

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.2 SUMMARY

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

4.3.1 Content reading comprehension and the imaging technique

4.3.2 Educator

4.3.3 Learners

4.4 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.5.1 Recommendations for practice

4.5.2 Recommendations for further research

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Reading is one of the basic skills for learning. If learners were taught in their early school years how to read with comprehension, reading difficulties experienced by most learners would be minimized at the secondary school level. The purpose of this research study is to examine the use of the imaging technique as a support in developing the reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners.

The literature study has shown that the imaging technique makes use of the formation of mental pictures when reading, which is crucial in the construction of meaning. The creation of mental pictures enable learners to connect new incoming information with their existing knowledge in order to construct meaning on the reading text. The use of the imaging technique promotes active learning, group participation and retention. The imaging technique advocates a holistic approach in the development of reading comprehension skills but its technique should be adapted to suit the particular needs of the learners.

4.2 SUMMARY

Township secondary school learners generally come from a disadvantaged environment. They often experience a diversity of learning problems of which one is reading comprehension. The research study looked at the use of the imaging technique as a support in the development of the reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners. The imaging technique was selected since it is seen as a simple, feasible, as well as less taxing, technique as far as time and money are concerned.

The research was conducted with the Grade 9 learners. The participants were selected after a pre-test was administered, to comprise the 60 weakest readers in the grade. The learners, whose scores ranged between 1 and 15, were randomly assigned to three different groups, namely, experimental group, control group and non-treatment group. During the course of the research attrition occurred where 5 learners from each of the experimental and the control group dropped out of the reading support. In the non-treatment group, 5 learners left the school (an additional 5

did not report for the post-test). Each group remained with 15 learners.

The experimental group used the imaging technique while the control group used the dictionary method in the development of reading comprehension skills. The non-treatment group did not get reading support. The experimental and the control groups had two sessions per week for one hour per session, for a period of ten weeks (20 sessions). The same reading texts and the same comprehension questions were used for both groups. Both groups experienced difficulties with reading aloud, meanings of unfamiliar words as well as the use of English as the language of learning and teaching.

The use of the imaging technique was introduced by means of relaxation exercises and verbal narratives. Learners were guided how to relax and to form mental pictures on narratives while closing their eyes. Discussion of mental pictures was done and the researcher checked that learners mastered the imaging technique. Once learners had mastered the technique, then imaging for reading was done. Learners were provided with reading texts in each session. The researcher guided the learners how to form mental pictures while reading in order to construct meaning. Imaging for reading began with word cards followed by sentence, paragraph and then the whole text.

During the use of the imaging technique problems experienced by learners were identified and addressed. The adaptation of the imaging technique was done with an aim of addressing these problems in order to enhance the mastery of the imaging technique. The researcher adapted the technique by assisting learners with the pronunciation of unfamiliar words, meanings of some unfamiliar words, the use of the mother tongue, the use of self-questions and the use of metacognitive and affective processes. Some learners mastered the imaging technique faster than others. Learners who seemed to be experiencing an intellectual disability had difficulty in mastering the imaging technique.

The control group used the dictionary method in developing reading comprehension skills. This group also experienced problems such as reading aloud, lack of vocabulary and the use of English as the language of learning and teaching. The use of the dictionary method assisted the learners with the meaning of unfamiliar words but still could not accelerate the development of reading comprehension skills. This suggests that only giving learners the meaning of unfamiliar words does not lead to reading comprehension. The development of English language is, however, seen as a critical issue in enhancing the development of reading comprehension skills when reading support is being given especially with township secondary school learners.

The research results indicate that the use of the imaging technique improved the development of reading comprehension skills more than the use of the dictionary method. The statistical difference of the results of the experimental and the control group could not be calculated as to whether it was significant or not since the research group was too small. The improvement that occurred in the experimental and the control group cannot be absolutely ascribed to the imaging technique or the dictionary method. Factors such as learner effect, motivation, learners' willingness to learn and the previous knowledge they have already acquired may have contributed to a positive effect in the improvement of their reading comprehension skills.

The conclusions discussed in 4.3 will look at the research results from three orthodidactic angles: Learning content (development of reading comprehension skills), the role of the educator (in enhancing the development of reading comprehension skills) and the participation of the learner (in improving his/her comprehension of written text).

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

4.3.1 Content: reading comprehension and the imaging technique

The use of the imaging technique in the development of the reading comprehension skills was investigated by means of the following research questions:

(a) What extrinsic barriers are obstructing the development of reading comprehension skills in English as the language of learning and teaching of Grade 9 learners in a township school?

The research findings indicate that poor English language development and the use of English as the language of learning and teaching in the township school are seen as major extrinsic barriers in the development of reading comprehension skills of learners in the township secondary school. Lack of reading books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias and lack of parental support as far as reading is concerned are other barriers obstructing the development of reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners.

(b) What extrinsic barriers are obstructing the mastery of the imaging technique as learning support to improve the reading comprehension skills of learners in township secondary school?

Poor attendance during the reading support due to dodging and the duty of fetching younger siblings, e. g. from day care centres or primary schools, afternoon sessions, the hunger factor, and the reading texts that learners were not within their language level and experiential world had a negative impact on the mastery of the imaging technique. Lack of parental involvement during the period of reading support was one of the barriers that obstructed the mastery of the imaging

technique, since no follow-up was facilitated.

(c) How should the imaging technique be adapted for learners in a township secondary school to master the technique and thus their reading comprehension skills?

The free use of the mother tongue, explanation of unfamiliar words, discussion of mental pictures, use of self-questions, as well as the use of metacognitive skills and affective processes were profitably used in adapting the imaging technique when the text was read.

4.3.2 Educator

(a) What are the difficulties experienced by the educator in the use of the imaging technique in learning support for reading comprehension in a township secondary school?

The difficulty experienced by the researcher was the shift from the conventional teaching style to that of being the facilitator. The role of being the facilitator was challenging since learners too were used to the conventional way of teaching that puts less demands on their participation during learning. This tempted the researcher to use the teacher directed way of learning which fails to benefit learners when using the imaging technique in developing reading comprehension skills. Another difficulty was the lack of planned procedure to be followed when using the imaging technique. The researcher had to think strategies to be used in order to overcome the problems encountered during the use of imaging.

The researcher found that some of the learners were functioning far below their age and grade level than what was expected. Learners who appeared to be experiencing intellectual disability were difficult to assist to master the imaging technique, while others were progressing much faster. Some of the reading texts were unfamiliar to the learners and that hampered the mastery of the imaging technique. Absenteeism and dodging of sessions slowed the progress in the mastery of imaging which negatively affected the development of the reading comprehension skills.

(b) How should the imaging technique be adapted to enable the educator successfully to use the technique in learning support and across the curriculum in the township secondary school?

The use of verbal narratives was one of the ways used to adapt the imaging technique when learners experienced difficulty with imaging. Once learners had mastered the imaging technique they were guided how to transfer the imaging skills for reading and the learning of other subjects.

Learners with pronunciation problems were assisted and those who had difficulty expressing themselves in English during the discussion of mental pictures were allowed to use their mother tongue. Poor readers were put amongst learners who read better in order to listen while following in their texts. Group participation such as the discussion of text, helped learners to share their ideas about the reading text and about the mental pictures they had formed when reading.

4.3.3 Learners

(a) What intrinsic barriers are obstructing Grade 9 learners in a township secondary school in developing their English reading comprehension skills?

Lack of basic communication skills in English, poor scholastic performance, passive learning styles, poor English language development, lack of meaning of unfamiliar words and lack of interest in reading and negative self-concept were recognised as barriers obstructing the development of reading comprehension skills of Grade 9 learners from the township secondary school. Learners who had a history of failure, are overage and displayed poor scholastic performance, tend to believe that they may never achieve any progress and this was detrimental to the support that they were getting.

(b) What intrinsic barriers are obstructing Grade 9 learners in a township secondary school in mastering the imaging technique in learning support to improve their reading comprehension skills?

Poor English language development, poor vocabulary, lack of meaning of unfamiliar words and lack of interest in reading were some of the barriers that obstructed learners in mastering the imaging technique. When learners failed to understand the meaning of unfamiliar word(s) especially word(s) that was critical to imaging, imaging was almost impossible. When the unfamiliar words were explained imaging was enhanced which in turn enhanced reading comprehension.

(c) How should the imaging technique be adapted to enable the learners in a township secondary school to master the technique and improve their reading comprehension skills?

The free use of mother tongue, explanation of unfamiliar words, assisting learners with the pronunciation of unfamiliar words as well as the strategy of asking themselves specific questions with an aim of constructing meaning were used in adapting the imaging technique in order to improve the reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners. The discussion of mental pictures the active participation of learners enhanced the mastery of the imaging technique.

4.4 LIMITATIONS OF RESEARCH

- The problem of English as the LoLT which is experienced by township secondary school learners was under-estimated in planning the research. Many township secondary school learners experience extreme language difficulty such as a serious lack of vocabulary, difficulty with decoding of unfamiliar words and overall lack of English language proficiency. These problems impacted heavily on their progress in utilising imaging for comprehension, often causing an insurmountable barrier.
- Lack of English vocabulary negatively affected the use of the imaging technique since learners had difficulty forming mental pictures because they could not access the content and association of words they did not understand. Most of the learners lacked even basic vocabulary, hence imaging became almost impossible.
- Failure to identify learners with specific learning problems or disability prior to reading support introduced a strong, confounding variable in the research. When learners with a diversity of learning difficulties were included in the sessions, they failed to cope with the work to be done since they lagged behind while others progressed. Special measures seem indicated, to include learners with intellectual disabilities in instruction on imaging for reading comprehension.
- Some of the texts used during the sessions were not at the learner's level of English proficiency and some of the texts were not within their experiential world. Learners lacked background knowledge about the text, which affected their use of imaging to understand the text.
- The time (afternoon sessions) for research had a negative effect on the results, since most learners were tired and hungry and they had to remain at school while other learners went home. Other learners could not attend regularly since they had to fetch their younger brothers or sisters from the day care centres or primary schools.

- The results obtained cannot be generalised to other township secondary schools due to the small number of learners involved in the research and the unequal assignment of learners to the research groups that occurred. The results can perhaps be generalized to Grade 9 (Senior phase) learners of the research school, and for learners with severe English reading and language problems.
- Disruptions such as the afternoon activities (like cleaning of the classrooms) and school holidays had a negative effect on the development of the participant's reading comprehension skills.
- The passive learning style that most township secondary school learners are used to hampered the development of the use of metacognitive processes which are crucial during imaging. Learners took a lot of time before they could get used to active learning where they were required to think and to participate meaningfully during the sessions.
- A general lack of exposure to reading material, a lack of interest in reading and, a lack of dictionaries and encyclopaedias both at home and at school had a negative impact on the development of reading comprehension skills.
- Inability to establish a relationship with the learner's parents during the period of reading support in order to involve them in helping their children with reading at home had a negative effect on the development of reading comprehension skills since some of the learners did not read at all at home and during the holidays. Absenteeism could not be prevented due to lack of support from the parents in motivating their children and in monitoring their progress regularly.

4.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.5.1 Recommendations for practice

When the implementation of the imaging technique for the development of reading comprehension in the township secondary school is done the following should be taken into account.

- The possibility of implementing the imaging technique within the school curriculum should be considered when learners who experience reading comprehension problems if they may be assisted during the normal school periods.
- The learning atmosphere, the learning conditions as well as the school activities during and after school should be controlled so that they should not hamper the use of special techniques in developing the reading comprehension skills. The development of English language should receive serious attention concurrent with the use of the imaging technique when developing the reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners.
- The time as to when to implement a special reading support programme utilising, amongst others, the imaging technique should be considered before the reading support is given. The reading material should be at the level of the learners' language of development and also within their experiential world. This will help learners in using their prior knowledge when reading new information. If learners have no clue about what they are reading then it becomes difficult for them to assimilate new information with their existing knowledge in order to construct meaning on what they are reading.
- Parental involvement should be established in order to form a partnership with the school and educators with an aim of helping their children with reading at home and to monitor their progress as well as giving them emotional support.
- The possibility of having planned guidelines to be followed by the educator on how to use the imaging technique as a form of reading support.
- The possibility of the training of educators in the use of the imaging technique in developing reading comprehension skills and the learning of the other subjects before implementing the technique.

It is recommended that one should not rely on the imaging technique exclusively when developing reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners. There is an urgent need

where special efforts in the development of the English language should be taken in order to enhance the development of reading comprehension skills.

4.5.2 Recommendations for further research

- The development of a measuring instrument that can be used to determine the baseline of English development which learners should possess before implementing the reading support.
- The method to be used in the screening of learners who need intensive development of their English language proficiency before they could use the imaging technique as well as those who can develop their English language while using the imaging technique.
- The development of strategies to be used in the development of the metacognitive skills of township secondary school learners in order to enhance the use of the imaging technique in developing reading comprehension.
- It is recommended that one should not rely on the imaging technique exclusively when developing reading comprehension skills of township secondary school learners. There is an urgent need where special efforts in the development of the English language should be taken into account in order to enhance the development of reading comprehension skills.