CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

As already established in the introductory chapter, within the Malaysian classrooms whilst there are pupils who are benefitting academically from their competence in reading and reading habits, there are also a mixture of pupils who could not read, unable to read or unable to understand what they read. And whilst it is equally important to encourage reluctant readers to read and raise the literacy levels among school-going children, it is also crucial to understand the specific difficulties faced by pupils who can read but, yet, cannot demonstrate full comprehension of what they are reading. This phenomena is present in Malaysian schools. For Malaysian pupils, achieving reading competence in a second language is a more complex process than that in first language reading. As pointed out by Horiba (1990) when reading in the second language, the reader may have to translate or compensate some words to arrive at a meaningful concept, whereas, in the first language, the processes of translation and compensation are skipped. Hence, the reading process in the second language is more complex than the first language.

Lunzer and Gardner (1979) indicate that competence in reading for learning, meaning efferent reading as well as aesthetic reading, rests on the ability and willingness of the reader to reflect on what is being read. They went on to suggest that competence in reading requires the reader to be able to respond to or recognize units of prints as meaningful representations, reflect upon such meanings to match the intentions of the reader, apply the appropriate level of reflection in any given reading situation and distinguish between word knowledge and responses that are more related to reflection. The mechanisms behind the ability or the inability to adhere to the above will be discussed in this chapter. First, it is necessary to explore some of the misconceptions of reading, which if not corrected, may lead to the employment of inappropriate remediation or wrong application of relevant strategies.

2.1   Misconceptions of Reading

Obviously when we read, we start with the seeing words with our eyes. However, Smith (1994) warns against giving the eyes too much credit for their role of 'seeing' the words during the reading process. Smith (1994) stresses that in actual sense, the eyes do not see at all in the strictly literal sense. He proposes that the human visual system is characterized by three particular features. First, people do not see everything that is in front of them. Second, they do not see anything that is in front of their eyes immediately. Third, they do not receive information from their eyes continuously. In other words, the eyes can only 'look' largely under the direction of the brain, as they are

devices for collecting information for the brain, and it is the brain that determines what we see and how we see. Although the perceptual decisions we make as we interact with a reading text are based partly on information gathered by our eyes, the decisions become more significant when they are augmented by knowledge we already possess as we approach the text.

What Smith (1994) has established here is that the words on a page, although important, do not provide the full meaning of the text as intended by the writer unless the reader can make connections between the written words and similar prior knowledge and experiences, or schemata he has stored in his memory. The richer the schemata, the deeper will be the meaning gained from the text. Therefore, in order to achieve maximum benefits from a reading experience, young readers need to have a wide range of schemata and to have the autonomy of constantly developing their schemata. However, having the schemata is only part of the process. Schemata would not be of any benefit to the reader if he is unable to make the connections between the schemata and the text he is reading. It is, therefore, also important to provide young readers with the strategies to draw out the schemata they have stored and to apply that in an active and interactive way as they read a given text.

Mackay et al., (1972), in discussing the translation to the *Gay Way* reading scheme advocate the use of a variety of pre-reading activities to orientate readers to the reading texts at task and as a way to develop new schemata as well as draw out stored schemata.

For early and young readers, pre–reading activities include drawing, pattern copying and construction, left-right linear pattern drawing with letter-like and letter-shape, story-telling and construction and relating daily experiences, describing objects and labeling objects and personal property in the classroom.

In the Malaysian school context, pre-reading activities are introduced during Phase I of the primary school education (Year One to Year Three) and are continuously practised in all reading activities at all levels including at the secondary school level. At the Phase II level, pre-reading activities are not only used to encourage pupils to actively reflect on the text they are about to read but are also used to provide slow readers with the opportunities to gather information and cues that would help hem make some sense of the text. However, in situations where classes are too large and time is limited, pre-reading activities may not be a constant feature in Malaysian classrooms (based on personal communication from teachers in the Klang valley). When steps are not taken to help children facing difficulties mastering reading, their problems may be further compounded while the more able members of the class progress. Although remedial intervention for Bahasa Malaysia and Mathematics has been made available for pupils who require it, remedial intervention for English is still lacking.

Although helpful remediation would be to those who need it, Spache (1981) reminds us that remediation is only a temporary, supportive help. Remedial reading teachers may be able to improve a child's feelings about reading, relieve some of his symptoms of

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maladjustment to school, and improve his reading test scores on a short-term basis. Spache (1981) recommends that for more long-term positive effects, teachers should target to put in place classroom practices in reading that aim to develop more permanent skills such as pre-reading, dictionary skills, vocabulary building and inferencing skills. The implication here is that teachers should not think of remedial interventions as curative, but rather as steps taken to help students' immediate problems in reading and in dealing with school demands. In other words, Spache (1981) suggests that technical improvement of reading skills such as motivation and encouragement, can to some extent, contribute significantly towards alleviating academic problems related to reading difficulties but these improvements are purely temporary in most cases.

Spache (1981) adds that pupils will show some interest in reading comprehension when they are motivated by the materials presented to them in the tests. However, such positive attitudes can only come about when the pupils are in a conducive environment where the classroom size is fewer than twenty, the pupils possess schemata and they read regularly with comprehension. Therefore, these two main misconceptions on reading – that it is a mainly a visual activity and that when a child has difficulties, remediation intervention will solve all their problems - should be considered in light of a deeper understanding of the more complex processes involved in mastering reading and reading comprehension. More important than inculcating positive attitudes, is teaching children to maximize their schemata and to use efficient strategies to interact positively with reading texts. It also important to understand the mechanism involved in reading so

problems at any point of the mechanism can be identified and appropriate strategies to overcome the difficulties can be put in place. The mechanism of reading used is also dependent on the purpose and the type of reading that is to be carried out.

2.2 Types of Reading

The ultimate aim of reading instruction is to produce competent readers who are able to read and interact with different genres of texts for a range of different purposes. Competent readers have the ability to, for example, lose themselves in the excitement, humour and terror of a story, gain maximum knowledge from academic texts in preparation for an examination, and experience winter from the point of view of a poet. Whatever the genre of the text and whatever the purpose of the reading activity may be, Rosenbalt and Langer (1994) suggest that they all come under the two main types of reading: aesthetic and efferent reading.

Rosenbalt and Langer (1994) explain that during an aesthetic reading, the focus of the reader is on the reading experience itself. As the reading act proceeds, the reader draws on remembrance of things past, senses relationships with other things and savours the artistry of the author. Children who giggle, become frightened or imagine themselves in the story are reading aesthetically. Aesthetic reading is the type of experience children should have with poetry, picture books and novels. Only by reading aesthetically, can children realize the full artistic potential of literature. As children become readers

through their experiences with picture books and poetry, they also need to know how to gather information from a variety of texts which is what efferent reading is concerned with.

According to Rosenbalt and Langer (1994), sometimes children approach a text with the sole purpose of extracting specific information - to find out what the climate is like in Argentina for example, or to find out the features of the latest i-pod. The best materials for this type of reading are materials such as encyclopedias, newspapers, brochures, advertisements and school text books. This is referred to as efferent reading.

In order to produce balanced readers who are both efferent and aesthetic, classroom instruction should include active construction of knowledge in the best possible manner. According to Piaget (1959), active construction of knowledge takes place through the mental process of *equilibration*. It is a process of people receiving new information. Piaget was trained as a zoologist, therefore, he described it in biological terms. He says that humans, like all animals, strive to maintain harmony with their environment. Since the environment is in a constant state of flux, the state of *equilibrium* is not a stable one. When something new is introduced to us, we are temporarily placed in a state of *disequilibrium.* Through the related mental functions of *assimilation* and *accommodation*, we strive to regain the state of equilibrium. Piaget defines a*ssimilation* as an attempt to make the new phenomenon (an idea, an object, a word) fit the pattern of knowledge we already possess. *Accommodation* says Piaget involves the modification of

those patterns of knowledge to fit the new phenomena. Competent readers, therefore, may need to master both the processes of assimilation and accommodation in order to comprehend a wider range of texts from different genres and for different purposes in order to fully benefit from reading for both academic and non-academic endeavours. The processes underlying these two types of reading can be better understood when looked at through the mechanisms proposed by reading models.

2.3 Models of Reading

The literature on reading processes discusses three main reading models: the bottom-up model, the top-down model and the interactive model. According to Carrell (1987), the bottom-up model focuses on the processing of cognitive information which basically means that the reader begins with the written text (the bottom) and goes on to construct meaning from letters, words, phrases, clauses and effectively processing the text into phonemic sounds that represent lexical meaning and then building meaning in a linear manner. In other words, the bottom-up model analyses reading as a process in which small chunks of texts are absorbed , analyzed and gradually added to the next chunk till they become meaningful. The bottom- up process is, therefore, data-driven.

The bottom-up approach to reading, say Nicholson (1993) and Perfetti (1995), has some drawbacks which are mainly focused on the issues of rapid processing of texts and word identification. Readers rely on context to grasp the meaning in the text. In many cases,

contend Nicholson (1993) and Perfetti (1995), the reliance on context is seen as a strategy used by poor readers. The argument is that poor readers rely on context as a compensatory strategy because they are poor at mapping text to immediate meaning.

The top-down model, on the other hand, views reading as a linear process that moves from the top, which Goodman (1968) and Smith (1994) call the higher-level mental stage, down to the text itself. In this model, the reading process is driven by the reader's mind at work on the text. Therefore, it is called the reader-driven model. The reader uses his general knowledge of a particular text component to make intelligent guesses about what might come next in the text (Goodman, 1968; Smith, 1994).

The interactive reading models on the other hand, imply an interaction between the reader and the written text. Similar to the top-down, the interactive reading model is reader-driven. They are not linear but rather repeated views of the reading process in which textual information and the reader's mental activities (including the processing of graphic, syntactic, lexical, semantic and pragmatic information) have a simultaneous and equally important impact on reading comprehension. As in the top-down model, the interactive reader uses his expectations and previous understanding to guess about text content (Rumelhart, 1977). Carell (1987) highlights an important aspect of top-down and bottom-up processing:

> [Both] should be occurring at all levels at the same time, since bottom-up processing ensures that the reader will be sensitive to some novel information; top-down processing will help the reader resolve ambiguities, for example to select the better alternative from possible interpretations of the incoming data'.
>
> Carell (1987)

Researchers such as Lindamood (1973), Mcintyre and Presley (1996) and Clearke (1998) and generally agree that during the last two hundred years there has been too much concern with the text. Scholars were a long time in discovering that reading had much to do with the printed page, comprehension not so directly. According to Carell (1987), scholars have come to acknowledge that the text in and of itself is meaningless. In other words, it is the reader who assigns meaning to the text, not vice versa. As such, Carrell (1987) focused his research on the schema-theory of reading comprehension which looked at the influence of schema or prior knowledge on comprehension and recall.

2.4 Background Knowledge/Schemata

Research establishes that prior knowledge, or what is known as schemata, a reader already has is a critical determiner of comprehension (Anderson and Pearson, 1984). However, they are careful to add that how significant background knowledge is to instruction is far from obvious. Nevertheless, they advocate that the materials students

read should concentrate on familiar topics or topics already covered in school, because only then will they have the schemata, required to process and comprehend the new knowledge presented to them. At the same time with seemingly equal force, one could argue that materials should also introduce unfamiliar topics so as to develop new schemata which will further enhance understanding and learning. Carrell (1987) demonstrates the first property of schema through the following simple exercise:

Glance briefly at the following sequence of letters:
T G C I M E P W S Q

Now without looking back, write down as many of the letters in their proper sequence as fast as possible.

Look at the next set of letters:

(Source: Carell, 1987: 128)

Carrel (1987) instructed the subjects to do the same, as in the previous exercise. Because the second exercise matches up with at least a part of a knowledge structure already acquired by most speakers of English, the reader can readily assimilate the second series of data. To one who is not familiar with the English alphabet, on the other hand, there is no inherent advantage to the second series.

The second major property of schema or schemata is that meaning depends very much on the first impression or prior knowledge the reader brings to the text. According to Carell (1987), the process of comprehension is guided by the idea that input is overlaid upon preexisting knowledge in an attempt to find a match. Two simultaneous processes are involved here: one is the process that moves the data from the page to the brain. This upward movement triggers certain past experiences or perceptions about the topic of the text. The other process is called top-down processing and represents an attempt by the brain to locate an existing knowledge structure to superimpose onto the incoming data so that they move quickly to facilitate the assimilation of this new information. These processes says Carrell (1987), share a symbiotic or complementary relationship; they are inter-related and occurs simultaneously - one is not able to function properly without the other.

However, the top-down process, contends Carell (1987), works only when the reader's schema matches the incoming data. If the incoming data contradicts the reader's schema, one of two things can happen - either the schema is amended by the reader's new information, or the information is rejected in favour of the existing schema. It may be concluded that, according to Carell's schema theory, the more you know, the more you can learn. However, the schema model does not provide needed background information as this was not its reasoning in the first place. In most cases, the schema model was designed to interest the readers, to get them interested in reading. As such, each reader will find something from his schemata to promote his reading

comprehension. However, by forcing readers to constantly be reading about the unseen, the remote and the bizarre, they would be deprived of the use and development of one of the good reader's prime strategies: top-down processing. This process of reading about the unknown, says Carrell (1987) is useless when the reader is reading something that is completely out of the reader's experience. Forced to take the information in little by little, the reader automatically slows down, and in so doing reinforces a bad habit--carefully reading word by word.

One way to ensure that the reader's schemata match the new data incoming from the text he is reading, might be found in the concept of narrow reading. Eisterhold (1988) and Krashen (1981) define narrow reading as using local materials, such as school newspapers, local novels and short stories that relate to the readers' life and experiences as reading texts. Using texts with a range of familiar topics is also a way to work with the diversity in terms of abilities and background of the class because the necessary background information can be fairly controlled by the teacher. According to Steffensen (1984), the essence of knowledge is its organization or structure. Therefore, they propose that the manner in which comprehension is affected through the text being related to the particular background knowledge is an important part of the schema theory. The teacher who is reading to the children needs to organize the effects he wishes to produce on the comprehension and motivation of the students by activating specific prior knowledge relevant to the different aspects of a particular reading text.

On the aspect of reading to the children, Elly (1989), provides evidence that children learn new words through hearing stories and children with low literacy background who may need more time to develop concepts that aid reading comprehension, would benefit from the teacher reading to them. In support of this, Chall (1996) says that children's comprehension growth might be best accommodated by the instructor reading to the children, and stopping at strategic places to point out certain things or to make children predict what is to come next. Leseman and Jong (1998) also noted that reading texts drawing on the family's social and cultural contexts could also help children activate their schemata for comprehension. Leseman and Jong (1998) say that to a certain extent, young children acquire knowledge and skills spontaneously in constructive interactions with their environment without explicit, intentional social mediation by a parent or teacher. The importance of schemata to reading comprehension can also be related to the development of vocabulary. As readers interact with the text, part of the prior knowledge they draw upon is knowledge of words. The more familiar words they see on the text, the better will be their understanding of the text, provided they know the meaning of these words. Equipped with a word-list that is appropriate to their reading age, readers will be able to develop their understanding of a given text and also expand their wordlist with new words from the text.

2.5 Vocabulary as Schemata

Graves (1986) contend that children will acquire better vocabulary if they are able to use contextual clues and to analyse words into parts. Therefore, the more words a person

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knows, the higher the likelihood that he may comprehend the reading text. Nagy (1990) found that knowledge about typical patterns of word meanings increases from junior high to college. Children acquire more words for reading comprehension purposes as they grow older and have had wider exposure.

Word decoding at age seven, say Leseman and Jong (1994), is determined by early vocabulary. They contend that the vocabulary of a seven year old child is most strongly influenced by the vocabulary he had acquired by age four. However, apart from early vocabulary, Leseman and Jong (1994) also provide evidence that the vocabulary of a school-going child is found to be significantly influenced by factors such as the language spoken at home and the quality of instruction at school.

Encouraging children to read or reading to them at home, can help them to increase their vocabulary. Juel and Roper-Schneider (1985) say that short stories must be read so that word knowledge may increase to allow reading comprehension tasks to be fulfilled. Juel and Roper-Schneider (1985) provide evidence that children who read interesting texts that contain a reasonable percentage of regularly used vocabulary will be more likely to have a better comprehension of other texts they have to read. Hence, limited vocabulary can hinder children from performing well in reading comprehension tasks. However, apart from limited schemata and low vocabulary, several other factors have been identified as influential in affecting reading comprehension abilities. Some of these

factors such as cognitive and affective pedagogical approaches towards reading and strategies for reading will be discussed in the ensuing sections.

2.6 Cognitive and Affective Approaches

Cropley (2001) contends that promoting positive attitudes towards reading can occur in a *mutually responsive teaching-learning environment that offers a wholesome learning* experience. Strategies and approaches that promote a favourable setting for reading must first and foremost, be learner friendly. Cropley (2001) explains that people gain more experience and develop psychologically when there is a switch in thinking away from focusing on the immediate and concentrate more on the properties of real physical objects to their general properties and then to their symbolic meaning. In order for reading comprehension to take place, the text should be meaningful and according to their reading comprehension ability so that the process of cognitive development may take place. At the highest level, operations can be carried out on symbols alone -- the concrete object or experience is no longer necessary.

Cropley (2001) illustrates this process through a sample lesson on the poem *The Eagle* by Tennyson. At a more general level, pupils could be introduced to the pre-knowledge that a dove and an eagle are both birds. Then make them compare and contrast these two creatures – that although they both have feathers, an eagle is physically different from the dove because the eagle's feathers are brown, it has claws and it lives high up in

the crags. At a more complex and symbolic level, pupils can be led to think of the dove as representing 'peace', and an eagle 'war'. As children look at words, pictures, watch movies and engage in conversations, they begin to sharpen their skills in encoding meaning, making sense of symbols and translating them into meaningful concepts. Cropley (2001) concludes that the ability to encode different levels of meaning is parallel to the ability to make higher level generalizations using higher order cognitive systems and thus, increasing the chances of effective and new understanding. The emergence of higher-order cognition is the result of a systematic process of development that is linked to increasing experience with the external world.

A primary cause of reading comprehension difficulty is creating an imaged gestalt- a whole image or the whole text. This is called weak concept imagery. This weakness causes individuals to get only parts such as a few facts rather than the whole picture. Those with weak concept imagery have difficulty with reading comprehension, critical thinking and may not easily follow directions and comment to conversations (Lindamood Research and Development, 1973). Similarly, individuals with weak reading comprehension difficulties do not create mental images of the words and concepts presented. Instead of processing the information, they tend to connect the information presented to parts of what they read.

Moving away from the cognitive approach, Gilland (1978) looks at the affective approach to reading comprehension and suggests that "the instructor should constantly

be watching for possible causes of reading comprehension difficulties." Gilland (1978) lists the failure to seek meaning actively, to show curiosity, or enthusiasm and general lack of alertness as some of the common signs of indication that the reader has comprehension difficulties. The failure to seek meaning effectively due to several reasons, for instance, lack of vocabulary, inability to comprehend the written word and the lack of background knowledge needed to make meaning are factors that are salient in readers with reading comprehension difficulties. Gilland (1978) traced a reader's lack of effort and inability to discuss materials read to the inability to comprehend and relate to the printed material. Gilland (1978) also observed that when a child has no enjoyment in reading or is embarrassed to read for appraisal, often the reading material is too difficult and the child does not visualize action, settings and emotions related to the text.

Reading materials should be culture sensitive, devoid of insensitive racial images and connotative negative messages. Any teacher or parent can see that a child is more likely to read and re-read materials that can capture their interest and imagination. Apart from consciously choosing appropriate materials for children's reading, emotional support and encouragement can also promote positive reading attitudes. It would be beneficial if teachers can catch them doing the right thing Each time a slow pupil shows the slightest improvement in reading comprehension, parents or guardians should be notified. Such practices indirectly promote motivation and positive reading attitudes in non readers and poor readers. Reading comprehension takes place only after the learner is able to
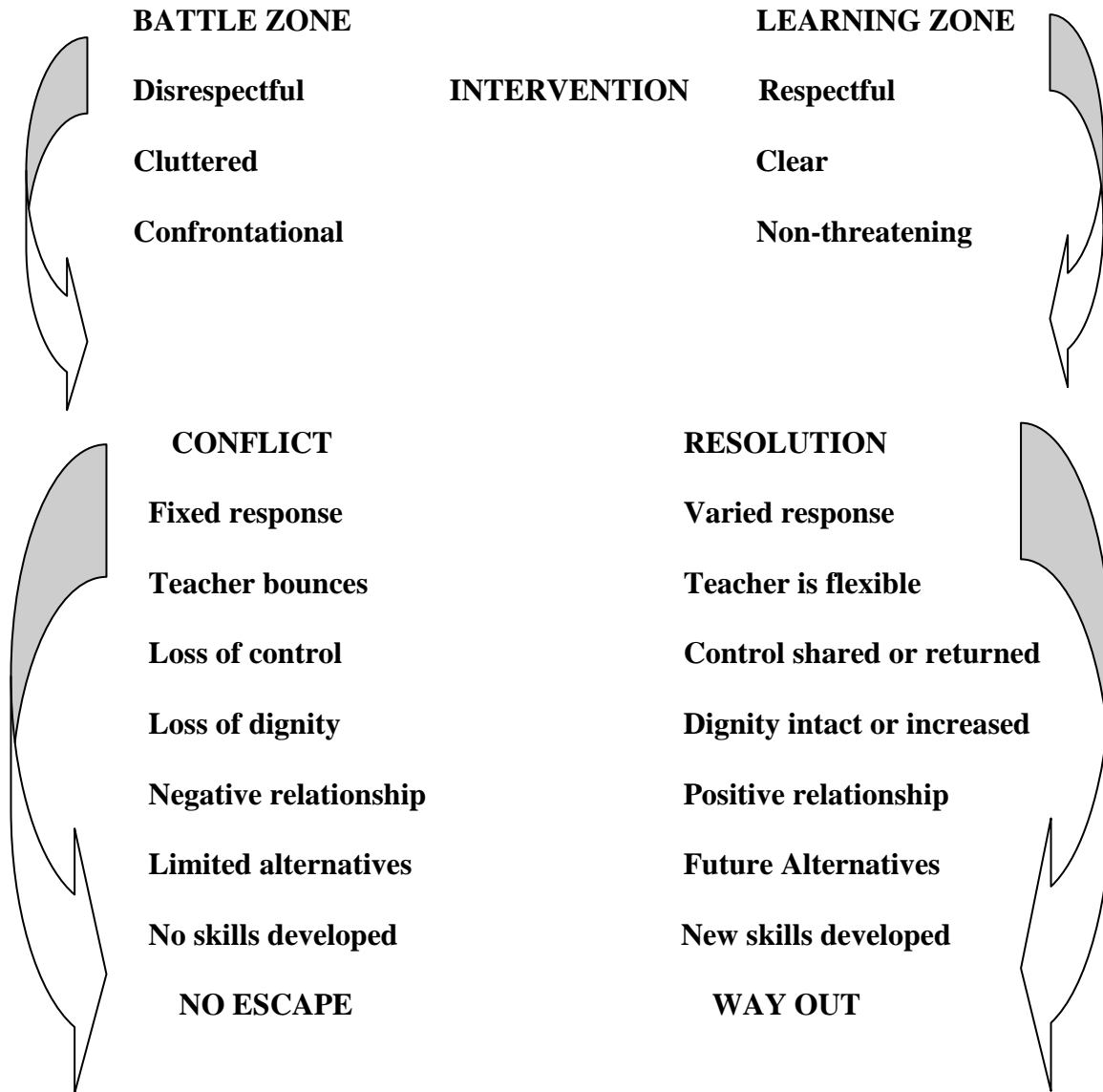
perform the reading task. Hence, when the reading task is performed, the teacher can aid with reading comprehension difficulties.

Poor reading comprehension can also occur in the presence of inattentiveness, restlessness and distractive behaviour on the child's part. There are those who simply cannot help being distracted by the noise or movement around him, even if the book he is reading is interesting or the discussion lively. Verbalization by poor readers is one of the main observations made by Gilland (1978) where reading comprehension difficulties are present. The reason for overemphasis on verbalization and memorization is that the students are unable to choose main ideas and respond to questions. When the reader is subconsciously vocalizing, Gilland (1978) observed that he may be facing reading comprehension difficulties. Furthermore, Gilland (1978) associates short attention span with lack of interest, learning disability and the material being too difficult. The text may not be of interest to the reader, Gilland (1978) contends, and this may be the cause of his lack of interest in the reading comprehension text. It is observed that poor readers often display symptoms of learned helplessness - a persistent belief that they are unable to prevent negative outcomes even when conditions allow them to take control. So much so that when they approach reading comprehension texts, they are not likely to engage in the very process that is required of them in order to gather meaning from the text, thus, they become passive and sink deeper into failure. However, it is warned that the task of identifying reasons for the passivity of poor readers and providing possible solutions are not that simple because it is often not clear whether passivity is the cause of poor

reading ability or the outcome. Nevertheless, Gilland (1978) stresses the importance of understanding passive failure in reading as a way of helping students who are poor readers. This makes sense if lack of motivation is seen as the cause of poor reading comprehension. Most probably, passivity towards reading is both a cause and an effect situation and whichever way it goes, identifying the reason is equally important. Simmons (1999) contends even good readers are not always enthusiastic about the activity called 'reading' in school. And, students who are good readers do not necessarily do well in reading comprehension texts. Individual variables, including passivity need to be examined in relation to other mediating factors to explain the complex issue of reading comprehension difficulties. Simmons (1999) believes that low self esteem can damage children's thirst for learning in a number of ways. For instance, he argued that it can result in children not mixing with other children, or wanting to be by themselves; not wanting to be affectionately handled and avoiding physical contact and not trying to do things for fear that they might get it wrong. When a child falls into this behaviour trap, he is depriving himself of the opportunities to learn and participate in learning. According to Simmons (1999), providing reading activities that give children a sense of accomplishment and encouragement are particularly important to get them interested in the reading materials and reading. Hence, the affective factor discussed by Gilland (1978) is connected to children's reading and comprehension ability.

O'Brien (1998), in discussing the role of the teacher in the classroom, indicates two sequential pathways available for the teacher in promoting learning. This is illustrated in Figure 2.1. At the core of the battle zone, the teacher assumes a confrontational and disrespectful role. In this role, the teacher provides children with confusing or condescending messages that can make a child feel worthless or powerless. In contrast, when she takes the learning zone path, the teacher will intervene with the children's difficulties, determined that they have to win the battle and the resolution of the problem comes in the form of flexible responses that are non-threatening. Such responses promote positive relationship patterns and offer dignified opportunities for mutual development. From O'Brien's (1998) model, it is obvious that the teacher plays a pivotal role in the classroom as the teacher is often looked upon as a leader who instructs, directs and channels the pupils they way they should go.

Figure 2.1: Role of Teacher in the Classroom

BATTLE ZONE   **LEARNING ZONE**

Disrespectful   **INTERVENTION**   **Respectful**

Cluttered   **Clear**

Confrontational   **Non-threatening**

     CONFLICT   **RESOLUTION**

Fixed response   **Varied response**

Teacher bounces   **Teacher is flexible**

Loss of control   **Control shared or returned**

Loss of dignity   **Dignity intact or increased**

Negative relationship   **Positive relationship**

Limited alternatives   **Future Alternatives**

No skills developed   **New skills developed**

    NO ESCAPE   **WAY OUT**

Adapted from O'Brien (1998: 68)

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2.7 Reading Strategies

When approaching a task which requires a certain skill, the task will be less daunting when it is approached with the right strategy. In much the same way, a reading comprehension task can be made easier for pupils with the help of appropriate strategies. A number of studies have identified some useful reading comprehension strategies. Adams (1982), on the other hand, recommend the strategy of reviewing by asking questions about the text when reading content area texts. Their findings indicate that this reviewing strategy help to activate the relevant schemata which will help readers answer reading comprehension texts more accurately. Adams (1982) discuss the reasoning strategy and how to teach it to students through the use of various genres of texts. Pupils, therefore, may be taught how to pose probing questions concerning the text, discuss the possible answers and arrive at conclusions which will help them understand the text better. Adams (1982) say that when students are taught the reasoning strategy through a variety of reading comprehension texts such as poems, dialogues, factual texts and fiction; with time, reading comprehension skills will inevitably be sharpened.

O'Brien (1998) outlines a reading comprehension strategy, whereby, students are guided in locating the main ideas of the text. When students know how to look for main ideas and to differentiate between main ideas and supporting details, they will be able to answer reading comprehension questions in a more focused manner. Similarly, the summarization strategy, can be useful in helping students identify and understand the

major points and supporting details. In order to summarise a text, students have to read and locate the most pertinent points in the text and to distinguish between main ideas and supporting details.

Garner (1985) on the other hand, say that the text look back strategy where students are taught to re-read certain words or phrases, can be useful in aiding comprehension. They found it especially helpful for students with reading comprehension difficulties related to unfamiliar vocabulary and low language proficiency. Reading certain parts of the text several times, allows the child to see words or phrases which may have been missed at the first reading. Ellis and Sinclair (1989, cited in O'Malley and Chamot, 1990) recommend a related strategy that teaches readers to use contextual clues to help them comprehend unfamiliar words. With this strategy, the reader is taught to use the technique of guessing the meaning of the unknown word by using other (known) words that appear before and after the unknown word.

Nunan (1991) states that a child's successful comprehension of a reading text depends quite a lot on the child's linguistic competence which includes the successful use of strategies such as linguistic cues and background knowledge to construct meaning. Linguistic cues such as the instructor's choice of words in prompting reading and comprehension plays a significant part in aiding the child overcome the fear of making mistakes in the reading comprehension task. The instructor's ability to start the child off on a reading comprehension tasks enables him to work independently on subsequent

tasks. Nunan (1991) concludes that it is eventually the child who constructs meaning via use of linguistic cues and background knowledge.

Competence in the reading language is one of the prerequisites of learning to read. Pupils with reading comprehension difficulties may not be proficiently equipped to read in the English language, contends Rose Tunku Ismail (1999). Even if the child is exposed to the English language at home, it may not be adequate for him to use it as a frame of reference to comprehend the aural and oral aspects involved in academic reading. Rose Tunku Ismail (1999) further explains that when a child enters primary school at age six, he has mastered the majority of his native language sounds. He also has control of his syntactic choice and is able to comprehend and produce complex sentences. But for most Malaysian children, at age six, they are forced to possess a certain level of proficiency in the English Language over a short period of exposure. Without sufficient proficiency in the reading language, the child does not possess the required reading skills in that language and therefore, may not be able to move on to more complex reading comprehension tasks.

Jordan and Nettles (1997:143) offers a comprehensive list of reading strategies that can be employed to aid reading comprehension:

    1.   Prediction.

    2.   Skimming (reading quickly for the main idea or gist).

    3.   Scanning (reading quickly for a specific piece of information).

4. Distinguishing between :

    (a) Factual and non-factual information.

    (b) Important and less important items.

    (c) Relevant and irrelevant information.

    (d) Explicit and implicit information.

    (e) Ideas and examples and opinions.

5. Drawing inferences and conclusions.

6. Deducing unknown words.

7. Understanding graphic presentation (data, diagrams, etc.)

8. Understanding text organization and linguistic/semantic aspect, such as:

    (a) Relationship between and within sentences (cohesion).

    (b) Recognizing discourse/ semantic markers and their functions.

Uruquat and Weir (1998) categorised the reading comprehension strategies offered by Jordan (1997) into three main stages in the reading activity: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading. Pre-reading strategies are aimed at introducing readers to a new text or book by getting them acquainted with the cover of the book read, for example the pictures, details of publications ,name of author and synopsis. While reading strategies focus on drawing meaning from the texts periodically by means of questioning to facilitate comprehension and post reading strategies is the consolidating factor whereby, the reader reinforces what was read by means of answering questions posed by the reader or by the instructor. The questions are non-formal and may make a transition to

formal questions if the reading comprehension task requires. Uruquat and Weir (1998) provide further support for the use of the skimming and scanning strategies to aid reading comprehension. They describe good readers as the ones who try to skim in order to identify the topic and scan to find specific details. Jordan (1997) support the findings that identified the absence of appropriate strategies as a common cause of reading comprehension difficulties. In that sense, all students and not just poor readers, can be taught these skills to empower them to be better at approaching reading comprehension tasks.

2.8   The Reading Comprehension Task

As this study focuses on the reading comprehension difficulties of Malaysian primary school children, it is therefore, necessary to discuss the kind of tasks the pupils are expected to perform and the skills they are expected to master in order to perform these tasks efficiently and successfully.

English Language is taught as a subject in all National Primary schools with time allocation ranging from 210 – 240 minutes per week. Years One, Two and Three (Phase I) have 8 periods of 30 minutes each period; and Years Four, Five and Six (Phase II) have 7 periods of 30-minutes each period. Commenting on this time allocation, Rose Tunku Ismail (1999) contends that pupils may not have enough exposure to the English language in school and for many pupils, the English class may be the only place where

they have the opportunity to speak English. According to Rose Tunku Ismail (1999), in order to master the English Language, Malaysian pupils need more aural and oral practice, more time either to practise reading aloud in class or do silent reading. Slow readers need time to master the mechanics of reading and to do the pre-reading activities that can enhance the learning of reading.

However, reading is not taught as a subject but as an activity to teach the English language. Therefore, teachers find it difficult to include within the time allocated, formal lessons on reading strategies to pupils. Although in the first three years of primary education pupils are taught the 3Rs (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic), the focus of these instructions is on Bahasa Melayu. As commented by Rose Tunku Ismail, the 240 minutes allocated is barely enough to teach pupils the English Language, let alone reading in the English Language. By the time they reach Phase II, the pupils are expected to have mastered the basic reading skills, and most pupils do. However, there will always be a number of these pupils who have not mastered the skills, but their Phase II teachers do not have the time to cater to their needs within the time allocated in the timetable.

Piaget (1959) states that the general theory of the development of logic in children can be applied to the child's learning of the written form of the language. Piaget's concept and description of egocentric language and the thought age of about seven or eight being relevant to the understanding of a child's mode of thinking is synonomous with

the typical beginning of formal reading age in Year One in the Malaysian context. Vygotsky (1962) cited in Uruquat and Weir (1998) replicated and expanded Piaget's research on the relationship between children's thoughts and language. The conclusion the two of them arrived at is that the child's mode of understanding influences reading comprehension. Rose Tunku Ismail (1999) concludes that it is the abstract quality of written language that is the main stumbling block to reading comprehension. The child, according to her, has little motivation and only a vague idea of the usefulness of English. The SQR3 simplified method of questioning suggested by Rose Tunku Ismail (1999) are **S**urvey, **Q**uestion, **R**ead, **R**ecite, and **R**eview. The SQR3 method replicated by Rose Tunku Ismail(1999) is defined as follows:

The survey is a quick preview or overview of the text is done by looking at the contents of the texts, as the teacher knows ahead of time the topics that will be covered. This helps the mind prepare for the subject at hand. Read the introduction / summary. This helps the teacher focus on the main points that will be discussed in the text.

Questioning aids the mind to engage and concentrate on what is being read. As each section is being read,   mentally try to find the answers to questions that are formed from the headings, if there are any.

Read slowly and carefully, concentrating on one section at a time. Read each section with the questions in mind. Try to determine the main points of the section and make a summary of the main points**.**

Recitation is an essential aid to reading comprehension. At the end of each section read, state aloud or silently, the important points covered.

Review the text immediately after completing the reading. Review it by skimming over the texts. Go over all the questions from all the headings and see if they can be answered.

Reading for comprehension of the text involves many factors. Rose Tunku Ismail (1999) suggests that reading speed be varied to suit the reading material. Due to time constraint, the reading comprehension task is timed in the classroom. Rose Tunku Ismail (1999:168) lists the reading comprehension skills a child would require in order to read and understand a comprehension text (based on the Malaysian School English Syllabus):

    (a)   Reading for main ideas and supporting details.

    (b)   Understanding the organization of the text, that is, organization of sentences within a paragraph within a chapter and organization of chapters within a book.

    (c)   Reading for key words, phrases or sentences used by the writer to guide the reader in following the argument.

(d)　　Recognizing facts and opinions.

(e)　　Recognizing logical relationships in the text.

(f)　　Noting chronological relationships in the texts.

(g)　　Defining generalizations and supporting examples or evidences.

(h)　　Recognizing cause and effect relationship.

(i)　　Recognizing propaganda techniques or other techniques which persuade or deceive the reader.

(j)　　Interpreting graphs, data, timetable and pictures.

(k)　　Distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant facts.

(l)　　Guessing vocabulary items from context.

(m)　　Using writer's syntactic and clues to understand selected positions of the paragraphs.

(n)　　Predicting and anticipating outcomes by reading, questioning and thinking.

(o)　　Writing annotation in the margin.

(p)　　Summarizing the material read

Reading Comprehension Specifications 2008 (See Appendix B) taken from the Year Four Syllabus are:

3.10.1 Read according to one's interests.

3.9.8 Tell why a person in the story is good or bad.

3.9.7 Read and talk about people in the story heard or read.

3.9.3 Read and talk about people in the story.

3.9.2 Read and give details about people in the story

3.8.4 Read and understand simple texts by answering comprehension questions

3.8.3 Read and obtain meaning by making references to words within the texts.

3.8.2 Scan for specific information in texts.

3.8.1 Read and recognize descriptions.

3.7.5 Read and locate the required words in the dictionary.

3.7.4 Read and select the definition suited for the word of the meaning in the text.

3.3.4 Read and understand simple sentences.

3.3.3 Read and understand simple paragraphs.

3.3.2 Read and understand simple sentences.

3.3.1 Read and understand simple phrases by matching simple phrases to pictures.

3.2.3 Recognize complete words in texts.

2.2.1 Ask "wh" questions to seek information.

In presenting reading comprehension texts and tests, a combination of the skills is manipulated and relevant skills will be used to test reading comprehension. Once the child is able to follow the author's arguments and presentation of material, he is on his way to better comprehension of the text. When pupils have finished reading, it must be followed up by the post-reading phase. Wixson (1983) points out that different types of questions produce different kinds of output, therefore, questions chosen should be those that will require pupils to focus on the desired concepts. Even with post- reading questions alone, low-level questions produce low-level processing, and vice versa with

high-level questions. For some time, it was popular to model the post reading phase questions after Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956). Certainly this was an improvement for many reading texts as a result of the post reading phase questions suggested by Bloom (1956). But, Bowers et. al (1993) points out that this type of questioning is still only a means of testing, rather than teaching comprehension.

McConaughy (1982) says questions should be ordered according to the events of the story in order to facilitate the proper processing and recall of the story or exposition. One further caution concerning the nature of the questions was raised by McConaughy (1982) who suggests that children at different ages are at different stages of cognitive development and maturity in their story schema development and thus, cannot be expected to answer the same type of questions as adults. In other words, questions should be sensitive to cognitive stages of development – younger children should be asked questions that require them to identify explicit events and actions of the story, and older children should be asked questions on implicit concepts such as character's reactions, feelings, plans, and so forth. Among the questions that require more attention relative to comprehension strategies is the interaction of comprehension strategies with motivation. At present, it is unclear whether individuals fail to comprehend because they fail to allocate sufficient effort to the task, lack strategic knowledge, or have other deficiencies. In addition, individuals tend to persist in comprehension tasks relative to

topics that are of interest to them, so comprehension measures contain an element of interest and task motivation as well as measures of the target skills.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the salient issues of misconceptions of reading, cognitive and affective approaches, inattentiveness, schemata and reading strategies in relation to theories, processes, types and causes of poor reading comprehension. It can be summarized that the literature reviewed suggests that no amount of instruction can compensate for actual reading, but with intelligent selection and preparation, the instructor can make reading comprehension more enjoyable, efficient and ultimately a meaningful experience.