READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCIES OF FIRST ENTERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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BY

KGABO BRIDGETTE LEKOTA

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis **READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCIES OF FIRST ENTERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY** hereby submitted to the University of Limpopo, for the degree of **PhD** in **English Studies** 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.

Lekota, KB (Ms)   **12 April 2023**
Surname, Initials (Ms)   **Date**

DEDICATIONS

This study is dedicated to my late mother, Mrs Jermina Lekota and my late grandfather, Frans Moloto. I will always strive to do better and more because of them. My daughters, Khomotšo Jeanette Lekota and Koketšo Moloko Maraba, who will always keep me motivated to work harder and do better. My grandmother, whose unwavering support and love knows no boundaries. This is for all the people mentioned above. I love you guys, always.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AGT – Achievement Goal Theory

ANA – Annual National Assessment

ARC – Advance Reading Comprehension

CRT – Criterion-referenced test

DoBE – Department of Basic Education

EAP – English for academic purpose

EFL – English Foreign Learners

EFAL – English First Additional Language

ELL – English Language learner

ESL – English Second Language

ESP – English for specific purpose

EVT- Expectancy Value Theory

FAL - First Additional Language

FET – Further Education and Training Phase

FP – Foundation Phase

GE – General English

HBUs – Historically Black Universities

HDIs – Historically Disadvantaged Institutions

HE – Higher Education

HEIs - Higher Education Institutions

HoDs – Head of Departments

HM – Home Language

IP – Intermediate Phase

IRR – Institute of Race Relations

L2 – Second Language

LoLT - Language of Learning and Teaching

NAEP - National Assessment of Educational Progress

NEEDU – National Education Evaluation and Development Unit

PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

PISA - Program for International Student Assessment

QAR - Question Answer Relationships

RC – Reading Comprehension

RC¹ - Reading culture

RC² - Reading Curiosity

RCCs – Reading Comprehension Competencies

RI – Reading Involvement

RWA – Reading Work Avoidance

SA – South Africa

SCLT – Social Cognitive Learning Theory

SLM – School Literacy Movement

SRE - Scaffolding Reading Experience

SSI – Semi-structured interviews

ST – Schema Theory

TREC - Turfloop Research Ethics Committee

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UG – Universal Grammar

U.S. United State

WA – Work Avoidance

ZPD - Zone of Proximal Development

ABSTRACT

Reading Comprehension (RC) is a challenge faced by many first entering English language students at Historically Black Universities (HBUs) in South Africa (SA), especially those who went to public schools. RC appears not to be given adequate attention at basic school level, and as such, the learners carry this problem with them from primary school to secondary school, and eventually to university level. However, at tertiary level, RC is vitally significant for academic success, which is why Reading Comprehension Competencies (RCCs) of students who come from a unique schooling background warrant an exploration. The aim of this study was to explore RC competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs. Thus, the study design was exploratory, and a combination of quantitative and qualitative approach was followed. The study also adopted metacognitive and schema theories. The research sample was made up of first entering English language students who first filled in a questionnaire during their first term at university and then sat for a criterion-referenced RC test as well as English language lecturers who were interviewed about RCCs. The participants collectively came from five HBUs in different provinces of SA. The data collected were analysed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The students underperformed in the test and their responses from the questionnaire revealed that they struggled with RC. Additionally, lecturers' responses indicated that the students struggled with the RC of academic texts. Several factors such as inadequate reading resources, language policy issues faced by public schools and RC teacher competency tend to compound the situation. Thus, the results corroborate the RC plight of the HBU English language students at the threshold of university study in SA.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Reading comprehension (RC) is the preferred outcome of reading, and is defined as the skill of combining prior knowledge with the text being read. Sánchez (2016: 36) defines comprehension as a mental process of recognising and extracting important information from a text. Elleman and Oslund (2019: 4) argue that RC is one of the most complicated activities that humans participate in, requiring the integration of numerous linguistic and cognitive processes. It also involves word reading ability, a functioning memory, the ability to make inferences and monitor own comprehension, adequate vocabulary and background knowledge. Thus, RC is a significant skill for life-long learning (Özdemir & Akyol, 2019: 563), which is essential for university students the world over, including in South Africa (SA).

There are several factors that can lead to the accomplishment of good text comprehension such as the reader's ability to predict what the text is about, relating new information with background information, asking questions while reading, monitoring own understanding of the text and summarising what is being read. For the reader to employ these reading strategies successfully, metacognition knowledge is a necessity universally (Muijselaar, Swart, Steenbeek-Planting, Droop, Verhoeven & Jong, 2017: 194), and in Historically Black Universities (HBUs) in SA in particular.

Moreover, the President of South Africa (SA), Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, asserts that RC should be attended to as early as the first years of schooling in order to equip learners to succeed in their education, work and life. RC is possibly the single most important factor which can help overcome poverty, unemployment and inequality in the long term (Ramaphosa, 2019). By tackling the SA RC problem as early as possible, the high failure rate could be minimised, leading to students to cope with advanced reading materials that they encounter at universities. Therefore, RC is important for the academic success of every student.

Chaka and Booi-Ncetani (2015: 1) state that poor levels of English First Additional Language (EFAL) in RC are of great concern, especially among learners in South African public schools. However, scholars share sentiments that poor levels of RC in English are prevalent in schools globally. By extension, these poor levels are likely to prevail at HBUs. According to Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016: 2), there are multiple reasons for poor RC in SA. For example, high levels of poverty, low parental literacy, poor governance in many schools, poorly resourced schools and poorly qualified teachers. These are amongst other macro factors that cause poor reading literacy at schools. In addition, the role of Home Language (HL) and the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in reading, teacher reading perceptions and practices are amongst some of the causes that lead to reading literacy that is poor.

RC strategies can assist in increasing vocabulary and improving students' writing skills (Hidayati, 2018: 2). A well-developed RC ability is a major goal that can lead to students' educational success. To enhance RC, readers must employ one or several Reading Comprehension Strategies (RCSs) (Khoshsima & Rezaeian Tiyar, 2014: 134). Since comprehension strategies are significant when it comes to RC, good readers make use of RCSs to decode meaning out of a text. It is believed that the use of RCSs can assist students to become metacognitive readers who would be able to monitor their own understanding (Safarpoor, Ghaniabadi & Nafchi, 2015: 68).

Turner (2017: 11) states that reading is the foundation of learning while motivation is the pillar of support. Thus, students who read a lot tend to be highly motivated. However, students who rarely read lack motivation to do so. Marsela (2017: 11) argues that a key factor in reading activities is motivation. It is easy to identify students who lack motivation, but it is also difficult to find motivated students. According to Turner (2017: 11), motivated students are inquisitive, ambitious, interested, driven and hard-working even when facing difficulties. There are several ways to motivate students read. Thus, first entering English language students at HBUs can be motivated to develop their RC abilities.

1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

According to Howie, Combrinck, Roux, Tshele, Mokoena and McLeod (2017: 11), 78% of Grade 4 learners in SA do not meet the required international benchmarks. As a result, they do not possess the basic reading skills in the English language by the time they finish Grade 4 when compared to only 4% of learners internationally. Whereas learners from urban, suburban and medium or large towns had the highest achievement obtaining up to 417 points, learners from remote rural areas, small towns, villages and townships achieved the lowest level of reading literacy achievement with a score of between 291 and 312 points. Because reading is not learned until the intermediate phase, learners face the challenge of comprehension which then affects content subjects such as Life Orientation, Mathematics and Science, which they encounter when they enter the intermediate phase. Some of the learners struggle until they reach Grade 12. Thus, these learners are likely to continue struggling even at a university level.

Furthermore, most South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are currently experiencing challenges regarding many students who enter Higher Education unable to read and write at the level that is expected of them (Bharuthram, 2012: 209). Since one cannot separate RC from academic excellence, the researcher seeks to explore RC competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA. Most South African studies on RC focus on lower levels, that is, basic education (Rule & Land, 2017; Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016; Chaka & Booi-Ncetani, 2015; Hlalethwa 20133; Stols, 2012), while those focusing on higher education are often at an international level (Gilakjani & Saubori, 2016; Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015; Hidayati, 2013; Bhauthram, 2012). Therefore, this study explores RC competencies in some of the South African universities, specifically SA HBUs.

RCSs can assist in increasing the vocabulary and improving the writing skills of an individual (Hidayati, 2018: 2). Khoshsima and Rezaeian Tiyar (2014: 134) argue that a well-developed RC ability is a major goal that can lead to students' educational success. To enhance RC, readers must employ one or several RCSs. Talley (2017: 19) argues that successful readers are known to exhibit the following qualities: they employ a variety of sources of information to guess what the text is about; they monitor

their own interpretation of a text by verifying their prediction against the reading material to try and create meaning from of it; and they use several strategies and embed new information in order to expand their content knowledge base. In this study, students exhibited signs of poor reading comprehension. They lacked, and are unable to use reading comprehension strategies to enhance their reading comprehension competency.

1.3   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1.3.1   Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to explore reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.

1.3.2   Objectives

The objectives of the study were:
- to determine the level of reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.
- to identify reading comprehension challenges experienced by first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.
- to establish factors that impair the reading comprehension of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.
- to suggest reading comprehension strategies that should be employed by first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.

1.4   ROLE OF THEORY IN THE STUDY

This study adopted a combination of metacognition and schema theories.

1.4.1 Metacognition Theory

According to Meniado (2016: 119), metacognitive implies thinking about thinking. The word 'metacognition' is always linked with Flavell (1979), who argues that it includes the reader's awareness of his reading process, active monitoring and constant regulation of cognitive processing activities. Aflah (2017: 11) posits that researchers concur that readers' ability to be aware and monitor their own comprehension process is a significant feature of the reading skill. Thus, students' knowledge of their cognitive process is recognised as metacognition. According to Çakici (2017: 71), RC as a cognitive process needs metacognitive awareness and regulation of the reader's thinking process during reading through planning, monitoring and evaluation. Karbalaei (2011: 6) states that metacognition refers to the knowledge and control that one has over their cognitive processes. Thus, first year students should be able to monitor the process of their own comprehension during reading. They must be aware of their cognitive process.

1.4.2 Schema Theory

The Schema Theory (ST) is defined as the organisation of information or past experience kept in the memory of the reader. It is a reading model aimed to explain that reading can be seen as an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. However, prior knowledge in the reader's mind is a prerequisite for acquiring new information. Thus, new information is easily attained when there is appropriate pre-existing knowledge (Xiao, 2016: 185). Activated background knowledge, which is also known as prior knowledge, can aid RC during reading. The knowledge is packaged into units called schemata (Ali, 2016: 13). The difference between a person who is more competent and a person who is less competent in any field, including reading, is the amount of knowledge possessed in the long term memory of the individual. This is the type of knowledge accumulated over a period of time around a particular concept, which enables the reader to understand that concept (Nwachukwu, 2017: 27). As such, students should be able to activate the correct prior knowledge and use it to bridge the gap between new information and old information that they possess in their schema to aid comprehension.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The SA education system is facing one of its major challenges, which is poor RC. A majority of learners cannot read for meaning although they can read out words with their sounds correctly. This study will add value to the existing body of knowledge pertaining to RC challenges faced by students who are already in institutions of higher learning, especially at HBUs. The study also revealed students' RC ability levels, shed light into whether students are familiar with RCSs and strategies that they could utulise to boost their RC. It also shed some light into how students can improve their RC competency levels. In line with this argument, Magnusson, Roe and Blikstad-Balas (2018: 189) assert that there is a body of research that has indicated that teaching and modelling RCSs to learners can enhance their reading skills.

1.6 PROGRAMME OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 gives motivation and background to the study, the research problem, purpose of the study, role of theory as well as the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 presents literature review relevant to the study.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed research methodology used and ethical considerations of the study.

Chapter 4 is about the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the results of the study.

Chapter 5 postulates suggestions for improving reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by giving a summary, conclusions and recommendations for improving reading comprehension competencies of students.

The next chapter reviews literature of the study.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 presented the orientation of the study. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature related to reading comprehension and reading comprehension strategies. It covers the following main areas: reading culture, reading techniques, reading comprehension models, reading motivation, motivation theories, and problems in reading comprehension, reading strategies, cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive theories and schema theories.

2.2 READING COMPREHENSION

Reading is the most essential skill needed to obtain knowledge in any field or area in life (Endenebaator & Harputlu, 2016). One of the main ways of learning a language is through reading (Jian-ping & Li-sha, 2016: 14), which is regarded as one the central skills of any language as it is the only means of sourcing information and a way of strengthening knowledge of language (Mohammadi & Afshar, 2016:5). Reading makes a substantial impact in assisting students to complete their studies and to gain substantial information needed for their study assignments. In the learning process of reading, lecturers are responsible for introducing and training students to utilise relevant strategies for the purpose of comprehension of reading texts (Suyitno, 2017: 109).

Reading literacy is significant for comprehension and correct interpretation of written texts. Reading ensures that students succeed in different aspects of their lives such as academic, professional and social aspects because being able to read affords one the opportunity to accumulate vast knowledge needed to succeed in life. In addition, reading is part of our daily lives, and is done for both pleasure and information (Kaya, 2015: 38). Being able to read is only a part of reading literacy. Students must be able to comprehend what they are reading as well.

Hidayati (2018: 1) argues that reading is a basic skill closely related to writing, speaking and listening skills. For a student to yield good results in their learning process, they are expected to read and understand many reading materials. A student who can read adequately will feel confident; it will be easier for them to adjust to the learning environment, and will benefit maximally. The second aspect of reading literacy is reading comprehension (RC). Hans and Hans (2015: 61) state that comprehension is the principal goal of reading.

Reading is the most over-looked and under-rated language skill by most South African teachers. A study conducted at a particular school revealed that Grade 10 EFAL learners showed reading problems. For these learners to be excellent in speaking, listening and writing, they must first possess enough reading comprehension strategies (RCSs) (Chaka & Booi-Ncetani, 2015: 1). The ability to master the reading skill depends on some interaction between the reader and the text; the reader must decode the meaning of the words to comprehend the writer's point of view (Qrqez & Ab Rashid, 2017: 422). Reading is a process of comprehending a written text with the goal of gaining access to meaning (Tánczikné, 2017: 43). Thus, first entering English language HBU students in SA should be able to successfully interact with texts when reading.

Furthermore, reading is an interactive process between the reader and the writer as the reader attempts to understand and interpret the message of the text. Reading is a task with difficult skills involving various elements such as psychological, physical and social elements. In addition, reading is a difficult task which includes the interaction of numerous cognitive, meta-cognitive, linguistic and socio-linguistic aspects (Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 5).

Babaiba-Medjahdi (2015: 13) presents differences between good and poor readers during the three phases of reading in Table 2.1 below:

Table 2.1: Differences between good and poor readers (by Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 13)

	Good readers	Poor readers
Before reading	• Are able to activate their prior knowledge. • Are able to comprehend tasks and set purpose. • Are able to choose correct strategies.	• Begin reading without preparing themselves. • They start reading with no knowledge of why. • They start reading without thinking about how they will approach the reading material.
During reading	• They focus their attention. • They can anticipate and predict. • Utilise fix-up reading strategies when they are not able to comprehend new terms. • Utilise text structure for assistance. • Are able to organise and integrate new information. • They are able to self-monitor their comprehension by determining when comprehension is happening and assessing what is being understood.	• Gets easily distracted • Read to only finish. • They do not know what to do when they cannot comprehend what they have read. • Cannot identify important words. • Cannot see any text organisation. • Add on information instead of integrating it with new information. • Cannot realise when they don't understand.
After reading	• They will reflect on what they have just read. • Know that the effort brings success.	• Will stop reading and thinking. • Feels success comes because of luck.

	• Will summarise main ideas. • Will look for additional information outside from provided sources.	

Reading comprehension is one of the most difficult cognitive exercises in which humans engage, making it complex to educate, measure and research (Elleman & Oslund, 2019: 3). The ability to say the words accurately and fluently does not guarantee that the reader understands the author's message (Shea & Ceprano, 2017: 52). Comprehension is based more on non-visual information that the reader supplies in his or her head as opposed to the visual information that he or she gets from the print. Non-visual information refers to the reader's full schema on a particular topic (Smith, 1985). Further, different studies indicate that a significant proportion of adolescents and adults struggle with understanding texts, consequently affecting them in their academic and professional lives (Abusamra, Difalcis, Martínez, Low & Formoso, 2020: 1), including English language students at HBUs in SA.

Reading comprehension refers to one's ability to understand what one is reading. However, there are various problems pertaining to RC, and these are well-documented in South Africa (SA). Most of these problems emanate from colonialism and to date they are still prevalent (Pretorius, 2002). The majority of South African learners are not learning how to read in any language until Grade 3, and as a result, this delays their RC ability. Researchers have already identified the significance of RC. It is therefore important that RC should be taught as early as at the foundation phase (Spaull, 2016) so that by the time students get to university, they have a good RC.

In line with the above, the President of South Africa, Mr Cyril Ramaphosa, asserts that RC should be attended to as early as the first years of schooling because the South African government aims to improve RC at this level This is important because it equips children to succeed in their education, work and life. RC is possibly the single most important factor which can help overcome poverty, unemployment and inequality (Ramaphosa, 2019).

Research conducted in SA indicated that students entering Higher Education (HE) have a lower level of reading literacy. A study conducted by Bharuthram (2017: 59) indicated that the majority of participants lacked reading exposure which should begin at home. Thus, many parents are unable to actively engage in their children's learning process. In addition, children coming from these backgrounds go into the schooling system with very little or no exposure to books. The foundation phase also does not sufficiently grow these students as independent, critical thinkers. As such, they come into higher education with some literacy of schooling that is not well-developed. These students are not well-developed with a literacy repertoire for higher education. So do first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.

Furthermore, the inequalities that were caused by the apartheid system in SA have not been eradicated. There are many challenges that still affect the quality of South African education. Some of these challenges are that schools are under resourced, the teacher/learner ratio is very high, there is lack of textbooks and so forth. All of these challenges affect South African townships and rural areas, and impact on learners' reading development (cf. Mbhele, 2016:7; Mailula, 2021: 68). The South African education system is in a crisis, and those who suffer the most are disproportionately black children (Roodt, 2018: 1), including first entering English language at HBUs.

Moreover, Kintsh (1998) regards RC as the process of creating meaning from the text. Scholars agree that in order for RC to happen, there are several RCSs that can be applied by the reader to aid comprehension. According to Stols (2012: 38), RC can only be established once the student has retrieved and formed meaning from the reading passage. The meaning of a text can be established at different levels of conceptual difficulty and thinking. These levels are identified as a literal, an interpretive level and an applied level (cf. Herber, 1978; Appendix A).

Figure 2.1 below is the model of levels of RC as illustrated by Herber (1978).

```
┌─────────────────────┐
│                     │     • Reading the lines
│  Level 1:Literal    │     :getting information
│                     │     as it is from the text
└─────────────────────┘
          │
          ▼
      ┌─────────────────────┐
      │                     │     • Reading between
      │  Level          2:  │     the
      │  Interpretive       │     lines:synthesising
      │                     │     information and
      └─────────────────────┘     making inferences
                │
                ▼
            ┌─────────────────────┐
            │                     │     • Reading beyond
            │                     │     the lines: formulating
            │  Level 3: Applied   │     new ideas and
            │                     │     expressing your own
            │                     │     ideas.
            └─────────────────────┘
```
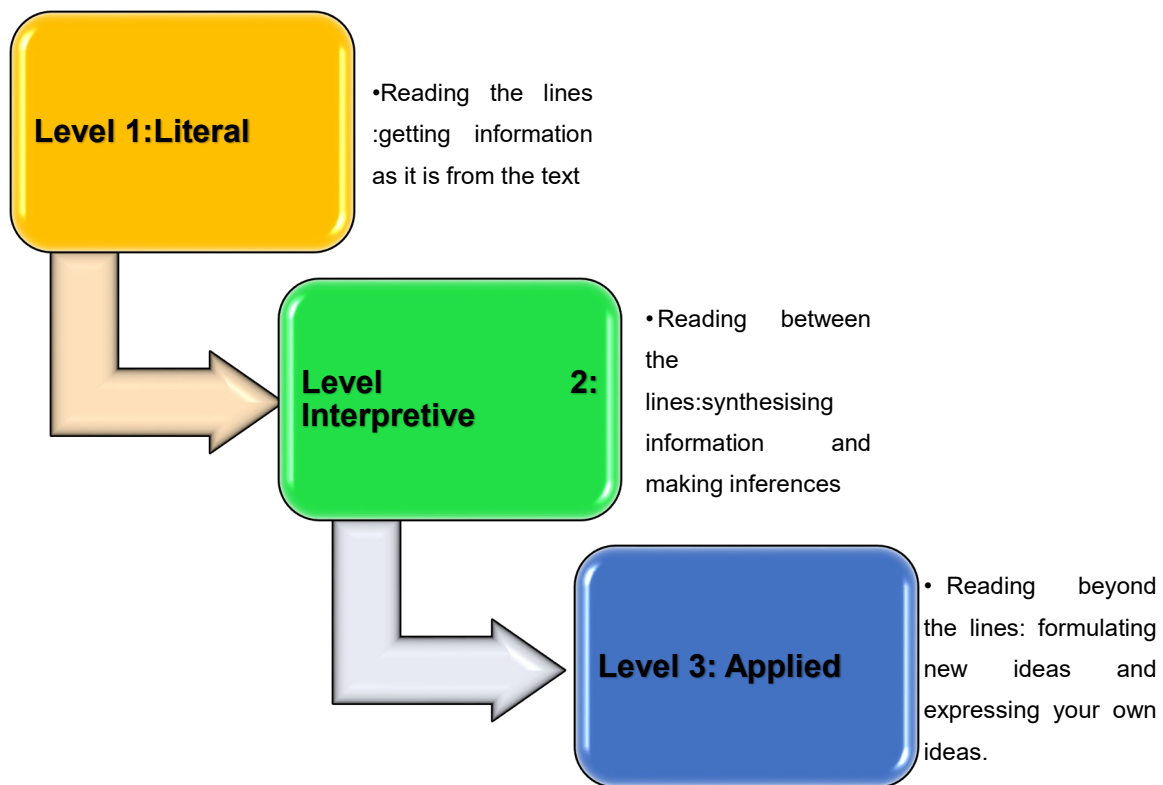
Figure 2.1: Three Levels of Reading Comprehension (Adapted from Stols, 2012:39)

Figure 2.1 above demonstrates the three levels of reading comprehension. Level 1 is the literal level where students read the text and get the information from it as it is without having to interpret it in their own understanding. Level 2 is the interpretive level. Students have to interpret the text by reading between the lines. This is where they have to synthesise information and make inferences for further understanding. They can activate their prior knowledge to make inferences. The last level is level 3, which is the applied level. Students have to use information from the text to create new ideas and to express their own understanding. This is reading beyond the lines and is the advanced level of RC.

Suyitno (2017: 109) states that lecturers must direct students' abilities so that the students can know and employ appropriate RCSs. Thus, teachers must be able to give examples of different RCSs such as prediction, activating prior knowledge, making connections, setting purpose for reading and making inferences. Francois (2016) argues that this would ensure that internal comprehension processes are made

explicit, and students will gain meta-cognitive knowledge of when and how to use a specific strategy to help their comprehension of a reading text. However, Jian-ping and Li-sha (2016: 14) state that: "In the traditional English reading class in junior high schools, teachers put much emphasis on teaching vocabulary, sentence patterns, and grammar. In the schema theory, these belong to a language schema. As a result, they neglect the use of content schema and formal schema. Under the pressure of exam-orientated education, students are forced to read word by word, sentence by sentence. As a result, RC has become a mechanical and passive process", hence the aim of this study, which is to explore RC competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.

Poor levels of English First Additional Language (EFAL) RC are a great concern, especially among learners from South African public schools. Scholars share the sentiments that poor levels of RC in EFAL are prevalent in some schools globally. There are, however, multiple reasons for poor RC in the country (Chaka & Booi-Ncetani (2015: 1). For example, high rate of poverty, low parental literacy, and poor governance in many schools, poorly resourced schools and poorly qualified teachers are amongst other macro factors that cause poor reading literacy at schools. In addition to the afore-mentioned, the role of Home Language (HL) and the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) in reading, teacher reading perceptions and practices are amongst factors that lead to poor reading literacy (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016: 2)

Factors that contribute to poor reading include struggling readers who are not able to link information; they rely only on what they know to decode a text. Struggling readers try to interpret the text by using only the words they are familiar with. This widens the gap between what they know and what they are required to do. Therefore, they will fail to coordinate what they are reading and will not elaborate on their understanding. They will not be able to know how to find meaning in the text when they do not understand the text itself. Readers with less experience in monitoring their meaning will passively read words but would not actively question their understanding. Struggling readers will have a failure attitude when they cannot interpret the text. This will eventually decrease their motivation. Less motivation implies less reading, and this presupposes that their RC will not improve (Talley, 2017: 19).

On the other hand, successful readers are known to exhibit the following qualities: they employ a variety of sources of information to guess what the text means; and they monitor their own interpretation of a text by verifying their prediction against the reading text to try and make meaning out of it. They also employ several strategies and embed new information in order to expand on their content knowledge base (cf. Talley, 2017: 19; 2.13 [Metacognition Theory]).

2.3 READING COMPREHENSION IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Reading comprehension challenges are widespread. Years of research in RC in both international and national reading scores indicate a stagnant growth for adolescents in the United States (U.S.). For example, the national and international test of literacy, such as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP]) indicate that students in the U.S. are not able to do relatively simple literacy activities such as to find pertinent information in order to establish the main idea of a text or make easy inferences. The most recent PISA indicates that U.S. adolescents rank 15th in literacy skills (Elleman & Oslund, 2019: 3). Both children and adults in the U.S. are faced with the major problem of reading difficulties. Thirty-million Americans are considered to be functionally illiterate and are not able to fill in job applications or understand health care forms, while fifty-percent of disabled adults believe that job opportunities are limited to them because of their poor reading ability (cf. Sanford, 2015: 1; Ngoepe, 1997: 1).

Indonesian people face more difficulties pertaining to RC because they are English Foreign Learners (EFL). Indonesia has been categorised as one of the poorest English master countries in Asia. Students in Indonesia lack reading resources such as English books, newspapers or even novels. They rely only on the classroom to learn. Despite these challenges, the Indonesian government highly supports reading through some of the policies they established. For example, based on Permendikbud Number 21 2015, the Indonesian government makes School Literacy Movement (SLM) to encourage students' interest in reading (Meylana, 2019: 2). In a study conducted on how to measure students' RC ability in Advanced Reading Comprehension (ARC) course, it is revealed that the following factors affected students in their reading

comprehension test: they were uninterested in reading and did not use English after the class. This led to them lacking vocabulary, and a lack of reading comprehension strategies and repetition in reading made them run out of time and failed to prepare themselves before writing a test (Meylana, 2019: 92).

In Saudi Arabia, instructors tend to be faced with an essential issue in reading and comprehension among university students in Arab nations. There has been a continuous decline in the reading ability of university students. Nearly a third of 4-year students in college are regarded as at risk students in terms of reduced academic achievement. Some of the identified factors perpetuating this problem are that many students do not like reading histories, stories or textbooks. This has had a negative impact on their academic achievement and improvement. Reading is regarded as a significant and essential skill in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi Arabian curriculum emphasises reading as a very important skill that should be developed by learners starting from the intermediate phase, graduate level and to preparatory year course (Sajid, 2020: 6703).

Some studies conducted in many African countries, including eastern, southern and western Africa, for example, reveal that the majority of children grow up in homes where they rarely ever see adults reading. Some of these adults are barely literate themselves. Further, research indicates that the home is the prime contributor where the journey of literacy should begin for children. A home and parents are the first educators for learners (Ruterana, 2019:19). For example, a study conducted amongst South African learners shows that learners with parents who enjoyed reading attained an average of a higher 17% score more than learners whose parents did not like reading. The study also revealed that learners who had access to educational resources such as books or the internet at home and whose parents were highly educated were the only sub-group that attained the reading level that matched the international norm (Roodt, 2018: 4).

The official language in Nigeria is English. The basic skills of reading and writing in this language, for example, are the foundation upon which almost all educational developments in Nigeria are established from kindergarten to tertiary life. English language is a compulsory subject in Nigerian secondary schools, and it is also a

prerequisite for admission into higher institutions such as universities, polytechnics and colleges of education (Kolawole, 2015: 41). For some years, there has been an alarming failure of students in English language conducted by the regional body – the West African Examinations Council. The nature of pedagogy has been identified as one of the many reasons for students' poor perfomance. Teachers play an important role in teaching and learning with their qualifications, training, experience and motivation. All these make them primary determinants of students, academic and lifetime achievements. As such, English language lecturers have a lot of responsibilities and challenges because they are in the forefront of imparting students with permanent literacy in English (Kolawole, 2015: 41).

It is important for the development of any nation and any individual to cultivate a reading culture. The significance of reading in a nation's development is something that cannot be overlooked (Anyira & Udem, 2020: 5). Reading benefits include enabling people to attain knowledge, information, skills, values and attitudes significant for personal, family and national awareness and development. A good reading culture unlocks the key to economic prosperity because knowledge is power (Mulauzi & Munsanje, 2013: 2). Reading is an indispensable life skill as well as a foundation for the achievement of a learner in school and a student at university (Odusina & Oloniruha, 2020: 252). First entering English language students in South African HBUs should be assisted in cultivating a reading culture.

2.4 INTERPRETATION OF READING COMPREHENSION

According to Luebke and Lorié (2013: 6), RC can be divided into four categories: Recognition, Understanding and Analysis, Inference and Application. Category 1 focuses on recognition. It is the first and the most basic category. The category includes items that aim to test the ability to recognise what is said and what is not said in a passage when reading. Category 2 deals with understanding and analysis. The items in this category aim to test the capability to comprehend in detail a text by establishing the meaning and aim of the terms and purposes in their context. Category 3 is about inference. It comprises making inferences about the passage while category 4 focuses on application, and requires one to apply what is in the passage to the outside world.

Moreover, RC specifications using Bloom's Taxonomy suggest that the following words in bold are very significant for RC (cf. Luebke & Lorié, 2013: 5):

Creating

Evaluating

Analysising

Applying

Understanding
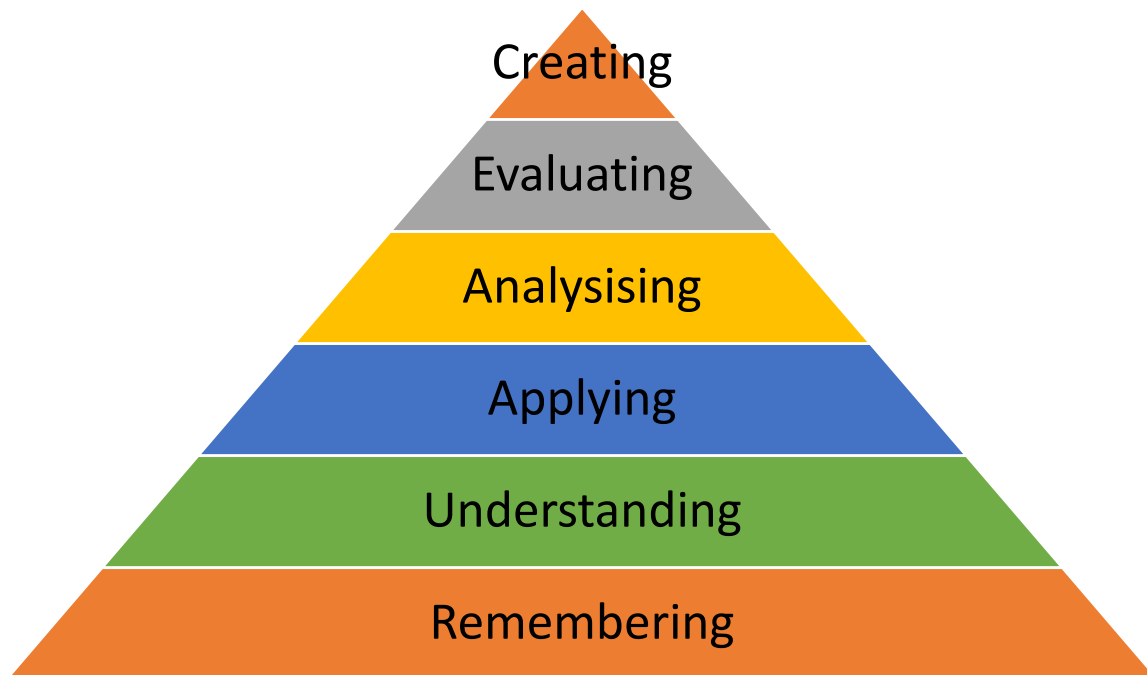
Remembering

Figure 2.2: Bloom's Taxonomy Pyramid (Revised: 1990)

Level 1: Remembering – **identify, describe, state and recognise**

Level 2: Understanding – **restate, paraphrase, distinguish and interpret**

Level 3: Applying – **generalise and apply**

Level 4: Analysing – **compare, differentiate, classify and infer**

Level 5: Evaluating – **appraise, evaluate and compare**

Level 6: Creating – **create, generate**

In Figure 2.2 above, Bloom's Taxonomy in relations to RC implies that in Level 1, the student must be able to remember what is said in the text and what is not said if comprehension has taken place. This may involve identifying important information or stating main points from the text. Level 2 is about understanding. This may include reinstating information in one's own words or the student's ability to interpret information correctly. Further indication that comprehension has taken place will be when a student is able to apply the information from the text in a real world – that is Level 3. Moreover, Level 4 suggests that a student must make inferences of what the text could be about to enhance comprehension, and Level 5 is about evaluating, that is, when a student uses the information from a particular text to justify or make sound

decisions. Level 6, on the other hand, is about the ability of a student to demonstrate comprehension by generating 'new ideas' based on what they have read from a particular text.

The documentation of the South African poor performance in internationally administered tests over the last two decades illustrates the state of the reading crisis in the South African educational system. Rule and Land (2017: 2) state that most South African children do not learn to read well. Despite the ANA tests by the Department of Basic Education (2014) showing a marked improved scores in home language literacy for children across the grades in between the year 2012 and 2014, only 48% of Grade 9 learners attained a literacy rate of 50% or more. The ANA tests in FAL (English for most South African learners) in 2014 revealed that 48% of learners in Grade 6 and 18% of learners in Grade 9 achieved more than 50% literacy. Poor reading literacy among South African learners indicates that there is a poor reading culture amongst these learners.

2.5 THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN READING COMPREHENSION

To be able to read and write in English, university students must have a second language (L2) competence. Hence, the issue of how L2 is acquired is very significant to the study. The two constructs to be considered are the Behaviourism Theory of language acquisition and Universal Grammar (UG). However, it is important to note that there are other theories concerned with language acquisition such as Neo-Behaviourism, Critical Period Hypothesis, Creolisation, Chunking Theory, Emergentism Perspective amongst many more (Mehrpour & Forutan, 2015: 30). Students have to learn how to speak before they can actually learn how to read. They must attain their own mother tongue. Behaviourism and Universal Grammar (UG) are barely identified as the two approaches of acquiring a language (Tánczikné, 2017: 42).

Behaviourism is a theory that dominated the scene of language acquisition in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century. It is known as the psychological approach to language acquisition, which regards language acquisition as any other type of learning. It states that learning is the formation of habits (Shormani, 2014: 79). An example is a student who will repeat the same behaviour of using varied babbling that is uttered by people

around them because such babbling is rewarded. The babbling and muttering will eventually lead to the development of similar kinds into combination of syllables and words being reinforced by the student. In summary, habit formation will lead to second language acquisition. However, UG states that every student is genetically, innately and biological born with the ability to acquire language, especially their mother tongue. This theory can also be called "The Innatist Perspective" (Mehrpour & Forutan, 2015: 310.

To this effect, Noam Chomsky argues that every language is innate and share the exact universal principles. According to Chomsky, language is also acquired similar to how children develop other biological functions (Mehrpour & Forutan, 2015: 32). UG is based on the notion that a child's ability to utilise language comes from an underlying innate system in the child's mind designed exactly to formulate language structure (Boxell, 2016: 352).

2.6 THE ROLE OF VOCABULARY IN READING COMPREHENSION

Vocabulary can have an influence on RC, and is identified as one of the most significant skills in the development of language for students. Word comprehension has a direct impact on the ability of a student to read a passage timeously. The argument is that students will be able to decode the meaning of words faster if they are familiar with the words and their meanings. Therefore, vocabulary development and comprehension have a direct relationship with literacy, considering the speed and simplicity of decoding meaning (Moore, 2014: 7). English language students at HBUs should improve their vocabulary in order to improve their RC.

Students read for comprehension, and vocabulary plays an important role during such an activity. One of the high predictors of RC has been identified as vocabulary acquisition (Boulware-Gooden, Carreker, Thronhill & Joshi, 2007: 70), and one of its most important elements is having enough vocabulary knowledge (Mohammadi & Afshar, 2016: 7). Students can increase their knowledge of vocabulary while reading by finding out the meanings of new words in the passage through the use of a dictionary and by trying to guess their meanings in a context (Houghton, 2015: 12).

English language HBU students are at liberty to increase their knowledge of vocabulary.

Moreover, one of the main areas of research in L2 for over twenty years has been vocabulary knowledge and its role on RC (Anjomshoa & Zamanian, 2014: 90). Comprehension and vocabulary cannot be separated; they go hand-in-hand. This implies that for a reader to understand larger texts, he or she must have knowledge of smaller words that make up the whole texts. Thus, academic success of English language learners is predicated by their vocabulary knowledge (Boyer; 2017: 1). Having a good vocabulary system can serve as an asset for every student. Having a rich vocabulary makes it simple to understand various texts, and makes it easier for one to engage in different interactions with people from different backgrounds and different proficiency levels (Sidek & Rahim, 2015: 51). However, it can also be highlighted that the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and RC is not one-directional because not only does vocabulary knowledge lead to RC but reading also increases one's vocabulary (Anjomshoa & Zamanian, 2012: 90). Thus, reading can also increase the vocabulary of first entering English language students in SA HBUs.

Vocabulary learning strategies are classified into determination-, social-, memory-, cognitive- and meta-cognitive strategies. The entailment of each strategy is illustrated in the table below:

Table 2.2: Vocabulary Learning Strategies (adapted from Ghaith, 2018: 8)

STRATEGIES	CHARACTERISES
1. Determination	• Dictionaries • Guessing the meaning from the context • Identifying the parts of speech • Word structural analysis
2. Social	• Entails asking questions to the teachers or classmates about the meaning of unknown or unfamiliar word, either in the classroom or outside.
3. Memory	• Assists students learn new words by linking learners' prior knowledge with the new words.

4.	Cognitive	• Repetition
		• Taking notes
		• Labelling objects
		• Highlighting new words
		• Making lists
		• Using flashcards
		• Keeping vocabulary notebook
5.	Meta-cognitive	• Monitoring
		• Decision-making
		• Assessment of own progress

The table above summaries the strategies that the students can employ to increase their vocabulary. Determination strategies involve using dictionaries to understand new words, guessing the meaning of a word or trying to identify the part of speech of a new word, amongst others. Students can also use social strategies such as asking their lecturers or other students about the meaning of new or unfamiliar words. Memory strategies, on the other hand, involve the use of prior knowledge. This means assisting students to learn new words by linking their prior knowledge with new words. Additionally, cognitive strategies that can be used by students to increase their vocabulary include employing techniques such as keeping vocabulary notebook, taking notes, labelling objects, using flash cards, et cetera. Meta-cognitive strategies include monitoring, decision-making and assessment of own progress in learning new words (see Meta-cognitive theory).

2.7 READING CULTURE

According to Roodt (2018: 4), the lack of reading culture amongst South African learners should be a worry to all of us. Reading is often regarded as a proxy for other parts of educational achievement. Prof J. Jansen, a leading educationist and president of the Institute of Race Relations (IRR), argues that "A child who can read well in a language class can also understand texts in a science or economics class. A child who can understand what she reads is able to make connections between real and abstract things, something essential for advanced learning. A child with reading

competency is more confident in her overall intellectual abilities". This implies that a learner who is competent in reading may not struggle with comprehending academic materials when he or she gets into university.

2.7.1 Definition of reading culture

Reading culture (RC[1]) is defined as the collective attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of all stakeholders in a learning institution regarding any and all of the activities associated. These enable all learners to read at the highest level of attainment for both academic as well as personal gain (Joubert, Ebersöhn, Ferreira du Plessis & Moen, 2014: 401). Additionally, reading culture is defined as a habitual and regular reading of informational material and books. The love for reading and the habit of reading among learners and students is fostered by developing a reading culture (Oyewole, 2017: 88). In order to ensure a supportive school reading culture, an educative context should entail the availability, opportunity, encouragement and support for reading (Merga & Mason, 2019: 173). For a good reading culture to be established, access to educational resources at home and at schools is required (Roodt, 2018: 4).

Reading culture evolves when an individual engages in the reading of books and other information materials necessary for the reader to advance in education or profession, habitually and regularly. The advantage of a skilled adaptive reader is the enhancement of chances of success at school and beyond (Oyewole, 2017: 91). The essence of reading culture is to encourage students to make reading part of their daily life and to make the reading of books a habit that is always needed and enjoyed in one's life (Alex-Nmecha & Horsfall, 2019: 4).

Many scholars view the exercise of developing a reading culture as a way of boosting the academic excellence and lifelong learning of students (Ruterana, 2012: 19). It is important to promote a reading culture as the future of all citizens. The reading culture requires self-education and lifelong learning. One cannot achieve and sustain the 'sought' academic excellence when there is no culture to keep on reading to continuously improving oneself (Kachala, 2007). Ideally, a reading culture ought to be developed at an early stage of childhood and must be nurtured until adulthood, and should be done with the support of cultural tools (Ruterana, 2012:19). As a result,

students entering higher institutions should develop a good RC[1] that is required for academic achievement.

2.7.2 Challenges in Developing a Reading Culture

In South African public schools, fostering a good reading culture may seem to be difficult as there are challenges in the education system. There have been a lot of changes in the South African education system since the year 1994. This is due to the many policies that are being introduced with the aim of improving the quality of education in the country (Mbhele, 2016: 7). However, poverty, apartheid inequalities, too many curriculum changes, poor administration and school leadership are some of the factors that have slowed down the transformation. It is also argued that out of a total of 28 00 public primary and high schools in SA, only 23% of them have working school libraries. Functional libraries are arguably some of the main sources that can be used to foster a reading culture in children and young adults (Wessels & Mnkeni-Saurombe (2012), such as first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.

A study was conducted to explore and describe the nature of a reading culture in a rural secondary school in SA before and after literacy intervention. The study revealed that before the literacy intervention, teachers who participated argued that the utilisation of the additional language, English, as the language used for teaching and learning negatively affected the reading culture amongst learners. Before the literacy intervention, the learners also experienced language barriers because of the dominance of the English language in the school. In addition, the teachers also indicated that communication between them and the learners was hindered, and that this made it impossible to have discussion around reading with the learners. The teachers, additionally, mentioned some incompetence regarding the ability to teach learners how to read because training in literary skills did not form part of the Further Education and Training Phase (FET) programmes. Consequently, these factors affected the learners' reading ability as teacher participants indicated that secondary school learners were not able to read at the appropriate grade level. Thus, this further hindered the promotion of a reading culture in SA classrooms, and impacted negatively on the development of their RC (Jourbet et al., 2014: 405).

2.7.3 Benefits of a good reading culture

According to Alex-Nmecha and Horsfall (2019: 7), the benefits of establishing a reading culture include an increase in memory in that reading slows down the rate of memory deterioration, and discipline. Reading leads one to be disciplined by obeying certain rules and standards. Improved vocabulary is also one of the benefits mentioned. As a result, vocabulary may improve speaking skills and make one a better reader, for example.

Other benefits of a reading culture include creativity and the accumulation of more knowledge. The more one reads, the more informed one becomes. There are, of course, more benefits in addition to the afore-mentioned. Additional benefits are that reading improves one's reasoning skills, and gives one something to talk about. Books equip one with the ability to make meaningful contributions in discussions and improves one's creativity (Alex-Nmecha & Horsfall, 2019: 8). Reading also builds one's self esteem because a person becomes better informed, and this can translate into higher self-esteem (Jegbefume, Yaji & Dala, 2017: 67).

2.8 READING TECHNIQUES

According Delgadillo, Hernandez and Hernandez (2015: 121), the most common reading techniques, also referred to as skills, are identified as skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive reading.

2.8.1 Skimming

The most common technique in RC is skimming. This is done when the reader reads only main ideas within a passage in order to get a general impression of the content of what they are reading (Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 9). The students can be guided by lecturers to use this strategy to identify main ideas from the texts quickly (Delgadillo, 2015: 21). Skimming is a strategy of rapidly moving the eyes over the passage with the purpose of identifying the main idea, and of getting the general understanding of the reading material (Asmawati, 2015: 71).

Moreover, Hidayati (2018: 9) argues that skimming is used to help students with the confidence and comprehension that one can be able to read and understand the text without having to read every word in the text. Thus, skimming helps the readers in comprehending the main idea of what is read even before extensive reading. Reading the title or the heading, looking at the pictures and reading the first and the last sentences of the paragraph, are identified as some of the ways in which skimming can be done.

2.8.2 Scanning

Scanning is used when the reader wants to find the information from the texts quickly. It is a method used to select reading when the reader is searching for a particular fact such as a name, date, statistic or answer to a question without having to read the whole article (Delgadillo et al., 2015: 22).

Hidayati (2018: 10) argues that scanning refers to the reader's capability to rapidly scan through a text for a specific piece of information such as a date, a figure or a name while ignoring unimportant information. Scanning assists the reader to locate data quickly without having to read the whole text. As such, the reader is able to save time and move to the next activity quickly. Babaiba-Medjahdi (2015: 9) asserts that scanning can be referred to as a 'speed-reading' technique, and is very advantageous to students when they are trying to locate information in a text without having to actually go through the entire text.

2.8.3 Intensive reading

Intensive reading is a detailed focus on the reading process and usually takes place in the classroom (Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 7). This type of reading focuses attention on grammatical forms of the text, discourse markers and other surface structures to understand the literal meaning (Delgadillo et al., 2015: 24).

Moreover, Hidayati (2018: 10) states that intensive reading refers to reading for details, and typically applies to shorter texts. Characteristics of intensive reading include looking at main ideas versus details; understanding what the text suggests; the ability

to make inferences by only looking at how the information is presented in a particular order, and how this could affect the message; the ability to identify words that link one idea to another; and being able to identify words that show that there is a change from one section.

2.8.4 Extensive reading

Extensive reading is reading that often takes place outside the classroom. This refers to reading a novel, a magazine or a newspaper and so on (Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 7). Extensive reading takes place so that the reader can be able to have a general understanding of the text (Delgadillo et al., 2015: 27). This type of reading is usually done for escapism, where the reader intentionally selects the reading material that they enjoy. Extensive reading occurs when the reader can select the material that they have high interest in. It also helps build the reader's confidence. This type of reading is said to be done in order to understand the main ideas, and not for specific details (Delgadillo et al., 2015: 27).

According to Hidayati (2018: 10), extensive reading usually implies that the reader has to read longer texts, and must have the knowledge of the whole understanding of the writing process. The aim of extensive reading is to create the reader's confidence and is also done for enjoyment.

The acquisition of reading techniques is key to the success of academic life. Therefore, first entering English language students should be taught and practise how to skim and scan texts, read intensively as well as extensively in order to succeed at tertiary level.

2.9 READING COMPREHENSION MODELS

Reading as a cognitive process involves the reader, the text and the interaction between the two (Ahmadi, 2013: 13). Thus the bottom-up, top-down and interactive models have been developed to explain and assist with RC (Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 10; Noar, 2016: 39).

2.9.1 The bottom-up reading model

The proponents of the bottom-up approach include Stanovich (1986), Garnham (1985) and Rieben and Perfitti (1991), who put emphasis on the role played by lower-level recognition skills. In their approach, they explain that reading is a hierarchical and a step and step process which starts with small units such as single phonemes to words, clauses, then sentences and eventually to the whole text (Davoudi & Moghadam, 2015: 174). The bottom-up reading model puts emphasis on the written and printed texts. In line with this view, reading is a linear process where a reader has to decode a text word by word, linking words into phrases and then sentences (Pardede, 2017: 2). This is also called data-driven reading, which stresses the ability to decode or put sound in the words within the text, which the reader is supposed to get the meaning from (Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 10). This model emphasises the identification of words and the decoding of letters and words in a text because students need to be able to process words first before processing the text (Noar, 2016: 39). The bottom-up model is known as the phonic model because it requires the student to be able to match letters with their sounds. By building letters into words, the latter into sentences, and sentences into phrases, and proceeding to get the overall meaning, the student is actually getting meaning in a linear form (Souhila, 2014: 5).

The bottom-up model starts with decoding the smallest linguistic units such as phonemes, graphemes and words, and eventually creating meaning from the smallest, to the largest units (Ahmadi, 2013: 13). Some researchers state that the model is only able to explain the reading process but not RC. This is because the model only considers the lower level of processing such as word identification. It ignores the reader's high level processing such as the impact that background knowledge may have on the reader (Noar, 2016: 39). This is why the bottom-up reading model should not be applied in isolation in tackling RC challenges of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.

2.9.2 The top-down reading model

Goodman (1967) started the systematic analysis of RC and came up with the top-down approach. In terms of the conceptualisation of this approach, reading is a guessing game because readers' preconceptions and background knowledge largely affect lower-level processes such as orthographic and phonological processing, as well as the word recognition skill.

In top-down processing, readers use the information from the text to compare it with their world knowledge so as to make meaning of what they read in the text. Basically, they bring prior knowledge with them when they read. They use what they know about the topic at hand to make sense of the text (cf. Davoudi & Moghadam, 2015: 173; see Schema Theory).

The top-down model emphasises the significance of the reader's background knowledge. The model is based on the idea that meaningful learning occurs when information at hand is in a relevant context and is related to what the reader already knows so that it can be integrated with the reader's schema (Pardede, 2017: 4). The top-down model puts more focus on the meaning of the word or text as opposed to the phonemic representation of the word. What matters is the context and meaning. It is argued that readers who employ the top-down approach do not use all the information presented in the text. The reader makes use of their guesses, present in their schema, and relates it to the text for comprehension (Noar, 2016: 39). The top-down reading model focuses on the reader's prior knowledge, which takes preference over text structure (Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 11).

According to Ahmadi (2013: 13), the top-down model is based on the notion that reading is a psychological guessing. The reader makes use of his or her prior knowledge or textual schemata in connecting with the text, and makes meaning of this new information in the text. Souhila (2012: 6) argues that the top-down approach refers to the use of prior knowledge to comprehend the meaning of the text, implying that the reader creates connections between his or her previous knowledge with new information for comprehension. As such, reading is a dialogue that takes place between the reader and the text. The advantage of this is that the more knowledge

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the reader has about the topic, the quicker it will be for comprehension to take place. However, it should be noted that without knowledge of the linguistic components, as suggested by the bottom-up reading model, RC will unlikely take place. The student must be able to read and understand letters with their sounds, and how they make up words to phrases, and so on, before they link what they are reading to what they already possess in their schemata (cf. Schema Theory).

The next reading model, however, encompasses both the bottom-up and the top-down reading models.

2.9.3 The interactive reading model

Reading comprehension cannot happen within the text alone; it happens as a result of the co-construction of the information that is in the text and the interpretation of the reader (Rumelhurt, 1977). The interactive reading model recognises the simultaneous use of both bottom-up and top-down processes throughout the text (Noar, 2016: 40; Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 11; Ahmadi, 2013: 14). The model has been defined as a process whereby the reader is engaged actively in the reading process of constructing the meaning of what is being read (Noar, 2016: 40). Thus, reading involves the lower level skill of being able to recognise and decode letters to words then to sentences, then finally into a whole text, as well as the higher level skill of being able to activate the appropriate schemata related to the presented information (cf. Meta-cognitive Theory).

Noah (2015) states that the interactive model is a reading process that is currently advocated for as it suggests that reading takes place when there are interactions amongst the text, readers and others. Ahmadi (2013: 14) argues that the interactive model is derived from the bottom-up and top-down interaction. Thus, an effective reader makes use of both top-down and bottom-up reading models. So should first entering university students. Babaiba-Medjahdi (2015: 11) further argues that the interactive reading model depends on both graphic and textual information, which is a combination of surface structure systems and deep structure systems.

Figure 2.3: The Interactive model (in Souhila, 2014: 7)

The Top-down model   The Interactive model

Text

Idea units

Paragraphs

Sentences

Phrases

Words

Letters
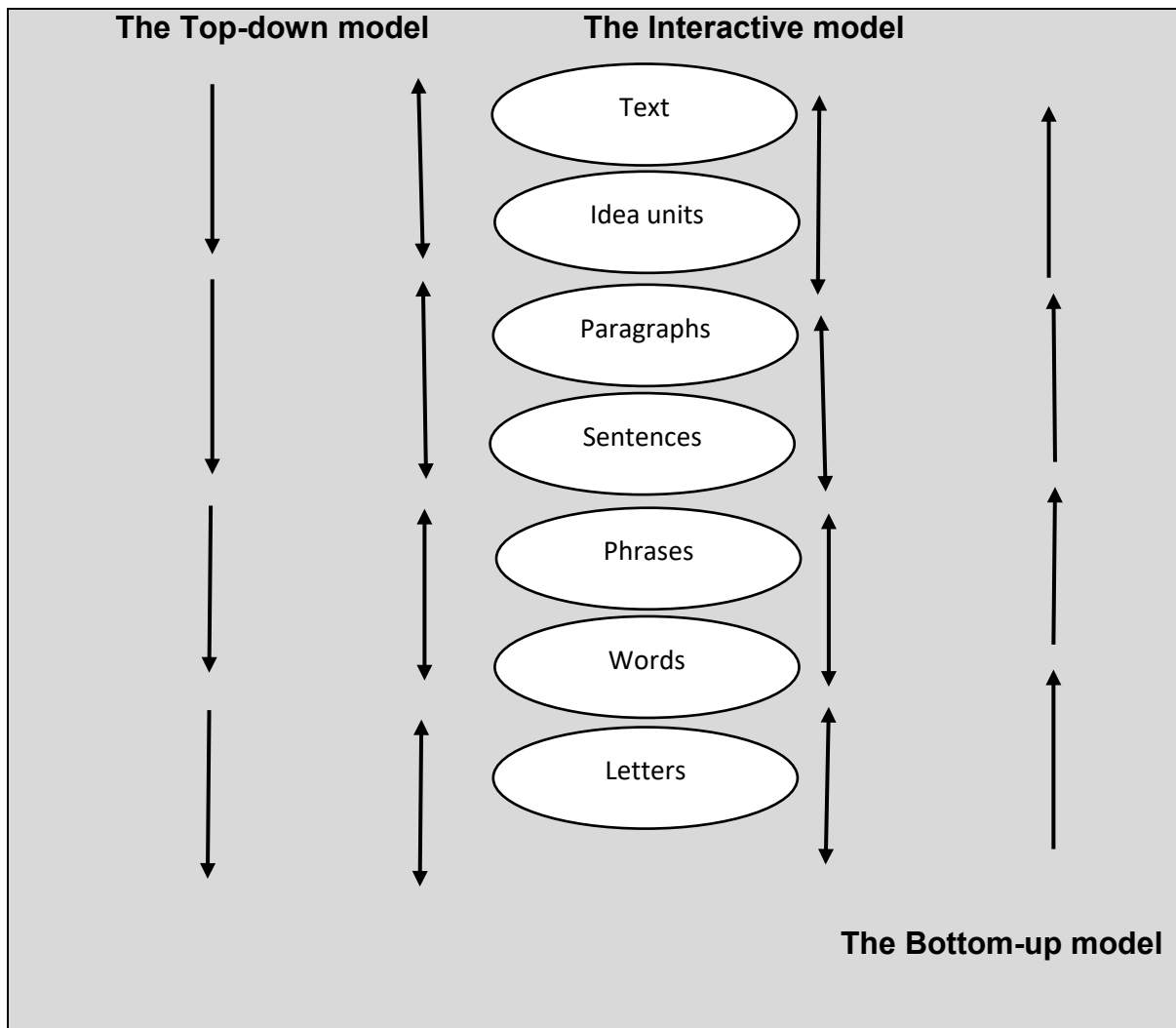
The Bottom-up model

Figure 2.3 above demonstrates the interactive reading model as an integration of both top-down and bottom-up reading models. The interactive model is basically a way of making a connection between the bottom-up model and the top-down model. Therefore, RC can take place when these two models are used simultaneously during the reading activity (Souhila, 2014: 6).

2.10 READING AND MOTIVATION

A number of South African university students are said to be lacking not only appropriate RCSs, but they also have low motivation and little or no love for reading. This is also based on the fact that there is poor reading instruction in several schools, print-poor environment at home as well as a lack of emphasis on reading at school

level (Boakye, 2017: 1). A study conducted about reading indicated that given the 21st-century over-dependence on electronic devices, most South African university students have not and still do not read for pleasure. The situation is even more complex for students who come from poor socio-economic homes as they lack resources and reading materials. The argument is that these students do not experience joy or pleasure when reading. As a result, they are unable to develop positive reading habits. Further, these students become overwhelmed when faced with the quality and the level of reading needed at tertiary level (Boakye & Southey, 2008).

Turner (2017: 11) argues that reading is the foundation of learning, and motivation is the pillar of support. Students who read a lot are those with great motivation. Those who rarely read lack motivation to do so. Marsela (2017: 11) states that a key factor in reading activities is motivation. According to Skinner and Belmont (1993), although it is easy to identify students who lack motivation, it is difficult to find motivated students. However, motivated students are inquisitive, ambitious, interested, driven and hard-working even when facing reading difficulties.

2.10.1 Kinds of motivation

There are several kinds of motivation that can lead to students' increased motivation to read. Ahmadi (2016: 2) lists intrinsic, extrinsic, integrative and instrumental as kinds of motivation.

2.10.1.1 Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation is related to the internal motivation of learners. Students who are self-motivated tend to read a lot. This kind of motivation is important for the promotion of lifelong, voluntary reading. Intrinsically motivation students engage in behaviours for their own inherent reward (Houghton, 2015: 30). It is one's desire to do or achieve something they want to and find satisfaction in doing so. When one is intrinsically motivated, one will read for enjoyment and pleasure to gain new knowledge or for some other positive results. Students with intrinsic motivation try to learn what is significant for them, voluntarily. They possess the internal desire to learn by themselves without any need for external reward (Ahmadi, 2016: 2).

Lopera-Medina (2014: 91) maintains that intrinsic motivation is about internal rewards and that its main objective is to learn. Additionally, Kirchner and Mostert (2017: 6) describe intrinsic motivation as doing something because it is enjoyable or interesting. Ahmadi (2013: 11) points out that when compared to extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation is more impactful because it is said to positively affect humans as it elaborates on innermost interests, abilities, adaptations and indications that are more significant to the cognitive and social development of people. The reward in this case is self-motivated. In a 2010 quantitative study by Guay, Chanal, Ratelle, Marsh, Larose and Boivin (2010), which focused on student motivation and reading, comprising 425 Grade 1-3 learner participants, it was discovered that intrinsic motivation had greater bearing on reading interest than extrinsic motivation.

There are three intrinsic motivational constructs that describe the reasons students become motivated to read for its own sake. The first is Reading Curiosity (RC²). This is the desire for students to learn for their own personal interests. The second is Reading Involvement (RI), which refers to the enjoyment that a learner may experience when they read a variety of different kinds of well-written fiction or non-fiction books, articles or other different kinds of texts. The last one is Reading Work Avoidance (RWA), which is the type of motivation that pulls students away from reading. Work Avoidance (WA) happens when students establish the reasons for liking to read or as to why they do not like to read (Anthuis, 2013: 10).

2.10.1.2 Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsically motivated students engage in a task for its potential to assist them earn a good grade, please a lecturer or obtain the respect of peers (Houghton, 2015: 37). This type of motivation refers to those external factors that can stimulate students to read. The external factors that have been identified are scores, prizes, admiration or a desire to be better than others (Mohseni Takaloo & Ahmadi, 2017: 27). It also refers to external rewards such as money, prizes or grades. The students' willingness to read is subjected to what they can gain after the activity of reading (Lopera-Medina, 2014: 91; Ahmadi, 2013: 11). Further, extrinsic motivation involves doing something because one may want to avoid being punished. Without a reason for students to read, they will not read at all (Ahmadi, 2013: 11). With extrinsic motivation, a reader will read because

there is a separable outcome to be achieved. The basic aim here is to get some outside reward (Kirchner & Mostert, 2017: 6).

Ahmadi (2016: 2) asserts that extrinsic motivation could have a negative effect on the students in that they do not have a strong intention to learn, but do so to avoid punishment or are concerned with the external reward. The difference between extrinsically motivated students and intrinsically motivated students is that the former only learn when they should learn for a purpose of achieving a reward, such as passing a test, whereas intrinsically motivated students would continue to learn even beyond the achievement of the results for self-satisfaction.

Extrinsic motivational constructs deal with outside goals or forces which motivate students to engage in a reading activity. Competition in reading, recognition for reading, and reading for grades are identified as extrinsic motivational constructs. Competition in reading takes place when students try to outclass their counterparts. Recognition for reading takes place when a student is recognised for his or her success with some tangible or intangible reward. Reading for grades is about students who are working to be positively evaluated through grades or other marks by their lecturers (Anthuis, 2013: 10).

2.10.1.3 Integrative Motivation

Saville-Troike (2006) defines integrative motivation as one's desire to be part of significant members of the community. This kind of motivation is based on the assumption that learning an L2 is triggered by interest that one has to learn about other's people language, and that one may want to connect with them through the use of that particular L2. Hudson (2017: 25) further states that learners are to be more successful in an English classroom when they have greater motivation and admiration for an English speaking culture. For example, English speakers in Canada who became motivated to learn the French language to appreciate its culture make friends and participate in community events. Zanghar (2017: 4) posits that integrative motivation transpires when a person appreciates the target language of a particular community and goes on to study the language with the sole purpose of joining that community.

Furthermore, integrative motivation can be defined as a favourable attitude towards the target language community. This may be attributed to a wish to integrate and adapt to a new target culture through language usage (Kusumaningrum, 2020: 25). Integrative motivation is regarded as the most significant tool for one to achieve long-term success; integrativeness is a sign of a positive attitude towards L2 and its culture. Integratively motivated learners own several goals such as exploring the L2 community's culture and tradition (Alsharif, 2018: 20) through reading.

2.10.1.4 Instrumental Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1972) define instrumental motivation as wanting to learn a language in order to gain an actual aim such as the ability to find a job or get a promotion, or the ability to read academic materials. According to Ngoepe (2019: 228), learners may make effort to learn L2 for functional reasons such as to get a better job or to pass a test or even get admission into the university. Gardener and Lambert (1972) also argue that the focus of instrumental motivation is on the functional reasons that come with learning a language such as being able to secure a high-ranking job with a good competitive salary.

Instrumental motivation is also defined as the desire for one to achieve language proficiency for practical reasons. This encourages performers to interact with L2 speakers so that they are able to attain specific goals (Kusumaningrum, 2020: 24). Instrumental motivation implies learning a language because of another person or a less clearly perceived utility the language may have for the learner. Further, instrumental motivation occurs because a student desires to achieve a practical benefit that can only be obtained from learning a second language (Zanghar, 2017: 3). Thus, instrumentally motivated learners have particular learning objectives to attain by learning a language (Alsharif, 2018: 20).

Students need to be intrinsically, extrinsically, integratively and instrumentally motivated so that they can read frequently as there are a lot of benefits that come from reading such as improved RC. This can also assist them to cope when they enter tertiary level, with the understanding that academic materials read at that level will eventually lead to academic success.

2.10.2 Factors that can improve students' motivation

When it comes to improving students' motivation to read, there are probably factors that lecturers can consider. Student choice, student interest, social interactions among learners, access to a wide range of texts and the classroom environment are identified as some of the means that the lecturer may use (cf. Chinappi, 2015: 17).

Students' choice comes with a sense of ownership, and this will obviously increase the motivation of the reader as they would have selected the material that they want to read (Chinappi, 2015: 17). Students' choice will likely increase their motivation as they would feel that their views and ideas are considered and valued.

There is also students' interest. When students are given a choice, they will most likely choose the materials that interest them, and this will obviously increase their motivation to read a particular text. Whereas formal reading material may unlikely contain materials that are not students' choices and what might interest them, when reading independently, students should be encouraged to read what interests them (Chinappi, 2015: 19).

Social interactions among children would imply that students socialise with each other about what they know. Some of the things would come from what they have read. As such, social interaction may lead students to develop interest to read because being able to socialise with peers and have knowledge of what others are talking about can give them a feeling of self-worth (Chinnapi, 2015: 21).

Another factor to consider is access to a wide range of texts. The wider the range of reading materials to read, the wider the chances that motivation will increase. Lecturers should then equip their students with a variety of reading materials such as different genres and text types, magazines, the internet, real-life documents, and so on. Students can bring old newspapers, magazines or books to their reading rooms. They can also ask for donations from other people or the community to support their reading endeavours (Chinnapi, 2015: 21). Reading materials play a significant role in the success of RC. Students must be able to have a choice to select reading materials that they have high interest in because the careful selection of reading materials can

create reading motivation and heighten class participation (Babaiba-Medjahdi, 2015: 12).

It is obvious that a dull classroom environment will hinder students' motivation to learn, let alone to read. A set classroom environment refers to the set-up of the classroom, the classroom community (how well the students get to know and accept each other) and the time given to students to read (Chinnapi, 2015: 22). Lecturers in HBU should create a classroom environment that will lead to first entering English language students' increased motivation and interest in reading.

2.10.3 Theories Supporting Motivation

Motivation is supported by the self-efficiency, the attribution of self-worth, the achievement goal theories, the incentive theory and the social cognitive learning theory.

The self-efficacy theory stipulates that the level of self-efficacy that students possess can either improve or hinder motivation (Houghton, 2015:24; Turner, 2017: 17). The theory is regarded as people's judgements of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action that are required to attain designated types of performances such as reading (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy is about the belief that the student has in his or her own ability to finish tasks and achieve goals. Self-efficacy explains how people feel about themselves and how they motivate themselves (Turner, 2017: 17). Students with high a reading self-efficacy tend to be high readers and can take on more challenging reading activities and achieve more goals compared to students with a lower self-efficacy (Yang, Badri, Rashedi & Almazroui, 2018: 4). It is argued that students do not often have a sense of self-efficacy and that lecturers should be able to recognise and assist them to develop their efficacy by being given meaningful and achievable tasks (Öztűrk, 2012: 35).

The self-worth theory was developed by Covington in 1992. Having a sense of self-worth and personal value is significant as a human need, especially when an individual takes risks and does not become successful (Öztűrk, 2012: 36). However, the attribution of self-worth theory relates to how students deduce actions in relation to the

thought process and behaviour (Houghton, 2015: 27). The theory suggests that high achievers approach tasks they expect to successfully perform because they believe their effort leads them to succeed (Houghton, 2015: 27). The self-worth theory refers to the fact that students' self-value is connected to their ability to perform tasks. A student who lacks self-worth will avoid participating in any activity altogether to avoid failing. Therefore, not trying, stalling or asking for help has been identified as behaviours that are often exhibited by struggling students (Turner, 2017: 15).

The achievement goal theory (AGT) states that achievement goals are the reason for students' motivation. The theory is based on behaviour that is tied to the need to complete specific tasks (Houghton, 2015: 28-29). AGT is explained as the reason why students often engage in tasks and excel in those tasks. Therefore, students who possess the AGT are described as self-determined and self-regulatory (Turner, 2017: 20). The goal theory is based on the principles that when goals to be obtained are established, the behaviour of an individual is motivated. For example, a student can set either learning or performance goals. Goals can further be distinguished as proximal and distal. Proximal goals can be achieved within a reasonable short period of time while distal goals can be attained after a long period of time. It is argued that students cannot measure their progress towards success without measuring the progress towards the goal (Leonardou, Rigou & Garofalakis: 2020: 4).

The incentive theory is also known as the 'expectancy value theory' (EVT). This theory shares the same views as the behaviourist theory as it believes that students learn that their actions are associated with different outcomes, thereby causing reinforcement to strengthen a behaviour and punishment to weaken it (Turner, 2017: 14). If the expectancy of success is not followed by positive results, it will not be sufficient. The theory posits that students are only concerned with activities that will lead them to achieve an outcome that has value (Öztűrk, 2012: 34). The theory was developed to motivate employees by their companies and was revised by HemaMalini and Washington (2014). It posits that there is a strong correlation between what amounts to an effort one puts into an activity, the performance that can be achieved from that effort and the appreciation that will come from the effort and its performance (Gopalan, Abu Bakar, Zulkifli, Alwi & Che Mat, 2017: 4).

The general idea of expectancy-value theory is that the subsequent behaviour is affected by expectations, values or beliefs that everyone has. This results from the learners expecting specific outcomes from certain behaviours. As such, when students' outcomes are given high value, it becomes more possible for learners to indicate a significant behaviour. This theory is strongly dependant on the notion of what the learner stands to achieve (Gopalan et al., 2017: 4).

The social cognitive learning theory (SCLT) is established on the assumption that people are able to learn by observing others (Zhou, 2015: 21). The theory was introduced by Alberta Badura in the 1977 with the aim of defining how one learns behaviour (Byrd, 2017: 17). Behaviour is learned from the environment through the processes of observational learning (Bandura, 1977). SCLT builds on behaviourism theory, which puts emphasis on the significance of behavioural factors, the environment and individuals' thinking in the process of learning; but in the case of SCLT, the main focus is on observational learning. Observational study includes imitation although it is not completely limited to it. This implies that what is learned is not exactly the imitation to what was observed on the model but a more general form which is more creative (Harinie, Sudiro, Rahayu & Fatchan, 2017: 2). Social learning is also often referred to as observational learning because of the fact that learning comes as a result of observational learning (Zhou, 2015: 19).

2.11 READING COMPREHENSION PROBLEMS

There are many problems in RC. However, Shehu (2015: 93) identifies vocabulary, working memory, absence of extensive reading and type of text.

Students see new words as obstacles for comprehension. These new words enter the dictionary every now and then, and this can present a challenge to students' comprehension (Shehu, 2015: 93).

Working memory is said to be helping students retain information while dealing with entering information, thus making it possible for the reader to merge both information (Van den Broek, Helder & Karlsson, 2014: 12). However, recalling information that

students have just read is a problem. Some students lack the ability to preserve information in the long term memory (Shehu, 2015: 93).

Some students rarely read, while others have no interest in reading at all. Reading will not only increase their knowledge, but will assist them by increasing their vocabulary. Some texts are said to be easier to preserve, whereas others are difficult (Shehu, 2015: 93). Lecturers at HBUs have to expose English language students to different types of formal texts.

The 2014 Annual National Assessment (ANA) tests in First Additional Language (FAL) show that 48% of Grade 6 learners and 18% of Grade 9 learners got more than 50% literacy (Rule & Land, 2017: 1). The Department of Basic Education report on the 2014 ANA tests indicated the following about the Grade 9s:

- A vast number of learners have been indicated to be struggling to respond to questions that need the use of their own words, both in home language and FAL.
- Learners could not interpret a sentence or give an opinion when required (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

In 2006, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study's results (PIRLS, 2006: 8) indicated that SA performed last in reading literacy when compared to performance of other 44 countries. PIRLS study tests in 2006 and 2011 revealed the poor performance of South African learners, with no statistically significant improvement between 2006 and 2011 (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Drucker, 2012). Four in five Grade 4 learners fall under the lowest intentionally recognised level of reading literacy (Chambers, 2018). Further, PIRLS (2016) shows that SA ranked last out of 50 countries. The study also indicated that 78% of South African pupils at Grade 4 level could not read for meaning (PIRLS, 2016).

Moreover, the low performing standards of South African learners on literacy assessments is a concern for many and is well documented. According to a paper presented by PIRLS (2016), reading literacy is at the height of the learning crisis. The

report of the latest results from UNESCO with the release of the latest Global Education Monitoring report 2017 reveals that more than 100 million young people still cannot read. In SA, research shows that learners' reading skills are poorly developed from primary schools, and that this problem transcends through to tertiary level (Pretorius & Machet, 2004).

The problem with reading illiteracy could also be perpetuated by the fact that teachers at secondary level do not teach RC. Reasons that could be identified to explain why teachers do not engage with comprehension instructions are a lack of proper teacher education. It is thus argued that most teachers are not well equipped to teach RC. It has also been stated that becoming a RC teacher is painful (probably because of lack of education on how to teach) and time-consuming. Teachers are sceptical about the effect of strategy instructions on their learners as well as the teaching of any related language skill which has been left alone for language teachers (Klapwijk, 2015: 2). Reading illiteracy could affect first entering English language students and lecturers at HBUs.

2.11.1 Factors Contributing to Poor Reading Comprehension in South Africa

Many South African township learners are faced with the challenges of poor RC skills. These problems affect them negatively as they tend to find it difficult to comprehend content subjects such as Science, Maths and others. However, it is argued that the impact of their lack of comprehension of content subjects has not been fully understood as yet (Scott & Beelders, 2019: 1). Most township learners include first entering English language HBUs students.

The following factors are some of the reasons that lead to poor levels of RC in South African schools.

Most South African learners are taught through a language that is not their mother tongue, which is English First Additional Language (EFAL) (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016: 3; Ngoepe, 2020: 230). However, the PIRLS results show that learners also performed poorly when they participated in comprehension tests in their African language. This shows that language ability is not synonymous to reading ability as both the 2006 and

the 2011 PIRLS studies proved that having an African language as a Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) did not help learners with their comprehension. This means that teachers must focus on developing learners' RC skills in classrooms (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016: 3).

Furthermore, the focus of instructional attention is another issue to consider. There is a body of research that has indicated that teaching and modelling RCSs to learners can enhance their reading skills. Teaching RC did not receive the attention it should in South African classrooms because South African teachers spend their time teaching reading for decoding purposes and not for comprehension. The creation of meaning and understanding while reading remains an area neglected by teachers (Pretorius & Klapwijk, 2016: 3). Therefore, first entering English language students at HBUs in SA lack the necessary RC foundation, by extension.

Moreover, there is also the knowledge of the teacher and orientations to reading. According to Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016: 4), teachers' roles in developing learners' literacy skills is very significant, but to do so teachers must first be very skilled readers themselves. The 2013 NEEDU report highlighted content knowledge (the knowledge about the subject being taught), pedagogic content knowledge (knowing about how to teach the subject) and curriculum knowledge (knowing the details specified in the curriculum for each grade) as three areas of knowledge that teachers struggle with. Pretorius and Machet (2004) argue that there is little research done to explain why teachers experience problems when it comes to teaching reading literacy. This tends to imply that SA teachers are not ready to impart RC and RCSs to English language learners.

2.11.2 Approaches for Reading Comprehension Strategies

Research shows that lecturers rarely focus on teaching RC strategies in their classrooms. However, research also revealed that lecturers play a major role in the development of students' reading and their RC as well. In teaching students RCSs, the lecturer can employ one or more of the following methods of teaching: the reciprocal method, the explicit teaching method and the scaffolding method (Stols, 2012).

Developed by Brown and Palinscar (1984), the reciprocal method teaches students to apply various RCSs taught by the lecturer. The method is based on the assumption that when learners read a text, paragraph by paragraph, they learn how to practise RCSs. As a result, they make predictions and inferences to the next paragraph and generate questions before, during and after reading (Stols, 2014: 46).

Explicit teaching would be practised when the lecturer explicitly and directly defines and explains RCSs (Stols, 2012: 47). Explicit teaching happens when lecturers give reasons and purposes of the choice of the texts they have selected for students to work with and their reasons for giving activities related to the texts. The goal of the explicit reading strategy should be to improve and enhance RC skills of students. Students that are equipped with reading strategies are able to read independently even in the absence of their lecturers (Beck & Condy, 2017: 3).

The six interrelated instructional actions encompass the lecturer who introduces the piece to be read to students, the lecturer who gives an explicit announcement of the strategy to be studied; the learner who applies the new strategy they have just learned to a passage from a text; the lecturer who gives a direct statement about the strategy; its application in other contexts; and the strategy on how it can be implemented (Duffy, Roehler, Meloth & Vavrus, 1986).

The scaffolding method of teaching is about lecturers operating within learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978; Vygotsky, 1935). ZPD refers to the gap between learners' actual development level and their potential level (Podolskiy, 2012: 3487). Scaffolding creates step by step instructions by explaining what students should do in order to meet expectations. It also gives clear instructions and decreases confusion for students; it helps students determine the reason and the significance of doing particular tasks. Further, scaffolding gives clarity by incorporating assessment with feedback, and reduces confusion, frustration and time by directing the students to use worthy sources given by lecturers. By diagnosing the problems which may appear in their lectures, students' uncertainty, surprise and disappointment are reduced (McKenzie, 1999).

First entering English language students in SA HBUs need to be taught RC together with RCSs. This would presuppose the scaffolding of their reading experiences by their English language lecturers.

The following table outlines the type of scaffolding strategies and their traits (Abdul-Majeed & Muhamad, 2015: 97).

Table 2.3: Adapted Scaffolding strategies

SCAFFOLDING STRATEGIES	CHARACTERISTICS
1. Modelling	- A learning process where modelling happens because another person's behaviour was observed and learned. - The learning of this behaviour can happen consciously or unconsciously.
2. Bridging	- This happens when the lecturers activate and build on the prior knowledge of the students. - Students can be taught to link new concepts or behaviour to what was previously learned.
3. Schema building	Schema refers to units of meaning that are interrelated. These units are organised in the students' brains. Students must be taught to extract those units and link them with new information for comprehension.
4. Developing metacognition	- Metacognition refers to one's ability to monitor their level of understanding and to decide whether it is good enough or not. - The students must be taught to think about their thinking.

Scaffolding activities should serve two main purposes, that is, to help students comprehend the reading texts, and to develop effective reading strategies that will assist them with their reading (Al Eissa & Al-Bargi, 2017: 5). In line with Table 2.3, the four strategies of scaffolding are scaffolding through modelling and think-aloud;

scaffolding through activation of prior knowledge and through the use of questioning; scaffolding through the use of bridging and building connections; and scaffolding through the use of visualisation and graphic organisers.

There is a framework for Scaffolding Reading Experience (SRE) designed to assist English language students with activities and skills that could assist them in RC. The SRE is divided into the first, and second phase. The first phase is considered the planning phase and takes into account the three important factors – the students, the reading selection and the purpose of reading. The second phase is considered the application phase, and emanates from the planning phase.

Figure 2.4 below demonstrates the phases of SRE (Graves, Juel & Graves, 1998).

Figure 2.4: Scaffolding Reading Experiences (SRE) Phases
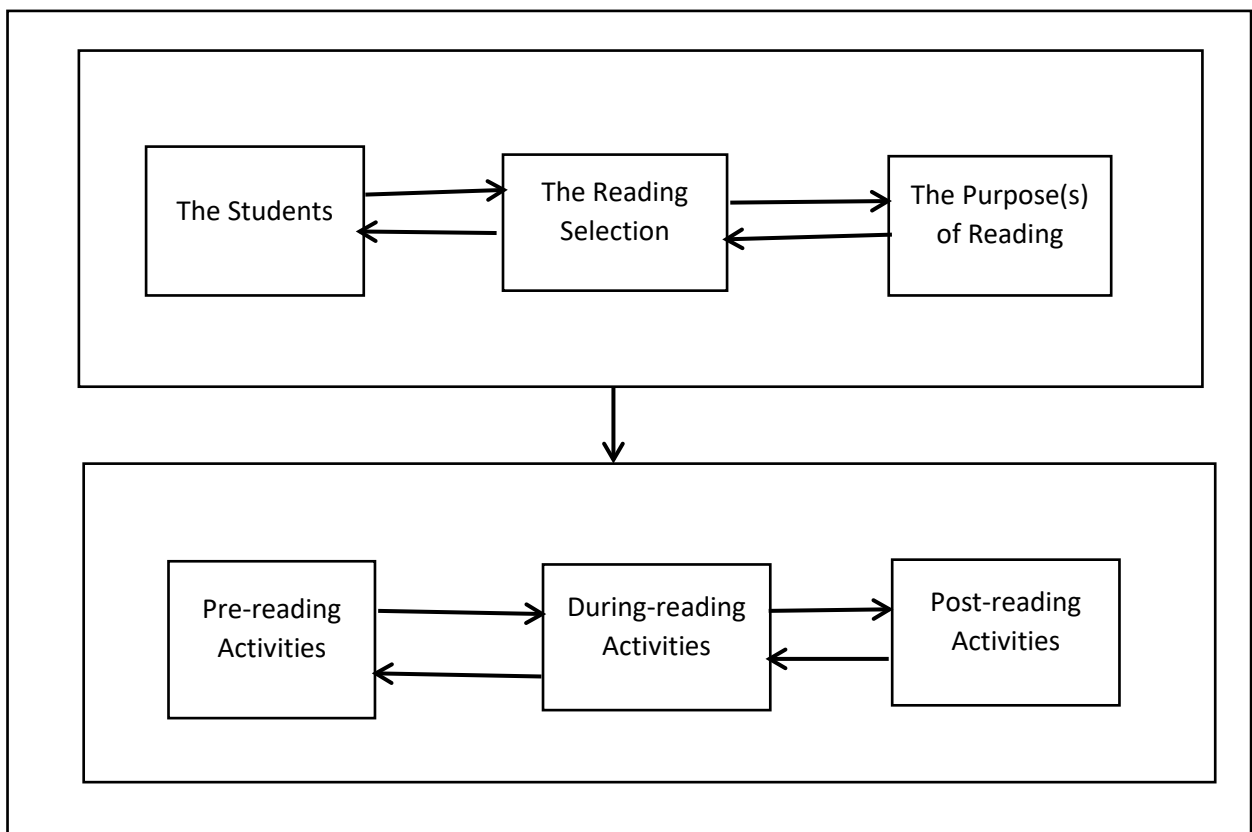
The reading in the application phase is divided into three parts. Each of the parts consists of several activities that the lecturers can choose depending on their students' needs. The sections are pre-reading activities, which aim to prepare students to cope

with the reading text. They are expected to do this by activating their prior knowledge. The aim of during-reading activities is to model effective reading strategies that students can choose from and use, and post-reading activities aim to check that the students have comprehended the reading material.

2.12 READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

Reading comprehension strategies (RCSs) are essential language tools that enable students to obtain knowledge through a variety of texts and contexts. Reading skills and comprehension strategies, prior knowledge activation, monitoring and confirming are major but yet basic strategies (Arthi & Srinivasan, 2018: 39).

Skimming, scanning, extensive and intensive reading are the processes of basic reading skills. It is argued that there is no significant variance between reading skills and reading strategies, and most often, lecturers tend to use the two concepts interchangeably. However, RCSs enhance reading skills and subsequently contribute to the improvement of language proficiency (cf. Arthi & Srinivasan, 2018: 40; Reading Techniques).

On the other hand, the significance of prior knowledge on reading and RC is well documented. The use of prior knowledge enhances reading and comprehension. One must be able to make prediction of what is expected from the next paragraph they are reading by making use of a piece of information from their prior knowledge in order to be able to understand the text better. The information in the student's mind is referred to as schemata (cf. Arthi & Srinivasan, 2018: 40; Schema Theory).

Monitoring is also a very important strategy in reading as students must be able to resolve the meaning of new words in a text and draw the meaning of those words as used in the context of the text they are reading. Students must be able to monitor new words to ensure that they have the precise meaning of the word as used in the context (cf. Arthi & Srinivasan, 2018: 40; Metacognitve Theory).

The student must also be able to confirm the exact meaning of the word after the prior prediction. This is where the student now focuses on the objective of reading. The

student can use the following tools or guides to confirm the true meaning of the word: a dictionary can associate the given word with similar context, and then continue with the smooth flow of reading after ensuring that his or her prediction of the word is correct (Artha & Srinivasan, 2018: 40).

Cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies are discussed next.

2.13 COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Cognitive strategies enable the reader to comprehend a written text (Gerald, 1996). These strategies are directly related to individual learning tasks, and include direct manipulation and transformation of the learning material (O'Malley & Chamont, 1990). They deal with how one learns, how one must remember, and how one should convey ideas reflexively and analytically. Students must be able to master the internal processes well in order to become independent students. They will solve problems and convey ideas soundly (cf. Suyitno, 2017: 110; see Meta-cognitive Theory). Cognitive strategies can increase comprehension, thereby enhancing learning.

Reading comprehension skills are related to the challenge of a cognitive process, and play an important role in a language learning process (Nordin, Rashid & Sadjirin, 2013: 469). If ELL students could be taught RCSs and how to apply them when reading, their RC could be improved. RCSs can assist in increasing students' vocabulary and improving their writing skills as individuals (cf. Hidayati, 2018: 2, Role of Vocabulary on RC). A well-developed RC ability is a major goal that can lead to students' educational success (Khoshsima & Rezaeian Tiyar, 2014: 134). To enhance RC, readers must employ one or several RCSs. Thus, RCSs are vitally significant when it comes to RC. Good readers make use of RCSs to decode meaning out of a text. It is believed that the use of RCSs will assist students to become meta-cognitive readers by monitoring their own understanding (Safarpoor, Ghaniabadi & Nafchi, 2015: 68).

Reading comprehension strategies refer to the mental operations, tools or plans that are employed by students to facilitate and extend their understanding of a text (Khoshsima & Rezaeian Tiyar, 2014: 134). Learning strategies comprise two kinds of strategies which can be used in reading. These strategies are grouped into direct and

indirect strategies. Direct strategies involve memory, cognitive and compensation strategies. On the other hand, indirect strategies encompass meta-cognitive, affective and social strategies. However, cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies are the most popular in reading (cf. Marzuki, Alim & Wekke, 2018: 1; Meta-cognitive Theory). These are commonly known as meta-cognitive (indirect reading strategies) and cognitive reading strategies (direct reading strategies) (Oxford, 1990).

Ntereke and Ramoroka (2017: 2) argue that there are a number of studies on abilities and strategies of proficient readers compared to less proficient readers. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016: 183) state that readers who want to read different kinds of texts should employ different kinds of RCSs. Thus, good readers interact with a text as a way of expanding comprehension.

Figure 2.5 depicts the RCSs to be discussed in this study.
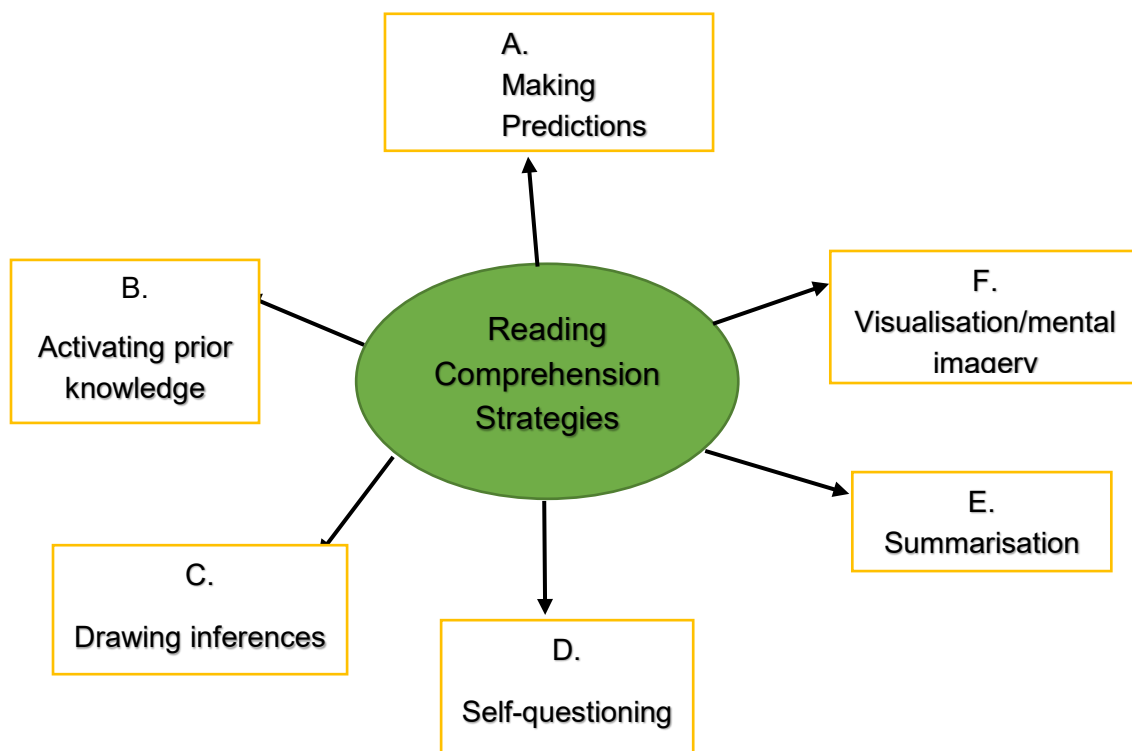
Figure 2.5: Reading Comprehension Strategies

Cognitive strategies include resourcing, repetition, grouping, deduction, imagery, inference making and summarising (Ratna, 2014: 3; Kara, 2015: 21). These cognitive strategies are discussed below.

2.13.1 Making predictions

Students can make predictions about the text before the actual reading. For example, titles or pictures in the text can be used to make predictions (Klapwijk, 2016: 2). This implies that students can make use of titles, tables of contents, pictures and key words to make their predictions. Therefore, lecturers can give students an activity of predicting at specific points throughout the text, then assessing the prediction and if necessary, reviewing the prediction as well (Amin, 2019: 35).

Students can use their background knowledge appropriately to the present subject to try and draw understanding. Thus, good readers always read with a purpose. Predicting has been identified as one of the basic approaches for building good comprehension skills. This also helps the readers set purpose for their reading (cf. Amin, 2019: 35; see Meta-cognitive Theory).

2.13.2 Activating prior knowledge

Activating prior knowledge is about being able to activate existing knowledge to try to use it to comprehend the presented information. This is meant to elicit as much prior information as possible with regards to the subject at hand (Klapwijk, 2015: 2). Most researchers concur that prior knowledge efficiently enhances comprehension in reading by awarding a quick and easy access to some information which is not clear or has been missed out. Students do very well when they read about something which they hold prior knowledge on. Thus, there is a relationship between RC and prior knowledge. The trick, however, is to activate the appropriate and useful schema. Lecturers should, therefore, be able to teach students how to activate the correct schema (cf. Abdelaal & Sase, 2014: 127; see Schema Theory).

2.13.3 Drawing inferences

Drawing inferences is the ability by students to make inferences to what they are reading. It refers to implied or inferred information. By making inferences, good readers read beyond the surface details to discover other meanings that are not stated but implied (Azizmohammadi, 2013: 156). Inferring is a strategy which needs one to read between the lines. Students should use their knowledge and information from the text to draw conclusions. Techniques such as illustrations, graphs, pictures, dates, related vocabulary and titles can be used by students to help them make inferences (Amin, 2019:37). In addition, inference is information that is accessed from the memory and generated during reading to fill in information that is not present in the reading text (cf. Kendeou, MacMaster & Christ, 2016: 63; see Meta-cognitive Theory). The more the students understand, the more they can keep making inferences (Warnidah, 2016: 79).

Moreover, reading will be easier when students can make inferences, no matter how long the text is. When making inferences, the reader must rely on the words the author has used and not their feelings, check if their inferences are wrong or right by using any statement in the paragraph, and in a difficult passage, check for statements that led them to their inferences (cf. Azizmohammadi, 2013: 156; Warnidah, 2016: 79). Tips and examples suggested are that when making inferences, one should rely on the writer's words and not on one's own intuition or experiences. One should also not invent one's own message, check to see if the inference is contradicted or supported by any statements in the paragraph, and check whether one can identify the statement that led one to one's conclusion about a difficult passage (Azizmohammadi, 2013: 156). Inference allows the reader to create connections that are meaningful by activating relevant background knowledge on text element (Van den Broek, Helder & Karlsson, 2014: 11).

2.13.4 Self-questioning

Questioning is one of the RCSs that enhance students' comprehension. Students must develop skills of constantly questioning what they are reading (Amin, 2019: 37). The ability to monitor one's own RC is an important skill for retrieving meaning from a text.

The self-questioning strategy can assist in this case. It can also help students increase their ability to learn by themselves. This strategy requires them to ask themselves a series of questions they themselves have generated, or use questions generated by the lecturer before, during and/or after reading a passage for comprehension (Joseph, Morgan, Cullen & Rouse, 2015: 2). The self-questioning strategy is expected to help students create their own motivation. In the process of reading, students should create their own questions, predict the answers to the questions that have been generated, search for the answers as they read and paraphrase the answers for themselves (Safarpoor et al., 2015: 69; see Reading & Motivation).

Raphael (1986) came up with an approach called Question Answer Relationships (QAR), which teaches students to differentiate between questions and answers that are found in the book as well as questions and different answers that are found in their heads. Therefore, the ability by students to answer the questions correctly will improve when this strategy has been taught wisely. Hans and Hans (2015: 65) argue that the QAR approach should be used after the reading exercise because students' RC increases in the process when they are taught how to ask questions and where they can find answers for those questions. They will be able to think about what they are reading and beyond that. They will get inspired to think creatively; will be challenged to use their higher-level thinking skills; and they will be able to think aloud, thereby becoming aware of their own learning process. Therefore, students will be able to analyse their own learning processes (cf. Meta-cognitive Theory).

2.13.5 Summarising

Summarising helps students separate important facts in a text. It also helps them to identify and connect main ideas, eliminate needless information and remember what they read (Cele, 2015). One way of improving RC is to teach students to summarise what they read. Reviewing the passage, evaluating the paragraph, answering with a paraphrase and determining a passage summary are identified as strategies of summarisation. However, for students who are not familiar with summarisation, the task of summarising can be a mysterious and daunting one (Zafarani & Kabgani, 2014: 1960). Summarisation has been labelled one of the most important and encompassing strategies of all the RCSs that can be employed by effective readers. When

summarising, the reader should put his or her focus on the main points of the text (Khoshsima & Rezaeian Tiyar, 2014: 135).

Moreover, summarisation is the abbreviation of a text based on the main and secondary ideas of the writer and its reconstruction by the reader. It is argued that the exercise of summarising requires a complex cognitive process of finding the main idea, linking secondary ideas with main ideas, leaving out less important information and being able to organise main and secondary ideas based on the main text. Summarisation ensures that information stays in the long-term memory, thus making the things learned permanent (Özdemir, 2018: 2199). It is a process of condensing a lot of information from the text for the purpose of creating a version that covers the main points of the text (Amin, 2019: 37).

2.13.6 Visualisation

Visualisation, also referred to as visual imagery, is defined as the process of creating an image of what is being read. Lecturers can assist students by asking them to draw or write down what comes in their mind after visualisation (Aman, 2019: 36). Good readers use mental imagery to make sense of what they are reading. Therefore, this strategy can be used at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of reading (Al Eissa & Al-Bargi, 2017: 7).

Visualising uses the capacity of the mind to imagine what the text is communicating. For example, many people that read the first 'Harry Potter' books before watching the actual movie formed the vivid images in 'their 'mind's eye' when they learnt about Harry and his new friends. Visualising also helps with anchoring new ideas in the reader's mind by connecting ideas and concepts to past experiences. This is why students have to be encouraged to recall ideas by visualisation (cf. Pressley, 2000; Role of Theory).

2.14 META-COGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Metacognition is a strategy that involves the reader's ability to exercise control over their RC. Thus, the reader must think about thinking; and think about what they are

doing when they are reading (Çakici, 2017). Therefore, meta-cognitive strategies govern the use of cognitive strategies (Gerald, 1996). There is a wide range of metacognition strategies which efficient readers can use to achieve each reading aim. These strategies are listed as integrating new information to the previous knowledge, selecting thinking strategies deliberately, planning, monitoring and evaluating the thinking process (Çakici, 2017).

Meta-cognitive reading strategies refer to activities that are designed to control, monitor and evaluate the reading process. These include planning the reading activity, checking that information has been comprehended and linking new information with prior knowledge (Chevalier, Parrila, Ritchie & Deacon, 2017: 35). Since meta-cognitive strategies are said to be facilitating RC and foster English First Language (EFL) or English Second Language (ESL) learning, it is, therefore, imperative to emphasise these strategies (Kara, 2015: 21).

Meta-cognitive strategies such as planning, direction attention, selective attention, self-monitoring, self-management, delayed production, self- enhancement and self-evaluation have been proposed by O'Malley and Chamont (Kara, 2015: 21). Metacognition has been categorised into four components that consist of being aware of factors that influence cognitive activities; being aware of one's own mental and emotional responses concerning any cognitive activity; the tasks that refer to the purpose of any cognitive activity; and the actions that pertain to activities carried out by students to fulfil the metacognition objectives (Meniado, 2016).

2.14.1 Model of Meta-cognitive Reading Strategies for a Textbook

Fogarty (1994) states that good readers must be able to develop a plan before they can start reading; they must monitor their comprehension of what they are reading; and evaluate their reading after they have finished reading. These stages are categorised as planning and monitoring during reading and evaluating. In the planning stage, students are expected to think about the topic of the text. They must think about how features in the text can help them with comprehension as well as how they can make connection with what they are reading and what they know. Additionally, they must think about text organisation. In the monitoring-during-reading, students should

constantly monitor their understanding. They can do this by asking questions such as "Do I understand what I have just read?" However, in the evaluating state, the students should be able to reflect and evaluate the reading strategy they have chosen and employed to determine if it worked for them or not.

The following is a model that illustrates the process of using meta-cognitive strategies that a reader can apply for comprehension.

Figure 2.6: The reading process of metacognition
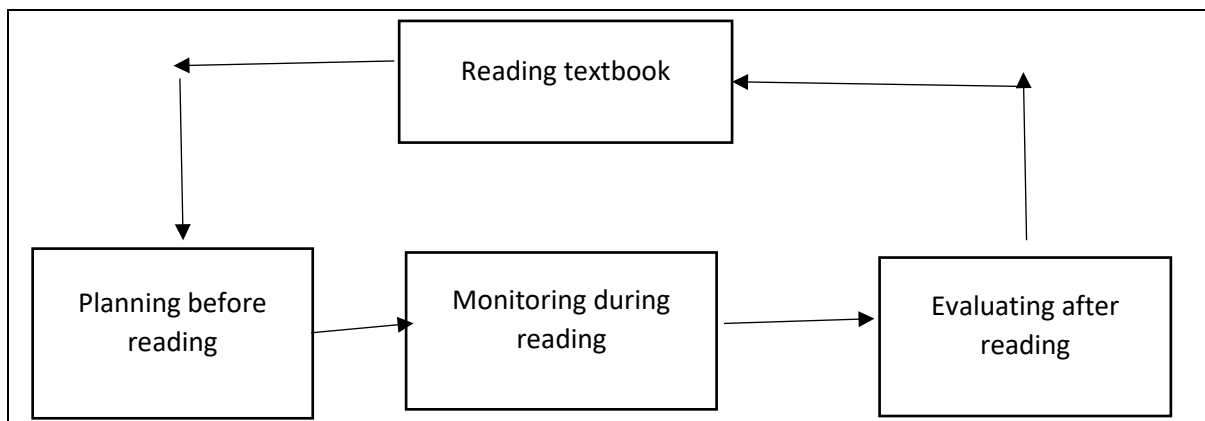
Seven strategies that can be used to improve students' metacognition skills are that they should be taught that their brains are wired for growth; they should practise to identify what they do not understand; they should be given a chance to reflect on course work; they should be given learning journals to practise; they should consider both essay and multiple choice questions; they should facilitate reflexive thinking; and be given a few tips to increase monitoring skills (Fogarty, 1994).

2.15 ROLE OF THEORY IN THE STUDY

This study adopts a combination of metacognition and schema theories.

2.15.1 Metacognition Theory

According to Meniado (2016: 119), meta-cognition implies thinking about thinking. Karbalaei (2011: 6) states that metacognition refers to the knowledge and control that one has over their cognitive processes. The word metacognition is always linked with

Flavell (1979), who argues that it includes the reader's awareness of his reading process, active monitoring and constant regulation of cognitive processing activities. Aflah (2017: 11) posits that researchers concur that readers' ability to be aware and monitor their own comprehension process is a significant feature of the reading skill. Thus, students' knowledge of their cognitive process is recognised as metacognition. Çakici (2017: 71) maintains that as a cognitive process, RC needs meta-cognitive awareness and regulation of the reader's thinking process during reading through planning, monitoring and evaluation.

It is common in reading to refer to what one knows (meta-cognitive awareness) and the skill to know when, where and how to use strategies. This is what one can do, referred to as meta-cognitive regulation and or control. Implicitly, meta-cognitive strategies are based on the notion that successful readers must think about their thinking while in the process of reading. Metacognition aspects include consciously applying learned strategies in the process of engaging in a task, knowledge and awareness of the strategic options that a student can choose from, and having the skill to choose the most effective strategy to employ, evaluate and adjust performance in the process of performing tasks, and lastly, a plan for future performance based on their prior evaluation (Abdul-Majeed & Muhammad, 2015: 98).

Shehu (2015:93) states that metacognition includes thinking about what one is doing when reading. Strategic students attempt to identify the purpose of reading before they can start reading, identify what type or form of text it is and think of features of the form and type of the text; that is, they identify the topic sentence, supporting details and the conclusion. They also project the purpose of the author for writing the text. They choose, scan and read in detail and make predictions and inferences, and use prior knowledge. In addition, Hans and Hans (2015: 63) also state that skilled readers create questions based on the main idea, message or text's plot, and attempt to get clarity on the part of the text that confuses them. In addition, they monitor their understanding of the sequence, context or characters.

There is a significant number of studies that have unveiled the differences between good and poor readers. Metacognition is an approach of awareness to readers relating to the ability to utilise dissimilar strategies in order to understand the reading material.

Meta-cognitive knowledge refers to knowledge related to learners and their usages of different strategies and tasks in reading activities. Meta-cognitive controlling, on the other hand, implies self-regulatory efforts of the cognitive approach which includes planning, efforts, evaluating, remedying and testing (Shehu, 2015:181).

2.15.1.1 Cognitive Knowledge and Meta-cognitive Control Process

According to Schraw and Moshman (1995: 352), metacognition makes the basic differentiation between cognitive knowledge and the meta-cognitive control process.

Knowledge of cognition refers to what one knows about his or her own cognition or cognition in general. Usually, this often involves three different types of meta-cognitive awareness: declarative, procedural and conditional knowledge. Declarative knowledge means knowing about things whereas procedural knowledge means knowing how to do things. However, conditional knowledge refers to knowing about the why and when of features of cognition (Schraw & Moshman, 1995: 352).

Furthermore, the regulation of cognition refers to meta-cognitive activities that assist one to control one's thinking and learning. The three important regulatory skills identified are planning, monitoring and evaluation. Planning includes having to select the appropriate strategies and to allocate resources that affect performance. This refers to making predictions before reading, strategy sequencing and allocating time or attention selectively prior to starting a task (Schraw & Moshman, 1995: 354). Whereas learning needs the ability of planning for learning strategies, reading is regarded as a three-step that includes pre-reading, reading and finally, post-reading (cf. Brown & Palincsar, 1982; Zimmerman & Pons 1986; Reading Comprehension Strategies).

In line with the above, Schraw and Moshman (1995: 354) state that monitoring refers to an individual's consciousness of comprehension and task performance. This is the ability to engage in constant self-testing while simultaneously learning. However, it is argued that the ability to monitor oneself tends to develop slowly and poorly in children and even adults. Some studies have also shown that the monitoring ability also improves with training and practice. According to Thiede, Anderson and Therriault

(2003), reading and comprehension exercises need to monitor students' comprehension during reading accurately. Thus, self-regulated behaviour in reading can be identified through monitoring the text when it is understood by the reader, and that readers can also be helped by self-regulated learning models such as the think-aloud strategy, the question strategy and the self-regulatory strategy.

Moreover, evaluation refers to appraising the products and being able to regulate one's process of learning. This includes being able to re-evaluate one's goals and conclusions (Schraw & Moshman, 1995: 354). Evaluating has a vital role to play in reading for numerous purposes. It is also considered a post-reading strategy that reveals the needs of students to summarise the main ideas for comprehension of specific texts and to discover supplementary evidence for outside needs. This evaluation strategy assists readers to make an appropriate conclusion about the material, and makes a way to guess the meaning appropriately by devising a plan for further reading strategies (Channa, Nordin, Siming, Chandio & Koondher, 2015: 183).

2.15.2 Schema Theory

The schema theory (ST) is the most researched theory when it comes to RC. The theory explains how readers use prior knowledge to understand a text. Schema is a theory of how activating background knowledge (also known as prior knowledge) can aid RC. This is about how knowledge is represented (Rumelhart, 1980). In literature, the terms prior knowledge and background knowledge are used interchangeably.

The schema theory is defined as the organisation of information or past experience kept in the memory of the reader. It is a reading theory aimed at explaining that reading can be seen as an interactive process between the text and the reader's background knowledge. However, prior knowledge in the reader's mind is a pre-requisite for acquiring new information. Thus, new information is easily acquired when there is relevant pre-existing knowledge (Xiao, 2016: 185). Activated background knowledge, which is also known as prior knowledge, can implicitly aid RC during reading. The knowledge is packaged into units called schemata (Ali, 2016: 13; Rumelhart, 1980). The difference between a person who is more competent and a person who is less competent in any field, including reading, is the amount of knowledge possessed in

the long term memory of the individual. This is the type of knowledge accumulated over a period of time around a particular concept, which enables the reader to understand that concept (Nwachukwu, 2017: 27).

Comprehending a text implies that one has found a mental 'home' for the information in the text, or else he or she has modified an existing mental home in order to accommodate that new information (Anderson & Person, 1988: 38). The schema theory explains comprehension by pointing out that a reader comprehend a meaning when he or she can activate a schema that offers a sufficient account of the events and objects in the message. What differentiates between a person who is more competent compared to one who is less competent in any field, including reading, is the amount of knowledge possessed in the long term memory of an individual (Gerald, 1996).

According to the schema theory, it is the type of knowledge accumulated over a period of time around a particular concept that will enable the reader to understand that particular concept. The idea of schema was proposed by Bartlet, who defined it as the organisation of information or past experience kept in the memory of the reader. The schema theory is a reading model aimed to explain that reading can be seen as an interactive process between the text and the reader's background knowledge (Bartlet, 1932). Background knowledge is the schema that is formed from past experiences of the reader, and helps with reading comprehension. The theory is based on pre-existing prior knowledge, selection and reader-driven process connotations (Xiao, 2016: 186):

Prior knowledge in the reader's mind is a prerequisite for acquiring new information. The argument is that new information is easily acquired when there is relevant pre-existing knowledge. Being able to select information that is in the schema is very significant to enhance reading. As such, acquisition and comprehension rely not only on pre-existing knowledge, but the ability to retrieve relevant background knowledge. Readers often approach the meaning of a text based on their cultural and social background. Therefore, they will relate to the text differently by taking into account their different cultural and social backgrounds. The schema theory is divided into linguistic, formal as well as content schemata (Pour-Mohammadi & Abidin, 2011: 238):

Linguistic schemata are described as one having the knowledge of letters and the sounds they make. Basically, this is the knowledge of vocabulary and grammar (Eskey, 1988). Linguistic schemata, which is the foundation of comprehending reading, refers to language knowledge and material (Jian-ping & Li-sha, 2016: 15). Students who do not obtain ample linguistic schema will not be able to understand linguistic information. As such, they will not be able to activate the content and formal schemata related to the subject. This category is in line with suggestions by the bottom-up model, that reading is based on the knowledge and awareness of smallest linguistic components such as letters and their sounds, words and so on (Cailing, 2016: 35).

Formal schemata are about possessing knowledge of the organisation and pattern of printed words, and influences the rate in which the reader will be able to understand the text. However, Smith (1994) argues that formal schemata refers to the way in which texts differ. This means that a reading text can be a fictional work, a letter to the editor, or a scientific essay. Each of these reading texts would have a different structural organisation. Carrel and Esterhold (1983) refer to formal schemata as the macrostructure of a text. The argument is that students should understand the information offered to them if the style and the writing pattern of a passage is familiar to them.

Content schemata suggests that the reader's background knowledge influences the reader's acquisition of knowledge. Content schemata refers to the background knowledge of the text's content area (Carreli & Eisterhold (1983). This incorporates cultural background knowledge, previous experience, related information of a text, et cetera (Jian-ping & Li-sha, 2016: 15). Content schemata is, in most cases, specific to a particular culture. Each person has their own life experiences. As such, the schema will also be different to an individual. The argument is that content schema can, to a certain extent, make up for the shortage in linguistic schema and can enhance students' comprehension. Characteristics of content schemata are that they are meaningfully organised; they can be added into as one grows in learning; they are always developing to include more variables and speciality; and there are other subschemata which formulate as each schema gets embedded in other schemata. Schemata also evolves each moment as new information is presented. They assist us

to understand, interpret and remember incoming information; they are useful for making inferences, reason evaluation and many more; and they help form a whole which is greater than the sum of their parts (Cailing, 2016: 36).

2.15.2 Activation of correct schema

While research indicates the significance of schemata, equally important, lecturers should be able to activate the correct schemata at the time fitting. An individual must be able to activate the appropriate schema. Schema activation is the process in which some textual stimuli signal the direction or area for the reader to look for, and evoke the relevant schema from memory into the present reading activity (Cailing 2016: 36).

A basic definition of prior knowledge is that it refers to what the reader already knows about the content. The information that does not fit in the already existing schemata may not be understood appropriately and sufficiently (Stevens, 1980). An example that was given:

> If the waiter in a restaurant, for example, asks you if you would like to sing, you may have a difficult time interpreting what he was asking and why, since singing is not something that patrons in a restaurant normally do. However, if one had been to the restaurant in the past and knew that it was frequented by opera students who liked to entertain the crowds, she or he would have incorporated that information into his or her schema and not be confused when the waiter asked if she or he would prefer to sing (Palestina, 2000).

2.16 ENGLISH LANGUAGE FIRST ENTERING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AT HBUS IN CONTEXT

Most HBUs are mostly patronised by students who come from a disadvantaged schooling background, that is, poorly resourced schools in townships and rural areas (see 2.2). These schools use English as an L2. So when these students register for new studies at the university, they are classified under EFAL students – who are taught in English. Since the students come from schools that are already disadvantaged, they also enter higher institutions with several challenges.

Firstly, first entering English university students in SA are known to have poor RC ability, which interferes with their academic performance. Thus, universities inherit students' linguistic challenges, which hamper their capability to read and write at tertiary level. Research indicates that a good RC is closely linked to academic performance.

The researcher has been teaching English at one of the five sampled universities, and based on her experience with first year students, in the span of four years, can attest to the poor levels of RC amongst most of them. The first year English language students exhibited signs of struggling with comprehending academic texts that they were subjected to when they entered the university. They were expected to read more than just a textbook, which is what they were usually used to at basic schooling level, although textbooks are still widely used even at universities.

At universities, the students are expected to read journal articles, dissertations/theses, case studies, study guides, reports and slide presentations prepared by different lecturers. All these different academic texts use vocabulary that is advanced, and words that are specific to a particular field, also referred to as jargons. Most of the students at HBUs often have a problem of vocabulary. They come to universities with vocabulary that is not well-developed. This results in them struggling to comprehend these academic texts as the language used is complex and advanced. A limited word bank is one of the main factors that contributes to the poor RC of these students.

In addition, students also struggled to understand assessment instructions and questions. This was evident in their test scores. It was demonstrated in the way they answered questions that required them to indicate their understanding ability and sometimes to infer meanings. The students rarely performed well in reading comprehension passages, but tended to do well with multiple-choice questions, choose-in-brackets questions and similar questions that required them to only provide one-word-answers or to choose from the answers provided for them. Consequently, the students did not perform as well as they should have and expected to.

Other factors have been identified to be contributing to their poor RC. For example, there is an issue of language (see 2.8.1.). Students are taught in English, which is an

L2 to them. For some, this creates a challenge as they only encounter English in the classroom. Another problem is that they are not really taught RC and RCSs. Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016: 3) have pointed out that teachers spend time teaching reading for decoding purposes and not for comprehension. The latter part remains neglected. High levels of poverty, low parental literacy levels, poor governance in many schools, poorly resourced schools and poorly qualified teachers are factors that are associated closely with language and reading literacy and poor RC.

Africa and Mutizwa-Mangazi (2017: 1) argue that Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) are not only faced with a set of deep material difficulties, but they also have to deal with the negative implications of naming. They argue that tertiary institutions in SA have been classified by the colonial structure and apartheid with the aim of subjugating some institutions while elevating others. According to Moyo and McKenna (2021: 2), South African universities function in an environment that is significantly affected by the socio-economic and political-geographical apartheid realities. In particular, HDIs are affected by struggles such as shortages in areas such as basic operational funds, library resources, computer systems, accommodation for students, lecture venues and laboratories. It was only in 2016 that a grant earmarked to address historical structural inefficiencies, the HDI Development Grant, was effectively implemented.

2.17 CONCLUSION

Reading and reading comprehension are two elements that need great coverage as early as the Foundation Phase. They should be taught in schools, and teachers should not evade the responsibility. There are several reasons why teaching reading is very significant and should not be overlooked. Some of the reasons include being able to accumulate vast and significant knowledge; being able to engage in social issues with peers and colleagues; building on one's self confidence; and being able to perform adequately academically et cetera. The South African school curriculum should cover reading comprehension just as much as it covers other content as well. This is due to the fact that learners who fail to read and to comprehend what they read are likely not to succeed. Reading comprehension incompetency leads learners to underperform in other content subjects such as science and maths, which are also, in addition to

reading, the other two subjects that the South African education system is having a challenge with.

Several strategies have been identified that could improve students with their reading comprehension. These are inference-making, activation of prior knowledge, guessing, the use of mental imagery, summarisation, making prediction, self-question and so forth. Students could be guided to use one or more of these strategies when they read. Probably, the best reader will be the one who can employ multiple strategies. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016: 183) state that readers who want to read different kinds of texts should employ different kinds of reading comprehension strategies. Good readers interact with a text as a way of expanding their comprehension of the text.

It is also significant that teachers assist students' vocabulary because although they may be able to read, they still need to have knowledge and a strong base of vocabulary to be able to use strategies such as making inferences, guessing, making predictions and so on. This indicates that lexical knowledge is as much significant as teaching students to identify the strategies to use. The vocabulary of students can be increased if they are encouraged and motivated to do so, which is also the reason why motivation in a reading class is highly significant. Whereas students can be extrinsically motivated to read by being given eternal awards such as a good grade, they can also be taught how to become internally motivated (intrinsic) as this ensures that they become lifelong readers. Intrinsic motivation leads one to engage in an activity because of their own satisfaction and with least or no expectation from any external results or achievement (Gopalan, Abu Bakar, Zulkifli, Alwi & Che Mat, 2017: 2). They also argue that is what is needed to sustain motivation is education, will power and a positive attitude.

The next chapter, which is Chapter 3, discusses the research methodology of the study.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 discusses the research method, techniques, analysis of data and quality criteria of the study. The chapter, in particular, addresses the research design and research approach, population, sample and the sampling procedure. It also covers the description of the research instruments, procedures for data collection and the way data was analysed. The researcher also details how the study adhered to ethics of undertaking a scientific study.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design, research approach and triangulation will be discussed in this section.

3.2.1 Research design

Creswell (2014) defines a research design as the overall plan for connecting abstract research problems to the relevant and achievable empirical research. According to Asenahabi (2019: 78), a research design is a step-by-step procedure that the researcher adopts prior to data collection and before the start of data analysis so that the research objectives are attained in a valid and accurate way. The significance of the research design is to translate a research problem into data analysis with the intention of providing applicable answers to research questions. In simple terms, research design always establishes the kinds of analysis that ought to be done to yield the desired results. In addition, Sileyew (2019: 2) posits that the research design aims to provide a framework that is appropriate in a research study. This study followed the exploratory research design.

An explanatory research design is a build-up on exploratory and descriptive research. It aims to give an account and explanation for descriptive information. It investigates

the causes and reasons, and gives evidence to support or refute an explanation or the prediction thereof. It asks the 'what', 'why' and 'how' types of questions, and seeks to establish the actual reasons a phenomenon occurs.

In contrast, Strydom (2013: 151) argues that an exploratory research design refers to a type of research design that produces first insights into the nature of a problem, and generates questions that need to be investigated by more extensive insights. This kind of design leads to large amounts of unstructured information to be collected in order to explore a new topic. According to Boru (2018), the aim of the exploratory research design is to not provide the final and conclusive answers to the research questions but to explore the topic of the research with different levels of depth. This kind of research is undertaken when there is little knowledge about a phenomenon and when the problem is not defined clearly. Additionally, Casula, Rangarajan and Shields (2020: 3) argue that in exploratory research, the researcher enters the unknown to discover something new. Stebbins (2011: 5) adds that researchers explore because they have little or no scientific knowledge about the group, process, activity or the situation they want to examine. The premise is that there is an element that is worth discovering.

The research design of this study is exploratory. A research design is a framework for a study, and was employed as a guide in the collection and analysing of data (Pandey & Pandey, 2015: 18). In this study, there was a two-phase sequential phase design that began with a quantitative phase, which was then followed by a qualitative one to shed light into quantitative outcomes of the first phase. Quantitative data is normally prioritised with a qualitative follow-up designed to explore some of the findings to throw light into anomalous results (Richards, Ross & Seedhouse, 2012: 308). Thus, first entering university students sat for a test and then later filled in a questionnaire on their RC competencies (see Appendix A & Appendix B). Additionally, lecturers at earmarked HBUs were interviewed about first entering English language students (see Appendix C). The researcher used qualitative data to support or clarify findings drawn from the quantitative data.

3.2.2 Research approach

According to Haradhan (2017: 2), a research approach is a plan of action that gives direction to how research should be conducted systematically. Three main approaches in research identified are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research approaches.

The quantitative approach refers to a technique and measurements that produce quantifiable values. This approach is considered to be an analytical approach towards research (Asenahabi, 2019: 79). Implicitly, quantitative research is a form of research which relies on the natural sciences methods, which produces data that are numerical and are hard facts. The aim is to determine a cause and effect relationship between two variables by utilising mathematical, computational and statistical methods (Ahmad, Wasim, Irfan, Gogoi, Srivasta & Farheen, 2019: 2829). Further, this approach is a scientific method that is used to collect fresh data with regards to the problem from a large population and data analysis. However, the approach ignores a person's emotions, feelings and/or environmental contexts (Rahi, 2017: 2). Quantitative research can begin with a statement problem, generating a hypothesis or research question(s), related literature review and a quantitative analysis of data. In essence, the purpose of quantitative data is to test a hypothesis, establish cause and effect and make prediction. One of the differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches is that with the former, the group studied is larger and randomly selected (Apuke, 2017: 42.)

On the other hand, qualitative research puts emphasis on exploring and comprehending the meaning that a person or a group of people ascribe to a human or social problem. This approach yields data that is not quantifiable and uses open-ended questions. This allows the researcher to understand issues by investigating them in their own particular context and the meaning brought by the individuals (Asenahabi, 2019: 81). This approach also provides insights and understanding of the problem setting. It is unstructured in nature. It is an exploratory research method that studies very high difficult phenomena that are not possible to clarify with the quantitative approach (Ahmad et al., 2019: 2829). The approach presupposes that an individual represents the group's feelings and emotions that are equally significant to interpret,

which a quantitative method often ignores (Rahi, 2017: 5). The qualitative approach is used for the purpose of trying to understand and interpret social interactions. Often, the group to be studied is smaller and cannot be selected randomly (Apuke, 2017: 42).

Mixed-method research, on the other hand, refers to an approach to an inquiry that makes use of the combination of association of qualitative and quantitative approaches. It includes philosophical assumptions, the usage of qualitative and quantitative approaches, and the mixture of the approaches in a study. However, this is beyond simply the collection and analysis of both types of data; it is also extended to include the utilisation of both approaches in conjunction. The aim of this specific approach is to ensure that the overall strength of the study is greater than either qualitative or quantitative research (Creswell; 23). Further, a mixed method approach refers to the integration of qualitative and quantitative research and data in a research study. This method resulted from the argument that both quantitative and qualitative research approaches have weaknesses, therefore, collecting data using both approaches neutralises each other's weaknesses. This approach also ensures that a greater degree of understanding is established. This might not occur if a single approach is used (Asenahabi, 2019: 84).

Dawadi and Shrestha (2021: 27) argue that mixing two methods could be a superior logic than using one method because it is likely that the combination can provide insights that are rich into the research phenomena. The use of a single method option, such as choosing either a qualitative or quantitative approach cannot provide a full understanding of the research phenomena. In addition, there is also a belief that both kinds of research have values, and that in some way, they complete each other. As such, using both in combination leads to an added value. In this study, the researcher utilised both approaches to give an answer to the same question so that data collected can yield greater certainty and wider implications in the conclusion.

3.2.3 Triangulation

Triangulation in research refers to the usage of more than one research approach to a research phenomenon, and is associated with research designs and methods. It is also known as mixed methods research. The goal is to ensure that there is an increase

in confidence in the results and/or findings through the confirmation of a preposition by using multiple independent tools (Heale & Forbes, 2017: 98).

Moreover, one of the main advantages of triangulation is being able to mitigate bias through the usage of numerous sources of data, such as the RC criterion-referenced test, the questionnaire and the interviews employed in this study. The reliability of the study results can be enhanced by the application of this approach (Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2018: 20). Mixed-method research is suitable for studies when the use of either the qualitative or quantitative methods appear to be insufficient to establish a complete understanding of the research problem. One of the advantages of mixed method research is its ability to maximise the strengths and to reduce the limitations of a single method (Wium & Louw, 2018: 4, 11).

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

In this section, the population of the study and sampling will be discussed.

3.3.1 Population

According to Casteel and Bridier (2021:343), the population of interest of the study comprise individuals, dyads, organisations, groups or entities that a researcher needs to understand. Populations set boundaries for the study scope while providing cues about the environment and context. Majid (2018: 3) defines the population of interest as the target population of the study that is intended to be studied. Majid (2018: 3) alludes that the population of interest is the target population of the study that the researcher intends to study. Additionally, Rahi (2017: 3) posits that population refers to all people or items that a person wishes to understand. All first entering English language students at all SA HBUs and their English language lecturers were the target of this research study.

3.3.2 Sampling

Sampling is a process of choosing a statistically representative sample of individuals in a population of interest. This is an important research instrument in any study

because the population of interest normally comprises too many individuals as participants (Majid, 2018: 4). A sampling unit consists of the individual population, object or element or group of individual population which is used as the basis of sample selection. Sampling is called a finite subset of the population. Twenty (20) students were sampled at University A, 21 at University B, 16 at University C, another 21 at University E and four students at University D. In addition, three (3) lecturers were sampled in each four universities and two lecturers in one other university.

The size of a sample is influenced by factors such as the purpose for the size of a sample drawn, and the heterogeneity of the sampling unit in the population (Bhatt, 2020: 3). Sampling involves the process of selecting the segment of the population to be investigated. This is a process of selecting a sample of unit from a set of data in order to measure the traits, beliefs and attitudes of the individuals (Rahi, 2017). Sampling is also a process of measuring the traits of the population by studying only a part of the chosen population. There are two kinds of sampling: probability and non-probability sampling (Bhatt, 2020: 4).

Probability sampling is also known as random sampling, whereas non-probability sampling is also known as non-random sampling. Probability sampling is a sampling approach where each unit has an equal chance of a probability of being selected. The five categories in probability sampling are simple random sampling, systematic random sampling, stratified random sampling, cluster sampling and multi-stage sampling (Rahi: 2017: 3). On the other hand, non-probability sampling refers to a sampling approach where the chance or probability of each unit to be selected is unknown or unconfirmed. The non-probability approach can further be categorised as convenience sampling, snowball sampling, quota sampling, and lastly, judgement sampling (Rahi: 2017: 3).

In this study, the sample was selected through probability sampling in which the population was first divided into clusters, and then a sample was selected randomly from the clusters (Showkat & Parveen, 2017). Students who have registered for a first year English language module at specific HBUs were clustered according to those who attended rural, township and Model C schools. Twenty (20) first entering English language students and three (3) English language lecturers of first entering students

were selected from the rural and township clusters in the sampled universities. Additionally, in line with the above, the sample comprised 20 first entering university students and three lecturers from each of the following six HBUs in SA: Universities of Limpopo, Venda, North West (Mafikeng Campus), Zululand, Sefako-Makgato and Mangosuthu.

Data was collected from the five universities. Initially, six universities were sampled but only five participated. The sixth university did not respond to the researcher, even after several follow-up emails were sent. Eventually, the researcher settled for five universities. The universities that participated were then labelled as University A, University B, University C, University D and University E to maintain anonymity. The first sample was made up of 82 students who took a criterion-referenced test based on an RC passage. It aimed at testing their RC by asking questions related to the texts (see Appendix A). The reading comprehension test results were used to establish the reading comprehension competencies of the students. The test was also used to support the data provided by the students through the questionnaires.

The second sample comprised 82 first entering English language students who filled in a questionnaire on RC. The implementation of this tool was due to the fact it is a fast, less expensive and an effective means of attaining information from students (Etikan & Bala, 2017: 219). The questions designed by the researcher aimed at yielding information about knowledge of RC competencies by 20 first entering students per institution (see Appendix B). The students' survey questionnaire consisted of three sections: personal information, reading comprehension application and reading comprehension prospects.

The third and last sample consisted of 14 English language lecturers who responded to semi-structured interview questions. The questions were centred around RC competencies of their first entering students in English language. Semi-structured type of interview questions were used because the researcher wanted to have in-depth information on the area of interest (see Appendix C). The layout of lecturers' interviews had six sections: personal information, reading comprehension of students, forms of reading comprehension support, vocabulary, reading comprehension effects and improvements to reading comprehension.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 Research Instruments

A criterion-referenced test, a questionnaire and interviews were used to collect data.

3.4.1.1 A criterion-referenced test

Firstly, a criterion-referenced test (CRT) was opted for because the researcher did not aim to compare students against each other, but rather, to determine their RC by assessing them against a set of pre-determined criteria in the form of a marking guide. CRT is a process used to evaluate and grade the learning of students against a set of pre-determined criteria (Hussain, 2015: 25). As such, the criterion-referenced interpretation allows an individual to describe what one can do without reference to how others have performed (Muthaiyan & Ananthi, 2020: 609). The reason is that, in a criterion-referenced measurement, the performance of a student is interpreted by comparing it with a specified criterion of proficiency.

Muthaiyan and Ananthi (2020: 609) further argue that CRT and assessments are designed in such a way that they measure the performance of students against a fixed set of criteria or predetermined learning standards. This is a concise, written description entailing what students are expected to have knowledge of or are able to perform at a certain stage of their education. Mashingaidze (2012: 76) emphasises that a criterion-referenced test reports and interprets every score in terms of absolute standard. The interpretation of a student's score has nothing to with other students' scores.

CRT is also referred to as a test that measures the performance of a test taken in line with a specific standard or criterion that has been agreed upon. The individual taking the test must reach the level of performance to pass the test, and the score is interpreted with reference to the criterion score and not with the scores of other individuals that have taken the same test (Hussain, Tadese & Sajid, 2015: 26). One approach of the CTR for establishing the criterion is to determine a cut score through the standard setting method that is based on the judgements of experts on the subject

matter (Cuhadar & Gelbal, 2021: 10). Criterion-referenced tests may include the following questions: multiple choice, true or false, open-ended questions or a combination of the above types of questions (Muthaiyan & Ananthi, 2020: 609).

3.4.1.2 A questionnaire

A questionnaire was employed to collect data from students after sitting for the test. This type of a tool is suitable as it can allow for both closed-ended and open-ended types of questions in case a student intends to give further explanation. A questionnaire is defined as a list of questions with a space for answers for the purpose of collecting useful information from respondents (Etikan & Bala, 2017: 219).

Nieuwenhuijsen (2005: 272) states that a questionnaire can either be self-administered or administered by the interviewer, and can be handed or sent out, or it can be administered over the phone or face to face, but this can affect how the questionnaire is designed. A self-administered questionnaire is said to be the easiest and cheapest form, and needs the involvement of both the subject and the researcher. Additionally, Sadan (2021: 60) argues that questionnaires can be both structured and unstructured. Structured questionnaires consist of both questions and responses/answers that the respondents must select from. On the other hand, unstructured questionnaires only consist of predetermined questions where the participant is required to provide their own answers.

A questionnaire is very helpful as it enables the researcher to get quick, easy, cheap and efficient way of acquiring sufficient information from a larger sample of people (Etikan & Bala, 2017: 219). Questionnaires are some of the primary instruments that can be used to collect data in research. When designing a questionnaire, the researcher should ensure that it is valid, reliable as well as unambiguous. There are three types of questionnaires. These include closed-ended (structured), open-ended (unstructured) and a mixture of closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires (Zohrabi, 2013: 254). The researcher opted for a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires because they complement each other.

At University A, approximately 20 students participated by taking the test and filling in the questionnaire. At this university, teaching and learning was still done online, and as a result, data collection was done both physically and online. Some students participated physically, whereas others requested to participate through the use of emails as they were not on campus. Twenty-one (21) students participated at University B, and about 16 students at University C. Data from students at University B and at University C was collected physically. Covid-19 protocols were observed. At University D, there were challenges with regards to securing students to participate. After a lot of sourcing and assistance from their lecturers and their class representative, only four students participated. Some students indicated that they will participate but withdrew in the last minutes. As such, the researcher ended up collecting data from the four students through the criterion-referenced test and questionnaires. Another challenge was that University D was still doing online teaching at the time of data collection, so data from students was done using emails.

3.4.1.3 Interviews

Lastly, semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were employed to collect data from lecturers in order to determine their awareness of their students' RC competencies. Just Like structured interviews, semi-structured interviews also outline topics and questions prepared by the researcher but they do not have a rigid adherence of structured interviews (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017: 89). One of the characteristics of a semi-structured interview is that it is based on a flexible topic guide that gives a loose structure of questions that are open-ended in order to explore experiences and attitudes. The advantages of this type of instrument include great flexibility that enables the researcher to enter new areas, to produce richer data and to establish a rapport with the participants (Triqueros, 2017: 3).

According to Kakilla (2021: 1), an SSI awards a respondent with a room for free response. An SSI that is well presented may draw upon the interviewee's inner voice when both parties are engaged in the interview. DeJonckheere and Vaughn (2019: 2) argue that the overall aim of opting for a semi-structured interview in data collection is to accumulate information from respondents that have personal experiences, attitudes, perceptions ad beliefs related to the topic in question. A researcher can use

an SSI to collect new exploratory data, triangulate other data sources or to use member checking to validate the findings.

In SSI, the researcher sets an outline for the topics to be covered. However, the way in which the interviewee responds determines the way the interview will be directed. Its gives a clear set of instructions for the interviewer, and as such, can provide reliable and comparable qualitative data (Stuckey, 2013: 57). An SSI is also designed to generate responses that are subjective with regards to a particular phenomenon or situation that respondents have experienced. When analysing an SSI data, participant responses are compared by item, and as a result, because of the fact that the questions asked are the same, data collected is comparable and may even be transformed numerically and quantified (McIntosh & Morse, 2015: 1). At universities A, B, C and D, three lectures in each university participated. However, only two lecturers were secured as participants at University E. The main reason for this outcome was that University E had only two English language lecturers responsible for first year students. All lecturers in all five universities were interviewed using online platforms such as Google Meet and Zoom meetings. This was to ensure that we comply with Covid-9 regulations. It was also time-saving and efficient.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data analysis commenced after the data was collected. A set comprehension passage test for students carried a total of 25 marks, but the analysis aggregated a total mark of 100. To analyse the students' test scores, we used Microsoft Excel and further categorised the scores using the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) grading system.

Questionnaire data was analysed by calculating frequencies and means of each item using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet software. The analysis applied the sentiment analysis to the open-ended questions whilst with closed-ended questions, frequencies and their percentages were done. The data was summarised using graphs. A brief discussion was then presented below each line graph.

Finally, data from semi-structured interviews was coded and given themes according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases. Lecturers' interviews were transcribed manually, meaning we had to listen, re-listen and capture to ensure we transcribe word to word and not miss anything. After the transcription was done, then we read the transcriptions to familiarise ourselves with the data before coding it. Familiarising yourself with the data means reading the transcription repeatedly to understand and capture general and specific ideas. Once the data was coded, we then grouped the overlapping codes into one category. This resulted in many categories, which were also combined based on their relationships. This led to the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data. The themes were then used to write findings in line with study objectives. Data was analysed using Microsoft Excel and Qualtrics software. The analysis package chosen to analyse close-ended questions included Microsoft excel. Qualtrics software was used to analyse open-ended questions. The chosen packages have wide options of statistical functions and capabilities that are efficient in analysing the research data.

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

In assessing the quality and soundness of this research, validity, reliability, objectivity credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were considered (Trochim, Donnely & Arora, 2016: 71).

3.7.1 Validity

Sürücü and Maslakçi (2020: 2696) state that a meaningful and appropriate interpretation of data that is obtained from a measuring tool as a result of the analyses determines validity. They further argue that it is often difficult to measure the validity of a measuring instrument. However, measuring validity is more significant than assessing and measuring the reliability of an instrument. According to Mohajan (2017: 14), validity is the degree to which the study results are honest. Validity of research refers to the extent to which requirements of scientific research methods have been followed during the process of producing the findings. They are compulsory

requirements for all kinds of studies. The researcher strove for honesty regarding the handling of data collection and analysis.

3.7.2 Reliability

Reliability is defined as the stability of a measuring instrument that is used and the consistency of the instrument over time. In simple terms, reliability refers to the ability of measuring instruments to yield similar results when used in different times. Reliability of the measuring instrument is an important factor to consider for the health of the study results (Sürücü & Maslakçi, 2020: 2707). Reliability also refers to a measuring tool that yields results that are consistent with equal values, and measures consistency, precision, repeatability and trustworthiness of research. In other qualitative research, the term 'dependability' is often used instead of reliability, referring to the degree to which a measuring tool yields consistent and stable (free from errors) results (Mohajan, 2017: 10). The data collected was reliable in that the instruments could be used in different times to yield similar results.

3.7.3 Objectivity

Researchers must be objective by controlling their personal preferences and prejudices, and interpret data clearly from the evidence and not their judgement. One must be able to interpret and convey authentic and true facts of the observation of any research study (Berger, 1991). This also refers to the willingness and ability to analyse evidence without bias. Objectivity in research means a value-free research; thus a major condition of a good research. It is the opposite of subjectivity (Nahrin, 2015: 1). Objectivity implies eliminating subjectivity when producing findings. It is referred to as a universal trait of the sciences, distinguishing them from points of view that are unscientific (Khatwani & Panhwar, 2019: 131). The researcher controlled her personal preferences and prejudices by handling data objectively.

3.7.4 Credibility

Credibility implies that the results should be credible from the view of the participant involved in research. This suggests the extent to which the results make sense

(Trochim, Donnely & Arora, 2016: 71). Credibility is believed to be equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research, and is concerned with the elements of truth-value. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation and member checking are suggested strategies to ensure credibility. When an individual designs his or her study, it is important that one determines which strategies to use as not all strategies are suitable for all the studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018: 121). In addition, credibility can also be achieved through the process of member checking to test the findings and interpretations with the participants (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017: 3). The aim of credibility is to create confidence that the results from the participant's perspective are credible, believable and true (Forero, Nahidi, De Costa, Mohsin, Fitzgerald, Gibson, McCarthy & Aboagye-Sarfo, 2018: 3). Triangulation assisted the researcher to ensure credibility of the results of the study.

3.7.5 Transferability

Transferability suggests that the results of the research should be generalised and transferred to other settings or contexts. This can be done by defining and describing the research contexts and assumptions central to the research (Trochim, Donnely & Arora, 2016: 71). Transferability simply means the extent to which the research results can be transferred and generalised to other contexts and settings (Forero et al., 2018: 3). When selecting the sample, the researcher ensured that the results could be transferred and generalised to other contexts such as HBUs in other provinces in SA. Transferability is concerned with the part of applicability. The researcher must provide a thorough and rich description of the research participants and its process to enable the reader to assess whether the research findings can be transferable to their own settings, also referred to as transferability judgement (Korstjens & Moser 2018: 122). It simply refers to the generalisability of research findings. By providing a thick description of the participants, the researcher will be assisting those who may need to transfer the findings to their own sites (Nowell et al., 2017: 3).

3.7.6 Dependability

Dependability emphasises that the researcher must always be in a position to account for the context that is ever-changing within which the research happens. The

researcher should describe and explain how these changes may affect the outcome of the results (Trochim, Donnely & Arora, 2016: 71). The researcher could account for the changing context of the research. Dependability also involves some part of consistency. The researcher must verify as to whether the process of data analysis is aligned with standards that are accepted for a specific design (Korstjens & Moser, 2018: 122). In order for one to achieve dependability, one should make sure that the research process is logical, traceable and well documented (Nowell et al., 2017: 3). Dependability also means that the researcher needs to ensure that the findings of a qualitative study can be repeated if the inquiry happened with the same group of participants, coders and contexts (Forero et al., 2018: 3).

3.7.7 Confirmability

Confirmability looks at the extent to which each researcher comes to the same conclusion of the results of a similar study. The results should be confirmed and corroborated by other researchers (Trochim, Donnely & Arora, 2016: 71). Confirmability involves some part of neutrality. The data collected reflects some neutrality. As a researcher, the interpretation should not include the researcher's specific viewpoints and preferences but should be grounded in the research data. The research must secure the inter-subjectivity of the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018: 122). Confirmability can further be explained as being concerned with ensuring that the researcher's findings and interpretations are derived clearly form the data. This requires the researcher to indicate how he or she has reached the conclusions and interpretations (Nowell et al., 2017: 3). In simple terms, confirmability means the extent to which the confidence that the findings would be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Forero et al., 2018: 3).

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Many academic disciplines consist of professional bodies that publish guidelines to help researchers to act ethically as they carry out their research (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006: 141). Most ethical issues in research are categorised in four ways: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional bodies (Hlalethwa, 2013).

3.8.1 Permission to conduct study

The researcher sought consent to conduct research from Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC). Permission to collect data was also sought from participating HBUs. These include registrars, English language HoDs, lecturers and students earmarked to participate in this study.

3.8.2 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Student participants from each selected institution signed consent forms to indicate their willingness to take part in the study (see Appendix F).

3.8.3 Confidentiality, anonymity and protection from harm

The participants were assured of their right to privacy. They were told that they may choose to remain anonymous if they so wish. Participants were also protected from mental harm by being told that they would be allowed to withdraw from the study at any given time should they so wish. Participants were briefed on what is expected of them and were not manipulated into participating unwillingly or willingly in the study.

The next chapter presents, analyses and interprets the results collected for the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents, analyses and interprets the results collected through the following three instruments: a criterion-referenced test, a questionnaire and an interview.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF THE CRITERION-REFERENCED TEST

The first instrument employed was a criterion-referenced test, which aimed to determine the level of RC of the participants through a reading comprehension passage (See Appendix A). The test results are discussed below.

Table 4.1: Students' CR Test scores

Mark out 25	Total number of students	Percentages
2	1	8%
3	7	12%
4	3	16%
5	5	20%
6	8	24%
7	20	28%
8	4	32%
9	6	36%
10	6	40%
11	7	44%
12	5	48%
13	5	52%
15	3	60%
16	1	64%

Table 4.1 above indicates that the majority of students performed poorly because more than 55% of the students obtained between 0 – 29%. These are marks from 2 to 7 out 25. A further 12% achieved between 30 -37%, which are marked 8 and 9 out of 25. Twenty-two percent (22%) obtained between 40 -49%, which are 10, 11 and 12 scores. Six percent obtained between 50-59%, that is, 13 marks. Only 5% received a score between 60 -69%, which is 15 and 16, respectively.

The types of questions that were asked included those that required students to make inferences and recall questions (also known as factual questions). Inferential questions are those that require students to use prior knowledge and what they read from the reading comprehension passage and gave answers by inferring. The answers are not necessarily within the reading passage itself. Examples of inferential questions were 'How do you know that the number of homeless people appear to be rising?' and 'What do you think causes young people to migrate to neighbouring countries?' More than 80% of the students failed to correctly answer these questions, with just fewer students whose attempts were correct. Recall questions included 'According to the passage, what is the approximate number of homeless people?' Since the answer was in the passage for this question, 100% of the students answered it correctly. However, there were still some recall questions that proved to be difficult to students as more than 50% could not provide the correct answers to questions such as, 'Why is it difficult to obtain statistics on the number of homeless people?' and 'Why do migrants find it difficult to return home?' The answers to these questions were contained in the passage, but most students (more than 50%) still performed poorly. This suggests that there is reading comprehension incompetency amongst first year students at HBUs.

The majority of students that obtained a score between 2 – 7 marks out of 25 relied on recall questions as they lacked understanding of how to answer inferential questions. Students should be taught different types of questions that can be asked based on a reading comprehension passage, and how they are expected to answer each type. This may improve how students answer reading comprehension passage questions and, will, in the process, enhance their reading comprehension.

Furthermore, the test scores were analysed using the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) grading system to categorise the students' obtained test scores and to indicate

their achievement level. Therefore, Table 4.2 below was used to determine the reading levels.

Table 4.2: Students scores interpretation using Department of Basic Education

Achievement level	Achievement Description	Marks %
7	Outstanding achievement	80 – 100
6	Meritorious achievement	70 – 79
5 (4 students)	Substantial achievement	60 – 69
4 (5 students)	Adequate achievement	50 – 59
3 (18 students)	Moderate achievement	40 – 49
2 (10 students)	Elementary achievement	30 – 39
1 (45 students)	Not achieved	0 – 29

In total, 82 students from the sampled universities wrote the comprehension passage test. The breakdown of their performance is as follows:

o 55% of the students scored level 1, which ranges from 0% - 29%

o 12% of the students scored level 2, which ranges from 30% - 39%

o 22% of the students scored level 3, which ranges from 40% - 49%

o 6% of the students scored level 4, which ranges from 50% - 59%

o 5% of the students scored level 5, which ranges from 60% - 69%

The results indicate a poor achievement level of students who wrote the comprehension passage test on the reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs in South Africa. The results show that over 55% of the students scored a not achieved mark, and nearly 12% scored an elementary mark. This suggests that students enter the university with poor RC competency levels, and this immediately posts a threat to their academic performance. A study conducted by Bharuthram (2017: 59) revealed that South African students enter higher education with lower levels of reading literacy. The study also indicated that the majority of participants lacked reading exposure that begins at home. As a result, the children go into the schooling system with very little exposure to books. This leads to students entering higher education with some literacy that is not well-

developed for higher education, thereby affecting their academic performance. Many scholars posit that developing a reading culture is a one way of boosting academic success (Ruterana, 2012: 19). Thus, a well-developed RC ability is the main goal that can lead to students' educational success (Khoshsima & Rezaeian Tiyar, 2014: 134). One of the contributors to the poor reading comprehension competency level is the inability by students to comprehend reading tasks. The analysis also found that five in 10 students struggle to comprehend reading tasks most of the time, which render them unable to answer the questions posed. Below is a summary table that shows the proportionality breakdown:

Table 4.3: Reading tasks comprehension

I comprehend reading tasks	49%
I do not comprehend reading tasks	3%
I sometimes comprehend reading tasks	48%

These findings suggest that almost half (49%) of the surveyed students are certain and confident that they can understand what they read, and 48% said "they sometimes comprehend reading tasks". This is not a good indication given that English is predominantly the medium of instruction in most HBUs. Poor vocabulary has also emerged as a contributor to the poor RC competency level. In lecturers' interviews, it was found that students have a very limited word bank. One lecturer gave the response: "You find a student who's responding to a question, you see how they're struggling to find a word, to explain what they're trying to say. And you will even see how that sort of what disheartens them. It takes them down because they cannot continue with their train of thought. And you see it in their writing and the repetitiveness of certain word because it shows that they have a limited amount of words." Lacking vocabulary poses a danger to students' ability to understand what they read and to answer the questions correctly. A student that lacks vocabulary is likely not to express their ideas in a manner that one can comprehend.

Moreover, research indicates that vocabulary can have an influence on RC. Word comprehension has a direct impact on a student's ability to read a passage timeously. The students are able to understand the meaning of words quickly if they are familiar with the words and what they mean. As such, vocabulary development and

comprehension have a direct relationship with literacy when considering the speed and simplicity of being able to decode meaning (Moore, 2014: 7). This explains why the students performed poorly in the RC passage test because vocabulary and comprehension go hand-in-hand and the two cannot be separated. For a student to comprehend a larger text, he or she must have knowledge of smaller words that make up the whole text (Boyer, 2017: 1).

4.3 ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The second instrument used to collect data from the students was a questionnaire, with the questions designed to explore the level of reading comprehension of the students and to determine the RCSs that the students are familiar with and use to aid their comprehension.

4.3.1 Biographical data

Biographical data, in this case, is from a question that was designed to determine the field of study of the students. The first entering English language learning students were from different study disciplines.

Table 4.4 below illustrates the different disciplines the students belonged to.

Table 4.4: Field of study

Degree registered for	Frequency	Frequency %
Bachelor of arts	31	37.8%
Bachelor of science	25	30.5%
Bachelor education	12	14.6%
Bachelor of commerce	5	6.1%
Bachelor of library & information science	2	2.4%
Bachelor of health sciences	1	1.2%
Bachelor of youth development	1	1.2%
Bachelor of laws	1	1.2%
HSBAVD	1	1.2%

HSBAYD	1	1.2%
HWR – Hydrology	1	1.2%
MNBBSE	1	1.2%
Total	**82**	**100%**

According to Table 4.4, the degrees that the students registered for varied widely. Most of the students registered for Bachelor of Arts (30.5%), while a slightly less number registered for Bachelor of Science (30.5%). A much lower number registered for Bachelor of Education (14.6%). However, few students (6.1%) registered for Bachelor of Commerce (6.1%). A few students (2.4%) registered for Bachelor of Library Information Science and half that number (1.2%) each registered for seven different degrees: Bachelor of Health Sciences, Bachelor of Youth Development, Bachelor of Laws, HSBAVD, HSBAYD, HWR – Hydrology and MNBBSD.

The sample consists of students from different qualifications. However, they were all registered for the English course, as it is mandatory in most universities that first year students register for the subject. English is a medium of instruction, teaching and learning in institutions of higher learning. It is also a language that the students use in writing. In addition, most academic texts and materials are written in the English language. Thus, it is very important that students across all streams register for the English subject. English has been dominating in international academic publications, and has become the main language of scientific communication, Social Sciences and Humanities. It is also now dominating in disciplines such as Medicine, Mathematics, Sciences, Psychology, History, Engineering and so on. Further, English for academic purposes (EAP), General English (GE) and English for specific purposes (ESP) courses are taught at universities to meet different needs of students in many universities globally (AL-Khalil, 2015).

Figure 4.1: Students' Grade 12 Pass Symbol
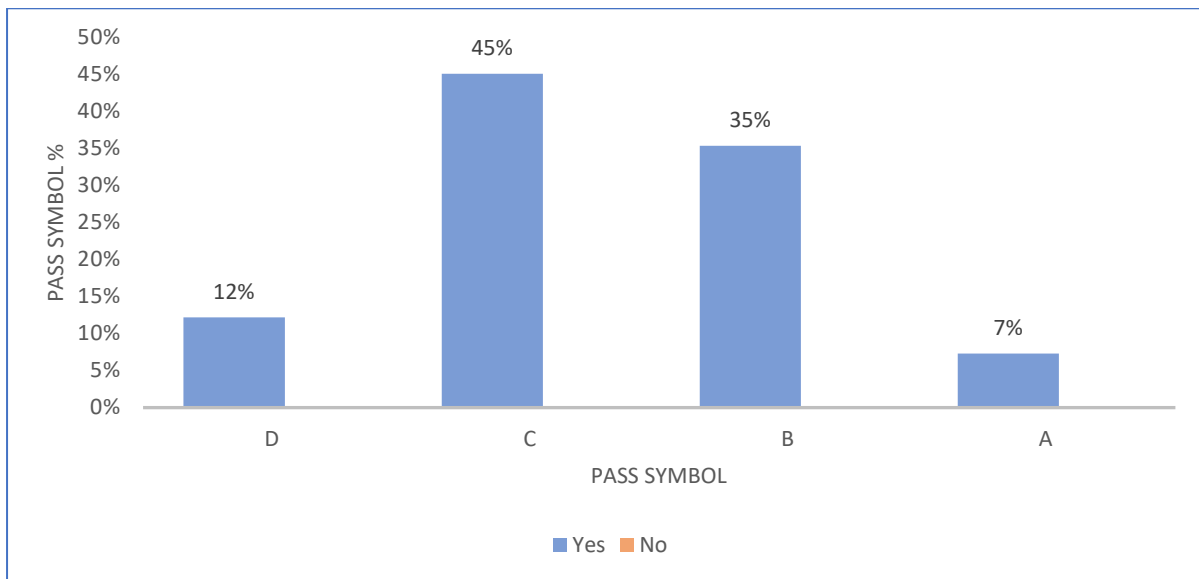
Students were asked to indicate whether they have passed EFAL or EHL examination at matric level and the symbol obtained. The above graph shows that all 82 survey students have passed EFAL or EHL examination at matric level, with majority of them (45%) getting symbol C or level 5. Only 7% of them got distinctions. A distinction is percentage of marks between 80-100%, which is outstanding achievement. In addition, 12% of the students obtained symbol D and 35% obtained symbol B. Symbol B is when a student has achieved percentage of marks between 70 -79%, which is a meritorious achievement. Symbol C is percentage of marks between 60-69%, and this is a substantial achievement. Symbol D, on the other hand, is percentage of marks between 50-59%, which is adequate achievement. The students' Grade 12 achievement levels in English are good. However, since the students have performed poorly in the comprehension passage, and that they have indicated that they struggle with understanding academic texts, this shows that there might a gap between the English language taught in basic schooling level and the 'English' that students encounter at institutions of higher learning. In addition, another factor could be that the students enter universities with little knowledge of RCSs that they can employ to cope with extensive academic vocabulary as RCSs are not adequately taught at basic school level (Cf. Klapwijk, 2015: 2).

Pertaining to what students understood by RC, 5% of the students opted not to answer the question, and 38% of the answers indicated that either the students did not

understand what RC is or that they did not understand the question itself. For example, one student said: "The comprehension is focusing more on the migration that is causing by the lack of job opportunities." Another said: "Reading comprehension is a short story that you have to read and answer the questions after reading." However, 57% of students' responses had to do with the ability to understand and interpret the message conveyed by the writer. They also reiterated that although RC in their field will mean to answer the set questions, it also uncovers new knowledge as well as enhance their vocabulary. One student said: "Reading a comprehension comes with gaining new knowledge, beside the fact that you have to answer questions that follow."

Below are some of the cases that were made by the students:

"It is basically the concept of reading a passage for understanding".

"Ability to understand a passage or information provided to read".

"Ability to read and understand by processing the information you have been reading".

"Reading comprehension is basically about reading information it could be on the textbook or newspaper and understanding what it says".

"You need to have an understanding of what the comprehension is about and able to analyse it".

"By reading comprehension is to understand and help to think openly so that you can be able to understand".

"What I understand about reading a comprehension is that you must read for understanding".

"It's where one reads something written down with understanding and make certain connections with what is written or just simply process whatever is being read".

"Reading a comprehension means to read a text, understand it and learn or know some information from it".

"It is the ability to read, analyse and understand the meaning and purpose of the content".

"Reading comprehension is understanding and interpretation of what I read and to think deeply of what I have read".

Pertaining to the types of English texts that students were expected to read at first year level, the results show that the majority of them indicated that they were expected to read textbooks, essays, research articles and case studies, with a minority of them stating that they were expected to read reports. This is captured in the word cloud below.

Figure 4.2: Type of texts students are expected to read at first level.

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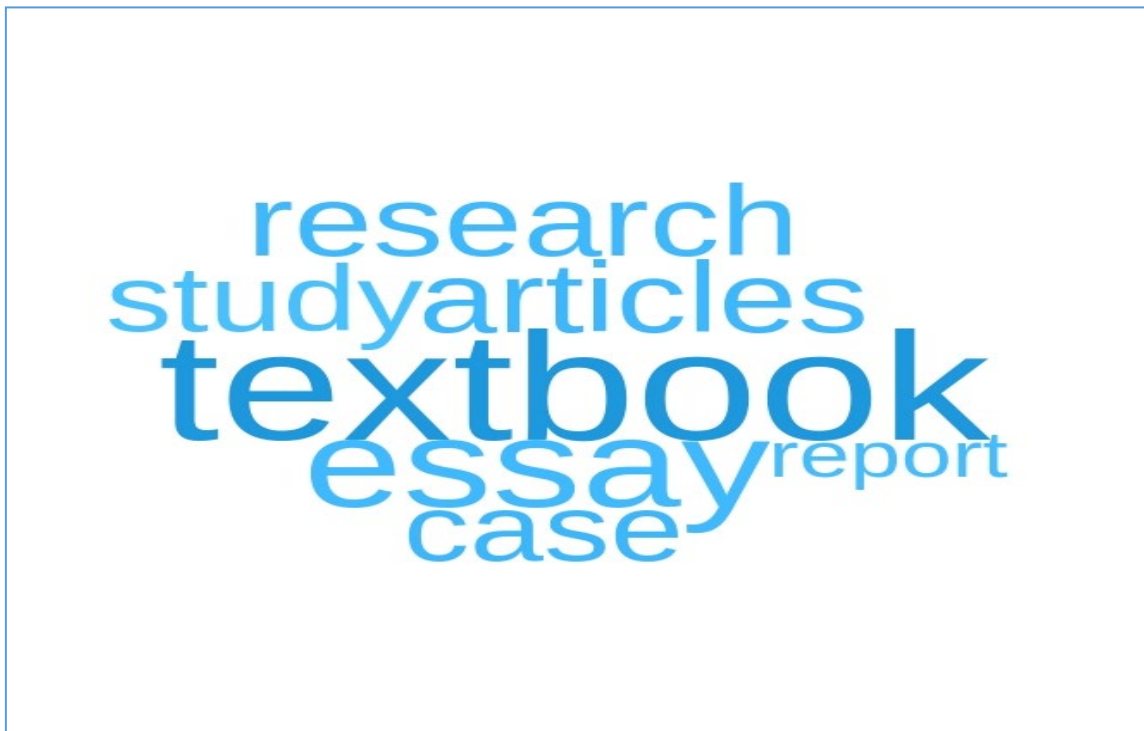
The above figure shows the types of texts that students are expected to read at universities. In addition to this, they are also expected to read study guides, slide presentations, course packs and websites. Further, the students are expected to read dissertations/theses produced by postgraduate students. Research indicates that textbooks are still dominate and widely used at universities (Pecorari, Shar, Irvine, Malmstrom & Mezek, 2012: 236). Furthermore, academic texts can be manifested in varied types such as book reviews, research proposals, research reports and scientific articles that are simple, concise, objective and logical in nature (Salam, Mahfud & Nurhusna, 2018: 123).

Figure 4.3: Level at which RC was taught to students
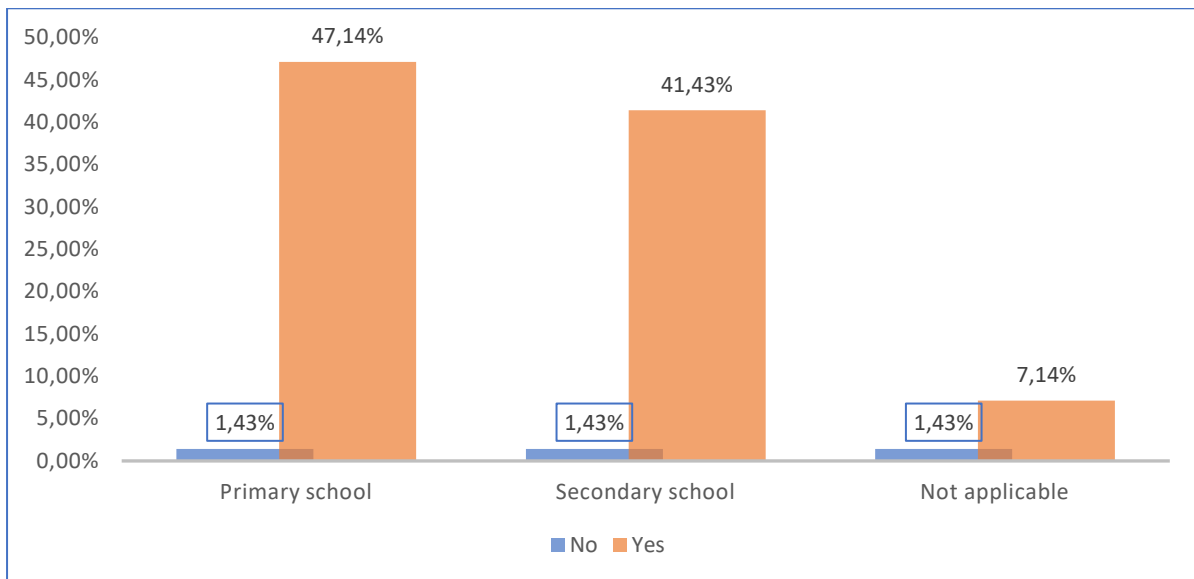
Regarding the level of study that they were taught reading comprehension, the students were asked if they were taught RC and to state the level of the study during which they were taught (RC). The figure below is a representation of the proportion of students that were previously taught reading comprehension, and the level of study during which it happened. The representation shows that over 95% of the students said that they were taught RC. A majority of them (47.14) were taught this at primary level, while a slightly lower number (41.43%) was taught RC at secondary school level. However, the remaining 5% indicated that they were not taught reading comprehension.

4.3.2 Students that would like to attend an RC refresher course

The students were also asked to indicate whether they would like to attend a reading comprehension refresher course. The results are presented in Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4: Students that would like to attend RC Fresher Course
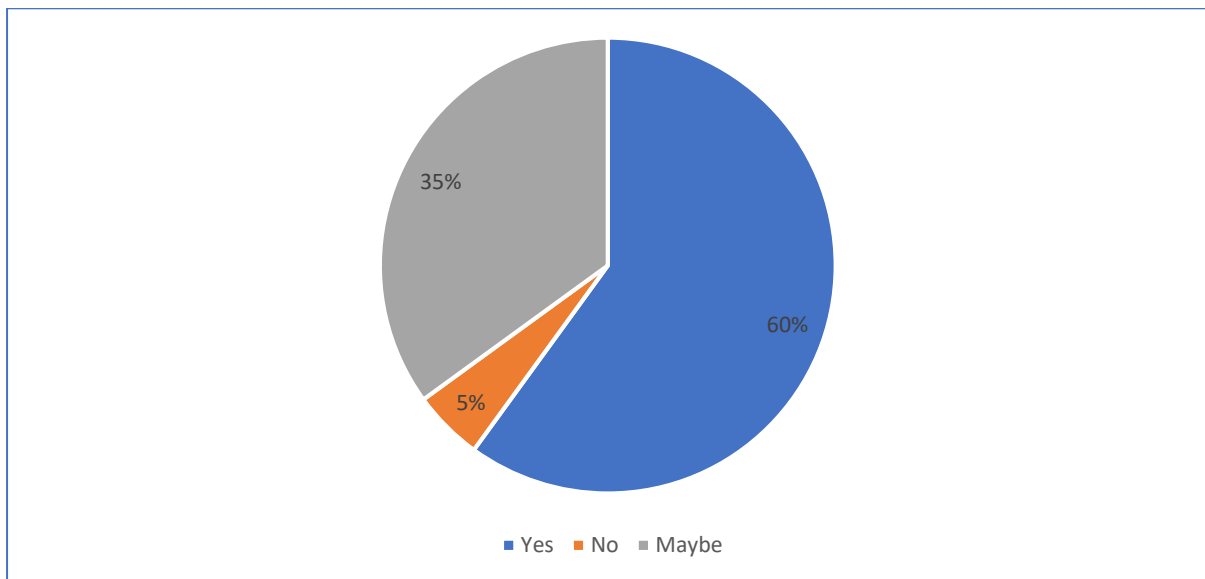
The results show that six in ten surveyed students (60%) would like to attend the comprehension refresher course, with over one-third (35%) of them being uncertain of the initiative. The remaining 5% indicated that they do not want to attend the course. This suggests that most first entering English language students at HBUs would like some RC support.

In Figure 4.5 below, a summary of results from the following three questions that the students were asked are presented: 'Do you reflect on what you have read?', 'Do you self-monitor your comprehension?', and 'Do you sometimes employ reading strategies?'

Figure 4.5: Use of RC strategies, reflection and self-monitoring
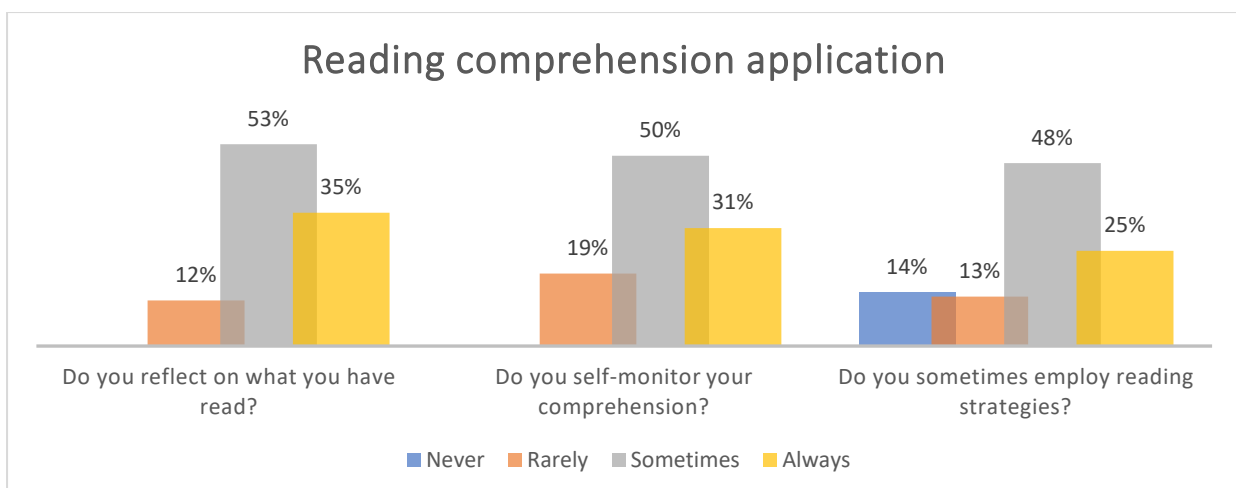
Figure 4.5 above presents results on the students' use of RC strategies, reflection and self-monitoring. Fifty-three percent (53%) of the students indicated that they reflect on what they have read sometimes; 35% indicated that they always reflect on what they have read; with 12% percent indicating that they rarely reflect on what they read. One of the ways that the students can enhance their understanding of a text is by reflecting on what they read. This could be done by developing questions about the text or summarisation (see. 2.13.4 & 2.13.5).

As for self-monitoring, 50% of the students stated that they self-monitor what they read sometimes, whereas 31% stated that they always do self-monitoring, and the remaining 19% indicated that they rarely self-monitor their comprehension. For one to be able to understand a text, one must be able to think about thinking; and think about what they are doing when they are reading (Çakici, 2017). This is a process known as metacognition; knowledge and control that a student has over their cognitive process (Karbalaei, 2016: 6).

When asked about the use of RC comprehension strategies, 48% of the students stated that they only employ reading comprehension sometimes in their reading, 25% indicated that they use RCSs always, 13% indicated that they rarely use them and 14% indicated that they never use reading comprehension strategies. This is a cause for concern because reading comprehension strategies are important as they aid comprehension. Research indicates that good readers always use RCSs to aid their comprehension. To enhance RC, students must employ several RCSs as they are very important when it comes to RC. The use of RCSs enables students to become comprehensive readers, thereby monitoring their own comprehension (Safarpoor, Ghaniabadi & Nafchi, 2015: 68).

Figure 4.6: Whether students consider themselves good readers or not
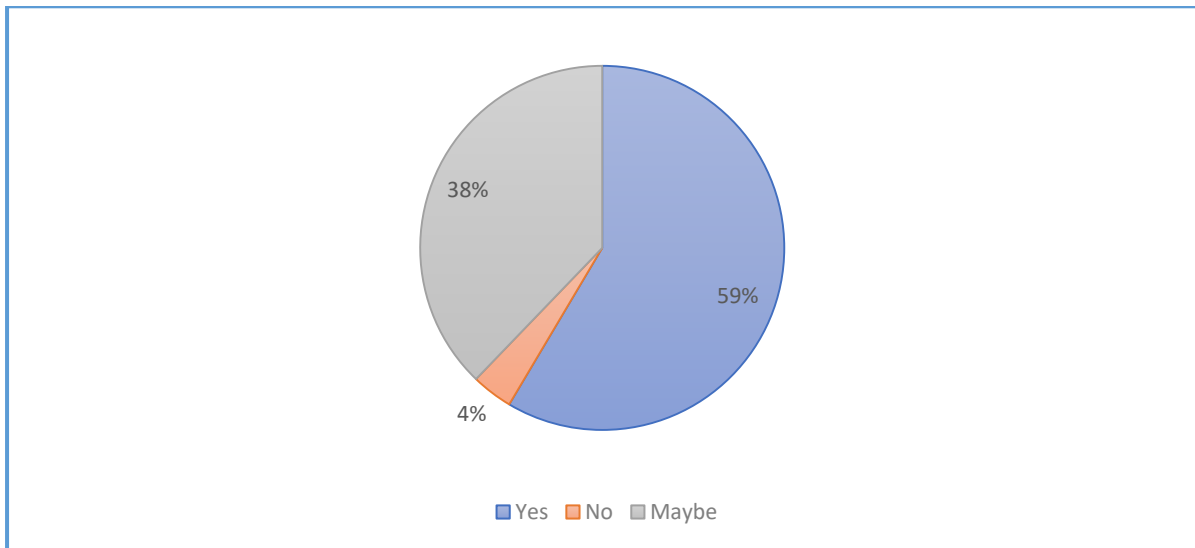
Figure 4.6 above captures the various answers from the students when they were asked to indicate whether they are good readers or not. As shown above, 59% of the students indicated that they are good readers, with 38% being not sure if they are good readers or not, indicated by 'maybe'. Only 4% indicated that they are not good readers. At a university level, the students should not be struggling with reading as they have already gone through 12 years of schooling. This gives an indication that RC is not adequately taught at the basic level.

4.3.3 Formulation of new ideas from reading

Table 4.5: Formulation of new ideas from reading

Question	Yes (I formulate a new idea from reading)	No (I do not formulate a new idea from reading)
Do you formulate a new idea from reading?	83%	17%

With regards to the formulation of new ideas from reading, 83% of the students indicated that they could formulate a new idea when they read, and are able to do so by visualising, brainstorming, summarising, interpreting, predicting and paraphrasing

what they read, including the use of prior knowledge. This then suggests that students can decode what they read. Below are cases from the students:

"Simple imagine a specific scenario either write it down or just keep it my head, after imagining it definitely brainstorm it to connect it with the story I read or reading".

"What I'm reading I picture it in real life situation".

"I think reading sparks your imagination therefore new idea can formulate from reading".

"I do create meaning from a reading response by imagination".

"I take everything written from the text that I will be reading and try to use my own knowledge to understand and keep an open mind".

"I formulate new ideas by brain storming".

"…I mentioned how reading increases my word bank, which some unleashes and teaches me different methods I can use to paraphrase with at most comprehensibility when given other tasks from different modules".

"Reading passages always have meanings or ideas sometimes figuratively so I formulate new ideas from my own understanding".

"I try to predict what will happen in the passage and how things will eventually unfold and conclude".

"While reading, I am able to have my own perspective on the article/comprehension that I'm reading thus formulating new ideas".

In response to the question whether they enjoy reading for comprehension, the majority of students (81%) indicated that they enjoy reading for comprehension, while 19% indicated that they did not enjoy reading. Students were then asked to indicate what they specifically enjoyed reading. Figure 4.7 below shows specifically what the students indicated what they enjoy about reading for comprehension.

Figure 4.7: What students enjoy about reading
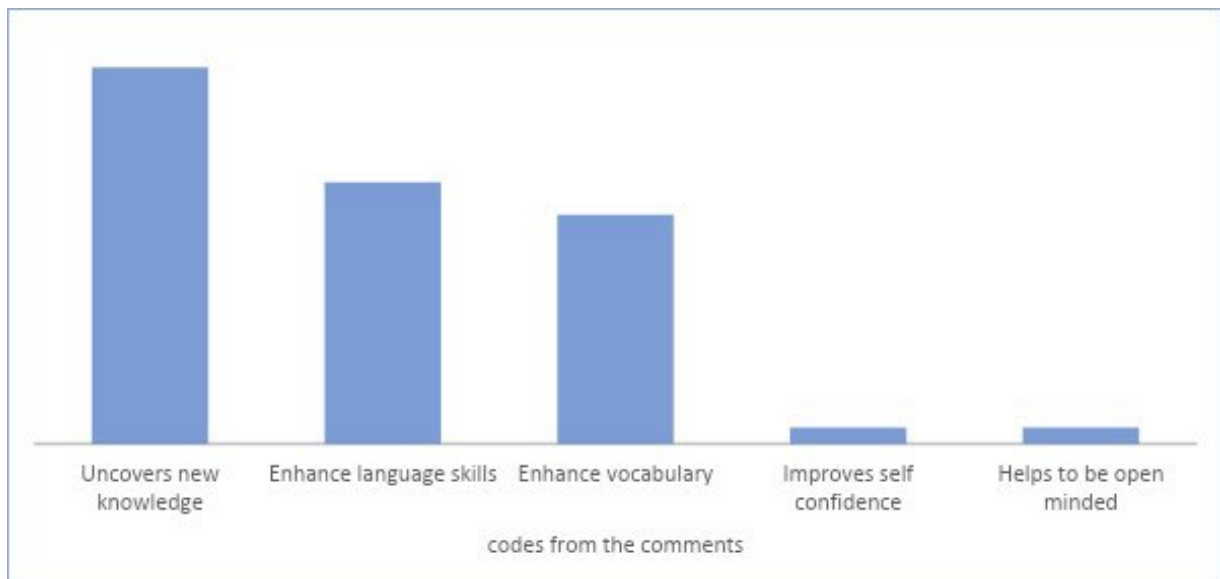
The chart above (Figure 4.7) shows that RC enables students to uncover new information, improve their reading and writing skills as well as their vocabulary. The views are presented below.

"I enjoy reading comprehension because I gain meaning from what I read. Reading increases my understanding of the comprehension and at the end it helps become an active reader. Sometimes I read for fun to gain more knowledge".

"It helps me in understanding things that I didn't know, also help me in my reading skills and vocabulary".

"It is another way of gaining new knowledge without going the long way, and it improves my reading skills and tackles my understanding".

"All comprehensions contain certain information based on what is happening in the world so when I read, I know that I would have obtained new information".

"Because I will have a stronger reading comprehension, and better writing and spelling check".

"I enjoy reading for comprehension because I get to learn new words that I didn't know and also this increase my vocabulary to be better".

"Reading for comprehension helps in increasing one's vocabulary and I can also master my reading skills in case I come through a tough word".

"It allows me to assess my vocabulary and ability to understand what is written, therefore useful in my academics".

"It is because I am being exposed on new words. It also helps to increase my vocabulary and get used to reading".

_____

An analysis of reading comprehension challenges sometimes experienced by students revealed that they faced varied reading comprehension challenges. Lack of concentration and understanding, poor vocabulary and an inability to decode and interpret the passage are themes that emerged from analysing this section of the study. Students also stated that the length of the passage plays a part in their interest to read. These views are highlighted in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6: RC challenges experienced by students

Participant	Statement
UCP15	"Having to encounter bombastic words and not knowing the meaning".
UAP2	"How to take out few important ideas from the passage and not knowing or understanding the moral of the passage".
UCP3	"Understanding the message conveyed in a comprehension when complex information is given, understanding some of words used meaning or to establish figure of speeches".
UCP7	"I struggle to understand some words that the writer might have used. I take long to understand or figure out the main ideas written in the comprehension".
UBP7	"Sometimes the passage might hold little words which makes it hard to quickly find answers or understand it better".
UBP16	"Like if sometimes the comprehension is too long, and you have less time and finding words that may be hard for you to understand the meaning".
UAP16	"Confusion about the meaning of words and sentences. Inability to connect ideas in a passage and lack of concentration during reading".
UAP13	"When there is plenty of scientific words or bombastic words used, I lose interest leading me to not understanding the message or

purpose of the entire comprehension. When there is too much reference or many people introduced for the purpose of proving a fact, I lose focus, the comprehension becomes too formal and does not fully engage with the reader. When the comprehension is too long".

Figure 4.8: Ability by students to summarise, extract and create meaning, and comprehend reading tasks
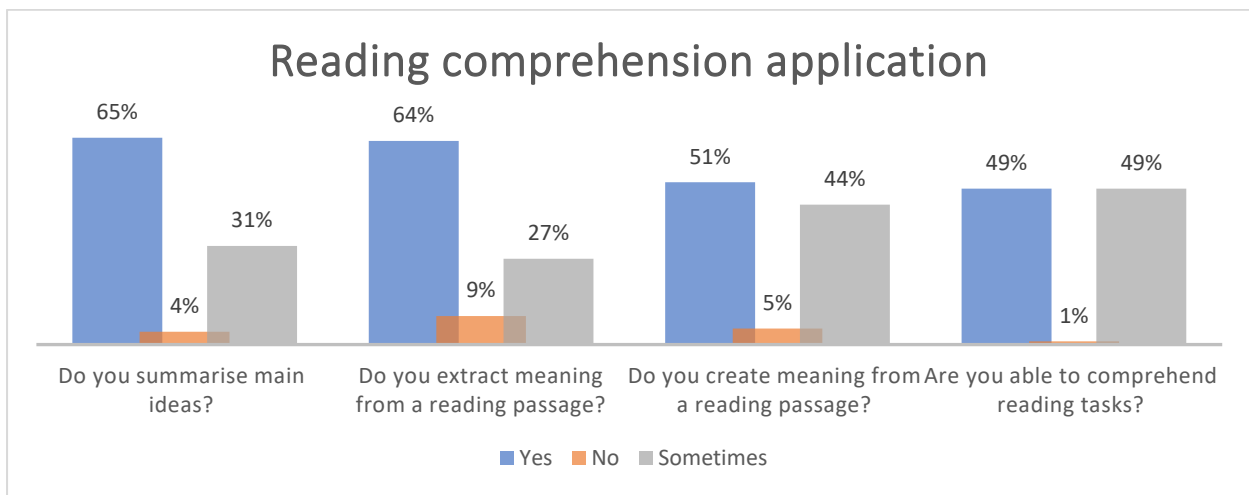
Figure 4.8 above shows that 65% of the students indicated that they are able to summarise what they read, 31% indicated that they sometimes summarise and 4% indicated that they do not summarise what they read at all. To create meaning from the passage, the students must be able to make use of RCCs such as summarising. One way of improving RC is to teach students the skill of summarising the texts that they read. It is a very important skill encompassing what can be employed by effective students (Khoshsima & Rezaeian Tiyar, 2014: 135). Students that are able to summarise correctly should be able to create meaning from texts. Since some students indicated that they do not summarise what they read, it explains why 44% of them indicated that they are not always able to create meaning from the text, and the other 5% arguing that they do not, at all, create meaning from the text. As scholars have already posited, the use of RCSs can aid reading comprehension.

The above figure also demonstrates that 49% of the students indicated that they are able to comprehend what they read, and the other 49% indicated that they are able to

understand what the read sometimes. The other 1% of the students indicated that they are unable to understand what they read. These results correlate with research that indicated that some South African students enter higher education with poor RC as such they tend to struggle academically. Many studies conducted at a national and an international level indicate a growing percentage of students that enter university with insufficient reading literacy which then lead students to struggle in achieving the necessary academic requirements of their discipline (Bharuthram, 2017 :50).

Figure 4.9: Use of reading comprehension tools, activation of prior knowledge, and support from lecturers
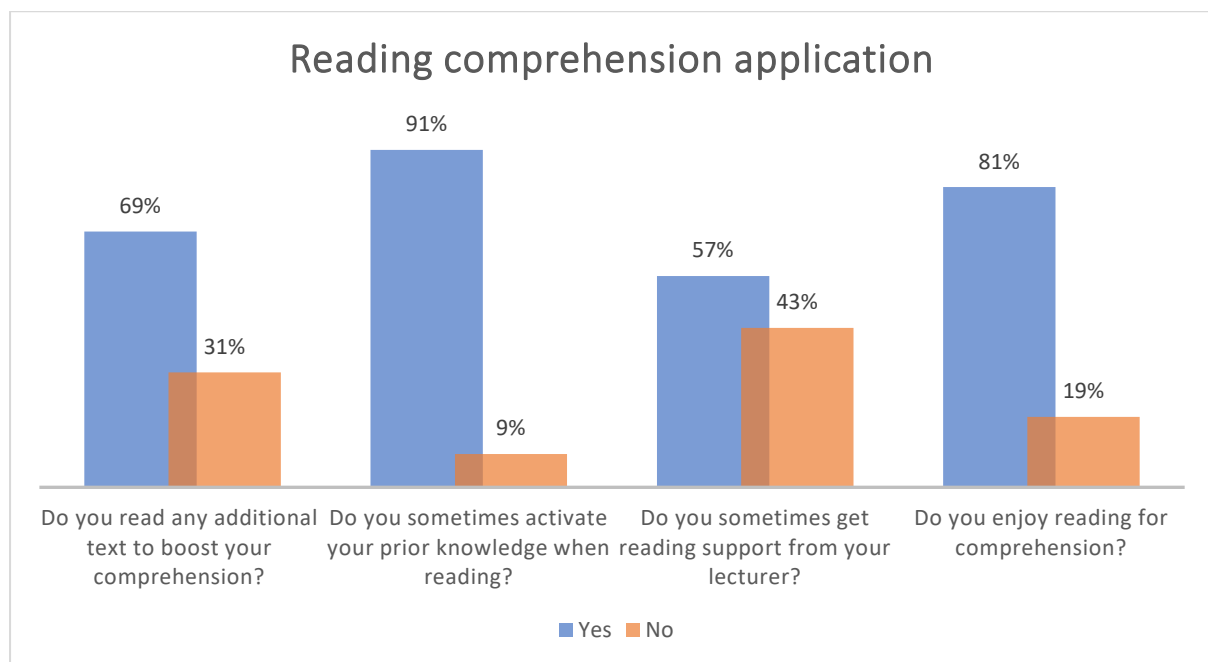
Reading comprehension application in Figure 4.9 above presents a summary of various questions from the questionnaire. Sixty-nine percent (69%) of the students indicated that they read additional texts to boost their comprehension, with 31% indicating that they do not read any additional text. Majority of the students, that is 91%, highlighted that they activate prior knowledge when reading to aid their comprehension. The use of prior knowledge when reading has been shown to aid reading comprehension and it is one of the most effective RC strategies. However, it is important that the students activate the correct prior knowledge; otherwise this strategy will not be of any use or efficient to them.

Fifty-three percent (53%) of the students indicated that they get reading support from their lecturers, and 47% stated that they did not get any support from their lecturers. Lecturers indicated that they try to give support to students with reading comprehension challenges through individual consultation time and by encouraging them to read constantly as well as to read varied texts. Lastly, the figure above indicates that 81% of the students mentioned that they enjoy reading for comprehension, while only 19% indicated that they did not enjoy reading for comprehension.

Figure 4.10: Use of reading tools that aid comprehension
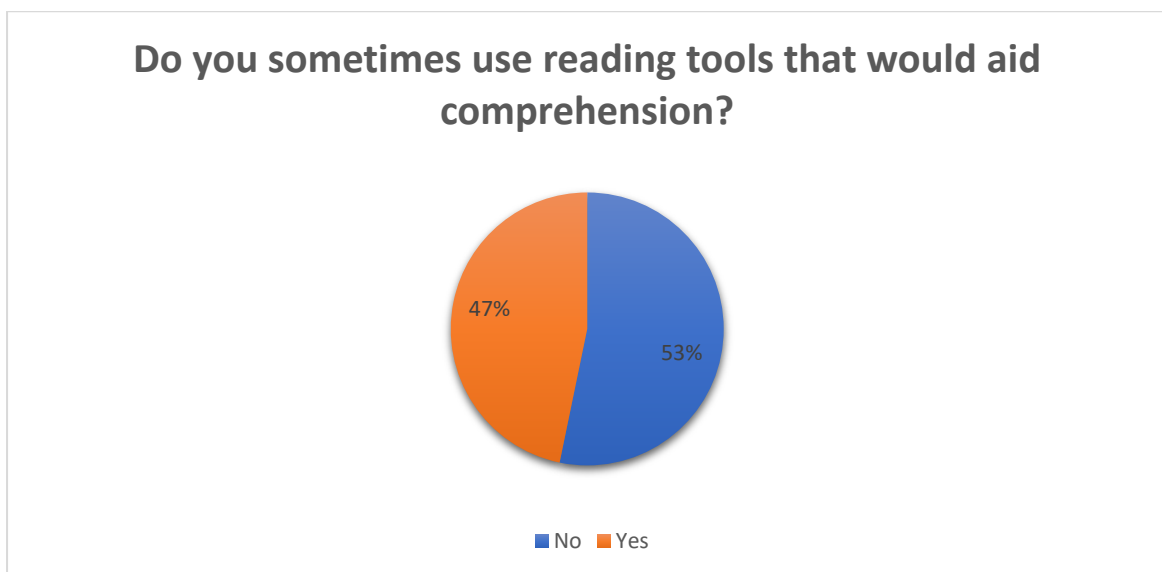
Students were asked to indicate whether they employ reading tools that would aid their comprehension. Figure 4.10 above suggests that most respondents do not use reading tools to aid comprehension. This explains why the participants performed poorly in a reading comprehension test (cf. 4.2). Good readers interact with a text to expand their understanding of a text presented before them (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016: 183). Scholars agree that in order for RC to take place, students must employ several reading tools in order to aid their comprehension (Stols, 2012: 38). Below is a word cloud that shows the reading tools employed by the proportion that employs them:

Figure 4.11: Word cloud of the most frequent reading tools that emerged from the text analysis
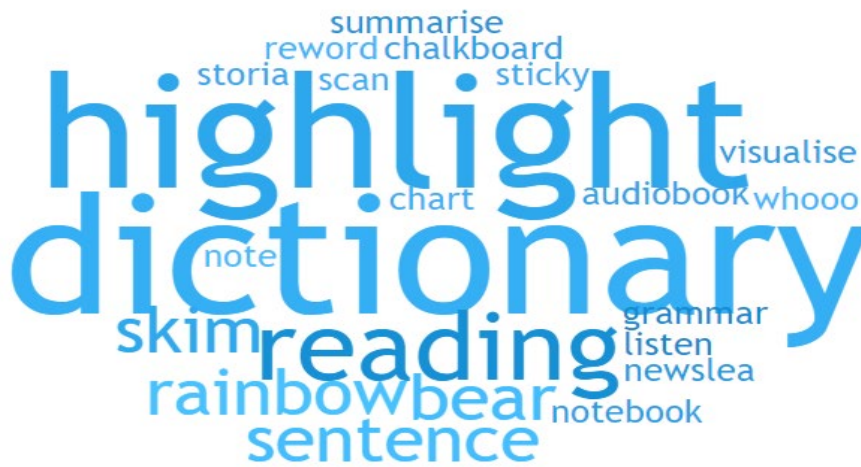
It is evident from the word cloud above that dictionaries and highlighters are the most employed reading tools, with scanning, rewording, scanning and others being the least employed tools. The most common reading tools, also referred to as skills, are skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive reading (Delgadillo, Hernandez & Hernandez, 2015: 121). These skills are significant as they assist students with their RC. For instance, skimming can help students with confidence and comprehension such that they can be able to read and comprehend the text without having to go through every word. Scanning, on the other hand, assists students to locate particular information very quickly in a text (see 2.8).

Figure 4.12: Students that employ reading comprehension strategies

Do you sometimes employ reading strategies?

- Always
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes

25%
14%
13%
48%
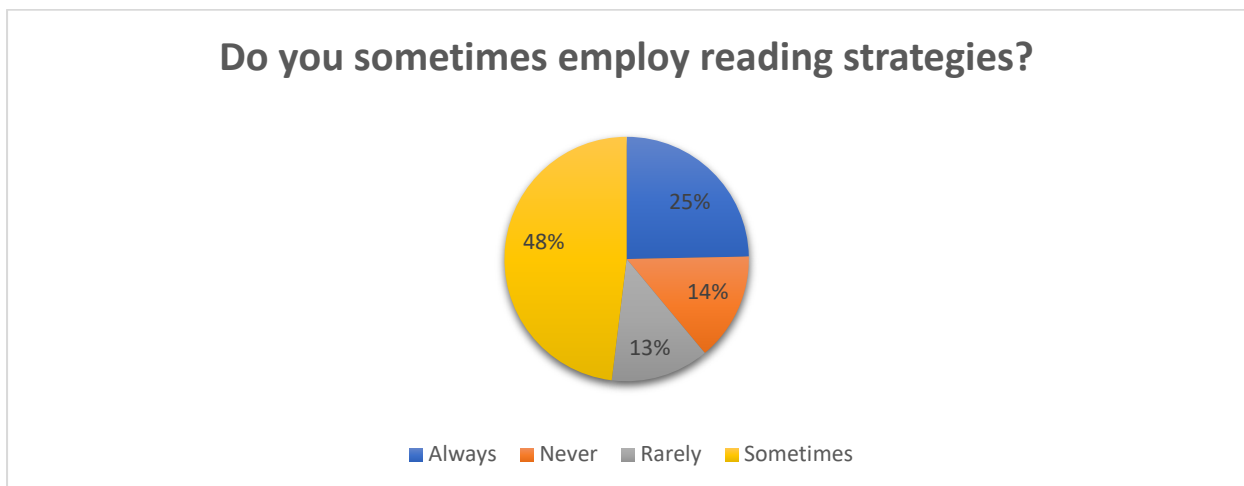
Figure 4.12 above shows that 48% of respondents indicated that they sometimes employed reading comprehension strategies to aid their comprehension, with a quarter of them indicating that they always make use of reading comprehension strategies. However, nearly equal percentages of students (13% and 14%) rarely and never employed RC strategies, respectively.

Figure 4.13: Reading comprehension strategies mostly used by students
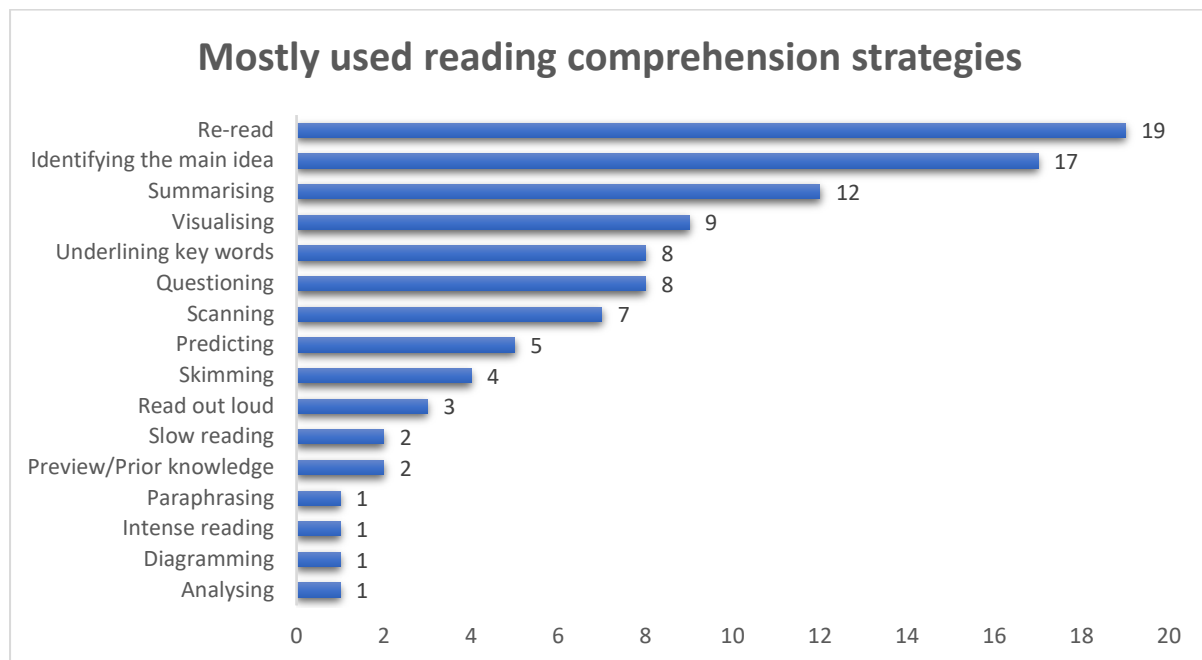
Students who use reading strategies have stated that reading a passage more than once and identifying the main idea are the key strategies that aid RC. For example, one student gave a detailed response: "I read a comprehension passage twice, at first I read to know what it is about then secondly I read while highlighting the main ideas". Another student supported the sentiment: "Always take time reading. Repeat reading the comprehension for understanding. Point out main ideas while reading to help answer questions." This strategy can be categorised as skimming, which is one of the reading skills that is also known to aid RC. Summarising the main points from the passage and visualisation also emerged as adopted strategies. The main RCSs which could be identified include the use of prior knowledge, making inferences, prediction, questioning, visualisation and summarising the text (See Cognitive strategies).

Figure 4.14: Reading comprehension prospects
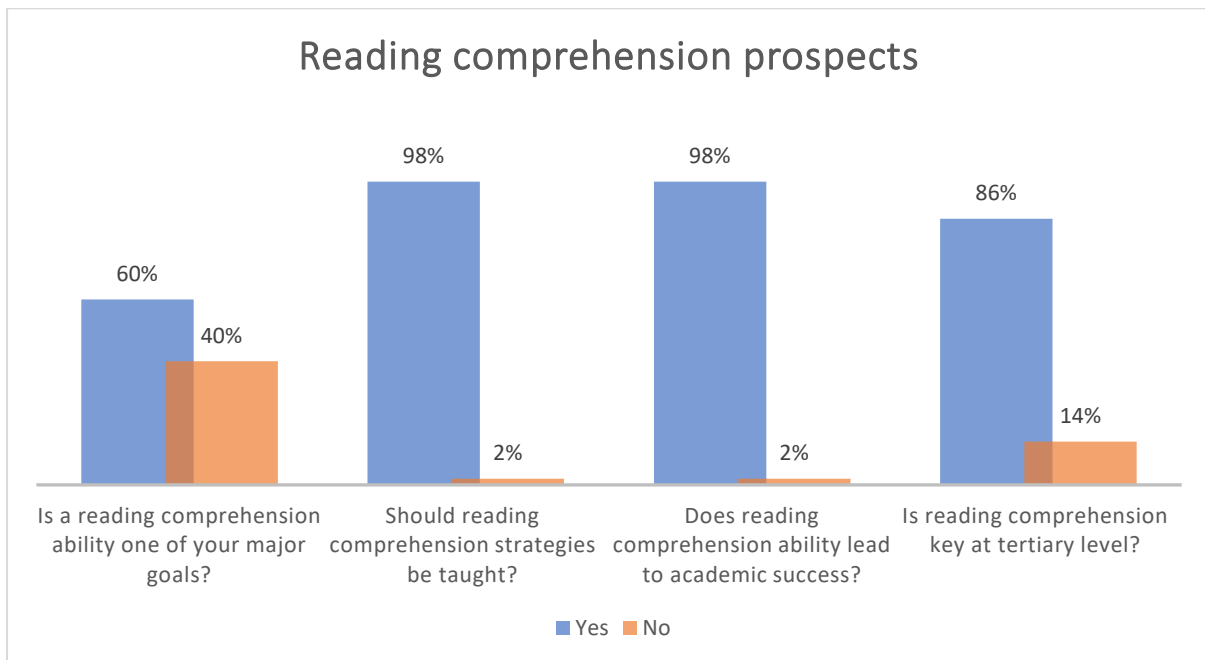
The figure above summarises the answers to the following four questions that were asked students:

Is reading comprehension ability one of your major goals?

Sixty percent (60%) responded that RC ability is one of their major goals, and the rest, which is 40%, stated that it is not. This is a cause for concern since RC is one of the main tools of academic success (cf. Ruterana, 2012: 19, 2.7.1). As such, it should be made a major goal by any reader or student.

Should reading comprehension strategies be taught?

Ninety-eight percent (98%) of the students agreed that they should be taught reading comprehension strategies, with 2% disagreeing. It was pointed out that RCSs should be taught as early as the basic schooling years (cf. Spaull, 2016; Reading Comprehension). Therefore, the use of one or several RCSs can aid RC. It is for this reason that first entering English language students at HBUs in SA should be taught RCSs.

Does reading comprehension ability lead to academic success?

Approximately 98% of the students concur that RC ability leads to academic success, whereas 2% answered that it does not. It was also emphasised that RC competency leads to academic success.

Is reading comprehension key at tertiary level?

According to the students, reading comprehension is important at tertiary level because it enables them to read with understanding and build on their existing knowledge (cf. Theoretical framework). It was revealed that it also helps them to create meaning, enhance their vocabulary, improve their language skills, and uncover new knowledge. Below are direct quotes from the students:

"Reading comprehension is very important at tertiary level. Students need to know how to read and understand comprehension because some of them will become qualified teachers while not knowing how to read and understand text".

"Reading comprehension is key at tertiary level because it is an ability to process information. It helps students and improves their reading and writing. It builds students reading skills and helps them understanding the whole text".

"One is about to enter the work environment which is all about practicality. Understanding something theoretically means one can apply the set of skills acquired via reading".

"Tertiary level is predominantly based on self-studying. It is important to be able to understand written work and be able to summarise in own understanding".

"It helps you when reading other materials to understand easily as you know the strategies to use when reading a text or comprehension".

"Because reading comprehension is the ability to process information that we have read and to understand its meaning".

"Because loads of tertiary work require you and only you with your mind so if you can't read with understanding you are definitely in an edge of failing".

"It helps you understand questions better, meaning you get to answer them better and ultimately obtain higher marks".

"At tertiary level, students are required to read and understand information on their own, therefore comprehension is key".

"Because we mostly come across research passages that require skills of reading a comprehension so that I can understand the message".

"Comprehension boost our understanding knowledge on text, so comprehension will make it easier to understand texts".

"I don't know but I think it helps student able to read".

"The more a person reads, the more terms he/she will be aware of many terms and definitions".

"Because at tertiary level you be vocabulary ready as the lectures uses strong words, so you need to be able to understand".

Figure 4.15: Level of study the students think RCSs should be taught
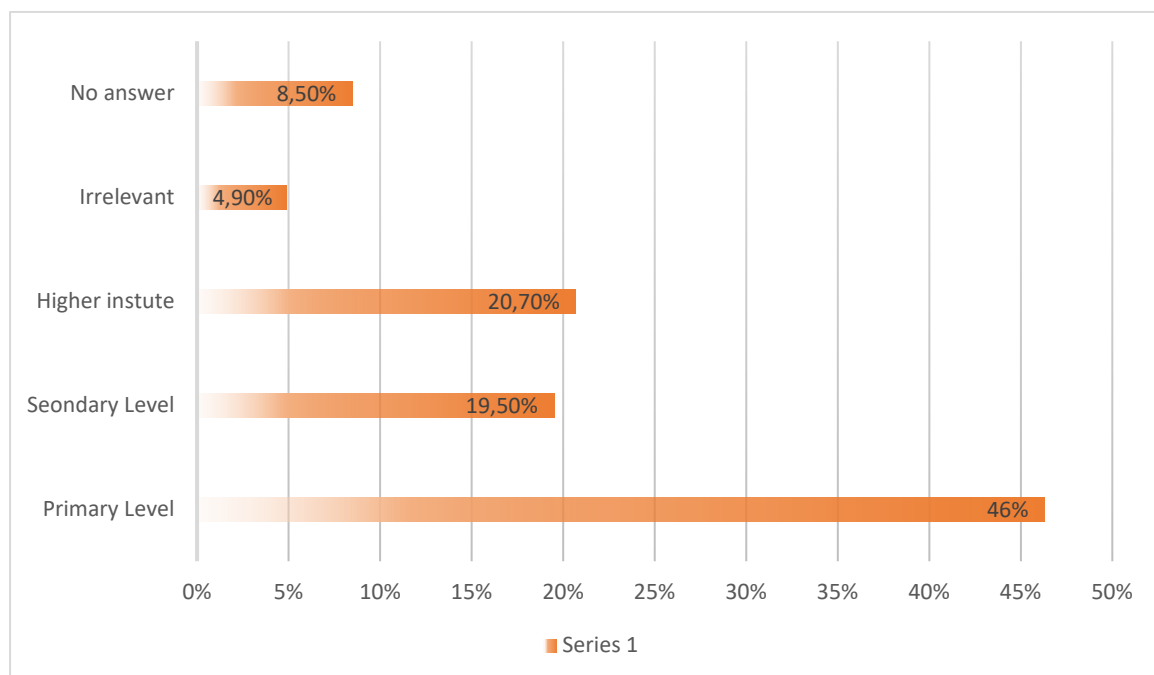
In terms of the appropriate level of study in which RCSs should be taught, Figure 4.15 above summaries the students' answers about what level of study they think RCSs should be taught. A majority of students (46%) suggested that RC should be taught in the primary school level. A slightly more than 20% of the students suggested that it should be taught at higher institutions such as universities and FETs, with slightly less than 20% of them suggesting that it should be taught at secondary school. This indicates that more than 60% of the students agree that RCSs should be taught at

basic level (primary and/or secondary school). This is supported by lecturers that were part of this study (cf. 4.4 [Ways to improve reading comprehension]). It is revealed that teachers play a major role in the development of learners' reading and their RC as well. Thus, Pretorius and Klapwijk (2016: 3) posit that teachers must focus on developing learners' RC skills in classrooms.

Regarding whether RC ability leads to academic success, students held a strong view (98%) that being able to understand what one reads puts one at an advantage to progress smoothly academically. One student gave a detailed response and said: "Reading comprehension is like studying. You read a piece of information, then you are questioned on what you have studied. Learners that are good in reading comprehension are academically good." Another student supported this narrative: "Being able to comprehend will not only help you in English but with all your other modules since English is language we are taught in." These responses suggest that it is of paramount importance for students to master RC as it is the basic requisite for their education and development. Additional responses regarding this are shown in the table below:

"Reading comprehension enable a reader to make connections and make sense of the text. This meaning is a strong support in maintaining fluency, detecting and correcting errors and solving words while reading".

"Reading the passage and understanding it successfully enables one to be able to respond to questions that follow, which leads to academic success, because if you are unable to answer the questions, you may fail, even though you understand".

"Reading comprehension improves one's language and having a strong language background increases your academic success. You have a better understanding of things in life".

"The ability to read and understand comprehension enables a person's mind to be creative in essay writing and other forms of writing. It also introduces new ways of writing to make the writings more interesting for the readers. Also helps with academic study and other aspects of life, for example engaging on a debate, a person will need ways they can effectively state their facts. Reading comprehension builds reasoning capacity of a person and vocabulary".

"It is because when answering a certain passage, you don't get lost because you know it. You won't struggle in pointing point in everything and helps to gain vocabulary and reading skills".

"Reading comprehension improves one's language and having a strong language background increases your academic success. You have a better understanding of things I life".

"A reading mind drives one to read further than just comprehension hence it leads to academic success".

"Reading comprehension and being able to understand better helps one to be able to understand other modules when studying".

"…it is an added advantage to be comprehend reading material because students are assessed through reading material".

Through the analysis of data gathered from the students through questionnaires, it can be deduced that there is a problem of reading comprehension amongst them. Although the majority of the participants have an idea of what RC and RCSs are, one cannot be certain that they employ these strategies when they read as they did not perform better when they were tested through a reading comprehension passage. One can also deduce from the results that students are not extensively taught RC strategies, and in case they are taught, they are not taught how to apply them when reading. All this suggests that the curriculum at basic education and tertiary levels should be reviewed in order to ensure that RC is taught extensively, as this is a necessary skill for better academic performance.

Half the number of the students indicated that they struggled creating meaning from the text and with comprehension. One of the main reasons that students identified as the cause was understanding the words. The students indicated that they struggled understanding the meaning of words, suggesting that their vocabulary is not on par with what is expected of a student at the university level. There are several factors that could have contributed to poor vocabulary such as a lack of a reading culture amongst the students, lack of resources or affective factors such as lack of motivation. One needs to remember that good vocabulary and RC competency go hand-in-hand. At their level, students should have a good word-bank and knowledge of how to deal with unfamiliar words in a text. To increase their vocabulary, they need to read regularly.

Thus establishing a reading culture should be prioritised by teachers, lecturers and parents.

4.4 ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

The third instrument that was used was a questionnaire. Lecturers were interviewed about the reading comprehension competencies of the students. Below is an analysis of their responses.

4.4.1 Biographical data

The first question of the interview was to establish whether the lecturers interviewed were qualified to teach English. All the lecturers that participated in the study had English language course as their major course. Two lecturers held honours degrees in English as their highest qualification, seven held master's degrees in English and five lecturers held PhDs in English language. Other lecturers also indicated the number of years in which they taught English, which made them qualified to teach English at the university level.

"Well, yes, I'm have been appointed to teach English for several years. So yes, I'm qualified. I hold a doctorate in English. I do not have a specific teaching qualification, but I do have a doctorate in, in English. And I have also taught at school level previously in my home country of Nigeria, before coming to South Africa in 2010. So yes".

"Well, I have been teaching in the Department of Education, education for over 20 years. And, and then I went on to qualify as a doctor, Doctor, doctor in English. And as a result, then it opened that opportunity for me to be to be able to teach at the university".

Table 4.7 below gives a summary of the highest qualification of the lecturers, and when and where these qualifications were obtained:

Table 4.7: Lecturers' highest qualifications, when and where obtained

Participants	Highest qualification	Where it was obtained	When it was obtained
Lecturer 1	Master's degree	2015	University of Limpopo
Lecturer 2	Master's degree	2015	University of Limpopo
Lecturer 3	Master's degree	1994	University of Witwatersrand
Lecturer 4	Honours degree	2010	University of Pretoria
Lecturer 5	PhD	2015	University of Venda
Lecturer 6	PhD	2020	University of Venda
Lecturer 7	Master's degree	2020	University of Limpopo
Lecturer 8	PhD	2019	University of Limpopo
Lecturer 9	PhD	2020	North West University
Lecturer 10	Master's degree	2009	University of Idadon, Nigeria
Lecturer 11	Master's degree	2018	The Solusi University, Zimbabwe
Lecturer 12	Honours degree	2020	Fort Hare University
Lecturer 13	Master's degree	2019	University of Limpopo
Lecturer 14	PhD	2016	University of Johannesburg

Others indicated that they have Master's degrees, and that at the university, this is one of the main requirements. One lecturer stated: "Yes, I'm qualified. I believe so.

Isn't that in the university the requirement for one to be a lecturer, number one is that they must have a masters in that particular language of teaching".

"Um, due to the qualifications that I have, the Master degree. It makes one to be to be qualified to teach that at a university level. I would say".

Table 4.8: Lecturers with other professional qualifications

Yes	36%
No	64%

Table 4.8 above presents lecturers' responses to whether they had any other professional qualification. Sixty-four percent (64%) indicated that they did not have other professional qualifications. However, 36% of the lecturers answered that they had other professional qualifications. One lecturer indicated that she was studying for a PGDP. Two other lecturers had a Bachelor's Degrees in Education, and the other one a Diploma in Education. The table below summaries their responses about having a professional qualification. Most lecturers did not attain a teaching qualification.

Participant lecturers also pointed out factors that affected their students' RC. One lecturer who started working at university in 2022 had this to say about the RC level of her students: "I noticed that the students are often mixed ability. There are some who are your intermediary. So those are the ones that I would place at three. And they are those who are closer to excellence that I will place at 4 and there are really good ones that I would place at five."

The lecturer further stated this about learners that she rated at intermediary level (Level 3): "So from what I have seen, since it's my first time, and it hasn't been so much time that I've spent with them. I can relate to what happens at a high school, having taught there for quite some years, where you realise that it all depends on where they come from, you know. There are schools that don't have enough resources to inculcate the reading skills. So I see it resurfacing now where you can tell that the nurturing was missed from the background. And now they're just immersed in a new environment that requires reading. And so those weaknesses can't help but surface so I attributed to backgrounds, the backgrounds that they are coming from".

Table 4.9: The number of years lecturers started lecturing at their respective universities

Participants	Year
Lecturer 1	2014
Lecturer 2	2019
Lecturer 3	1999
Lecturer 4	2013
Lecturer 5	2010
Lecturer 6	2010
Lecturer 7	2019
Lecturer 8	2016
Lecturer 9	2021
Lecturer 10	2020
Lecturer 11	2022
Lecturer 12	2021
Lecturer 13	2020
Lecturer 14	2016

Table 4.9 above depicts the years in which the lecturers started lecturing at their respective universities. Fifty percent (50%) of the lecturers have been working at universities for a period of more than five years, and another 50% indicated that they were at the university for less than five years. However, the lecturers were able to rate the RC levels of their students.

Table 4.10: Other courses the lecturers teach and the number of students per course

Participants	Courses responsible for	Number of students per course
Lecturer 1	First and second levels	540, 160
Lecturer 2	First and second levels	300, 160
Lecturer 3	First and second levels	750
Lecturer 4	First levels	750

Lecturer 5	First And Honours Theories	250 -500.
Lecturer 6	First and research for Honours group	500 -700
Lecturer 7	First level	Between 150 and 200.
Lecturer 8	First level	1200
Lecturer 9	First year and extended programme (ECP)	178; 192+
Lecturer 10	First level	200
Lecturer 11	First , second and third level	190
Lecturer 12	First, second and third level.	190
Lecturer 13	First Second level, third level, honours level	125, 98, 150
Lecturer 14	First Second level, third level, honours level	130, 48, 10 honours

Table 4.10 above summarises the other levels that the lecturers were also offering besides the first level as well as the number of students per course/modules. Most universities do team lecturing, where students are divided between 2, 3 or 4 or even more groups. For example, lecturers 14 and 15 are from the same university. This is what one of them had to say:

"Our first year, let me explain this. Our first years, there are about 400. But then now they have been divided into four and I think I have about there are over 400 actually. And then they were divided into four groups because of this online thing. So there are four lectures teaching the same thing to these four different groups, which are actually one group. So I think I have plus minus 125. And of that 125, I'm teaching all the four sections. I'm teaching poetry. I'm teaching, well, there's the language segment. And then there is poetry. And then there is drama. And then there is prose. So in other words, I'm, in principle, I'm sort of dealing with 400. Students, but according to the sections that are that I teach".

"Yeah, I teach. In first year students in total there are 3500 but we are a team of eight lecturers. So one is responsible for at least two or three groups. So in total, one might have about 500 to 700 students, but divided into different groups".

"HFE000, It's 530. And then now with HFEB000 Should I give you the total or maybe the half? Half of those that I get to teach"?

Reading comprehension (RC) should be considered significant in English language learning

Respondents were asked to give their perspectives on whether or not RC should be considered significant in English language learning. RC emerged to be significant in English language learning. One participant emphasised that it is the ability to understand, "I think comprehension basically is the foundation in terms of whether you understand. So, obviously, for you to unpack whatever you are reading, you need to understand what you're reading…".

"It assesses students' ability to recall information after reading and to establish the main ideas that are in a particular text and to critique the perspectives that a particular writer has conveyed in that particular comprehension. It also improves the students' vocabulary in a sense that it exposes them to how words are used, how sentences are constructed, and how arguments are conveyed and developed".

"Reading comprehension is foundational to formal learning, not just for the discipline that you're in. English being the, it is almost like a sole language of learning and teaching. So, it's critical, it's compulsory reading comprehension. If students and learners cannot read, then they cannot learn. They cannot engage with knowledge. They can't engage with the material presented to them".

Factors that impair reading comprehension

This theme reviews factors that affect the students' RC. Translanguaging emerged as one of the factors that the lecturers highlighted as being a contributor to poor RC ability amongst students. In their interviews, lecturers indicated that switching from mother tongue to English instruction proves to be challenging for first entering English language students. One lecturer gave a detailed statement:

"The major problem is the issue of the monolingual use of the English language. We know the distractions of Africa, they [students] are taught in their mother tongue from grade one, up to grade three. And then they shift into English from grade four up to

high school. Now, the literacy practices that are required for the students to read and understand right from grade four, they are not developed because remember, from grade one to three, they were using their mother tongue. We want to perpetuate a monolingual use of English to students who actually cannot really understand the English because of that educational background".

The lecturer in this response explains that learners' language transitioning from being taught in their home language in Foundation Phase (FP) to English language as from the Intermediate Phase has an element of confusion to learners. Their literacy abilities are not being nurtured and developed from the early stages. This would be somewhat late in this regard. The majority of South African learners are not learning how to read in English until Grade 3. This delays their RC ability (Spaull, 2016). Similarly, one lecturer has hinted at the language policy as being a problem as well, "policy is problematic, especially the one that requires learners to switch from indigenous language when they hit grade three and four. I think it is a very problematic policy that needs to be addressed because it puts the learners at a strong disadvantage…". This statement shows that the language education policy needs to be reviewed in a bid to be aligned with the reality of South African English language learners and students at school and university levels, respectively.

- **Poor teaching and learning standards**

In this sub-theme, lecturers stressed that the conditions and standards of teaching and learning at school levels where the development of RC is expected to intensify were not conducive. Teachers' competencies, their training and learning standards were also highlighted as being factors that impact the RC negatively. One lecturer said: "The overall teaching standards at secondary level probably are poor. It is the quality of teaching that the students are experiencing at a junior and secondary level…". Another lecturer said: "…when students are now asking their teacher in class, they ask him questions, the teacher gets very upset with them, that they cannot ask questions like that, because this, the teacher themselves is not equipped to handle those questions. They don't really understand what they're doing anyway. So, it is a problem if the teacher himself or herself does not understand, then what happens to the students that they're teaching"?

These responses indicate that the level of teaching and learning at school level is so low to the extent that some teachers are not knowledgeably equipped to impart RC knowledge to learners. Thus, HBUs inadvertently admit first entering English language students who are not ready to tackle academic RC challenges in tertiary education.

- **Limited resources**

This theme focused on reading materials such as books that are available to students for comprehension. Lecturers indicated that most of the students do not have books to read to enhance their comprehension. This was evident from some of the lecturers' responses. For example, one lecturer said: "…you find that students don't have books that they can practice reading", and another lecturer stated that: "There are schools that don't have enough resources to inculcate this reading skill" and another added that: "They lack reading material. Again, they don't have libraries in schools". These responses indicate that a shortage of reading materials and a lack of libraries is one of the factors that impair RC.

- **Low self-esteem**

Students become confident when their reading is good, when they can pronounce words correctly and are able to interpret what they read. In their responses, one lecturer said: "Some students are too shy and afraid to be laughed at and afraid of trying…" and the other one added: "…and some students are shy, especially if you can ask them to read in front of other students, they tend to withdraw". This is an indication that poor RC leads to a low self-esteem because students tend to question or doubt their abilities if they do not comprehend what they are reading.

- **Lack of Motivation**

"You may find that from their former schools, they were not encouraged to read. They way just. If maybe a student does not want to read, they just leave them like that".
"You will find that we hardly encourage them on the aspect of reading. We'll only focus on what has been prescribed in the syllabus so that they can get knowledge and pass their matric".

"The motivation. At home, in the school environment, for me, I think it's really important too because there are parents, even I'm a parent, also, I have young children, they come home with homework. And you find that at the end of the day, you come home at five, six o'clock, now you must start engaging with homework, primary school homework. And for some parents, they couldn't be bothered, it's too much for them, you know, you're tired, it's the end of the day is supposed to come home to cook, take care of the kids, relax a bit, but because you've got homework to do, so it's easier to just say, you should have you should do your homework by yourself, or you should have done this at school. So, the child is not motivated to learn, you know, the motivation for me, if now the child is faced these challenges at home, it is demotivating. Then they go to school. The idea is you are here, just because you must be here, you're here and you need to exit the system. So, but students are not motivated to like and enjoy their school journey". This suggests that students' reading endeavours should be supported from home and the lower schooling level in order to be motivated to continue reading with comprehension even at tertiary level.

- **Attitude**

"… you may find that the focus is on the textbooks that they want to pass the matric and go to university, they hardly read something like what additional material which are not what exam focuses [on]. So, you may find that these students, their focus is on, as I've said, it's all about passing matric, they hardly read something on daily basis, which can help them improve their reading ability". This supports the results from students' questionnaire analysis where it was found that 98% of them prefer reading for academic success than reading for interest and leisure (60%) (See 'Motivation').

"There is hatred towards the language. People just don't like it. And the students themselves, they're busy, you know, poisoning each other with stories that English is difficult. And then that sort of developed, has developed this negative attitude towards the language, to a point where you can see that most students are not interested".
"There is a misunderstanding. So here people think there is this misunderstanding that if you speak English, in a way you have, you're throwing away yourself, yourself of who you are".

"One thing that I have noticed is that they basically don't read. Reading is not something that they factor in their activities. So, I assume that they may take reading only when it contributes to specific grading. So, reading for assessment, not reading for leisure, because I think the foundation for better reading comprehension is when one is exposed to a variety of texts and that can only happen if you have adopted reading, you know, as a hobby, or as a leisure".

How does poor RC affect class participation?

The lecturers mentioned that students' self-belief is affected by poor RC. A lack of confidence and non-participation are main issues that emerge from this challenge. Students who are not confident enough to put their ideas across tend not to participate in classroom discussions:

"They can't even answer because they don't have confidence to speak the language well, which is because some of their fellow learners might laugh at them, because maybe they don't know the language and all these things".

"It's difficult for one to participate actively, when they are failing to comprehend what they are reading, you know, so it forms some barrier. It forms some, you know, it's some line that blocks you know that participation as much as they would wish to participate, but for as long as they cannot comprehend what they are reading then their participation is impacted".

"I feel it's all got to it impacts on one's esteem, it impacts on their confidence, it impacts on how they carry themselves around, seeing that everything that they have to deal with is a written".

The following are measures that the university should put in place to assist students with poor reading comprehension.

The lecturers pointed out that universities should provide mentorship to struggling students, and establish language laboratories and outreach programmes to collaborate with local libraries to assist students struggling with RC.

- **Provide mentorship to struggling students**

"Postgraduate students who have gone through the processes of being taught reading strategies for comprehension are guardians of that and then they share these lessons from a student's perspective with fellow learners. Every department must have a room dedicated for students to have interactions about reading and then this must be a formal program within the department every department".

- **Establishment of language lab**

"I think the language lab would really be useful. Because students would have more time. You know, with the lab, you can even have your little cubicles where the student is dealing with a text by themselves or just themselves in the lecture. So, it would be, it would be more helpful because they are not now sitting in a large group. And they are not confident, so they do not want to answer questions. They don't want to read out loud, so they can read for themselves. They can hear themselves speaking back to themselves. So, they hear how they sound".

- **Outreach programmes**

"…we have to do the outreach programs; we collaborate with the local library and then we assist students at the nearest high schools".

"The university I think has to budget something for the students coming up even with competitions, reading competitions…".

"…through community engagement projects with schools. Colleagues like us, we can be engaged in community engagement projects. It will help the universities I think in the long run to now undertake to do what should have been done in lower grades".

The respondents were also requested to give their views on whether poor RC abilities affect students' motivation to learn. The respondents indicated that poor RC influences students' motivation to learn. Below are some of their responses:

"…there is a connection between the two [poor RC and motivation to learn] and it does affect the motivation, simply because where students have adequate capacity in terms of their reading comprehension, it naturally motivates them to learn, ability to understand what your teacher is saying, ability to, you know, read and make meaning

out of a teaching materials that is posted or made available to them. It motivates them, you know, to be good learners and to perform well in their academic activities".

"I think it affects their motivation; it makes some of them feel like they're not going to be able to make it…".

"…for those who are struggling because it makes it difficult to engage in something that you're struggling with. It impacts on their motivation, it impacts on their self-esteem, it impacts on their confidence, as well as their performance".

"…if their reading would not improve, they [will] lack the motivation, but once they see and feel that they are making progress, they become more motivated and they gain confidence as well".

"Because I cannot understand something, then I become demotivated. It is like you're reading a computer script, you know, written in this JavaScript, this strange language, you stop reading at the first sentence. So, it really demotivates them".

"…even if they have to talk or share ideas with other students, some they do not have even that courage or that motivation, in a sense that let's say, he or she knows that this is in my class, he or she speaks Sotho or Sepedi and I speak Xitsonga or Tshivenda so it means that we have to speak in English".

Reading strategies taught by lectures

Lecturers said that they do cover reading strategies in their syllabus, with majority of them, more than 95%, indicating that they teach summarising, questioning, visualising, and scanning. One lecturer said: "…they should learn to ask themselves questions. And then as they read, okay, they should also learn to summarise whatever they'll be reading, even if they are not writing it on a paper, but just to think about what I've read in short, it will help them to understand". Another lecturer added, "I tell them to say give me a summary of the book that you read, give me a summary of the drama. And I say you see now if you are able to summarise like that, then you understand". Lecturers advise students to also question the events of the passage as they aid their comprehension, "…the general readings strategies that I used to impart to my students is that I advise them to generate questions or as they read. Having questions all the time when you read helps to clarify the passage events continuously".

- **Visualising**

"Visualising helps a lot when it comes to understanding of something, if you can just get a bit of something that okay, this is about this topic or this passage is about this. And then you bring in that in, you look at it, as if you see that, that will help you to understand the passage".

"We also teach them that as they read, when they're reading academic texts, they have an idea, they gather an idea of how they are supposed to be writing as academics, because now they become academics. So even when they are writing, they must emulate that academic form of writing, where they also keep that invisible thread".

- **Scanning**

"We teach students on how to handle a comprehension piece, for example, strategies like going through the questions first, before you go through the text. So that when you go to the text, you have an idea of the kind of information you're looking for, you have a map of what you what you're looking for. So, when you go back to the piece to read the piece, it's easier for you to pick up those pieces of information that are relevant to you".

Intervention strategies lecturers employ for students with poor RC competencies

In an academic space where students enrol for various programmes, it is expected that there will be those that struggle because of poor RC as it is one of the key areas that enable students to progress. Lecturers know their students as they spend the better part of their academic journey with them. They can easily identify those who are struggling and those who are not. For those that struggle, the lecturers have adopted the strategies below to improve their competencies.

- **Offer extra lessons/classes for students with poor reading comprehension**

This intervention was opted for by the majority of the lecturers in the study, who argue that they first identify struggling students from the larger group, then sort them accordingly. One lecturer gave a detailed response: "I try to identify those who have problems and maybe try grouping them you know; they can be maybe in small groups

of five. If we cannot have individual time for one on one, but if they can be in small groups of five, maybe, and then we create some extra time, so that we can get more time, you know, with each other. And at least, you know, remove them from the larger group that can also be threatening, you know, so you're trying to create that time with those who are struggling to give them some cases have some ketchup lectures, some ketchup kind of approach, that maybe can elevate them to a better level of, you know, their reading comprehension". Some lecturers acknowledged that this activity can be unfriendly, and could be considered a slap on the face of confidence of some of the students, and further hinted at a one-on-one consultation slot as a way to mitigate the problem, "We have one-on-one consultation slots to allow students to come and express themselves freely".

How students' vocabulary affects reading comprehension

Concerning how students' RC is affected by vocabulary, lecturers indicated that the students have a very limited vocabulary, and as a result, they struggle with academic texts. For example, pertinent responses were, "academic texts have words that overcome vocabulary that are pertinent to the genre, we'll also look at the scientific terms that are used in reading so. If a student in a sentence find finds it difficult to understand two or three words, then definitely they're struggling." Others suggested that the students' limited vocabulary affect their ability to paraphrase and interpret a text, "Reading also affect the ability to paraphrase, then it will then make them struggle when they are to paraphrase". In addition, one lecturer said: "They will then have limited ability to rephrase what they've read". Thus, vocabulary plays a huge role in students' ability to understand and interpret a text. For example, paraphrasing is one form of showing understanding of what one has read. Failure to paraphrase is an indication that one has not fully understood what one has read.

Poor reading comprehension affect students' motivation to learn

According to research, motivation also has an effect on reading and reading comprehension. Students with good comprehension are likely to be highly motivated and often read more. On the other hand, students with poor RC exhibits signs of poor self-esteem and confidence, and as such, are less motivated to read on their own.

They are also less motivated to participate in class. Reading is the foundation of learning; and motivation is the pillar of support. Students who read a lot are students with great motivation. Those who rarely read lack motivation to do so (Turner, 2017: 11). Struggling readers will have a failure attitude when they cannot interpret the text. This will eventually decrease the reader's motivation. Less motivation implies less reading; and this presupposes that the RC of struggling readers will not improve (Talley, 2017: 19). Below are the lecturers' responses when asked about the effect of poor reading comprehension and students' motivation.

"…even if they have to talk to or to share ideas with other students, some they do not have even that courage or that motivation, in a sense that let's say, he or she knows that this is in my class, he or she speaks Sotho or Sepedi and I speak Xitsonga or Tshivenda, it means that we have to speak in English. That also serves as a challenge to someone that I would like to ask but my communication or my vocabulary prevents them".

"…there is a connection between the two and it does affect the motivation, simply because where students have adequate capacity in terms of their reading comprehension, it naturally motivates them to learn, ability to understand what your teacher is saying, ability to, you know, read and make meaning out of a teaching materials that is posted or made available to them, it motivates them, you know, to be good learners and to perform well in their academic activities".

"How do you engage in a lot of reading when your skill and when your performance is poor? For those who are struggling, because it makes it difficult to engage in something that you're struggling with. It impacts on their motivation, it impacts on their self-esteem, it impacts it impacts on their confidence, as well as their performance."

"I think it does, I think it affects their motivation, it makes some of them feel like they're not going to be able to make it which is why I spent a lot of time doing motivation. So, there is something I do with every first class at the beginning of the term of the session I really like my first year, I really spent time. I can go one full lesson or two full lessons just motivating them, just making them know that if you pass my matric, you can handle this".

"…because I cannot understand something, then I become demotivated. It is like you are reading a computer script, you know, written in this JavaScript, this strange language, you, you stop reading at the first sentence. So, it really demotivates them".

Ways to improve reading comprehension

In connection with ways to improve RC, the lecturers cited extrinsic – and intrinsic motivation, introducing RC in lower grades of schooling, adopting translanguaging, introducing reading competitions, teaching reading strategies, reading laboratories or libraries and providing training for teachers. Participant teachers' quotations in terms of sub-themes are presented below.

- **Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation**

"If they can have that motivation that this is for self-enrichment, let me do it on time, it will help me to improve that will be very much okay. So, the level of our students also contributes a lot, they do not want. Their focus is on finishing that if they pass a course, they don't care whether their reading has improved or not. The focus is on getting their degree and then looking for a job. So you see, so they don't have that motivation, some of them and I am not saying all but majority they don't have that motivation that I'm reading this leisurely to improve my reading ability and then they just let it go".

"You teach students and you encourage students to read in the classroom and encourage them to read things outside of the classroom so that they are confident in handling different kinds of texts. So, if you encourage students, if you expose them to different kinds of texts, if you expose them to different environments, if you encourage them to read different types of texts, and also engage in different context".

"There should be one way of motivating students so that they see the link between good comprehension and good academic performance".

"By encouraging learners to read and providing with new skills and strategies as to how reading with understanding can be a success".

"Teachers will have to encourage students to read even books because what the focus, the challenging thing now is, the focus at the high school is on passing matric. They hardly encourage them to go and read for leisure".

- **Introducing reading comprehension in lower grades of schooling (foundation phase)**

"We wait until the last phase just before the student exits the school system, grade 11 and 12. That's when now we want to come up with intervention strategies, where these strategies could have been implemented earlier".

"Government should deploy reading comprehension at primary level".

"Reading comprehension can be improved if they can start teaching it at a lower grade"

"By being introduced to learners in lower grades".

"By teaching learners for secondary level of study so that students can be fully equipped by the time they get to university".

"Learners must be taught reading skills and strategies at lower grades in high school as this will improve their reading comprehension ability".

"Always introduction to younger age, to have power of reading".

- **Translanguaging**

"Let us adopt a translingual approach to teaching and learning…".

"We underestimate I think there needs to be a better multilingual policy".

- **Introduce reading competitions**

"All universities in their community engagement projects, they must have these high schools coming to university participating in this reading competitions, in essay writing, which is monitored and judged by university lecturers according to how they expect learners to come to university".

"…It is better that our high schools can introduce a reading cultures and give the students a platform where they can <u>debate</u> using English and expose students also develop a reading culture among the students".

"By doing competition and involves learners and also encourage them to read books for their own benefits academically".

- **Reading strategies**

"I would have loved a situation where I can be reading some texts together with my students be it playing be it any piece of essay, I want a situation where we can, you know, and that is what reading comprehension is about. It's not about teaching the theory, it's not about teaching the strategies, of course, that you just be, you know, a part of it, but more attention ought to have been given to, you know, practical demonstration, you come to a class, each of them has a sample of an essay, we read it together".

"Everyone must be given opportunity to read out loud the comprehension in class and everyone must be given opportunity to write essays on regular basis".

"By introducing new strategies and introducing it at lower levels".

"Teaching students how to analyse".

"By learning and implementing reading strategies and changing how you read".

"By teaching reading comprehension strategies".

- **Establishment of reading labs/libraries**

"…there must be a formulated reading club where the student feels involved. The reading club must be run by the students, where they read and review books that they've read and then they are taught on the steps on how to review a book…".

"A reading lab. So, this lab, it is an intervention tool that our department is going to use, especially for our students who are not competent enough with English. So, we are going to give them different reading materials to upgrade their reading and vocabulary".

"Most of the schools in rural areas have no libraries, so the Department of Education, it is their responsibility to ensure that there are libraries at high schools or even community libraries".

- **Provide training for teachers**

"There should be a regular in training program for them [teachers] so that the knowledge will be up to date".

"One may suggest that there is a need to establish the competence of high school teachers who are responsible for teaching for the teaching of English, first additional language or if, if they're taking it, it's a home language".

"I strongly recommend that those the teachers who are teaching students they should also be suitably qualified. Right from Foundation, intermediate phase, senior phase, and then FET, they should be suitably qualified".

Forms of support from the department and the university

Lecturers were asked about the form of support that students receive from the Department of English and the university. The following sub-themes emerged as forms of support that the departments gave to the students with poor RC although most lecturers indicated that often, the support offered by the departments is also the one

that is offered by the universities. They also identified tutors, reading materials and reading centres.

- **Tutors**

"The mentors. I think we have mentors in each department or mentors".

"Oh, it is quite. It is quite enamours, let me quickly highlight one or two. The university passed a program called students… I mean, how do I put it? The university has another program where they allow some students leaders, students like them that is above their level to equally participate in the teaching and learning these ones they interact with them, they get feedback from them, the they relate with them on one on one basis, give them extra attention, give them some classwork that you know, can assist to identify their weak areas and see how to help them. So, university is doing a lot in that regard. And in terms of the department to the department ensures they engage qualified hands and they kind of being liberal in terms of how they are being accommodated their query their questions, their concerns are always being encouraged to be entertained, to be listened to. The departments, as well also been in supporting in terms of in making adequate teaching materials to be available".

"No, the only suppose that done is by offering tutors, they offer us tutors. So they say they train the tutors themselves first. And then they ask us to give them what a little bit advanced training or a little bit more knowledge on which is what course specific and then we use them to, to help the students because we indicated some years back that because of the high number of students, it's not easy for a lecturer to make follow up, check all the students at risk".

- **Reading material**

"The only support they can offer is in the form of reading material. Yeah, that is the main support that they have, the reading material and engaging with the library, as you know, historical disadvantage University. Yeah, the main source is either we get them from the internet these days, the library or some lecture on having their own resources, which then can read and the best thing again, is just try to get what material which are relevant of interest to students, which if you want them to read or which are current topics. So the only thing is that we have what to call some books in the department, which are not in the library, and some material which some others offer that this helpful to the students".

- **Reading centre**

Reading centres were also mentioned as the main support offered in some universities. This is another form of support given to first entering students to mitigate RC challenges of SA students at HBUs. For example, one lecturer stated, "What I know about struggling students, especially with regard to reading is that there is a reading centre. We are advised to advise those students who can't read, who struggle with understanding, maybe find difficult to comprehend the passages so the comprehension passages to go and enhance their reading at the centre".

Furthermore, a centre for teaching and learning was also cited as a form of support in one university. The support given is captured below as follows:

"Yes, the university does have the Centre for teaching and learning. There, they do have psychologists who, sometimes the problem becomes psychological, the problems become, you know, you can't really help the student at a lecturer student level, they get support, and we also do have a peer support, students who support other students. So it may be a case of a student struggling to read and understand. They go through sessions with the peer support students. So the university at that level does help. But also remember, for us to be able to fund the license of the 'my foundation lab', it's the university that allows for that license to be purchased in the it was purchased by university funds".

"CAE – Centre for Academic Excellence. It's a university system used by all the departments".

"There is a centre for reading at the university. It can be from all the departments to identify students who are struggling with reading to send them to the centre where they will get assistance".

"They have a writing centre, which gives orientations, seminars on how to write. And in their, in their, you know, in their lectures, they have steps and reading is one of them. Steps towards, you know, doing assignments, reading is one of them. And they even teach on how to understand and interpret what you are taught. But there is a catch, most students take that for granted. They don't really utilise that platform".

"Yeah, we do have a writing centre. I work I try to work a lot with the writing centre, I go to the writing centre, I ask my students to go to the writing centre. I bring Writing Centre consultants to class and I also try to let the students understand that academic English is a serious variant of English which is which is different from you know your

general conversational, in any language anyway, I also try to show the, the difference between because again, there's yet another block that our students are told, that they can't speak English".

In a nutshell, Table 4.11 below presents sub-themes that emerged from the forms of support provided by departments and universities.

Table 4.11: Forms of support by the department and university to students with RC challenges

Themes	Sub-Themes
Forms of support by the Department	Reading material Reading centre Tutors
Forms of support by the university	Reading centre Tutors Centre for teaching and learning

Table 4.11 summarises the forms of support that lecturers identified as support systems that the English departments and the universities offered to students with RC challenges. Reading centres, tutors and the provision of reading materials to students were identified as the forms of support received by students at their respective universities. They appeared to be common forms of support that HBUs provided to their first entering English language students.

From the qualitative data that was analysed, it was found that although high school teachers teach RC, the study revealed that it is insufficiently taught. There are various reasons associated with this. One of the reasons is that some of the students lack vocabulary and were not taught RC from the early grades of their education. One respondent gave this response: "I would say the problems started early with the younger. Reading was not [taught] or was not given priority. And more especially the strategies were not prioritised at primary level and the student would come with little or no vocabulary at all. And as a result, they will stumble when it comes to reading. And then they will stumble when it comes to fluency. And most of those stumbling

comes to comprehension". This response shows that there is generally lack of development of language, reading and the tools applied in reading in these students. This could be rooted in the dearth of the fundamentals of RC. Another respondent added: "It [RC] is not sufficiently taught because majority of them are at average, and below average. If it was sufficiently taught, their reading ability should be above average. When we engage them or give them material to read. It is clear that their reading comprehension competency is low".

"It is not sufficiently taught because majority of them are at average [level], and below average. If it was sufficiently taught, their reading ability should be above average. When we engage them, or give them material to read, so that we engage them, it is clear that really their reading comprehension competency is low".

"If you mean at the secondary school level, I do not think it is adequately taught at the secondary school level, given the feedback. Yes, given the feedback I'm getting from my students. So, government needs to do more at that level in terms of getting competent teachers, making necessary our teaching materials available. The teachers at that level should be exposed to up to date training on skills methodologies, appropriate methodologies that will enhance our students to be properly taught in reading comprehension".

What can be done at school level to improve the reading comprehension of students?

The lecturers stated that RC is not sufficiently taught at school level. They suggested that reading strategies and RC should be taught; students should be exposed to different texts; libraries should be built; students should read for grades; teachers should be qualified and trained regularly; and reading clubs should be introduced in order to assist students to improve their RC.

- **Teach reading strategies and reading comprehension**

"There should be more energy and attention to reading comprehension. Motivate learners with the awareness that this is a foundational skill and that if the foundation is not laid properly, then no fruition shall ever be attained. Make cultivation of a reading comprehension mandatory because with no reading comprehension, learners' academic journeys are impacted".

"It should be taught better. The focus should be on actual reading. Reading does not need sophisticated infrastructure, it needs texts".

"There is still room for teachers to make some changes there and there when it comes to reading comprehension strategies. So they need to teach them more".

"They should spend more energy and attention to reading comprehension. Motivate learners with the awareness that this is a foundational skill and that if the foundation is not laid properly, then no fruition shall ever be attained. Make the cultivation of a reading comprehension mandatory because with no reading comprehension, learners' academic journeys are impacted".

- **Exposure to different texts**

"They've got to be exposed to a lot of reading material and they need to have support both, both from home and at school. That's how we can we can arrest the problem of regular thing environment needs to be enriched".

"I think I'll go back to some of the strategies that I've raised earlier, to say that students need to be exposed to different texts, they need to be exposed to reading, vocabulary, where you have your little spelling tests, you can have them every day or every other day, not exactly every day, every other day or once a week. So that you kind of encourage them to learn vocabulary to build their vocabulary. So also reading texts, exposing them to reading texts, maybe once a week, at school, maybe once a week, you bring a text to class, you ask students to read then you, you can ask them questions, although it is time consuming, but I think it would be worthwhile to invest in such".

- **Build libraries**

"Because, first, although keep on blaming the… the government, let's start from the government. Most of the schools in rural areas have no libraries, so the Department of Education, it is this responsibility to ensure that there are libraries that high schools or schools or even community libraries, and if libraries are there, teachers will have to encourage students to read even books because what the focus, the challenging thing now is, the focus at the high school is on passing matric. They hardly encourage them to go and read for leisure. I remember when they were collecting data in one school, and then asked about a similar question only to find that the focus is only on what is prescribed. If you, to be fairly speaking, if the student has got to improve their reading

comprehension competency, they even sometimes read books at leisure, wherein a student can say this weekend, I would like to take out this book from my library. When I'm tired reading my mathematics, my history book whatever. I can take this book and read to relax. So if this can be done, and then from a lower level, because towards the matric the focus is on the result, that's the challenge."

- **Read for grades/ reading activities**

"I think the because normally students, I encouraged by, they read for grades, if there could be quarterly assessments that have good gradings that contribute towards the final, final grades, then that that can also help and also to evaluate the suitability of teachers who are teaching. The First additional language and also the assessment rubrics that are prescribed for reading. They should also be explored to see if there is any additional input that can be also been committed".

"I think schools will have reading as an activity, as a subject on its own, so that we can develop strategies, these strategies, we expand them, they become a textbook, a section, a subject you see, that is located a enough time in the schools teaching schedule, were reading is just taught and nothing else, but most of the time, people are teaching reading as as an attachment to a main course. Yeah".

"The spirit of giving students enough reading comprehension activities will help them to improve from the lower grades. If maybe this is applied at starting from lower grades to high school, and that will make our students to be proficient in reading and understanding".

- **Qualified and regularly trained teachers**

"Yes, I was to say teachers should be well motivated at secondary school level. Qualified teachers should be employed, there should be regular in training program for them so that the knowledge will be up to date, imaginary strategies, methodologies in teaching reading comprehension should be exposed to them, the library should be well equipped, then appropriate instructional materials should be made available to them. These are what can, you know, assist the teacher to motivate the students to do well in this regard".

▪ **Reading club**

"You see this reading culture, this reading club I was talking about it needs to be there. And then this reading culture, all universities in their community engagement projects, they must have these high schools coming to university participating in this reading competitions, in essay writing, which is monitored and judged by university lecturers according to how they expect learners to come to university. So there is a need for schools to approach universities for collaborative work on reading comprehension. And there is a, there must be a consensus between the lecturers and the teachers in high school to say what are you guys teaching there, what do you expect us and what kind of students, learners do want us to bring to you, you know, so that is the first step that I think should be there".

4.4.2 Reading comprehension challenges experienced by first entering English language students at HBUs in SA

This theme reviews comprehension challenges experienced by first entering English language students at HBUs in South Africa as they are likely to impair RC and affect the levels of reading competencies. Below is a discussion of the sub-themes that emerged from the students' responses to an open-ended question.

▪ **Inability to decode and interpret the passage**

This sub-theme reveals the inability by English language learning students on RC. The students stressed their inability to capture the message being conveyed in the passage by the writer. This was evident from some of their responses. One learner said: "Not understanding the message conveyed in a comprehension…" and another one said: "It is difficult to find meaning or the idea of the comprehension" and another one said: "Sometimes I read the comprehension and fail to understand what it is about".

Below are some comments relating to the sub-theme above: "When reading a comprehension, I sometimes fail to make sense of my reading, which makes it hard for me to answer questions".

o   "Poor decoding and word recognition skills...".

o "How to take out few important ideas from the passage".

o "Sometimes I am unable to find the relevant answers from the passage".

o "…meanings to some of the words I don't know or understand and sometimes figurative words".

o "Unable to understand some of the words used".

o "Failing to understand the writer's style of writing until someone explains it to me quite a number of times".

o "The meaning of certain words that I find them difficult to break down".

o "I am sometimes unable to understand the passage that I am reading".

▪ **Lack of concentration**

o "I sometimes experience lack of concentration by thinking of something else…".

o "I have a short attention span and often bored by some passages".

o "Sometimes reading comprehension that are too long is a challenge".

o "Sometimes I lose focus if the comprehension is too long and not interesting".

o "I get lost when I read so I have to re-read the comprehension maybe twice".

o "I experience difficulties when I have to carry on reading when I did not understand a certain word".

o "…I don't take enough time to read it well".

▪ **Poor word/language processing ability**

o "Difficulty following basic direction and difficulty pronouncing or recognising words".

o "Bombastic words are hard to pronounce and to understand".

o "When they use big words making the sentence difficult to understand".

o "Having to encounter bombastic words and not knowing the meaning".

o "Perhaps a first encounter with a word, will require me to look it up…".

o "Comprehension have big words that we sometimes don't know the meaning".

▪ **Lack of understanding**

o "Not understanding the passage, you are reading".

o "Failing to understand some word in a sentence, failing to summarise".

o "I struggle to understand some words that the writer might have used".

o "Not understanding a certain phrase particularly idioms or a complicated word".

o "Sometimes the passage might hold little words which makes it hard to quickly find answers or understand it better".

o "…you have less time and finding words that may be hard for you to understand the meaning".

o "Sometimes I don't understand the comprehension easily".

o "I experience difficulties when I have to carry on reading when I did not understand a certain word".

o "I sometimes find it difficult to understand the comprehension…".

o "Well, coming across difficulties words, in not knowing the meaning…".

Table 4.12: Themes and sub-themes emerging from students' RC challenges

Themes	Sub-Themes
Factors that impair reading comprehension	Switching from mother tongue instruction to English instruction (Translanguaging)
	Poor teaching and learning standards
	Limited resources
	Low self-esteem
	Lack of motivation
	Attitude
Reading comprehension challenges experienced by first entering English language students at HBUs in SA	Inability to decode and interpret the passage
	Lack of concentration
	Lack of understanding
	Poor word/language processing ability
Reading comprehension strategies	Re-read
	Identify the main idea
	Summarising
	Visualising
	Questioning

From the lecturers' interview, it can be concluded that there is a common problem of poor reading comprehension amongst students at HBUs as depicted in Table 4.12

above. There are several factors that the lecturers indicated to have contributed to this problem, such as inadequate teaching of reading comprehension at basic level, teacher incompetency, lack of resources, poor vocabulary and poor parental support. The unsmooth transition from learners' native language in the FP to the English language when a learner enters the Intermediate Phase (IP) was also highlighted as one of the main contributing factors. Lecturers concur that it is very important to teach RC because it is the basis on which academic success is dependent. As such, RC should be given sufficient time so that it is taught well. They highlighted that poor RC affects students' learning, class participation as well as the pass rate. The lecturers also mentioned that they do not really have enough time to teach RC themselves as they dealt with a large number of students in one group. As such, they could not pay adequate attention to individual students. This may lead to the conclusion that students that come with the challenges of RC comprehension from school level are likely to exit with them at the university level despite the 'support' offered by departments that teach English at universities.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The results showed that there is no correlation between what the students indicated in the questionnaires and the test scores. Although the students indicated their awareness of RC level and their knowledge of RC and its strategies, the test scores revealed that the students' RC competency was not on par with that expected of students at the university level. CRT results indicated that the students achieved between level 1 and level 2, which are the lowest levels of achievement on the DoBE grading system, which consists of 7 levels. None of the students achieved above Level 2.

The lecturers' responses from the interview, however, correlated with the test scores in that when asked to rate their students' RC level, the lecturers rated them as either poor or average, and that only a few were good. This indicated that there is a problem of RC that needs to be given attention. Research shows that RC competency not only leads to academic success but extends beyond that.

Reading comprehension and RCSs should be taught as early as the schooling years (primary school). Teachers should be able to teach RC and RCSs to their students so that they can develop a good RC in their early years of schooling. This would make them navigate their schooling years with ease and possibly, leading to academic success at universities. Since the use of RCSs can aid a student's understanding, RC and RCSs should be taught adequately at the basic school level. Students should be taught what RCSs are and how to employ them when reading. In addition, they should be encouraged to read and develop a good reading culture, as this could increase their vocabulary. This is because good RC and vocabulary are inextricably linked. The higher the volume of words a student has, the better their comprehension will be. Good vocabulary is a predictor of RC competency. The issue of language policy should also be considered. Thus, the language policy should be reviewed. Since English is the official language in SA, learners ought to be taught the language as early as the FP because it has been argued that the late transition from native language to English is one of the contributing factors of poor RC. Home literacy also plays a significant role in RC. Therefore, parents must also get involved in ensuring that their children are encouraged to develop good reading habits. Thus, it will take a concerted effort to curb RC challenges that the majority of the students face in SA.

The next chapter suggests how reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs can be improved.

CHAPTER 5

IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCIES OF FIRST ENTERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT HBUs

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to suggest guidelines for improving reading comprehension competencies and to present a model of reading comprehension competency, as well as a model of reading comprehension strategies for first entering English language students at HBUs.

5.2 GUIDELINES FOR READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCIES

This section discusses reading comprehension competency guidelines that increase students' vocabulary, reading of comprehension passages, reading comprehension strategies and reading support.

5.2.1 Increasing students' vocabulary

Students should be given more reading comprehension exercises, leading to them to read extensively in their first year of study at HBUs in order to increase their vocabulary. They should be guided on handling new and difficult words such as synonyms within context, determining the root of the word in particular and parts of speech of new words. Using a dictionary needs to be emphasised to students as this can assist them acquire and establish meanings of new words.

5.2.2 Reading of comprehension passages

Students need to read more RC passages in order to make up for the insufficient school level reading experience. Reading comprehension passages that contain contextual questions for self-assessment should be given to students. This may motivate them to read so that they could be able to provide answers to given questions.

For example, RC passages can be based on academic and non-academic materials such as general topics that are and could be of interest to the students at HBUs.

5.2.3 Reading comprehension strategies

First year students at HBUs should be exposed to and be taught more reading comprehension strategies. RCSs such as the use of prior knowledge, making inferences, making predictions about texts, self-questioning, visualisation and summarisation (cf. Cognitive Strategies) can enhance students' comprehension when used appropriately and effectively.

5.2.4 Reading support

Lecturers at HBUs could strategically factor in reading rooms or reading corners, depending on their budget, to complement what the library can offer, and include reading incentives to motivate students to read extensively. They should encourage their students to join or form reading clubs and motivate them to read regularly and make reading their habits (see Reading Culture). The more students read, the more they will learn new words which will ultimately lead to a better reading comprehension of different texts.

Since RC is a predictor of academic success, it is important that this should be a primary focus, and that students are given all the necessary RCs study guides and assistance in order to improve their RC so that they ultimately cope with academic life that requires extensive reading. Additionally, developing students' reading comprehension capabilities ought to be the responsibility of all the lecturers teaching first entering students at HBUs.

5.3 THE READING COMPRENSION COMPETENCY MODEL FOR FIRST ENTERING STUDENTS AT HBUs

Figure 5.1 below presents the cycle of reading comprehension competency. It incorporates different elements such as regular reading, good vocabulary, and use of reading and meta-cognitive strategies. Good RC can be developed and maintained

through a cycle of constantly reading, learning new words, using strategies and starting all over again.

Figure 5.1 The Reading Comprehension Competency Cycle Model for First Entering Students at HBUs
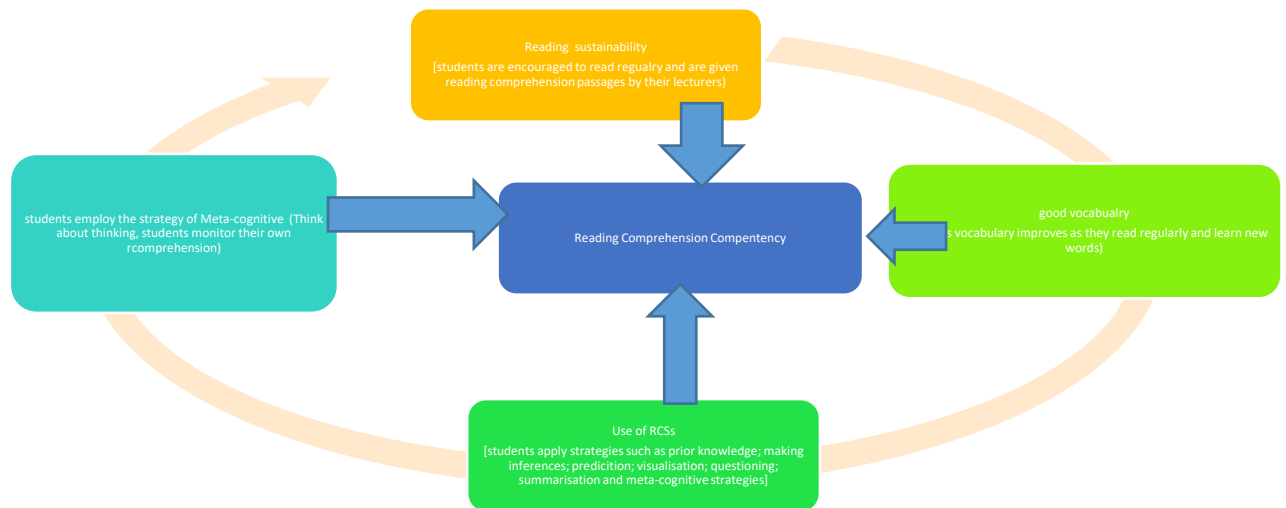
Figure 5.1 above consists of the following four components: reading sustenance, good vocabulary, use of RC strategies and meta-cognitive strategies. These components are now discussed.

5.3.1 Reading sustenance

Good reading comprehension starts with regular reading and being able to sustain the reading culture by students. This will lead to the improvement of their vocabulary. As such, students should be encouraged to make reading an important habit (cf. Reading Culture), thus, the formation of reading clubs and reading debates at HBUs to motivate first entering English language students to become avid readers. Universities can provide them with reading texts such as newspapers, magazines, autobiographies, fictional books and/or reading comprehension passages that they can read at their leisure time in libraries or online since some students may not be able to afford these materials themselves.

5.3.2 Good vocabulary

'

The more students read, the more new words they learn. As such, students at HBUs should be taught different ways of handling new or difficult words. Strategies such as using contextual clues, establishing parts of speech of new words, and using a dictionary regularly may assist students to determine the meanings of new words. Improved vocabulary means improved RC. When students increase their word bank, they will ultimately be increasing the RC competency as well as their chance to succeed academically.

5.3.3 Use of RC strategies

It is through the use of various reading strategies that students can aid and improve their comprehension. The strategies that are suggested for first entering HBUs students include activating prior knowledge, making inferences, prediction, self-questioning, visualisation, summarisation and meta-cognitive strategies. Students must be encouraged to use RCSs when struggling with comprehension so that they are able to aid their understanding.

5.3.4 Meta-cognitive strategy

Students' ability to use the meta-cognitive strategy by monitoring and regulating their own understanding will eventually enhance their comprehension of a particular text. This implies that in addition to the use of cognitive reading strategies, first entering English language students at HBUs must accumulate the skill of regulating and monitoring their own reading comprehension. Most of the students may not be able to think about what they are thinking about. As such, lecturers can familiarise them with this meta-cognitive strategy that leads to effective RC.

5.4 READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES FOR FIRST ENTERING STUDENTS

The significance of the use of RCSs to improve and enhance RC should not be overlooked. It is, therefore, important that students are taught these strategies as early

as schooling years because it was revealed that the following RCSs are either not sufficiently taught or not taught at all to first entering students at HBUs. The model of reading comprehension strategies that can be taught and demonstrated by lecturers to first entering students at HBUs is presented in the figure below. Figure 5.2 below depicts how RCSs can be integrated and used simultaneously.

META-COGNITIVE STRATEGY

(Thinking about Thinking)

Prior Knowledge — Inferences — Predicition — visullisation — questioning — summarisation
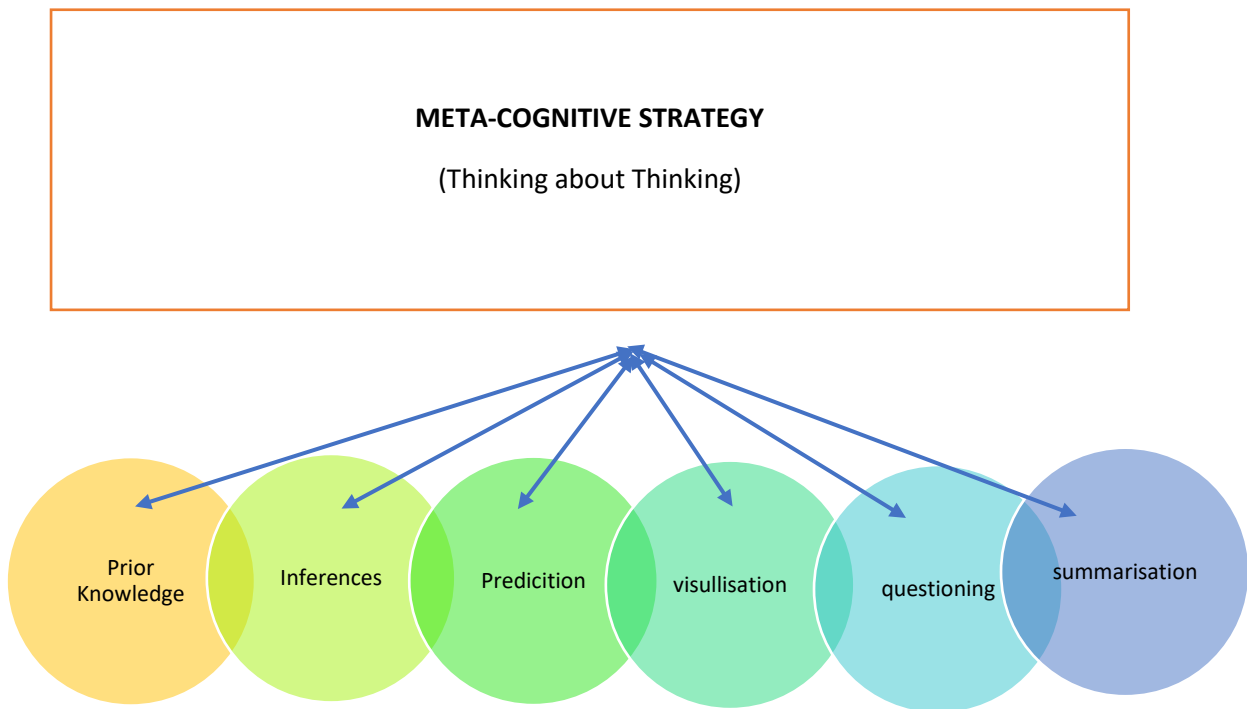
Figure 5.2: The Integrated Model of RCSs for First Entering HBUs Students

5.4.1 The meta-cognitive strategy

This is a strategy that affords students an opportunity to think about what they are doing when they are reading; the students must think about thinking. This will ensure that they develop the ability to exercise control over their comprehension. Additionally, meta-cognitive sub-strategies include planning, monitoring and evaluating one's thinking process. The meta-cognitive strategy also governs the usage of cognitive

strategies. The ability to monitor one's process of comprehension leads to the effective use of the following cognitive strategies:

5.4.2 Prior knowledge

The use of prior knowledge is a very significant strategy. At a university level, the students' schemata ought to be more advanced. Students should know how using background knowledge (also known as prior knowledge) of a topic they are encountering can aid their understanding. However, they would have to activate the correct background knowledge to bridge the gap between new information at hand and old information that they already possess. Lecturers at HBUs should teach first entering students how to activate the correct schema when reading a particular text to support and increase their comprehension.

5.4.3 Making inferences

First entering students at HBUs can use their background knowledge to make inferences, which refers to the information implied or inferred. Inferences will lead students to discover meanings that are not stated but implied. Students can use their background knowledge and information from the text to draw conclusions. The inferential strategy assists students to infer what the text is about, of which the students can verify as they continue reading and enhance students' understanding in the process.

5.4.4 Making predictions

Students can also use clues such as titles, pictures, table of contents and key words to make predictions. Lecturers at HBUs can give their first entering students activities of predicting at specific points, through-out the text and then assess the prediction. Students can also use their prior knowledge to the present subject to make predictions for the purpose of enhancing their understanding and predicting the overall message of the text. What a student predicted can be confirmed or refuted at the end of a reading activity.

5.4.5 Self-questioning strategy

Furthermore, first entering students at HBUs should make use of the self-questioning strategy. They must ask themselves questions related to the text, predict the answers to the questions that they have generated, and search for the answers as they read on. The self-questioning strategy assists students with the ability to monitor their own RC. Monitoring one's comprehension is a very important skill – a process called meta-cognition.

5.4.6 Visualisation

Another effective reading comprehension strategy is drawing a picture of the text – creating mental imagery. This strategy is known as visualisation or visual imagery. This is the ability to visualise the text so that the students are able to understand it better. First entering students at HBUs must use the capacity of their mind to imagine the message of the text. This strategy can also assist students to accumulate new ideas by connecting ideas and concepts to their past experiences. Lecturers can help students to visualise by asking them to draw or write what comes to their mind when they read the text.

5.4.7 Summarisation

Summarising a text is also a very important skill that students need to learn. It can assist students separate important facts in a text. It thus helps them to eliminate needless information and to remember what they read. Summarisation as a strategy can bring about multiple advantages such as improved writing and vocabulary, and enhanced understanding. Above all, summarisation can lead to permanent learning. Being able to summarise will ensure that first entering students at HBUs understand texts better and build on their schema, which could be activated during reading to aid their understanding.

In a nutshell, reading comprehension strategies could be more effective when they are used in support of each other than separately. Therefore, lecturers should emphasise this point to their students. What students must be made aware of is that they are not

subjected to the use of just one strategy: they can make use of several strategies simultaneously. The use of multiple strategies is more effective than the use of one strategy at a time. In addition, students must be made aware of the fact that there are no RCs that are more important than the other. They are all interrelated and should be used in conjunction for maximum RC effectiveness. For example, they can make use of the prior knowledge strategy to make inferences about the meaning of the text, or they can create questions through prediction and so on.

5.5 GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING THE READING OF COMPREHENSION PASSAGES

Since it was found that first entering English language students at HBUs were unable to answer different types of questions on RC passages, the researcher also suggests that lecturers should teach them different types of questions that can be asked based on RC passages as well as how they are expected to answer pertinent questions. Knowing the different types of questions that can be posed when assessing RC through reading passages can also enhance students' understanding of a given passage. As such, the researcher suggests the following different kinds of questions to be emphasised by lecturers to first entering students at HBUs:

5.5.1 Recall questions

Students ought to be taught that recall questions means that answers are within the reading comprehension passage itself. An example of such a question would be 'In which year was the first case of Covid-19 detected in South Africa?' The answer to such a question should be found in the passage itself. These types of questions are also called factual questions as answers are within the text itself.

5.5.2 Inferential questions

With inferential questions, the answer is not found in the RC passage itself, but students can use what is the passage and their prior knowledge to make inferences. This is often what is implied, and students often have to read between the lines to give an answer.

5.5.3 Questions based on titles

Lecturers of first entering students at HBUs could sometimes instruct the students to produce a title of a particular RC passage. The title of the passage would be directly linked to the main idea of the passage. Attempts by students to come up with a title enhances their understanding of the text.

5.5.4 Tone

Being able to deduce the tone from a written text can assist students to understand the message better. Certain words would indicate certain emotions in context, and being able to correctly determine the tone of a text will not only enhance comprehension, but also build their vocabulary as well.

5.5.5 Figurative expression questions

Figurative expressions are statements with underlying meanings. The meaning of a statement is not on the surface but must be unpacked by the students. The correct interpretation of a figurative statement will enhance students' command of language and the understanding of a text.

5.5.6 Vocabulary questions

First entering English language students could also be asked questions that may assist with the development of their vocabulary, such as questions on antonyms and synonyms, or be asked to explain a word or phrase from a chosen passage.

5.5.7 Paraphrasing and summarising questions

Paraphrasing and summarising types of questions require students to use their own words. The advantage of these types of questions will not only lead to a thorough understanding of the statement but they can also lead to permanent learning. These are the types of questions where English language students have to explain the meaning of a specific statement in their own words.

Exposing and affording first entering students at HBUs to experience different types of questions can assist them to answer the questions better, and aid their understanding of a particular RC passage. When it comes to practising RC, there are various factors to consider, such as the types of questions they may encounter based on a RC passage, RCSs and how to increase their vocabulary.

5.6   CONCLUSION

Reading comprehension is very important for academic achievement and life in general. As such, it needs to be given primary focus in the early schooling years. This presupposes that strategies and guidelines on how students can be assisted to improve their comprehension must be taught from the lower levels of schooling in SA. As emphasised, reading comprehension strategies are helpful in terms of assisting students to aid their understanding of reading materials. Further, to improve their comprehension, students will need a good word-bank. This means that they must become regular as well as avid budding readers. Good vocabulary leads to excellent RC. In establishing a good reading culture, the students will have to read not only academic texts, but also a variety of texts, including magazines, newspapers, autobiographies and other fictional texts, including reading comprehension passages that stimulate and sustain their interest and motivation to read. A plethora of reading materials ought to be made available to students by lecturers of first entering students. This implies that even students who cannot afford to access a variety of texts should be counted among first entering English language students who read for comprehension at HBUs in SA.

The next chapter presents a summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

CHAPTER SIX
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this chapter is to give a summary of the main findings. The chapter will also draw conclusions on the level of reading comprehension competency of first entering English students at HBUs in South Africa, and outline the recommendations of the study.

6.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were intended to guide the exploration of reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA. The objectives below were used as guide in the study:

- to determine the level of reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.
- to identify reading comprehension challenges experienced by first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.
- to establish factors that impair the reading comprehension of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.
- to suggest reading comprehension strategies that should be employed by first entering English language students at HBUs in SA.

6.3 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The study aimed to explore reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at HBUs in SA. It was a triangulation study that used CRT, questionnaires and interviews as data collection instruments. The general findings of this study revealed that first year students at HBUs in South Africa struggled with reading comprehension, and that they were not aware of reading comprehension strategies. In addition, it is evident from the results that the students did not use any

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RCSs to help them with the comprehension of reading texts. The data collected was aligned with the objectives outlined under 5.2. Below is the summary of the findings.

The first instrument that was used was a CRT. Students had to sit in for a reading comprehension passage test. The test was intended to determine the level of reading comprehension competencies of first entering English students in South African HBUs. The test scores indicated the poor performance of the students. More than 55% of those who participated in the test did not meet the achievement level. They performed poorly, suggesting that there is a problem of reading comprehension in South African HBUs. One of the challenges of RC indicated by students through questionnaires was their inability to comprehend reading tasks. More than 50% of them indicated that they struggle with comprehending reading tasks. Poor vocabulary was also established as the main contributing factor of poor reading comprehension competencies of the students. Some of the lecturers also indicated that the students had a limited word bank, and this affected their reading comprehension competencies. Research indicates that vocabulary and comprehension go hand-in-hand. This means that students with good vocabulary are unlikely to experience RC challenges, whereas those with poor vocabulary will struggle with RC. This finding corroborates other research studies that stated that SA learners struggle with RC from the basic schooling level. These problems transcend to universities when they do eventually enter.

The second objective was to establish reading comprehension challenges experienced by the students. Inability to decode and interpret passages, lack of concentration and understanding, and poor word/language processing abilities were identified as the reading comprehension challenges that were experienced by first entering English language students at HBUs in SA. The students emphasised their inability to interpret and understand the message being conveyed in a reading text. One of the main challenges that they had was with words. They reiterated that their inability to understand words presented them with RC challenges. One student used the words "bombastic words" and that not knowing what they mean was a problem. Another student also emphasised that 'scientific words and bombastic words' made her or him lose interest in reading because he or she struggled with understanding, as a result. As already emphasised, vocabulary is one of the main predictors of RC. To accumulate good vocabulary, one needs to establish a good reading culture because

it is from regular reading that one learns new words and their meanings, which ultimately results in broadening one's vocabulary. A reading culture must be established in early grades, the Foundation Grades, so that the students' vocabulary bank can increase from early ages. Also, the President of South Africa in 2019 mentioned that RC needs to be given attention in the early years of schooling so that the students do not struggle to attain academic success. Research posits that RC competency leads to academic success. As such, to curb the challenge of poor RC presented to students, special attention must be given to teaching RC as early as Grade R.

The third objective was to identify factors that contributed to poor reading comprehension. Lecturers pointed out various factors that contributed to the plight of RC in South African schooling system. The transition to switch from mother tongue to English in Grade 4 is one of the factors that has been identified as an obstacle to good reading comprehension. One of the lecturers argued that learners' language transition from being taught in their mother tongue in the Foundation Phase and to switching to the English language when they enter the Intermediate Phase presented an element of confusion to the learners, and as such, contributed to RC challenges. One argument was that their literacy abilities are not being nurtured and developed from the early stages, and that they are somewhat late in this regard. Research also shows that the majority of SA learners are not learning how to read in English until Grade 3. This delays their ability to develop a good RC. This can be attributed to the language policy in South Africa, which stipulates that learners must learn in their native language in their Foundation Phase. Other factors identified include poor teaching and learning standards in basic education. Teacher incompetency in teaching RC was brought to light. Limited resources were also credited to being one of the factors contributing to poor RC. Majority of public schools in South Africa have limited resources, and most do not have libraries that can accommodate learners from poor socio-economic background that might assist learners to develop a culture of reading. Other factors mentioned included poor self-esteem and lack of motivation. Learners are demotivated by their surroundings and are not encouraged to read.

The fourth objective was to establish reading comprehension strategies that the students were familiar with and used to aid their understanding of the reading texts.

Despite their challenges and poor reading comprehension, the students stated that they used reading comprehension strategies when engaged in a reading comprehension task. Whereas lecturers indicated that RC strategies should be extensively taught at the basic schooling level because at universities there is not enough time to cover the subject in greater length, they did identify various strategies that they use to teach their students. One of the strategies that has been identified by the majority of the students was to 're-read' the text. The second strategy used mostly by the students was identifying the main idea. This was followed by summarising and then visualising. Summarising and visualising are identified as effective RCSs and are skills that students must be equipped with. Other strategies that were identified are underlying key words, questioning, scanning, predicting skimming, use of prior knowledge, paraphrasing etc. The lecturers also identified similar strategies such as skimming, scanning, the use of prior knowledge, summarising and so forth as reading comprehension strategies that they use to teach their students. Research posits that teaching RC strategies to students will aid their comprehension. There is a correlation between RC strategies and improved RC. Students can use one or a multiple of strategies, including visualising, making inferences, prediction, questioning, summarisation and the use of prior knowledge. Research also indicates that teachers should be responsible for teaching these strategies and teach the students how to use them to aid their understanding. As early as the schooling years, learners must be aware of these strategies. Reading comprehension strategies can assist in increasing the vocabulary and improving the writing skills of the students.

6.4 CONCLUSION

Reading comprehension is very important for academic success. Students with poor reading comprehension find it hard to navigate through their schooling years, while on the other hand, students with good reading comprehension have high chances of success. Most South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are currently experiencing challenges regarding many students that enter Higher Education being unable to read and write at the level that is expected of them. Learners struggle with reading comprehension from the early years of schooling until they reach Grade 12. These students continue with the RC challenges until the university level.

From data analysis, it is evident that first year entering English language students at HBUs struggle with RC. Although it is also evident that students are aware of the reading comprehension strategies, more than half of the students still indicated that word comprehension is a major obstacle. This shows that the students have poor vocabulary. This also indicates that there is no well-developed reading culture amongst the students because reading assists one to learn more words. The more one reads, the better word bank one would have. Therefore, a reading culture should be established in the early schooling years, that is, in Grade Rs.

Being taught reading comprehension from early years at basic education is very important. Reading is a skill that is often ignored as research proves that most students in public schools struggle with reading comprehension, and this problem is carried to the university level. Research also states that reading comprehension is very important for students to succeed at the university level and for life success. This is why it is very important that teachers at basic level should focus on teaching reading comprehension. The students will also need a good RC to succeed in other content subjects as well such a mathematics, life orientation, physical science and so on, and to develop critical and sound reasoning from early years. The students will, therefore, enter institutions of higher learning with improved RC.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study sampled reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language at five HBUs in SA. It did not, however, include all first entering English language students in all the nine provinces in SA.

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which presented restrictions for the researcher. One of those restrictions included relying on the use of emails to get data from the students. Interviews were conducted through online platforms such as Google Meet, WhatsApp calls and Zoom Meetings. Because of reliance on online contact in some of the universities, this led to delays in data collection. As such, it took over two months to complete the data collection process. In some of the universities, it resulted in little participation from the students than was anticipated.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Through the findings, it was discovered that there are challenges that are faced by first year entering English students in South African HBUs in terms of their reading comprehension competencies. The results revealed that students struggle with reading comprehension, and that this might lead to poor academic performance for struggling students. The researcher makes the following recommendations:

- Introduce the English language as early as possible. The transition to switch from mother tongue to English in Grade 3 is one of the main hindrances that was identified in this study that contributes to poor reading comprehension. The English language should be taught as soon as the child enters his or her schooling years.

- As good reading comprehension competency guarantees good academic performance; it is significant that reading comprehension and reading skills be taught as early as possible- from Grade R – the Foundation Phase.

- Reading comprehension strategies should be introduced in basic schooling years; research emphasises the effectiveness of RCSs and their impact on text understanding.

- Establishing a reading culture amongst SA learners from an early age would assist learners to improve their reading comprehension. This can be done in the form of using technology to entice learners. For example, e-books can be used in support of traditional books. Teachers can incorporate the use of technology in establishing a reading culture.

- Reading clubs can be introduced as early as Grade R. This might get learners excited as they would share their ideas with their peers.

- The English curriculum/syllabus should be adapted so that it accommodates reading as a skill that has its own period and is taught extensively at basic schooling level.

- It should be made clear to the teachers that teaching reading comprehension in classes is one of their responsibilities and must not be overlooked.

- Teachers should constantly go under training and workshops aimed at strengthening their teaching abilities so that they can know how to teach RCCs.

- Parents should also be engaged and enlightened that reading is a skill that also needs to be instilled at home by encouraging children to read even outside the classroom.

- At a university level, lecturers should encourage students, especially first year students, to form reading clubs as well. This may lead to an increase in their vocabulary. As such they will have a good reading comprehension competency.

- Extra reading lessons at universities with mentees can be established to offer support to struggling students.

- Communities and rural schools should have adequate libraries around them to build where learners that come from families facing socio-economic challenges can find reading materials to establish a reading culture.

- Libraries can be built by the communities themselves through sponsors, and universities might assist through donations, for example. Curbing RC challenges will benefit everyone in SA in that way.

6.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The scope of reading comprehension competency of first entering English language students in South African universities is broader than depicted in the study. As such, the discussion of RCCs in the study has to be understood against the background that only a few participants in HBUs were selected for the study. Therefore, future research could investigate other South African universities sampling first entering English language students and their English lecturers other than the HBUs selected in the study.

Because the study focused on English first entering students in HBUs and their English lecturers, a comparative study that would look into the RCCs of first entering English language students in other universities that are not categorised within HBUs might give an overview of the RCCs of first entering students in South African universities in general.

That the study focused on students whose English is second language implies that RC of students that were taught English as first language could be explored to determine the level of RC in South African universities. Basic school level teachers' competence in the field of teaching RC could be studied as a way of strengthening the base for RC teaching in an English subject at basic school level.

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8. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDENTS

Directions: Complete the following questionnaire. Use the spaces provided to write your answers.

1. Personal Information

1.1   Did you pass EFAL or EHL at Matric/Senior Certificate examination?

Yes		No	

1.2   Which year was it?

1.3   What symbol/level did you obtain?

1.4   What degree have you registered for?

1.5   Were you ever taught how to read a comprehension passage?

Yes		No	

1.6   At what level of study did that happen?

1.7 Would like to attend a reading comprehension refresher course?

Yes		No		Maybe	

2. Reading Comprehension Application

2.1   What do you understand by reading comprehension?

2.2   What type of English texts are you expected to read at first year level? **You may choose more than one option.**

Textbooks		Essays		Research articles		Case studies		Reports	
Other (Please specify)									

2.3   How much time do you need to complete the task mentioned above?

2.4   Do you read any additional text to boost your comprehension?

Yes		No	

2.5   Is your English vocabulary poor or good?

2.6   Do you sometimes use reading tools that would aid comprehension?

Yes		No	

2.7   If your response to 2.6 is yes, please give examples mentioned.

2.8   Do you consider yourself a good reader?

Yes		No		Maybe	

2.9   Do you sometimes activate your prior knowledge when reading?

Yes		No	

2.10 Are you able to comprehend reading tasks?

Yes		No		Sometimes	

2.11 Do you reflect on what you have read?

Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always	

2.12 Do you self-monitor your comprehension?

Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always	

2.13 Do you summarise main ideas?

Yes		Never		Sometimes	

2.14 Do you extract meaning from a reading passage?

Yes		No		Sometimes	

2.15 Please explain how you extract meaning from a reading passage.

2.16 Do you create meaning from a reading passage?

Yes		No		Sometimes	

2.17 Do you formulate new idea from reading?

Yes		No	

Please explain your response.

2.18 Do you sometimes employ reading strategies?

Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Always	

2.19   Give an example (or examples) of a reading comprehension strategy.

2.20   Do you sometimes get reading support from your lecturer?

Yes		No	

2.21   Do you enjoy reading for comprehension?

Yes		No	

2.22   Please explain your response to 2.21.

2.23   Mention the reading comprehension challenges you sometimes experience.

3. Reading Comprehension Prospects

3.1   Is a reading comprehension ability one of your major goals?

Yes		No	

3.2   Should reading comprehension strategies be taught?

Yes		No	

3.3   At what level of study should reading comprehension strategies be taught?

3.4   Does reading comprehension ability lead to academic success?

Yes		No	

3.5   Please explain your response in 3.4.

3.6   Is reading comprehension key at tertiary level?

Yes		No	

3.7   Please explain your response to 3.6.

3.8   How can reading comprehension be improved?

Thank you for participating.

APPENDIX B: COMPREHENSION PASSAGE FOR STUDENTS

Duration: 45 Minutes

Read the comprehension passage below and answer the questions that follow.

Given the nature of their lifestyle, statistics on the number of homeless people can be difficult to obtain. Despite this, the latest research appears to show that the number of people who find themselves in this situation is rising. The figure as estimated now stands at 10 500. The recession is responsible to some extent, for this increase. Unemployment may cause relationships to break down, leading to one member of the household being forced to leave. According to Bowcott, economic stress tends to increase levels of alcohol abuse, which can put at risk an individual's ability to maintain a job and a tenancy.

The situation seems to have been made worse by the presence of the newly unemployed economic migrants, who are not necessarily familiar with the country's support system. Simpson (2020) notes the relatively high proportion of young people from the neighbouring countries among the homeless population. Apart from their possible obvious economic problems, such people find it psychologically difficult to return home.

Passage adapted from Oxford Grammar for EAP by Ken Paterson with Roberta Wedge (2013)

---

1.   Give the passage a title.   (3)
2.   Why is it difficult to obtain statistics on the number of homeless people?   (2)
3.   How do you know that the number of homeless people appear to be rising?
                                                                                       (2)
4.   According to the passage, what is the approximate number of homeless people?   (2)
5.   Why are some members of households forced to leave?   (2)
6.   What are the effects of economic stress?   (3)
7.   How do economic migrants impact on the situation?   (2)
8.   Why is the situation made worse by newly unemployed migrants?   (2)

9.   What do you think causes young people to migrate to neighbouring countries?

(4)

10. Why do migrants find it difficult to return home?   (3)

TOTAL [25]

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW WITH THE LECTURERS

1.   Personal Information

1.1   Are you qualified to teach English?

1.2   Please explain your answer in 1.1.

1.3   What is your highest qualification?

1.4   When and where did you acquire the qualification?

1.5   Do you have any professional qualification?

1.6   If your answer for 1.5 is yes, please state the qualification.

1.7   When were you appointed lecturer at this university?

1.8.   Besides first year students, what other courses or modules do you teach?

1.9   Please state the number of students you teach per course or module

2.   Reading Comprehension of the Students

2.1   Do you think reading comprehension (RC) should be considered significant in English language learning?

2.2   How can you rate the RC abilities of the first year students?

2.3   Please explain your response in 2.2.

2.4.   What factors contribute to poor RC ability amongst students?

2.5   How does poor RC affect class participation?

2.6   How does poor RC affect academic performance?

2 7   Do you think poor RC is a challenge experienced by all the first year students?

2.8   Please expatiate on your response to 2.7.

3.   Forms of RC Support

3.1   What system do you have in place to assist students with RC challenges?

3.2   What form of support do students experiencing RC challenges receive from the department of English?

3.3   What form of support does the university give to students with poor RC?

3.4   Do you teach reading strategies to the students?

3.5.   If yes, what kind strategies do you teach?

3.6   What intervention strategies do you employ for students with poor RC competencies?

4.   Vocabulary

4.1   In your opinion are your students' English vocabulary poor or good?

4.2   Please describe how your students' vocabulary affect RC?

4.3   What is your opinion about the relationship between an excellent vocabulary and reading comprehension competency?

5.   Some Effects

5.1   Do you think there is a relationship between reading comprehension competency and students' confidence?

5.2   Do poor RC abilities affect students' motivation to learn?

5.3   Please explain your response to 5.2.

5.4   How does the RC competency of your students affect the overall class pass rate?

6.   Improvements to Reading Comprehension

6.1   How can reading comprehension be improved?

6.2   Do you think English language lecturers should teach RC?

6.3   In your opinion, is RC sufficiently taught at school level when evaluating the level of reading comprehension of your current students?

6.4   What do you think can be done differently at school level to enhance the RC of the students?

6.5   What do you think the university should do to assist students with poor RC?

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX D: LETTER TO THE REGISTRAR

<div align="right">

16 Potgieter Street

Eduan Park

POLOKWANE

0699

05 July 2021

</div>

The Registrar

University of Venda

Private Bag X5050

THOHOYANDOU

0950

Dear Sir/Madam

A request for permission to collect data from first entering English language students and their lecturers

I, Kgabo Bridgette Lekota (St. No. 200814774), am a PhD student in the Department of Languages, English Studies, University of Limpopo under the supervision of L J Ngoepe, a Professor in English Studies. I therefore request for permission to conduct research among first entering English language students in your university. The study in question is titled 'Reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at historically black universities in South Africa: An exploratory study.'

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at 015 268 4784/ Cell: 072 686 9032 or email address kgabo.lekota@ul.ac.za..

Yours sincerely

………………………………..

Ms K.B. Lekota

APPENDIX E: LETTER TO THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT (DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH)

216 Potgieter Street

Eduan Park

POLOKWANE

0699

05 July 2021

The Head of Department

Department of English

University of Venda

Private Bag X5050

THOHOYANDOU

0950

Dear Sir/Madam

A request for permission to collect data from first entering English language students and their lecturers

I, Kgabo Bridgette Lekota (200814774), a PhD student in the English Studies department, request permission to conduct a research study titled 'Reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at historically black universities in South Africa: An exploratory study' under the supervision of Prof Ngoepe. The study aims to explore the reading competencies (RC) of first entering English language students at historically black universities (HBUs).

The study intends to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and encourage awareness about the RC challenges of first entering students. I therefore request to collect data amongst the students and their lecturers; the students are expected to write a test and fill in a questionnaire while lecturers will be interviewed on RC. The information will remain confidential and will only be used for academic purposes.

For any further information or clarification regarding the above-mentioned request, please contact my supervisor Prof Ngoepe on 015 268 3056, Email: lucia.ngoepe@ul.ac.za. Thank you for your time and consideration on this matter.

Yours sincerely

…………………………..

K.B. Lekota (Ms)

APPENDIX F: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I, …………………………………………………., voluntarily participate in the study on study title 'Reading comprehension competencies of first entering English language students at historically black universities in South Africa: An exploratory study.' Kindly read the information below and sign if you would like to participate.

The study aims to explore the reading competencies of first entering English language students at historically black universities (HBUs). The study intends to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and encourage awareness about the reading comprehension competencies of first entering students.

Participation in the study is completely voluntarily. The researcher will sustain the participants' anonymity and the information will only be used for academic purposes.

PARTICIPANT

By signing this form, I agree that I have read and understood the information above, and I freely give my consent in this study.

Signatures

Participant …………………………   Date ………………………

Researcher …………………………   Date ………………………

APPENDIX G: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

University of Limpopo
Faculty of Humanities
Executive Dean
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga   , 0727 , South Africa
Tel: (015) 268   4895 , Fax: (015) 26 8 3425 , Email :Satsope.maoto   @ul.ac.za

DATE: 30 July 2021

NAME OF STUDENT:	**LEKOTA, KB**
STUDENT NUMBER:	**[200814774]**
DEPARTMENT:	**PhD - Languages**
SC HOOL:	**LANGCOM**

Dear Student

FACULTY APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL (PROPOSAL NO.   FHDC20 21/7/05)

I have pleasure in informing you that your   PhD   proposal served at the Faculty Higher Degrees Meeting on   28 July 2021 and your title was approved as follows:

TITLE: READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCIES OF FIRST ENTERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT HISTORICALLY BLACK UNIVERSITIES IN SOU   TH AFRICA: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
   Note the following:

Ethical Clearance	Tick One
In principle the study requires no ethical clearance, but will need a TREC permission letter before proceeding with the study	
Requires ethical clearance (Human) (TREC) (apply online) Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate	√
Requires ethical clearance (Animal) (AREC) Proceed with the study only after receipt of ethical clearance certificate	

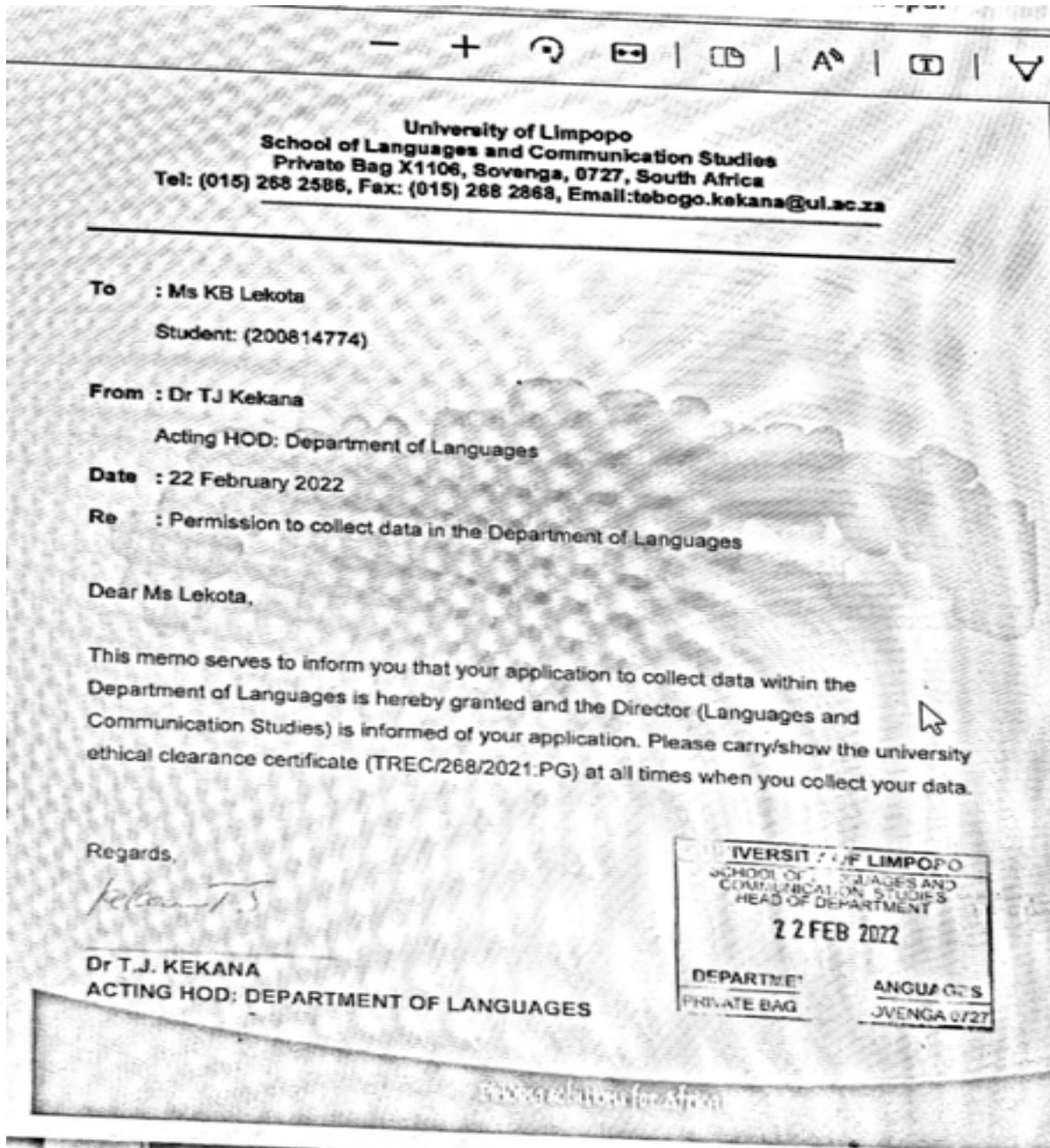Yours faithfully

Prof RS Maoto,
Executive Dean: Faculty of   Humanities
Director: Dr JR Rammala
Supervisor: Dr LKJ Ngoepe

APPENDIX H: UL PERMISSION LETTER

University of Limpopo
School of Languages and Communication Studies
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 2586, Fax: (015) 268 2868, Email:tebogo.kekana@ul.ac.za

To : Ms KB Lekota

Student: (200814774)

From : Dr TJ Kekana

Acting HOD: Department of Languages

Date : 22 February 2022

Re : Permission to collect data in the Department of Languages

Dear Ms Lekota,

This memo serves to inform you that your application to collect data within the Department of Languages is hereby granted and the Director (Languages and Communication Studies) is informed of your application. Please carry/show the university ethical clearance certificate (TREC/268/2021:PG) at all times when you collect your data.

Regards,

Dr T.J. KEKANA
ACTING HOD: DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES

UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES AND
COMMUNICATION STUDIES
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT
2 2 FEB 2022
DEPARTMENT LANGUAGES
PRIVATE BAG SOVENGA 0727

APPENDIX I: FORT HARE PERMISSION LETTER

OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR

Alice (main) Campus:

Private Bag X1314, King William's Town
Road, Alice, 5700, RSA Tel: +27 (0) 40 602 –
2501Fax: +27 (0) 664756526
Email: nrasavi@ufh.ac.za

8 March 2022

Ms KB Lekota
16 Potgieter Street,
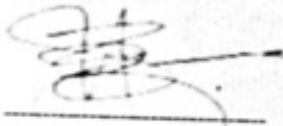Eduan Park, POLOKWANE
0699

Kgabo.lekota@ul.ac.za

Dear Ms Kgabo Lekota

Approval from the Registrar's Office to Conduct Research

In line with the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Policy and Practice, I hereby grant you permission to conduct research relating to your study entitled ".Reading Comprehension Competencies of First Entering English Language Students at Historically Black Universities in South Africa".

From the information provided it is noted that data relating to the study will be collected in the form of questionnaires and through online channels.

Kind regards,

Mr EN Zuma
University Registrar

University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

APPENDIX J: ZULULAND PERMISSION LETTER

University of Zululand
Department of English
Dr. L Mafu
Senior Lecturer/ Head of
Department
MA, DLITT et Phil, Grad. Ce

Private Bag X1001
KWADLANGEZWA 3886
South Africa

email: MafuL@unizulu.ca.za
Phone: 035-9026086

31 October 2022

[A node for African Thought]

To whom it may concern

Confirmation that Ms K Lekota was authorized to conduct research

This is to confirm that Ms K Lekota requested for and was given permission to conduct research involving students and staff from the Department of English at the University of Zululand during the first semester of 2022. Her data collection methodology included the use of interviews and the administering questionnaires.

Yours faithfully,

Dr L Mafu
HOD – Department of English

APPENDIX K: SEFAKO MAKGATHO PERMISSION LETTER

SEFAKO MAKGATHO
HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

To	:	**Ms Kgabo Lekota**
From	:	**Dr M.E. Seleka**
		Head of Academic Literacy & Science Communication – School of Science
		& Technology
Department	:	**Academic Literacy & Science Communication**
Date	:	**15 March 2022**
Subject/Re	:	**PERMISSION TO COLLECT DATA**

Dear Ms Lekota

Your email dated the 25ᵗʰ February 2022 refers.

This letter serves to inform you that your request to collect data for your study titled: "Reading Comprehension Competencies of First Entering English Language Students at Historically Black Universities in South Africa: An Exploratory Study" is granted.

Should there be a need to discuss the unfolding of the data collection process, I am available at: email: edwin.seleka@smu.ac.za/012 521 4471.

Wishing you a successful journey through your studies.

Kind regards

Dr ME Seleka

Yours Sincerely

[signature]

DR ME SELEKA
Head – Academic Literacy & Science Communication