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ADDRESSING THE BARRIERS TO READING COMPREHENSION DEVELOPMENT OF LEARNERS IN A TOWNSHIP SECONDARY SCHOOL: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading is a highly complex act that must be learned. Bernhardt (1998:9) holds the view that reading is not a single skill but a combination of many skills and processes in which a reader interacts with print to derive both meaning and pleasure from the written words. Inability to read hampers the individual's overall learning and daily functioning in a literate society. Teaching learners to read with comprehension is a prerequisite to successful learning at school. Burns, Roe and Ross (1992:4) maintain that learners who cannot see any advantage in learning to read will not be motivated to learn either. Learning to read takes effort, and learners who see the value of reading in their personal activities will be more likely to work hard than those who fail to see the benefits.

In this chapter the focus will be on the following; the development of the reading comprehension skills of secondary school learners, reading comprehension problems experienced by secondary school learners, reading comprehension in the second language as the language of learning and teaching, reading support in the secondary schools and the use of the imaging technique as learning support to improve the reading comprehension of learners in a township secondary school.

2.2 READING COMPREHENSION

2.2.1 Definition of reading comprehension

According to Richeck *et al.* (1983:7), reading is defined as an ability to gather meaning from printed symbols. To some later theorists however, recognizing words is the essential ingredient, others stress literal comprehension of printed words, sentences and paragraphs, and others emphasize the important role of inference, prediction and judgement in reading.

Taverner (1990:1) views reading as something more than reading of black marks upon a page: it is for meaning and one which requires the reader to be an active participant. He further states that reading takes pupils beyond first hand experience: it enables them to project themselves into unfamiliar environments, times and cultures, to gain sympathetic understanding for other ways of life and to experience joy and sadness vicariously.

According to Robeck and Wallace (1990:27), reading is a process of translating signs and symbols into meanings and incorporating the new information into existing cognitive and affective structures.

To Irwin (1991:8), comprehension can be seen as the process of using one's own prior experiences and the writer's cues to infer the author's intended meaning.

McNeil (1992:16) defines reading comprehension as a process of making sense out of text. Reading comprehension is a process of using one's existing knowledge (schemata) to interpret text in order to construe meaning.

Alley (1994:5) defines reading literacy as the ability to understand and use those written language forms that are required by society and/or valued by the individual. The category of language forms "required by society" refers to those kinds of literacy tasks which are needed to cope with the business of living in an organized society reading notices, direction maps, graphs etc. The latter part of the definition allows for the inclusion of leisure reading, but as less often required for survival in society. Le Roux (1993:152) points out that (Cummins 1981:21) postulated that colloquial language known as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) consists of the "visible" aspects of language such as pronunciation, basic vocabulary and grammar, which allow pupils to converse fluently in undemanding every day situation. However BICS alone are not sufficient for academic success. This definition would indicate that the reader's skill of reading comprehension is still on the basic interpersonal communication level BICS of processing reading information.

Jackson and Coltheart (2001:11) take reading to be a cognitive activity that is accomplished by a mental information - processing system that is made up of a number of distinct processing subsystems. The nature and functioning of this mental information-processing system is expected to change as a reader becomes more practised and skilled and acquires new knowledge. According to this definition the development of reading skills would also be important at the higher level of thinking where academic work can be processed. (Cummins 1981:21) defines Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) as the proficiency needed to understand academic concepts and to perform the higher cognitive operations that are required to achieve in school.

The above mentioned definitions of reading comprehension incorporate concepts such as schemata, existing knowledge, cognitive process, social process, literacy, vocabulary knowledge and active participation of the reader when interacting with the text to generate meaning on what he/she is reading about. Other definitions consider the purpose of the reader and the context within which the reader is functioning. These definitions indicate that reading comprehension skills equip the reader with basic interpersonal communication skills BICS in order to function easily in his or her society as well as higher cognitive academic language proficiency CALP skills. Hence no single definition of reading comprehension is fully adequate.

2.2.2 Development of reading comprehension skills of secondary school learners

The development of reading skills generally begins from preschool years and continues up to higher education level. Gunning (2000:12-17) identified the following five stages of reading development:

Stage One. Emergent literacy (Birth to five years)

Stage Two. Early reading (Kindergarten and first grade)

Stage Three. Growing independence (Grades two and three)

Stage Four. Reading to learn (Grade four through to Grade six)

Stage Five. Abstract reading (Grade seven and up)

Gunning (2000:16) maintains that at Stage Five (Grade seven and up) much of the school learning is conveyed by texts that are longer, more complex, and more abstract. Reading interests are more varied and individualized. This indicates that, in developing reading comprehension skills, the learners' age and developmental stage need to be taken into account.

Recent theories on reading comprehension skills advocate metacognition, prior knowledge and active interaction of the reader with the text to achieve meaning or comprehension. The development of reading comprehension skills initially aims at equipping the learners with basic communication skills in order to function adequately in their society. At this level reading is seen as a communication mode. Bower (1989:116) maintains that readers gain access to knowledge and world incidents by means of reading books, magazines and newspapers, watching TV, surfing the internet etc. The early development of reading comprehension skills may even begin before formal learning commences at school. The primary schools play an important role in developing basic interpersonal communication skills in the learners in both spoken and written media.

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Reading comprehension skills need to be taught. Danielson and La Bonty (1994:65) maintain that instruction in comprehension occupies less than one percent of instructional time in the classroom. They further mention that educators should develop in their learners a thorough understanding of what reading comprehension means, how it can be monitored and what can be done when comprehension fails to occur (Danielson and La Bonty 1994:65). Samuels and Farstrap (1992:188) also hold the view that instruction in reading comprehension involves giving students opportunities to activate their background knowledge, discover information, and construct new understanding.

Current theories on reading comprehension advocate the importance of prior knowledge, that is, the background information that a reader brings to the text. Gunning (2000:204) holds the view that, because comprehension involves relating the unknown to the known, it is important that students become aware of what they know about a subject. Before students read a selection, the teacher should activate students' prior knowledge through questioning. By so doing, the educator will be supporting the development of reading comprehension skills in learners.

The development of reading comprehension skills does not necessarily mean the increase of word knowledge or vocabulary. Aaron and Joshi (1992:53) hold the view that simply increasing the reader's vocabulary size does not by itself automatically guarantee a corresponding improvement in comprehension of sentences and text. Sentences and texts require that the reader go beyond the lexical information present on the printed page. This indicates that reading comprehension skills need to develop towards a higher level of thinking.

Secondary school learners are at the stage where higher levels of reading comprehension skill need to be introduced. According to Bower (1989:116), reading does not only keep people in touch with their environment, but it also promotes personal development. It enriches vocabulary and logical thinking. Taverner (1990:4) maintains that reading can also be used as a means of learning. Reading constantly subjects the reader's mind to new information requiring him/her to adjust his/her thinking.

This indicates that the learner needs to develop higher order thinking skills for academic learning. Bower (1989:116) also mentions that academic progress is frequently the result of reading. Learners use their reading skills to improve their study skills, manage their time, take notes, read with comprehension and to learn to read with analysis of the text in order to form their own interpretations and views. The latter reading comprehension skill reflects CALP which

is characterised by advanced vocabulary, high reading speed, logical, critical reading as well as creative reading.

The demands and challenges in the development of reading comprehension skills of secondary school learners, especially of township secondary school learners, need to be contemplated with reference to the above.

2.2.3 Demands and challenges in the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners

In most secondary schools, learners are generally found who experience reading comprehension difficulty. However, it is often taken for granted by teachers that, at this level, learners are able to read with comprehension and little is done to support those who aren't. Learners who fail to read with comprehension are often left only with an option of using a dictionary to enhance comprehension. In township secondary school, the standard of reading comprehension might be low for various reasons!

A strong challenge in the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners is contained in their scholastic background. The scholastic background of most township secondary school learners is often characterised by poor performance. Often the reading comprehension level with which they enter the secondary school, is not yet at the basic level of interpersonal communication. These learners can be referred to as high-risk learners in the development of reading comprehension skills at the higher levels, especially if such skills will not be taught explicitly during Grade 8.

Taverner (1990:5) holds the view that reading is more than seeing words clearly, more than pronouncing words correctly, more than recognizing the meaning of isolated words. Reading requires one to think, feel and imagine. Effective reading is purposeful. This emphasizes yet again that the development of reading comprehension skills should reach a level where the learner functions at the higher levels of thinking. Secondary school learners need to be assisted to begin to develop their cognitive academic language proficiency in order to meet the demands of further and higher education.

The demands and challenges that face educators and learners in township secondary schools frequently include a lack of resources. Lack of books such as fiction, non-fiction and reference books (encyclopaedias and dictionaries) puts the schools in a disadvantaged position. Most

fiction used in the classroom in township secondary schools is not culture-friendly. Some of the information in these books is far removed from the learners' experiential knowledge. Thus, when reading, they experience a problem of how to assimilate the new knowledge with their existing knowledge.

Educators, as facilitators of knowledge, play an important role in the development of reading comprehension skills of learners. In the definitions of reading comprehension mentioned earlier metacognition is one component that is important in enhancing reading comprehension. Irwin (1991:4) defines metacognition as conscious awareness and control of one's own cognitive process. This involves knowing when one does or does not understand something and knowing how to go about achieving a cognitive goal such as successful comprehension or long term recall. Educators need to assist learners in making them aware of their cognitive process and how it can help them with reading comprehension. Educators also need to equip learners with strategies for improving metacognitive skills in order to improve reading comprehension.

According to Aaron and Joshi (1992:176), a metacognitive strategy to teach students to plan, implement and evaluate strategic approaches to reading comprehension is described by Palincsar (1986) as reciprocal teaching. Before starting to read each day, students and their teacher review the skills necessary for successful reading namely, strategic planning, self monitoring of comprehension, and self evaluation. Comprehension monitoring is a very basic metacognitive process. Aaron and Joshi (1992:173) hold the view that if a learner reads and comprehends poorly but is aware of this fact, he/she can take appropriate measures to remedy the comprehension failure. In contrast, a child who does not monitor his/her own comprehension will not take corrective action. Thus, making learners aware of their metacognitive processes and also using them is the challenge that is faced by both educators and learners in the development of reading comprehension of township secondary schools.

According to schema theory, a schema is the background knowledge on which the interpretation of the current text depends. McNeil (1992:19) explains that schemata consists of the reader's concepts, beliefs, expectations and processes - virtually everything from past experiences that is used in making sense of things and actions being present. In reading, schemata are used to make sense of the text; the printed words evoke the reader's experiences, as well as past and potential relationships.

A notable challenge which educators in a township secondary school face is maintaining or enhancing the learners' interest, motivation and self-concept. The researcher has observed that the interest and motivation of most township secondary school learners are often low and this affects their self-concept negatively. On the other hand, educators often lack the motivation, creativity and skills on how to present good quality lessons that can promote learning in an interesting manner. According to Donald *et al.* (1997:115), some teachers are able to express their enthusiasm in such a way that students begin to feel enthusiastic about their work. Others are demoralized, showing little interest in their work. This attitude rubs off onto the students, who are also likely to show little interest in their work. In South Africa the above mentioned factors are the daily experiences of most township secondary schools. Unfortunately there is little research that has been done about this state of affairs. Most facts mentioned above are the personal experiences of the researcher.

2.3 READING COMPREHENSION PROBLEMS

2.3.1 Reading comprehension problems experienced by secondary school learners

Reading comprehension problems experienced by secondary school learners is also viewed from an orthodidactic perspective. The interaction relationship between the educator, learner and content forms the basis for all formal learning. Once this harmonious relationship is disturbed or does not move smoothly then learning problems may arise, of which one is a reading comprehension problem (Van Niekerk 186:189).

When learners learn to read, not everybody succeeds equally well in their reading, especially not in reading comprehension. There are various forms of reading and proficiency in the language of the text that logically affect the understanding of the text. Learners experiencing reading difficulties of any nature will to a large extent experience difficulties with comprehension. Barriers to reading with comprehension may arise from various aspects such as intrinsic factors e.g. the learner's cognitive style, motivation etc. and extrinsic factors such as the learning environment, cultural background, resources and teaching styles.

One of the reading comprehension problems experienced by secondary school learners is an inability to use their metacognitive processes. Educators need to teach learners how to choose appropriate strategies when reading to enhance comprehension. The use of metacognitive process demands the learner to actively interact with the text. Irwin (1991:7) holds the view that comprehension is an active process to which the reader brings his/her individual attitudes, interests, expectations, skills and prior knowledge. Active participation in reading comprehension

enables the learner to monitor his/ her reading. Most secondary school learners who experience reading comprehension problems or difficulty, often fail to monitor their understanding and also lack the skills of how to remedy the problems they encounter during reading, hence comprehension is not achieved.

Some of the secondary school learners experiencing reading comprehension problems find it difficult to elaborate on what they are reading. According to McNeil (1992:72), comprehension can be improved by deep processing of text material or information. One form of deep processing is elaboration, the embellishment of what is read. According to Gunning (2000:222), the term elaboration refers to additional processing of text by the reader which may result in improved comprehension and meaning. Elaboration involves building connections between one's background knowledge and the text or integrating these two sources through manipulating or transforming information. The different types of elaborations include making predictions, integrating the information with prior knowledge, forming mental images, responding effectively and responding with higher-level thinking process.

Another problem secondary school learners experience with reading comprehension is an inability to read critically. According to Burns *et al.* (1992:278), the critical reader must be an active reader, questioning, searching for facts and suspending judgement until he/she has considered all the material. This level of reading is essential for higher-education students but it should be developed as early as Grade 8 onwards. Educators need to teach learners to read critically from early grades by encouraging critical thinking. When reading a story in class, educators can ask, "Do you think this story is real or make-believe? Why do you think that?" (Burns *et al.* 1992:278). According to Aaron and Joshi (1992:167), critical reading is part of comprehension skill, and the development of critical thinking is one of the goals of education.

Most secondary school learners often fail to read creatively. Creative reading, just as critical reading, is one of the higher-order thinking skills. Burns *et al.* (1992:258) maintain that creative reading involves going beyond the material presented by the author. Creative reading requires readers to think as they read, and it also requires them to use their imaginations. Thus educators need to carefully nurture creative reading, trying not to ask only questions that have absolute answers, since this will tend not to encourage the diverse processes characteristic of creative reading.

Reading comprehension further rests on making meaning or interpreting the text at hand. Burns et al. (1992:266) maintain that interpretive reading is reading between the lines or making inferences. It is a process of deriving ideas that are implied rather than directly stated. A text is never fully explicit. Some relationships among events, motivation of characters and other factors are left out of text with the expectation that readers will figure them out on their own. For example, consider the sentence "Our neighbour unlocked the door". An inference one might make is that the instrument used to unlock the door was a key. Thus the ability to draw inferences is a cornerstone of reading competence (Mayer 1998:94). Educators need to develop these reading comprehension skills gradually up to a higher level in order to combat reading comprehension problems.

2.3.2 Reading comprehension problems experienced by township secondary school learners

(1) The township environment

Vacca, Vacca & Gove (1991:65) maintain that the roots of reading begin at home. They also mention that early readers have access to a variety of easy material in the home. Such homes are frequently characterized by one or more parents and older siblings who read regularly.

In South Africa, the researcher has observed that township learners who come from families where parents have a low level of education, early stimulation is very little if not absent. In some families, parents are "educated", meaning that they can read and write, but still they never buy books or read stories to their children. In other families, books are there such as magazines, newspapers or literature books, but these parents still lack the knowledge that they should develop literacy in their children from an early age. Thus ignorance, lack of interest and motivation in reading on the part of the parents is a great barrier in the development of literacy in the early ages of township learners.

Most township secondary school learners often come from a disadvantaged environment. Rude & Oehlkers (1984:332) hold the view that one reason why learners fail to develop the ability or motivation to read by the time they reach adolescence, is the lack of literate role models in their lives.

Gunning (2000:24) also believes that children begin developing literacy long before they enter school. He further highlights that children in high literacy families in their five or six years before

going to school, have already acquired a great deal of insight into the reading-writing process. In South Africa, there are very few learners who have acquired reading and writing before they begin school. Most township learners don't go to a pre-school before they enter school. In some who do go to pre-school, the development of literacy at the age of six still leaves much to be desired. Le Roux (1994:60) points out that empirical research done by (Verhoof 1990:508) has shown that poverty-culture pupils who had received pre-formal education were more motivated to achieve and displayed a better self-concept. He further states that the pre-school education programme is essential for the pre-school child from a culture of poverty because it represents the basis of formal education. The development of literacy in the township schools generally begins when the learners go to school in Grade 1. Some parents begin to be involved in their children's learning when children are at school.

Wood & Dickinson (2000:233) highlight that recent research conducted in the US. Department of Education found that learners at risk for educational failure represent the fastest growing segment in American schools. They point out that people who lack the ability to read and write are severely restricted in their acquisition of knowledge, which becomes evident when observed in the academic settings where learners who lack reading capabilities begin to fail in other areas of learning. In South Africa, especially in the township and rural areas, the picture of the above problem may be even darker if the research is replicated.

(2) The linguistic aspect

Literacy entails the ability to read and write. It involves all the language arts, reading, writing, speaking and listening, with thinking being part of each element (Cooper 1993:6). Bialystok (2001:152) views literacy as the ticket of entry into our society, it is a currency by which social and economic positions are waged and it is the central purpose for early schooling. In some sense children are sent to school to learn to read. In Gauteng township learners are brought up in a multilingual environment where Zulu, Ndebele, Swazi, Tsonga, Tswana and Sepedi languages are being spoken. In some families one parent may be a Zulu speaking person while the other may be speaking Sepedi. Children from such a family may grow up speaking both languages. Most Ndebele and Swazi learners in the Gauteng township areas learn Zulu as their first language. The researcher has observed that neither of these languages is well developed by the time the learners reach secondary school level. Literacy development in Zulu as the first language is often poor due to lack of reading material such as newspapers, magazines and the small number of native Zulu speaking people in the townships in Gauteng especially around the Pretoria area.

It has already been mentioned that language development is a prerequisite in the development of reading comprehension skills. Wood & Dickinson (2000:178) hold the view that the native language or (mother-tongue) plays a critical role in promoting literacy and ultimately in the overall success of Limited Proficiency Learners (LEP). They also mention that literacy instruction in the native language is the most pedagogically sound way to teach learners acquiring English about the relationship between meaning and print in both the native language and English. Research has shown that learners with high levels of literacy proficiency in the first language (L1) perform much better on tasks of academic language proficiency and literacy proficiency in their native language (Wood & Dickinson 2000:178). Most township secondary school learners who experience reading comprehension problems in English experience overall literacy problems. Their level of English language development is often inadequate. They usually also fail to express themselves adequately, both in spoken language and in written language.

The limited use of English language by township learners is attributed to the following: These learners acquire English as a second language under an entirely different set of conditions: he/she learners English at an older age, at least pre-primary or primary age. Learning takes place within a group of the formal environment of the classroom. The introduction to English is largely through the printed word, and learning the rules of the language is primarily mechanical. Moreover, adequate and appropriate adult models might be lacking, since teachers in black schools are themselves often limited in their command of English (Le Roux 1993:155). Thus communication in English for township learners is still a problem in their everyday environment due to the above-mentioned factors.

Another problem that aggravates reading comprehension problems is the English linguistic components that differ from those of African languages. This linguistic problem makes it difficult for township learners to master these components since they don't form part of their daily experiential world.

Bialystok (2001:154) holds the view that learning to read is the acquisition of culture, and is therefore a central part of children's socialization from the earliest encounters with text. Thus the family context of language use has left no doubt that family support and early exposure have a profound influence on the child's development of literacy skills. Literacy skills are the building blocks of language. Language development is a prerequisite in the development of reading comprehension skills.

2.4 COMPREHENSION OF TEXT IN THE SECOND LANGUAGE

2.4.1 Introduction

One of the barriers to reading comprehension is the use of a second language. Most township secondary school learners learn through English, which is their second language. Gregory (1996:7) highlights that in pedagogical discussions, learning to read has long been considered a mental or interpersonal process. Cook (2001:89) maintains that the cognitive process of reading is restricted in the second language. Reading, like speaking, occurs in a context rather than in the sentences themselves, but is derived from the previous knowledge stored in the reader's mind and the processes through which the reader tackles it. The background knowledge into which a text fits, sometimes called schema, plays a large role in how it is read. Experience has shown that the low level of English language development attained by most township secondary school learners is one of the greatest barriers to reading comprehension.

2.4.2 Development of reading comprehension skills in a second language as the language of learning and teaching (LoLT)

The development of English language proficiency as the language of learning and teaching is a pre-requisite in the development of reading comprehension skills for academic purposes, by township secondary school learners in South Africa. Bialystok (2001:175) maintains that: "for children in school, reading is the primary source of knowledge transmission and expression, and if this exchange takes place in a weaker language or depends on compromised skills, the consequences for children's education are obvious. Vacca *et al.* (1991:50) believe that meaningless pronunciation drills should be avoided when developing the second language. All instruction and practice should provide opportunities for natural, meaningful communication. If learners feel comfortable and confident in the use of a second language then they will be actively involved when interacting with the reading text. They will also be able to use their cognitive process in order to create meaning and sense of what they are reading.

The English language is generally introduced as early as Grade 2 level in the township primary schools. Township learners are exposed to English through formal learning at school and media such as TV, radio, newspapers, books etc. Learners from township secondary schools don't have much opportunity to learn the English language in an informal way. Wallace, Charles and Temple (2001:76) hold the view that among factors which influence a person's ability to learn a second language, are the age of acquisition, the role of the language, and the exposure to the second language. The development of basic communication skills in the second language or

language of learning and teaching is imperative in enhancing the development of reading comprehension skills.

Cook (1991:3) holds the view that one crucial component in second language learning is what students bring with them into the classroom. Second language learners often have fully formed personalities and minds when they start learning the second language and these have a profound effect on their ways of learning and how successful they are. The development of English as the language of learning and teaching in South Africa is important in enabling learners to achieve comprehension when they assimilate new knowledge with their prior knowledge.

The development of basic communication skills in the language of learning and teaching will facilitate the development of reading comprehension skills. The problem township secondary school learners experience is their inability to use English in their daily lives. Donald *et al.* (1997:165) suggest that one way of developing the second language proficiency of disadvantaged learners is by devising opportunities for active language communication in the classroom - not just educator talk and passive learner response (Mills and Mills 1998). This is particularly important in helping learners to grow in language competence and confidence in their own and second language development. According to Gunning (2002:2), reading is very much a language activity and, ultimately, our ability to read is limited by our language skills. Without language there actually would be no reading. The development and the enrichment of English as the language of learning and teaching is important in enhancing reading comprehension skills.

Most township secondary school learners are often afraid to communicate in English since they feel inadequate and incompetent. Bond, Tinker & Wasson (1979:105) highlight that learners from homes in which a language other than English is spoken may know little or no English. They may be unable to understand or to speak English well enough to participate in ordinary classroom activities. They further mention that the reading difficulties of learners who are learning in English as a second language tend to be due to their inability to understand or speak English. Educators should therefore encourage learners to use the English language without any fear of failure since this fear is detrimental to the development of the English language and reading comprehension skills. Wallace *et al.* (2000:43) maintain that anxiety is another reaction to academic stress and failure in the learning situation. Anxious learners need reassurance that they can learn the second language by the very act of communicating in it.

Motivation is one factor that plays an important role in the learning of the second language. According to Cook (2000:115), learners will find it difficult to learn a second language if they have neither instrumental nor integrative motivation as in the case of school language teaching. Instrumental motivation means learning the language for an ulterior motive unrelated to its use by the native speakers - to pass an examination, to get a certain kind of job, and so on. The integrative motivation reflects whether the learners identify with the target culture and people in some sense, or reject them. Once learners realize that reading contributes to their personal development, they will be motivated to read. Samuels and Farstrap (1992:181) hold the view that the reading environment is optimum when learners are enthusiastic about reading and have an I...can...do...it attitude. The educator's ability to help learners develop this enthusiasm depends on the presence of two factors: success and usefulness of reading. The educator can provide learners with opportunities for success by giving them reading instruction that is within their zone of proximal development.

To gain some insight into the process of comprehension, Gunning (2000:199) explains it by using the following paragraph as to how one goes about comprehending it.

A hoatzin has a clever way of escaping from its enemies.
It generally builds its home in a branch that extends over a swamp or stream.
If an enemy approaches, the hoatzin plunges into the water below.
Once the coast is clear, it uses its finger like claws to climb back up the tree.
Hoatzin are born with claws on their wings but lose the claws as they get older.

Gunning (2000:200) explains that for comprehension to take place, one would rely heavily on the knowledge one brings to the text. One definition of comprehension states that, comprehension is the process of building connection between what we know and what we don't know. He further highlights that it is currently theorized that our knowledge is packaged into units known as schemata. Comprehension therefore primarily involves activating or constructing a schema that accounts for the elements in a text.

In constructing the meaning of the selection on the hoatzin, one has to use various processes to activate the appropriate schema and fill in the slots or gaps in the story. By reading the first sentence assuming that the learner did not know what a hoatzin was, he/she may have made reasoned prediction that it was some kind of animal. The information in the first sentence was

probably enough to activate his/her animal - survival - from - enemies schema. Learners for whom English is their first language will find it easy to predict that a hoatzin is an animal trying to survive from its enemies. Township secondary school learners who are using English as a second language and who lack a lot of English vocabulary words will find it difficult to make such a prediction. Although these learners have a schema on animals and their survival, this schema has not been developed in English.

To understand the above paragraph, the whole paragraph must be seen as a “whole” and learners need to comprehend the incoming written or spoken language as a whole. To understand one word in the sentence which is difficult does not lead to comprehension. Comprehension of language of this whole paragraph will lead to understanding or comprehension of the text. Hence the use of mother-tongue to explain what this paragraph is all about, will activate the schema on animals and their dangers to learners. Once these schemas are activated then learners are in a position to connect what they know with the new information they are reading to construct meaning. It will also help them to infer and to draw conclusions on how the hoatzin is able to survive from its enemies. Thus a technique that would take the learners' level of second language knowledge and the barriers affecting the development of reading comprehension skills into account will be vitally important especially for township secondary school learners.

2.4.3 Barriers affecting the development of reading comprehension in the language of learning and teaching

One of the barriers in the development of reading comprehension skills is learning through the second language. Wood (1994:113) argues that, since second language learners have an extensive base of prior knowledge that has not been developed in English and the cultural traditions of English, special attention needs to be given to their prior knowledge when developing reading comprehension skills. He further emphasizes that learners learn, understand and remember more when their background knowledge is activated and organized prior to engaging in a reading task. Township secondary school learners' background information is in their first language. Second language text hampers the processing of new information. Thus learners may fail to comprehend what they are reading in their textbooks and worksheets.

Second language also negatively affects the development of the cognitive structures. Samuels and Farstrap (1992:50) describe language as the medium of human learning, which makes

human learning quite different from the learning process of other species. They also maintain that language facilitates linguistic and cognitive development as a simultaneous and integrated process. Thus, when language and thinking develop, concepts and schemata are built. Inadequate second language development negatively affects the active involvement of learners with content and written text both cognitively and affectively in creating meaning from what they are reading. Wallace *et al.* (2000:68) remind us that reading is language expressed in written form. The ability to express and receive thoughts through language, is therefore, fundamental to being able to read and a second language as LoLT may impact directly on this ability.

Another barrier to the development of reading comprehension skills in a second language for learning and teaching is the learners' unwillingness to meet the demands of learning the second language itself. Cook (2000:126) maintains that strategies employed by people known to be good at second language learning actually reveal that second language learning can be very demanding. She points out that good language learners persevere in spite of those emotional barriers. Township secondary school learners generally do not want to make the effort to improve their second language proficiency on their own. The learner's willingness to learn and to improve himself/herself far surpasses what the teacher can do in class. Cook (2000:129) further highlights that the learner's involvement, the learner's strategies and the learner's ability to go his/her own way is what counts, regardless of what the teacher is trying to do.

Some of the external barriers that affect the development of reading comprehension skills are related to the poor learning environment most township learners find themselves in. These learners usually come from families and schools that lack emotional support as far as learning is concerned. The school alone may not be in the position to improve reading comprehension skills without the help of parents. Alley (1994:89) mentions that some research studies indicated that variables such as parental occupation and education, home and literacy resources and interactions between parent and child concerning literacy and language could exert an influence on the performance of children in reading.

The researcher has observed that the number of learners experiencing reading comprehension problems is high in township secondary schools hence the high failure rate in matric. Recently the Deputy Minister of Education Mr Mangena mentioned that the pass rate of mathematics Higher Grade in black schools is less than one percent due to poor English knowledge since the learners learn Maths in English. Again lack of support programmes makes it difficult to help

these learners. On the other hand, since learners experiencing reading comprehension problems are many, they don't see any need to improve themselves. To them, the inability to read with comprehension seems to be a norm that should be accepted and there is nothing to be done about.

The challenge is therefore how to help township secondary school learners to improve their reading comprehension skills. In terms of all the barriers mentioned above that hamper the development of reading comprehension skills the challenge is therefore which technique can be used in order to improve the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners.

2.4.4 Challenges faced by township secondary school learners in the development of reading comprehension skills in the LoLT

One of the challenges in the development of reading comprehension skills in the township secondary school is the poor culture of learning. According to Donald *et al* (1997:87), culture refers to the atmosphere or "ethos" including the values, norms and benefits which are reflected in patterns of interaction. Culture also includes the written and unwritten rules (norm) that determine the way things are done. Developing a culture of learning and teaching in a school is a pre-requisite for the development of reading comprehension skills. When a positive learning atmosphere prevails at school and in the classroom, learners experiencing any learning problem will feel comfortable when support is given even if it is after normal school periods. The culture of learning and teaching promotes a healthy learning environment for learners and also motivates them to achieve. The poor culture of learning has a negative effect on the overall learning of township secondary school learners. Learners often become demotivated, are reluctant to participate in class activities, absenteeism is very high, they are bored and don't want to put effort into their learning.

Another challenge in the development of reading comprehension skills is the poor scholastic performance of most township secondary school learners. These learners lag so much behind the required level of performance in almost all the learning areas and the challenge is how to improve their poor performance. The challenge faced by township secondary school learners is to discover what are the intrinsic barriers obstructing them from developing reading comprehension skills in the language of learning and teaching? One of the intrinsic barriers is their poor development of the English language. To overcome this barrier educators facilitating the development of reading comprehension skills, need to come down to the level of the

learners. By this one means that, if possible, the mother-tongue may be used to explain concepts in the process of comprehension. This will also help learners who are engaged in peer reading to communicate in the mother-tongue in order to participate actively when reading a text. Mother-tongue use will help in the activation of prior knowledge which is critical in constructing meaning on the new information that is being read.

Language enrichment is another challenge that township secondary school face in the development of reading comprehension skills. A holistic approach in the teaching of English language will be necessary in order to improve reading comprehension. Cook (2000:66) maintains that one main issue is understanding the meaning of words. The development of learners' vocabulary in English is one of the basics in the development of reading comprehension skills. Cooper (1993:192) holds the view that as readers develop vocabulary, they learn two aspects about words: recognition and meaning. Unfortunately this is not the case with township secondary school learners since English is not their first language. Township secondary school learners may recognize a word but fail to pronounce it or they may be able to read or decode that word but still without understanding its meaning. Thus recognition and meaning vocabulary with township learners do not develop simultaneously as they learn to read and write. Vocabulary knowledge which is a reflection of an individual's knowledge and concepts in a particular area cannot be taken for granted as with L1 learners when reading comprehension is being developed. Undivided attention must be given to text analysis alone in order to help township secondary school learners to develop comprehension skills when learning through the second language. A support programme is needed to help these learners in developing English language comprehension which is imperative in developing reading comprehension skills.

Gunning (2000:150) identified seven principles in developing vocabulary.

- Building experiential background.
Is to provide students with a variety of rich experiences. These experiences might involve taking children to an apple orchard, supermarket, zoo etc.
- Relating vocabulary to background.
It is essential to relate new words to experiences that students may have had.
- Building relationships.
The third principle of developing vocabulary is showing how new words are related to each other.

- Developing depth in meaning.
The most frequent method of teaching new words is to define them.
- Presenting several exposures.
Frequent exposure or repetition of vocabulary is essential to comprehension because of limitations in attention and memory.
- Creating an interest in words.
Generating interest in words can have a significant impact upon vocabulary development.
- Teaching students how to learn new words.
The seventh and the last principle of vocabulary development is promoting independent word-learning skills.

Educators as facilitators of knowledge need to be equipped with reading comprehension instruction skills in order to help learners with reading comprehension difficulty. The challenge is how to train educators in facilitating reading comprehension skills in such a way that the instruction is adapted to the needs of the learners. The empowerment of educators with reading comprehension skills may help in the establishment of a support programme aiming at the improvement of reading comprehension as well as the learning of other subjects. To equip educators with reading skills it will require that those skills are not sophisticated skills that may need expert knowledge in order to train them. Organising, for example, English language educators for training on reading comprehension and how to implement this in the classroom is the first step towards the facilitation of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners.

2.5 LEARNING SUPPORT FOR READING COMPREHENSION DEVELOPMENT IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

2.5.1 What is learning support?

Learning support can be described as an intervention approach whereby strategies to improve learning are implemented. Learners who experience learning difficulties such as reading comprehension difficulties and who fail to benefit sufficiently from classroom lessons need support.

Baskwill and Whitman (1997:8) highlight the following underlying principles of learner support:

- Learners learn best in a safe, supportive environment that encourages risk taking.
- Learners learn best by doing.
- Learners learn best when they can establish their own purposes for learning.
- Learners learn best when the language is kept meaningful and whole.
- Learners learn best when people around them demonstrate a love for learning.

Learning support provides learners with a positive learning environment that is characterised by trust. Wallace *et al.* (2000:331) believe that the key stone for success with adolescent learners with reading problems is the establishment of trust. Without trust, learners do not view the educator or anyone in authority as a credible source of information. Learning support creates a positive atmosphere conducive to learning where struggling learners can learn to improve their learning skills.

Learning support is a holistic approach in the improvement of learning as a whole. In other words, learning support is the assistance given to learners experiencing learning problems or learning difficulties to come to a point where they realize the source of the problem and how to overcome it. If learners do not realize why something is difficult to them or why they go wrong and how to correct that difficulty as independently as possible, then these learners have not received appropriate support.

Learning support aims at promoting self-regulated learning in learners. Schunk & Zimmerman (1998:1) hold the view that self-regulated learners, whether historic or contemporary, are distinguished by their view of academic learning as something they do for themselves rather than as something that is done to or for them. Learning support helps learners to acquire skills that will enable them to initiate their learning once they have mastered such skills.

On the other hand, remedial education differs from learning support. The term remedial from the Oxford Dictionary compiled by Thompson (2000:765) comes from the word remedy. To remedy means giving medical treatment or counteracting or removing anything undesirable. Richeck et al (1996:293) point out that the term remediation was used to describe the instruction of struggling readers. This term suggests that, just like a physician, a remedy could be applied to an already existing condition. Remedial education aims at correcting or remedying the wrong the learner makes during his/her learning. Remedial education can be seen as concerned with the

“parts” rather than the “whole”. Township secondary schools lack holistic learning support programmes that would help learners to overcome their learning difficulty such as a reading comprehension problem.

Baskwill and Whitman (1997:7) believe that the most important aim of learner support is to help all learners to see themselves as effective readers who can become independent readers. A further goal of support is to help learners develop the ability to use reading strategies independently in a balanced and integrated manner.

2.5.2 Learning support and the challenges in the township secondary schools

Most township secondary schools don't have learning support programmes. The challenge facing these schools is how to establish support services and sustain them in order to develop reading comprehension skills of learners. Allington (2001:111) maintains that the best evidence available indicates that addressing the needs of struggling readers requires a comprehensive and sustained intervention effort. He believes that each teacher has a professional responsibility to continue to become more expert with every year of teaching to support the professional development. Most township secondary school educators lack skills and knowledge in the development of reading comprehension skills. Empowering educators with knowledge and strategies in developing reading comprehension is crucial in establishing a reading support programme in township secondary schools.

Another challenge in the development of learning support in township secondary schools is lack of finances. The researcher has observed that most township secondary school learners come from a disadvantaged family background. Parents often find it difficult to pay school fees since most of them are not working. The schools often depend on the funds offered by the government which are not sufficient to establish a learning support programme. Lack of innovative skills such as fund raising further hampers the establishment of support in most township secondary schools. Allington (2000:117) maintains that, if schools are to develop a high level of reading and writing proficiency in virtually all learners, then funding schools so that class sizes of twenty or so are common, would be a broad first step.

Another challenge in the development of learning support in the township secondary schools is lack of parental involvement. Most parents often fail to take ownership of the schools where their children are attending. Donald *et al.* (1997:161) mention that developing a sense of ownership of the school and its goals in learners, parents and other members of the community, is crucial in

making a school a positive experience for learning. If parents are involved and also take ownership of their schools they will be in a position to assist in the establishment of learning support programmes. Parents are also not involved in their children's learning. Lack of emotional support from the parents puts learners in a disadvantaged position as far as learning and the development of reading comprehension skills are concerned.

The distance between the school and the home of most township secondary school learners is another challenge in the provision of learning support after school hours. Learners have to walk long distances back to their homes in informal settlements areas. These learners walk long distances because they don't have money for transport. The distance between the home and school of most township secondary school learners has a negative impact on the establishment of learning support. If learning support is to be implemented after school hours, most learners who stay far away from school may not be able to attend such support programmes.

Over-crowded classes present another challenge in the establishment of learning support in township secondary schools. Overcrowded classes hamper effective learning in the classroom. Allington (2001:116) believes that when teachers work under conditions of low autonomy they do not seem to develop the very expertise that will be necessary to teach expertly. Under these conditions teachers simply follow the rules and offer a standard form of low level of instruction. Thus having all these challenges in mind, therefore, how learning support for the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners can be established.

2.5.3 Learning support for the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners

The learning support that should be implemented in the township secondary school should be fit for the use in a group of learners. By this we mean that the technique should not target individual learners. The technique should not be a sophisticated method that needs expert knowledge in order to be successfully implemented. Sophisticated methods are costly and township schools may not be able to finance them. The technique should be feasible in such a way that educators will be able to improve the learning of other subjects which will lead to the overall improvement of the learning of township secondary school learners.

According to Bond *et al.* (1979:105), the educational problems in improving reading growth of learners with cultural and language differences belong to the developmental reading program rather than to the remedial program. The educational program of these learners should be

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adjusted to meet their individual needs. Learning support that needs to be developed in order to address learning difficulties such as reading comprehension difficulties should be learner centred. The support programme should take the learners' level of development and the learners' background knowledge into account. This will enable learners to develop at their own pace. Each learner needs to experience success as an individual and feel no pressure to perform beyond his/her capabilities. High expectations from either educators or parents of the learner may have a negative impact in helping struggling learners to develop reading comprehension skills. Thus the commitment of the learner, educator and parent is vitally important in the development of reading comprehension skills. The support rendered should be adapted to the learner's needs.

Allington (2001:117) believes that instruction time for support needs to be extended. Extended time should be part of the school plan to meet the instruction needs of struggling readers. He also suggests that after school reading buddies can be formed where ten or fifteen minutes of reading can be introduced in order to help learners with reading comprehension difficulties. Group work is another way learners experiencing reading comprehension difficulties can be assisted. In other words, a support programme that can be used in groups of learners is recommended for improving reading skills of township secondary school learners. Group work has a potential to address as many learners as possible, rather than individualized reading programmes. Group work can also promote cooperative learning amongst the learners. Learner participation and involvement needs to be promoted so that learners can realize their own potential and also use it to the optimum level. Motivation, encouragement and support on the part of educators will be necessary in order to create a positive learning atmosphere among the groups.

Although the establishment of a support programme will need the commitment of parents, educator, learners and the availability of resources such as books, magazines, newspapers, TV etc, if there is no appropriate technique that can be used in developing reading comprehension skills having all these resources may be of little help. The implementation of a technique that is feasible, and has the potential of equipping township secondary school learners with reading comprehension skills is more than welcome. The technique that will be used in the development of reading comprehension skills will be the imaging technique.

2.6 IMAGING FOR READING COMPREHENSION

2.6.1 Introduction

The term imaging according to the mini Oxford Dictionary compiled by Howkins, Delahunty & McDonald (1998:313) means to form pictures or ideas in your mind. Imaging in reading is a technique that advocates the creation of pictures or images in the mind while reading, in order to enhance comprehension. According to the Gestalt theory, imaging is the ability to create imaged wholes. The creation of the imaged whole is seen as a critical factor in oral or written language comprehension (Bell 1991:246).

Language comprehension is the ability to connect to and interpret both oral and written language. It is the ability to recall facts, get the main idea, make inferences, draw conclusions, predict facts and get the evaluation (Bell 1991:246). The inability to comprehend language as a whole may be associated with what is called language comprehension disorder. Bell (1991:246) describes language comprehension as an ability underlying the reading process, which goes beyond the use of context, phonological processing, word recognition, vocabulary, prior knowledge and background experiences. He further mentions that learners who experience weak gestalt imagery often process “parts” rather than “wholes”, hence reading comprehension is not achieved. Imaging entails cognition as well as affective aspects in helping the reader to read with comprehension. The theory on imaging for reading will now be discussed.

2.6.2 Theory on imaging

Imaging theory dates back to the times of Aristotle. Aristotle also believed in the formation of pictures in the mind. He once stated that “It is impossible even to think without a mental picture” (Bell 1991:247). The imaging technique is embedded in the Gestalt theory. The gestalt theory advocates the “whole” rather than the “parts”. Gestalt imagery is the ability to create an imaged whole. The creation of the imaged whole is a prerequisite to reading comprehension. Learners who experience weak gestalt imagery often processes “parts” rather than “wholes”, hence reading comprehension is not achieved.

According to Esrock (1994:24), (Ingarden) suggests that imaging or visualization occurs during a phase of aesthetic experience in which the reader is apprehending the “concretization” of the literary text. A concretization is a flashing out of the text that brings the fictional work into a synthetic, quasi - sensory immediacy before the reader. This means that the reader brings into actuality what is potentially contained in the text - that is, held in readiness in order to enhance comprehension.

According to Bell (1991:246) imagery is a sensory link. Gestalt imagery connects us to incoming language and links us to and from prior knowledge, accesses background experience, establishes vocabulary and creates and stores information in both long and short term memory. Imaging is also characterized as picture theory or a pictorialist's mode. According to such a model the production and use of visual imagery involves cognitive operations that are specific to picture - like representations. McNeil (1992:73) maintains that comprehension generally increases when readers create images from the information which they get while reading. The key to effective image - making seems to lie in forming mental pictures of persons, events or information.

According to Gunning (2000:228), the term imaging refers to creating sensory representations of items in text. A dual-coding theory holds the view that information is coded in two or dual ways, that is, verbally and non-verbally. Verbal processing seems especially well suited to abstract and sequential text and tends to be characterized by order, logic and organization. Non-verbal processing or imaging tends to be more holistic, less bound by constraints such as logic, and better for dealing with concrete aspects of reality (Gunning 2000:228). These systems, that is, the verbal and non-verbal, can perform independently, in parallel or in a complementary, integrated fashion in which verbal input can stimulate the creation of a non-verbal image and a non-verbal image can stimulate a verbal response (Gambrella & Javitz, 1993, Sadoski & Paivio 1994). According to Gunning (2000:228), creating mental images has been shown to have many benefits. It promotes the use of prior knowledge, and improves the ability to make predictions and draw inferences. In addition to overall comprehension, imaging aids retention. The imaging technique certainly appears to be a holistic approach that can be used as a support in the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners.

2.6.3 The imaging technique as a holistic approach in the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners

The imaging technique is one technique that has been identified which may be used as a support in the development of reading comprehension skills. The aim of using imaging technique for reading is to help learners who experience reading comprehension problems to develop and to improve their comprehension skills and memory for content. Comprehension is the main purpose of reading. Since reading is the process of constructing meaning from print, comprehension is therefore a constructive, interactive process involving three factors: the

reader, the text and the context in which the text is read. For comprehension to take place, the interaction among the three factors must be taken into consideration (Gunning 2000:198).

Township secondary school learners often experience reading comprehension problems. The reading comprehension problems generally arise from various factors such as internal factors, that is, within the individual learner and also from external factors, that is, from the environment. Some of the factors that have a negative impact on the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners are the poor scholastic background, poor reading skills, lack of early stimulation in reading, poor reading comprehension instruction, lack of books, disadvantaged environment, the use of English as the language of learning and teaching etc. The purpose of this study is to examine imaging as a holistic approach in the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners. Imaging is one constructive method that supports the development of reading comprehension but its technique should be adapted to meet the needs of particular learners (Pretorius & Bornes 2002:197).

According to Burns *et al.* (1992:277), guided imagery can be used to help learners to read with comprehension. Guided imagery can be used before reading, during reading and after reading. Guided imagery before a story can help readers to draw on their past experiences to imaged events, places and things in a story. Creating such images before reading has been shown to produce better literal comprehension than produced by creating the images after reading. Gunning (2000:222) also hold the view that creating images is a powerful strategy for enhancing both comprehension and memory of text.

The advocates of the imaging technique view language comprehension as a critical factor to reading comprehension. Language comprehension is seen as the critical factor in enhancing comprehension. Bell (1991:253) holds the view that although an individual may experience an impaired phonological processing and decoding, weak oral vocabulary, and reduced prior knowledge and background of experience may contribute to weak imaging, these factors alone do not appear to be casual. In other words these factors mentioned above do not cause an individual reader to read without comprehension. He further points out that good decoders are not able to comprehend efficiently. Thus how can imagery help a learner to read with comprehension?

Bell (1991:253) maintains that an individual or learner can have good imagery and good comprehension only if he/she can decode enough words critical to the integration and

processing of the gestalt. This indicates that the learner does not need to understand every word in a sentence in order to form an imaged whole. For learners to form the gestalt imagery when reading they only need to decode enough words critical to imaging in order to process the gestalt imagery which leads to comprehension.

Imaging technique helps the learner to form gestalt imagery which is a sensory link that connects the learner or reader to incoming language. Gestalt imagery also connects the reader or learner to and from prior knowledge, accesses background experience, establishes vocabulary and creates and stores information in both long and short term memory. During the process of imaging the learner stays focus, pays attention, concentrates and it positions him/her within the text in making the fictional world concrete. Above all, imaging enhances memory.

Most township secondary school learners are often poor decoders and also lack vocabulary. Weak vocabulary may interfere with gestalt imagery only if the unknown words are critical to the whole or are critical to the processing of the gestalt. During the reading, process if the learner encounters new words that are not familiar to him/her and those words are not critical to the processing of gestalt, then the imaged concept - context - may serve to stimulate vocabulary development. Bell (1991:253) believes that stimulating images for vocabulary aids in the storage and retrieval of meaning for isolated words. The development of gestalt imagery can be developed by direct stimulation requiring specific questioning. The imaging technique also promotes the active participation of the learner where the learner uses his/her cognitive processes and affect in order to construct meaning and to enhance comprehension.

Imaging should be taught directly. The use of metacognitive processes during reading enhances comprehension. During the implementation of the imaging technique learners should be helped to develop the metacognitive skills of visual imagery as a strategy to improve reading comprehension. Gunning (2000:229) highlights that, when teaching learners to create images, one should start with single sentences and then move to short paragraphs and later longer pieces. Another way of using imagery is to have learners to draw pictures of concepts or topics rather than use of words to describe or talk. This works especially well with learners who are still learning English or other learners who might have difficulty expressing their ideas through words alone. This technique can benefit most township secondary school learners since they have difficulty expressing themselves in English and have a limited vocabulary in the English language.

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According to Pretorius & Barnes (2002:204), effective imaging does not come automatically. The skill needs to be acquired and practised systematically in accordance with the learners' abilities as well as the demands of the tasks. During guided imagery learners are asked to relax, to close their eyes and to allow themselves to form images or pictures in their minds about what the educator is telling them or reading to them. The educator may use a short narrative and learners should picture all the events mentioned in the narrative. The use of the senses is imperative in creating the subjective meaning about what one is imaging. After the narrative, learners are asked to open their eyes and to discuss their pictures. Learners may say what they saw, how they felt and this allows deep processing of what was said when they were creating pictures and constructing meanings about the text.

Gunning (2000:229), indicates that imaging should follow the following guidelines:

- Learners create images based on their background. Images will differ from one learner to another.
- Educators may not alter the learners' images.
- Learners should be given sufficient time to form images.
- Educators should allow the learners to elaborate on or expand their images through careful questioning. "What did the truck look like? Was it old or new? What model was it? What colour? etc."

The illustration given above is the basis of the imaging technique in enhancing comprehension and memory. Later, learners are taught how to form images or pictures in their minds while reading. Blachowicz (2001:140), indicates that many researchers have found this ongoing mental activity, of (forming pictures) a hallmark of good readers. Imaging as a holistic approach in the development of reading comprehension skills has the following advantages:

- It can be used in a group of learners.
- Cognitive strategies are used and they enhance comprehension.
- It helps learners to assimilate their prior knowledge with the new information to create meaning and comprehension.
- Imaging enhances memory.
- Imaging helps learners to interact with the text in their own individual way.
- Imaging helps learners to use all their senses to create meaning on the text.
- Imaging helps learners to elaborate, to infer and to monitor their reading.
- Imaging enhances involvement.

- Imaging advocates the “whole” rather than “parts”.
- Relaxation is the key to imaging.

2.6.4 The imaging technique as a support in the improvement of learning of other subjects.

Most learners who experience a reading comprehension problem often perform poorly in other subjects. They are often demotivated, passive and have a negative self-concept or low self-esteem. The imaging technique is a creative technique that enhances active participation on the part of the learners and enables them to create pictures in their minds about what they are reading. Once learners are taught how to form images, how to activate their prior knowledge and to connect it with the new knowledge in order to construct meaning, learners will be in a position to use these reading comprehension skills to learn other subjects. The imaging technique helps learners to be attentive, to concentrate and to monitor their reading. It also helps them to question themselves when they don't understand and to draw inferences on what they are reading. Learners can share their views or pictures they have formed which enhances group participation. Learners may also use their mother-tongue in order to express and enhance comprehension.

The improvement of reading comprehension skills is the key to the improvement of the learning of other subjects. The ability to comprehend is a foundation for successful learning. Imaging enhances active individual participation with the reading of the text. Gunning (2000:229) points out that imaging is also used as pictorial summary. When learners are learning a content subject, the use of pictorial summaries such as mind maps may help learners to understand the content subject much better. By means of pictorial drawings learners perceive a particular chapter in a holistic way. Imaging advocates the whole rather than the “parts”. Bell (1991:247) maintains that the gestalt is the entity from which the interpretive skills of identifying the main idea, inferring, concluding, predicting, extending and evaluating can be processed. The perception of the whole is the prerequisite to the creation of meaning and comprehension. The imaging technique can therefore improve the learning of other subjects.

Gunning (2000:227) further maintains that learners who are good decoders but poor comprehenders have problems with all kinds of comprehension, but have the most difficulty making inferences. For learners to understand the content of other subjects they need to base their inferences on several pieces of textual or background information. Some learners choose the wrong information on which to base their inferences, and others do not use the text at all.

They over rely on prior knowledge or do not recall or use sufficient pertinent facts from the text to make valid inferences. Inferencing is a cognitive skill that can be used in all areas of learning. Learners should be encouraged to apply inferences in class discussions and when reading in the content areas. The educator should also emphasize that learners need to go beyond facts and details in order to make inferences. Thus imaging can be used as support in the learning of other subjects.

2.6.5 CONCLUSION

The development of reading comprehension skills is vitally important in enhancing learning. Most township secondary school learners come from a disadvantaged environment and their learning is hampered by various factors. Poor scholastic background, poor early stimulation, poor culture of learning, the use of English as the language of learning and teaching, language problems etc. negatively affect their learning as a whole. The use of the imaging technique as a support in the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners is seen as a key to effective learning. The imaging technique will be adapted to the needs of township secondary school learners in order to be effective in helping the learners to overcome their reading comprehension problems. In order to overcome the barriers obstructing the mastering of the imaging technique and to face the challenges in the implementation of the imaging technique one has to adapt this technique to the needs of the learners. Discussion and reflection on what has been done during each lesson with the learners may lead to successful use of the imaging technique as a support in the development of reading comprehension and the learning of other subjects. Imaging aims at helping learners to be self-regulated learners in their learning once they have developed reading comprehension skills.