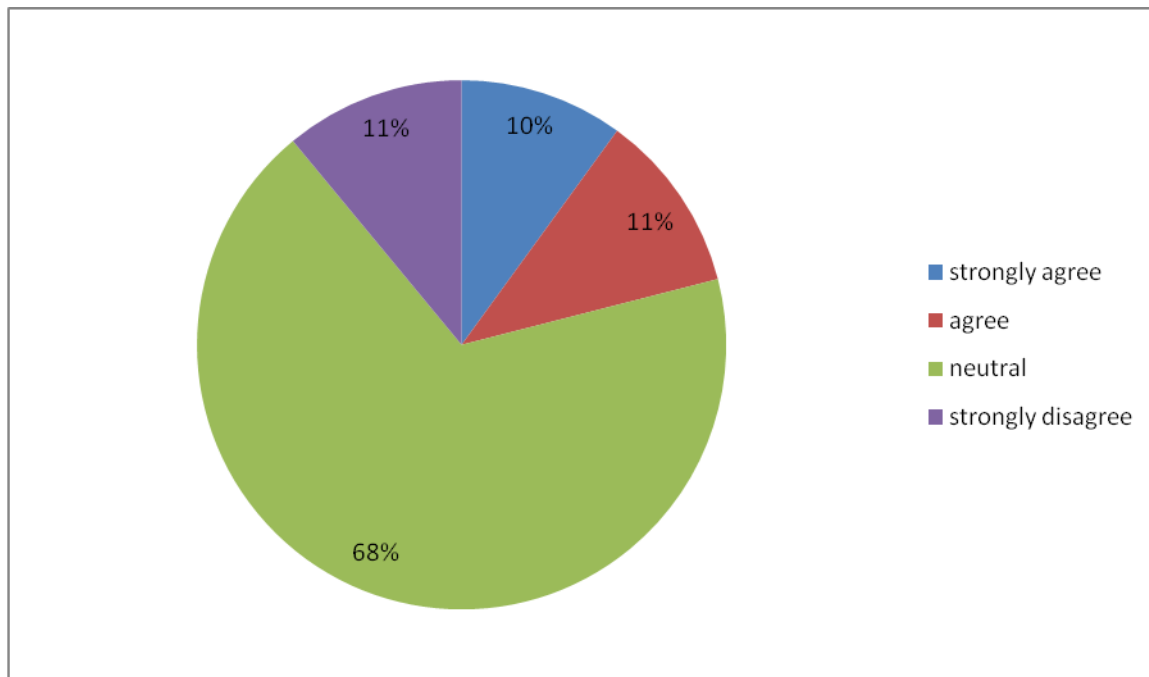
Graph 4.5: Opinions of learners on their performance

Seventeen (17) learners cumulatively agreed that their cultural background affected their comprehension of English texts. Only nine learners thought the opposite. It depicted that 21% of the respondents were surely declaring their use of English as problematic. They did not show motivation and enthusiasm in reading and achieving adequately. If learners were not familiar with the English texts and tasks, it was obvious that their accumulation of the content in those areas would be limited. The presentation that follows was from the data elicited from a comprehension test.

4.3 COMPREHENSION

The comprehension test was used as a second source in order to gather more information concerning the sample. Bearing in mind that the purpose of implementing this type of data

collection method was to investigate whether learners' cultural background would affect their comprehension on English text or not and to see if learners are familiar with such texts. Data in this section would be predominantly narrative and numerical figures and percentages would be employed to a lesser extent. It was used in conjunction with the questionnaire. The other reason for selecting this method was that the comprehension test tests the readers' comprehension and interpretation of texts. The comprehension test was seen as relevant because respondents' comprehension was tested and findings were elicited from their responses as the aim of the study was to find out whether their cultural background helped or distorted comprehension. In execution of that method, 82 respondents were presented with a written English text. The comprehension test was based on Western culture and was about a custom which is celebrated on the first of April every year. The content culture for this source was preferred because the aim of the study was to find out the effect of cultural background on comprehension of texts that are unfamiliar to the learners. The objective was to see whether the cultural background that the respondents possess, would affect their comprehension of the text provided.

The procedure followed to implement this method was that the respondents were told the purpose of the study. Learners were presented with a text and that they should read individually. The researcher did not explain the comprehension because it would have affected the findings, bearing in mind that the main use of the comprehension test was to find out if learners can comprehend the text. The questions asked were divided into two categories. The first category focused on the general understanding of the text. It did not focus on the terminology and syntax.

The second part was based on the testing of the learners' availability of cultural schemata, that is, whether they have the information in their long term memory to help them remember the text. It should not be overlooked that the cultural background that the learners possess was the package of what they had heard, seen, spoken and stored in their long term memory. It helps when people read or listen to texts. If the reader has relevant schemata, then the text is understood. The questions were closed-ended because the researcher preferred to receive straight forward objective responses from the respondents. The researcher marked the respondents' scripts. There were twenty questions in the test. The first ten questions were based on the overall understanding of the text followed by five questions based on vocabulary. The last five questions were

formulated to determine the familiarity of the content of the text to the respondents. Therefore, the themes for the comprehension test were the comprehension, vocabulary and familiarity. These three themes were dealt with because they had a bearing on the problem and they helped to find solutions.

Fielding (2006:440) argues that comprehension tests are used to test the people ability to grasp the theme of the passage, to understand what the ideas mean, to understand what words mean in the passage and to understand how the ideas and the words connect together in the passage, to write answers that show the ability to write in a clear formal style with good grammar, punctuation and sentence structure. To arrive at that, Coleman (2003:14) mentions that the learners' prior knowledge and experience should continually interact with the information in the text to create meaning and comprehension. Content schema or cultural orientation in terms of background knowledge is also a factor that influences L2 /FL reading. Carrell (1984:332) also states that the role of background knowledge in language comprehension has been formalized as schema theory. The theory holds that any text, either spoken or written, does not carry meaning by itself, rather, a text only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or construct meaning from their own previously acquired knowledge. Such knowledge is called the reader's background knowledge; the previously acquired knowledge structures called schemata. The comprehension text was extracted from British folk customs which was written by Hole (1976:21). For the first ten questions, the researcher aimed at testing the respondents' comprehension. According to schema theory, the respondents who showed comprehension of the text possess the relevant schemata to attack the questions. Hereunder is the table showing the summary of the scores for the first ten questions. Respondents were supposed to state whether the statements are correct or incorrect based on the context of the text. The expected outcomes for the questions were all incorrect. The respondent who responded correctly to the questions would have stated that all the statements are incorrect.

Table 4.6: Responses to questions 1 -10

Question number	respondents (correct)	% correct
Q1	65	79%
Q2	69	84%
Q3	75	91%
Q4	41	50%
Q5	43	52%
Q6	61	74%
Q7	45	55%
Q8	41	50%
Q9	44	53%
Q10	25	30%
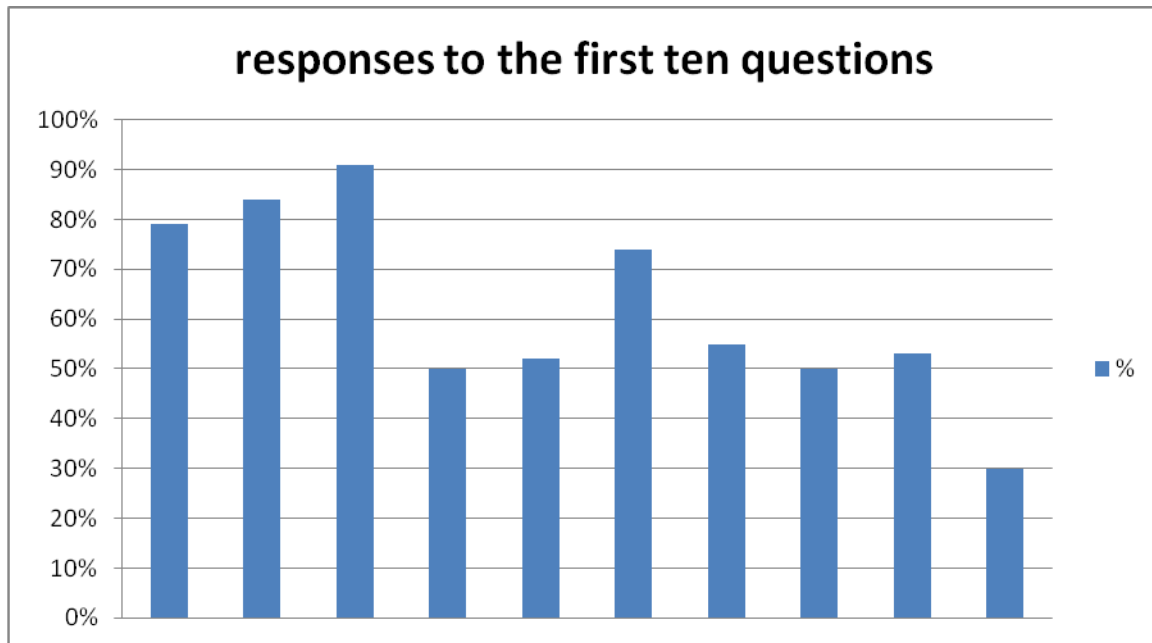
Graph 4.6: Responses to the first ten questions

Most respondents were able to get question 3 correct. The other questions that were correctly answered were numbers 1, 2 and 6 at percentages 79, 84, 91 and 74 respectively. The respondents performed poorly in the last question where an overall percentage of 30% was achieved. These figures reveal that respondents do not possess the relevant schemata in order to

comprehend the text. Their cultural background does not trigger their long term memory to help them understand the text. It reveals that their cultural background does not conform to the culture of the west, because if they had the knowledge related to the text, they could have scored more than they did. People would access new information, understand new concepts and new ideas and can derive meaning to them when they can be related to something they already know. Readers in this study did not get the meaning of the text. The lack of content schema, which according to Al-Issa (2006:42) is the familiarity of the subject matter of the text, was missing. Al-Issa (2006:46) states that content schemata include the understanding of the topic and culture-specific elements needed to interpret it. He says that content schema is part of the individual's cultural orientation since culture affects all aspects of life; it certainly has a major impact on all elements of reading.

The penultimate five questions (Question 11 to Question 15) were based on vocabulary. The researcher opted to include questions of this type because one's language is built up of vocabularies. Vocabulary forms an important element of languages. The vocabulary that a group of people use reflects the type of community they belong to. Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995:18) argue that the relationship between language and culture is well reflected in the vocabulary of a language, kinship systems, perceptions of colour, the organization of society, religious beliefs and taboos all relate to aspects of culture which are encoded in language. The beliefs and values as well as the needs of a particular society are therefore reflected in the language. The vocabulary of a language is regarded as culturally important in a particular society. Misunderstandings can prevail where one society regards something as culturally important and another thinks of it as meaningless. Honigman (1963:157) states that vocabulary in every language reflects interests that its speakers hold. A vocabulary is attuned to environmental and other distinctions useful to people. Learners cannot use the words out of space, they use the language that they have learnt and are competent in. In this study, it was shown in the discussion of the biography of the respondents that they belong to an African black society. This implies that the linguistic and cultural content that they possess will be African in nature.

The researcher thought it was relevant to include questions on vocabulary because vocabulary is part of the package of the learners' cultural background. It forms part of their schemata. According to Carrell and Eisterhold (1987) in Singhal (1998:10) the background that the second language learners bring to a text is often culture-specific. They persistently attempt to provide schemata to make sense of the texts. However, if readers cannot access the relevant schemata or do not possess that, the attempt to connect new information to the prior one would fail. So vocabulary should be expanded in order to access greater information related schemata to comprehend texts.

Lyons (1981:324) states that full understanding of the several kinds of meaning that are encoded in the grammar and vocabulary of a language comes only with a full understanding of the cultures, in which it operates. Particular languages are associated historically with particular cultures; the languages provide the key to the associated cultures and, especially to their literature; the languages themselves cannot be fully understood otherwise than in the context of the cultures in which they are inextricably embedded; so languages and cultures are studied together. Since the question to be answered seeks to investigate the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts, it was deemed fit to know about the relevance and familiarity of the text to the learners. Lin (2008:4) states that as the basic element of language, vocabulary is the backbone of the whole language system. It certainly reflected the differences of culture, most obviously and extensively.

The aim of including vocabulary questions was to find out whether respondents had acquired the specific cultural schemata from their home background to help them comprehend the text. Cook (2001:89argues that reading occurs in content, not in isolation. You cannot read a text by skipping or ignoring some words. A text gives meaning. Lin (2008: 2) supports that indeed, in the reading comprehension process readers' linguistic element is very important but, sometimes we cannot read behind the lines except by the help of background knowledge of culture, because the meanings of words are acquired in a circumstance of culture. It is mentioned that lack of the necessary cultural background may hinder people from comprehending language. According to Saunders (1991:14), in Coleman (2003:26), it has been reported that a survey which was undertaken at some of the teacher training colleges in the North West Province showed that the

average reading age in English of incoming black students was equivalent of the average English first language student half way through standard 1 (grade 3). These differences and concerns are quite significant if one considers the fact that most school reading materials or texts assume extensive prior knowledge, not only of typical school vocabulary but also of vocabulary and idioms that are learnt in the settings. This means second language learners are greatly disadvantaged as far as reading comprehension is concerned, and therefore need instruction not only in reading comprehension but also in vocabulary. Hereunder is the table to illustrate the scores of the respondents for questions based on vocabulary. Langer (1981), in Fuhong (2004:5) believes that for adequate comprehension to occur, there must be a match between what the reader already knows and the content and vocabulary in the text.

Table4.7: Responses to questions based on vocabulary

Questions	number correct	% (correct)	% (incorrect)
Q11	24	29%	71%
Q12	42	51%	49%
Q13	18	22%	78%
Q14	10	12%	88%
Q15	7	9%	91%
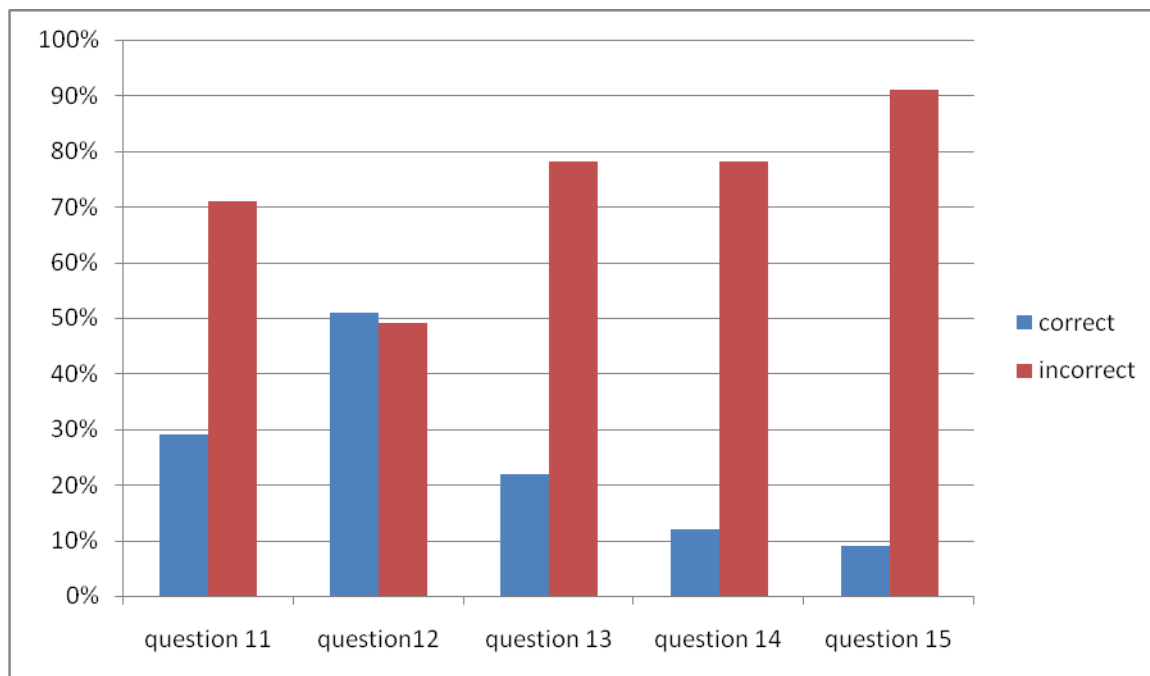
Graph 4.7: Response on questions based on vocabulary

According to the graph, 51% of the respondents were able to get question 12 correct. In all questions respondents did not show knowledge of the vocabulary used in the text. Question 15 was one of the poorly answered at an overall performance of 9%. The graph depicted that the respondents lack vocabulary in the English language, more especially in the text mediated in the culture of the west. It gave an indication that the learners did not possess culture-specific background of the text they had read about. There was no total comprehension of the text. For total comprehension of the text to take place, new information should merge with existing information.

The last five questions were based on the learners' exposure to customs and traditions of the Western culture. The aim of asking the questions was to determine the learners' familiarity with the events in the text. Kaschula and Anthonissen (1995:15) say that the beliefs and values as well as the needs of a particular society are reflected in the language they use. Lyons (1981:324) mentions that particular languages are historically associated with particular cultures and especially in their literature; the languages themselves cannot be fully understood otherwise than in the context of the cultures in which they are inextricably embedded. Questions to test this aspect included questions 16 to 19.31 respondents answered that they had never heard of the day

before, and 43 indicated that they were never pranked and they had never heard of the day before. They have never read a text or heard any spoken form of the subject matter on April Fool's day. These figures indicated that the cultural originality of the text is not native to the respondents. The practices and customs dealt with in the text were not familiar to them. They did not have cultural knowledge on that issue. As a result, they did not respond positively to the questions. Pienaar (1989:2) argues that it is the culture-specific words that often create problems for the learner and result in misunderstanding in cross-cultural communities. Some words are culture-bound and denote concepts that are peculiar to a particular culture. Respondents were asked whether it was the contents of the text, the type of language used or the terminology. 59 respondents (72%) indicated that they found the textual terminology unfamiliar and complex rather than the flow of the text itself. This impedes the readers' comprehension. Al-Issa (2006:41) indicates that language originality and cultural originality in the passage had an effect on the reading comprehension than the syntactic and semantic aspects. Al-Issa (2006:45) also states that if the unfamiliar content of a text, whether cultural or topic-related, has an effect on reading comprehension, then this fact must be considered as a criterion in the selection of reading materials and also in the evolution of reading comprehension.

4.4 CONCLUSION

There is significant effect of factors of culture on the comprehension of English texts. Learners do not encounter language for the first time at schools. They are born in a language and culture. Learners who learn English as an additional language already have a language in which they are competent and proficient. Using a language embraces the knowledge of culture of that particular language. Structures of language like vocabulary, including cultural aspects and concepts cannot be learned exclusive of culture. Culture and language are dependent on each other. Gao (2006:59) explains that the interdependence of language learning and culture learning is so evident one can draw the conclusion that language teaching is culture teaching. The peculiar relationship between language and other aspects of culture and the traditions of language teaching itself require particular consideration.

When readers are confronted with texts they are expected to show competence in reading and display comprehension. Texts are embedded cultures of languages in which they are written.

Gao(2006:59) argues that there is no doubt that all language teaching contains explicit reference to the culture. It is vital for readers to possess the cultural schemata relevant to the texts read; otherwise there would not be any comprehension. Texts should be familiar to the reader. This means that the reader should have stored information in the long term memory in order to comprehend the newly read information. Prior knowledge is crucial in reading comprehension. So the schema theory does influence reading. When texts are read, the relevant schemata should be activated to make comprehension possible. Prior knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension. It requires some cultural background to comprehend a second language, because language is constructed within the boundaries of culture. Readers who lack cultural background in such languages would find texts unfamiliar and as such difficult to comprehend.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

This chapter is divided into four sections, namely, findings, conclusion, limitations and recommendations.

5.1 FINDINGS

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings from the two sources: questionnaire and a comprehension test. The research questions to be answered were to investigate the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts by second language learners and whether the familiarity with the texts could help learners comprehend. These types of studies were conducted by several researchers previously. It was found that the lack of cultural background and familiarity on the topic-area dealt with would lead to misunderstanding of the texts. Comprehension is reached when the text is fully understood. It is an interactive process which occurs when the previously acquired information matches with the new information. This study was informed by the schema theory that stipulates that a text, whether spoken or written does not carry meaning on its own. The text needs to be interpreted by the reader in order to comprehend it. The comprehension in this case is a product. According to schema theory, the reader should possess the schema related to the type of text to be comprehended. The previously constructed knowledge structures to help the reader comprehend texts are called schemata. The different kinds of schemata, formal, content and linguistic are to be activated in the reader to be able to comprehend the text. Content schema is also called cultural schema because it is concerned with cultural orientation or background information in reading.

Singhal (1998:3) contends in some studies, discussed by, Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) and Johnson (1982), findings were reached that cultural orientation in terms of background knowledge is also a factor that influences second language or foreign language readingAccording to Singhal (1998:3) the study involved 28 Muslim Arabs and 24 Catholic Hispanic, foreign second language students of high-intermediate proficiency enrolled in an intensive English programme at a Midwestern university. Each student read two texts, one with Muslim-orientated

content and other with Catholic-orientated content. Each text was presented in either a well-organized rhetorical format or an unfamiliar, altered rhetorical format. After reading the text, the subjects answered a series of multiple choice comprehension questions and were asked to recall the text in writing. Analysis of the recall protocols and scores on the comprehension questions suggested that schemata affected the English as second language readers' comprehension and recall. Participants better comprehended and remembered passages that were similar in some way to their native cultures, or that were deemed more familiar to them. According to Singhal (1998:03), researchers like (Johnson, 1981, 1982); conducted studies that have shown similar effects that participants better comprehended and or remembered passages that were more familiar to them.

Singhal (1998:40) relates an interesting study which was carried out by Kang (1992). Kang's study examined how second language readers filter information from second language texts through culture specific background knowledge. Korean graduate students with advanced English read stories and answered questions. A think-aloud protocol assessing their understanding and inferences indicated an effect of culture specific schemata and inferences upon text comprehension. Although all the variables and factors surrounding the issues of how culture shapes background knowledge and influences reading are not fully understood, there is agreement that background knowledge is important, and that content schema plays an integral role in reading comprehension. Overall, readers appeared to have a higher level of comprehension when the content was familiar to them. Given this second language readers do not possess the same degree of content schema as first language readers, and hence, this can result in comprehension difficulties.

The important intent about languages was to confirm the home languages of the respondents and the language of learning and instruction at school. It was also to confirm that learners are offered English as a second language. In the data collection processes it was found that the respondents belong to the African black community and their ethnicity is basically Pedi. The learners used Sepedi as their home language and were taught English at school as a second language. The respondents' culture is founded on Pedi customs, traditions, beliefs and norms. It was observed that the site, which was in this case a school, is about eighty-five kilometers away from the

nearest town. The community is rural. The fact that learners use Sepedi predominantly at home is an indication that their cultural orientation is not that of English. Their upbringing and use of language are embedded in Pedi culture. These characterizations form part of their cultural background that is subconsciously and consciously applied in learning to read. This has an influence on the learning of English as a second language because English as a language has its own structures, syntax, registers, grammatical rules and historical influences on figurative language like proverbs and idiomatic expressions. The atmosphere in which they find themselves is void of English language.

The aim of the study was to investigate whether learners of this type would be able to comprehend English texts which are not familiar to them. According to information collected by means of the questionnaire, the cultural and linguistic profiles of the learners were suitable to the study because they do not belong to the English community. Learners were not exposed to real life encounters with the speakers of English first language. There were no physical material around them to bring them in touch with English language and culture except television. Learners indicated that they only read a newspaper when it was available. There was an indication that only a few learners could read newspapers. The matter that also curbed the enthusiasm and interest of the learners to read was that there was neither a resource centre in the community nor in the school. The study showed that as a result learners were disadvantaged as far as exposure to reading resources are concerned. This deprived them of the acquisition of western language and culture which is a prerequisite to English comprehension texts because language is an aspect of culture. The research question was on the effect of cultural background of ESL learners on their comprehension of English texts. With regards to the research question it was found that learners did not fully understand the text presented to them. According to the schema theory, the learners could have no cultural background on the topic-area of the text. They did not have relevant cultural schemata to help them comprehend the text at hand. There was no match between the information that they had in their long-term memory and the information in the text. Thus, nothing was activated in their minds to make them comprehend the text.

Data on the comprehension factor was gathered using a comprehension test. With regards to the question that familiarity with the text could affect comprehension, it was found that learners'

comprehension was impeded by their unfamiliarity with the text. Learners were asked to state what made the text simple or difficult for them. Their performance indicated that they did not comprehend the text. The finding with respect to answering the research question is that when learners are not familiar with the text, comprehension cannot be reached. Questions based on vocabulary were not attempted correctly by most learners. As mentioned earlier, vocabulary is an essential element of language. Learners cannot learn a language without its vocabularies. In the comprehension test, learners mentioned that they found the vocabulary unfamiliar. Written texts cannot be read in isolation of other terms or words in them. It becomes difficult to comprehend a text in which vocabulary is totally unfamiliar.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above findings, it could be summarized that the cultural background of the ESL learner has an impact on comprehension of English texts. The results had shown that learners who belonged to a different cultural environment handled the written texts differently because the cultural content was not from their own background. It was also shown that learners who did not possess the relevant schemata found it difficult to comprehend English written texts. It shows that cultural background facilitates comprehension. The intention of the first research question was to find the extent to which cultural background could affect comprehension of texts. The study affirmed that cultural background did affect comprehension of English texts by second language learners. Affirmation was also received that the unfamiliarity of the readers with the text had an effect on the comprehension of texts. In conclusion, it was relevant to mention that the study affirmed the schema theory that the unfamiliar content of a text, whether cultural or topic-related, has an effect on reading comprehension. English, second language learners will lack the background knowledge appropriate or necessary for many texts, since they come from cultures with different customs and values from native speakers of English. Thus, learners who use English as a second language are more likely to have low reading comprehension ability owing to lack of background knowledge that may be essential for certain texts. There is no doubt that cultural background influences reading. Therefore, there should be ways to exercise reading in ESL classrooms in order to ensure that learners' reading problems are minimized.

5.3 LIMITATIONS

This study was not void of limitations. The study was conducted as a successive step to other studies and it might not include all possibilities relevant to the topic. It was conducted at a site which is situated far from the environments abundant in western culture. Therefore, the study might have been conducted in comparison with the respondents that were English first language speakers rather than only one sample of second language speakers. The study could have also been done under observation method to collect more information concerning the factors experienced by teachers and the school as a whole. Finally, the limitations stated here should not discredit the study to be utilized as a research tool for further research.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from this study the researcher recommends the following:

- Teachers should teach English as a second language in context. Themes that are taught should be based on real life situations of English language use.
- The contextual atmosphere of the lessons should reflect the cultural origin of the content taught. Teachers should be able to research about the topic to be taught themselves.
- Learners should be trained and encouraged to read willingly, sensibly and independently.
- Teachers themselves should be extensive voracious readers.
- Texts to be read should be brainstormed before actual reading.
- There should be pre-reading exercises and post-reading activities.
- Teachers should provide culturally based texts to develop culture-specific schema which is important in reading.
- Reading material should be available and sufficient for learners, if there are cases where libraries are not available, makeshift ones can be erected. Teachers should improvise.
- Learners should be encouraged to read famous works of literature in English.
- Projects based on themes on English cultures should be given to learners.
- Learners should be encouraged to role play or mime what they have read to show that they have understood.
- Teachers should encourage learners to spend time on print media than television.
- Provision should be made of material that is rich in cultural content.
- Reading should be introduced in early school years and be monitored.

- Teachers should communicate with parents and guardians to make assessments on learner reading progress. There should be continuity in socializing with the parents about learners' reading homework. Teachers should make parents aware that checking on their children's reading is a routine.

- Education authorities should ensure that relevant syllabus is designed in ESL.

- Teachers should be made aware of what is expected of them in the ESL classrooms.

- Examinations should be based on what was prescribed to be taught and learned in the syllabi.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A

Letter of permission from DoE

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
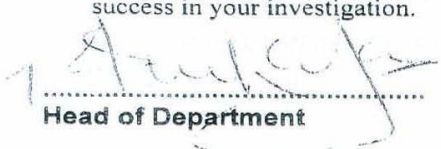## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquires: Moyana P, Telephone: 015 290 7984 e-mail: MoyanaP@edu.limpopo.gov.za

Mrs. Emsley M.R
House No 1141
Zone 8
Seshego
0699

Dear Researcher

Request for Permission to Conduct Research

1. Your letter of request bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that you are granted permission to conduct research. The title of your research project is the effect of cultural background on the comprehension of English texts by second language learners.

3. The following conditions should be observed.
a. The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
b. Arrangements should be made with both the Circuits Office and the schools concerning the conduct of the study. Care should be taken to disrupt the academic programme at the schools.
c. The study should be conducted during the first three terms of the calendar year as schools would be preparing themselves for the final end of year examinations during the fourth term.
d. The research is conducted in line with ethics in research. In particular, the principle of voluntary participation in this research should be respected.
e. You share with the Department, the final product of your study upon completion of the research assignment.

4. You are expected to produce this letter at schools/offices where you will be conducting your research, as evidence that permission for this activity has been granted.

5. The Department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

....
Head of Department

....
Date

ANNEXURE B

Questionnaire completed by learners

Serial number:

Please complete the following questions by filling in the spaces or choosing the option that suits you.

SECTION A: Biographic Information

1. Gender   male   female
2. Age:…………………………………...
3. Nationality:……………………………
4. Race:……………………………………..
5. Ethnic group:………………………..
6. Home language:……………………..
7. Residence   rural   urban

SECTION B: School and Education

8. Grade:…………………………………….
9. School:…………………………………….
10. District:…………………………………….
11. Province:………………………………….....
12. Country:……………………………………
13. Locality:……………………………………

SECTION C: Exposure to language use

Communication

14. Do you use English as a language of communication in your home?

    Yes   No

15. How often do you use it?

    Few interactions   most of the time   all the time   never

16. Do you have friends who use English?

    Yes   No

17. If yes, when do you use the language with them?

After school hours	at the playing grounds	in the classroom

everytime

18. Do you celebrate your friends' cultural activities?

Yes		No

Reading

19. Do you like to read English texts?

Yes		No

20. If yes, choose the option hereunder to indicate your time of reading.

Leisure time	school time	for homework	all the time

21. Which type of genre interests you?

Plays	novels	poetry	short stories

22. Do you read newspapers?

Yes		No

23. If yes, how regular do you read them?

Daily	weekly	monthly	when available

Media

24. Do you have a media centre in your school?

Yes		No

25. Indicate your visitation to it.

Daily	weekly	projects only	never

26. Do you have a television at home?

Yes		No

27. Do you watch television?

Yes		No

28. Which types of programmes interest you?

News & info	movies	cartoons	musicals	sports

Documentaries

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Classroom activities

29. Do you enjoy reading aloud in the classroom?

Yes   No

30. Which extra-curricular do you take part in using English?

Debate   speeches   drama   music

31. What do you think is your level of performance in English subject?

Below average   average   above average   exceptional

32. Do you think your home and cultural background impede your performance in the English?

Strongly agree   agree   neutral   strongly disagree

33. Do you find it difficult to answer questions in English language?

Often   sometimes   always   never

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

x

ANNEXUREC

Comprehension passage

Study the passage below and then provide answers for the questions. You need not to write down the questions, just provide the question number and your answers only.

All Fools' Day. The first day of April is known in England as All Fool's Day, or April Fools' Day, or in some northern districts as April Noddy Day. In Scotland and along the border it is Hunting Day or Gowkin' day. Other countries have other names for this cheerful anniversary on which, by time-honoured and widespread custom, any person, young or old, important or otherwise, may be made an April fool between the hours of midnight and noon. Making fools of people on April 1st, or near it, is a custom known in France, Sweden, Germany, Portugal and elsewhere in Europe, in the United States of America, and in other English-speaking countries. In India, Huli fools are made on the last day of the Huli Festival in late March.

Children are, of course, very keen supporters of the tradition although some of the more elaborate practical jokes perpetrated on this day cannot be laid at the door. Their victims are all types of ages- other children, parents, schoolteachers, tradesmen, friends or any one else unwary enough to fall into their well-laid traps. Most of their tricks are far from original, and many have been used so often that they have now become traditional, yet they succeed again and again, and will probably go on doing so for a long time to come. One is to tell someone that his shoelace is undone, or his tie is crooked, or that something else is wrong with his dress, when in fact all is in order. As long ago as 1825, William Hone recorded how thirty years before he wrote, boys would stop a man in the street and say, "Sir, if you please, your shoe's unbuckled", and then joyously shout "April fool!" when he looked at his feet. When buckles went out of fashion, the joke was transferred to laces. Other 'stock pieces' are false summons to the door or nowadays, to the telephone, the urgent call to deal with a domestic disaster that has not occurred, or sharp warning that an insect is crawling over the victim's clothes or neck.

Nearer the true practical joke is the empty eggshell set upside down in the cup at breakfast, the sleeve or trouser leg sewn up, of the letter that either mocks its recipient with the words 'April fool', or contains some deceiving message or invitation. One of the earliest known English examples of this last trick is recorded in Drake`s newsletter for April 2nd, 1698, where we read that a number of people received invitations to see the lions washed at the Tower of London on

April 1st, and duly went there for the purpose. Precisely the same trick was played with equal success by some unknown person in 1860. Best-loved of all is the bootless errand. The young and innocent may be sent to fetch a pint of pigeon`s milk, a pennyworth of strap-oil or elbow – grease, a guttering-peg, or some other non-existent commodity. Apprentices and juniors in factories and offices are dispatched by their straight-faced elders to buy a pot of striped paint, or a soft-pointed chisel, or a box of straight hooks.

In Scotland people are sent upon a gowk`s errand. A gowk is properly a cuckoo, but the word also means a fool. The victim is sent out with a note which, unknown to him, contains the words 'Hunt the gowk another mile', or some other message showing what is afoot. When the recipient reads this, he tells the messenger that the answer must be sought at another mile, and then another, until he finally realizes that is happening, or some kinder-hearted person tells him.

On the stroke of noon, all ends. This rule is rigidly observed everywhere, because to break it causes the mockery to recoil upon the jocker`s own head. If any one attempts a trick after midday, the intended victim retorts, **'April fool's gone past,**

You're the biggest fool at last.'

or

'April Noddy's past and gone,

You're the fool and I'm none',

Or in Northumberland version of the couplet,

The gowk and the titlene sit on the tree
You're the gowk as well as me.

(Hone C,British Folk Customs: 1979)

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ANNEXURE D

Questions based on the comprehension test

Now answer the following questions by stating whether the statements are correct or incorrect according to the information in the text.

1. April Fools' Day is only celebrated in England.
2. The victims of April Fools' day are only young children.
3. The trick of invitation to the lion's bathing took place for the first time in 1855.
4. The victim sent on an errand knows the message he or she delivers.
5. Managers at factories sent experienced workers.
6. The trick to invite the victims to see lions washed was successful.
7. The mockery on the April Fool's day can never be returned onto the jokers.
8. Traditional tricks done on April 1st are neither practical nor successful.
9. The biggest fool plays the tricks after midday.
10. According to the passage, the trick that preceded the laces was sending the victim on an errand**.**

Section B

Choose the most appropriate answer. Write down only the number of the question and the letter representing your choice.

11. An article or item exchanged in trade is called

        a. telephone

        b. commodity

        c. errand

        d. share

12. A yearly return of the date of an event is called a or an

    a. decade

    b. anniversary

    c. century

    d. celebration

13. The meaning of useless or unavailing in the context of the passage is

    a. kinder-hearted

    b. bootless

   c. crooked

   d. non-existent

14. A word referring to people learning skills from their experiences colleagues is

   a. tradesmen

   b. apprentices

   c. juniors

   d. fool

15. The adjective "…straight-faced…" means

   a. honest and polite

   b. expressionless but amused

   c. sad and disappointed

   d. strict but firm

16. Have you ever heard of April Fool's day before?

   a. Yes   b. No

17. Have you ever been pranked before?

   a. Yes   b. No

18. If yes, from whom have you heard about this day?

   a. friend

   b. neighbour

   c. relative

   d. school

19. Have you understood the next you have just read?

   a. Yes   b. No

20. State the area you experienced difficulty when you read the text.

   a. terminology   b. unfamiliar content   c. language used in the text

ANNEXURE E

Memorandum for the questions

Section A

   1. incorrect

   2. incorrect

   3. incorrect

4. incorrect

5. incorrect

6. incorrect

7. incorrect

8. incorrect

9. incorrect

10. incorrect

11. b

12. b

13. b

14. b

15. b

16. There is no right or wrong answer.

    a = indicates that the text is familiar to the learners.

    b = indicates that the text is unfamiliar to the learners.

17. There is no right or wrong answer.

    The response in 17 is dependent on answers in 16 above.

18. The response indicates the interaction of learners with people about the topic.

19. The question requires learners' opinion on the readability of the text.

20. The difficulty of the text is questioned.