CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

The researcher's intent in this chapter is to present a basis to place the research questions in perspective. The researcher will provide the relevant theoretical bases of the study and the background information on the research questions will be reviewed.

2.1 Defining Reading

Reading is seen as an indispensable skill for the individual and society. It is a needed channel of communication with the global community. Reading is often regarded as the foundation to all learning activities and facilitates effective daily living (Harris & Sipay, 1980). It is the key to learning and personal enjoyment. Learning to read is emphasised as a means of producing a literate society to benefit a nation's overall economic condition. A literate population is recognised as a crucial prerequisite for generating ideas that lead to social changes and improvement.

Reading is regarded as a tool for communication, with print as the stimulus that is converted into meaningful messages (Dauzat & Dauzat, 1981: 6). The reader

uses the visual input to form perceptions about the orthographic system and constructs a set of rules that enable him to translate the visual symbols into meaning. Perfetti (1985: 9) states that reading involves many general cognitive components particularly with regard to comprehension. Reading is therefore perceived to be the ability of the reader to decode and gain meaning from the written message.

Goodman defines reading as "a psycholinguistic process by which the reader, a language user, reconstructs, as best he can, a message which has been encoded by a writer as a graphic display" (Goodman, 1970: 135). Meanwhile, Smith cites that there is no description that can be summed up as the "process" that is involved in reading (Smith, 1994: 169). In fact, he feels that the meaning of the word "reading" depends on what is being read and why the reader is reading. He further elaborates that reading involves purpose, prior knowledge and feelings of the reader and the nature of the text being read.

2.2 The Reading Process

Harris & Sipay (1980) state that reading is a very complex process. The reader has to recognise and comprehend the written symbols whilst being influenced by perceptual and decoding skills, experience, language background, mind set, and reasoning ability as he reads. A similar view is shared by Reutzel & Cooter (1992) who observe that reading is a complex process influenced by the reader's linguistic repertoire, cognitive skills, reasoning abilities, mind set and experiential and cultural background. Therefore, it is obvious that reading is a complex process that requires the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information.

Taylor, Harris, Pearson and Garcia (1995) have described the reading process with themes as linguistic, cognitive and social processes. As a linguistic process, reading is seen as related to the listening, speaking and writing processes. The phonological, graphemic, semantic and syntactic subsystems of language are the sources of information used in reading within this scope of the reading process. As a cognitive process, the emphasis is on mental operation-attention, perception, encoding, memory and retrieval. The schema-theoretic perspective constitutes reading as a cognitive process. As a social process, reading is required and played out in the social context, both explicit and implicit, influencing both the reader's attitude and competence.

The process of reading begins with the pronunciation of words, which gives access to meaning. It begins with the meaning of words added together to form the meaning of clauses and sentences. Then the meaning of sentences is combined to produce the meaning of paragraphs. This half of obtaining information from letters and words in the text is integrated with the other half of selecting and using prior knowledge about people, places and things and also knowledge about text and organisation. Thus, reading is a process where information from the text and knowledge possessed by the reader integrate to produce meaning. In other words, it is a constructive process.

2.3 Models of the Reading Process

Mercer (1991) discusses three reading models that differ in the importance they attach to the text and meaning. The 'bottom-up' model emphasises that readers

proceed from text to meaning, that is, letters and words are perceived and decoded and then the text's meaning is comprehended. In contrast, the 'top-down' model emphasises that readers rely on prior knowledge and the comprehension of the meaning of the textual material rather than on word recognition and decoding of individual text elements. The 'interactive' model proposed by Rumelhart in 1976 (McCormick, 1995) emphasises both text and meaning by proposing that readers shift between attending to text and what is in their mind. For example, a reader might use a top-down approach when the material is familiar but change to the bottom-up approach when confronted with unfamiliar text.

An 'interactive-compensatory' model that was proposed by Stanovich (1980) explains that the reader compensates for deficits in any of the processes by using other knowledge sources, better known as "parallel processing". Here the higher-level processes can help lower-level processes such as the use of context to compensate limited word knowledge. This model attempts to explain the individual differences in the development of reading fluency. Just & Carpenter (1987) concluded a similar interactive parallel processing reading model but with a restriction, that is word meaning precedes text meaning.

A reality-based, classroom-centred model presented by Ruddell & Unrau (Ruddell et.al., 1994: 1042) discusses a sociocognitive interactive model that considers reading as a meaning-construction process with emphasis on the reader, the text and the teacher. It attempts to explain the reading process in the classroom context. The reader's affective and cognitive conditions play a vital role in the reading process and they are interrelated. The affective conditions of the reader directly influence the reader's decision to read and interact with the cognitive

conditions. Similarly, the teacher's affective and cognitive conditions influence the reading process as well. These interrelate with two important components - the knowledge use and control components that direct the instructional decision-making process. The third major component is the text and classroom context which create the learning environment for the reader.

2.4 Reading Components

Reading is defined as a visual-auditory task made up of two major components: the ability to pronounce the written word, either overtly or covertly and to comprehend words in the text (Aaron & Joshi, 1992). The two components are modular and independent. Carr & Levy (1990) conclude that word recognition and comprehension skills are interrelated. Skilled reading requires the integration of both components with efficient operation of each.

The first component i.e. the ability to pronounce the written word, either overtly or covertly, is also referred to as a decoding skill, a phonological encoding skill and a grapheme-phoneme conversion skill. It is an operation that is specific to the written form of language. The decoding process involves understanding the grapheme-phoneme relationship and translating printed words into a representation similar to oral language. It enables the learner to pronounce words correctly. The second component, the comprehension of words in the text, enables the learner to understand the meaning of words in isolation and in context.

Meanwhile, Perfetti (1985) refers to these components as cognitive components i.e. lexical access, knowledge and comprehension. Lexical access is "a

set of products that uses the products of the decoding process to identify and select the appropriate word meaning" (Gagne, 1993: 272).

The ability to perform sub-skills one at a time is no proof of reading. The sub-skills need to be integrated smoothly. The acquisition of one component does not suggest the acquisition of the other. The word "reading" may sometimes entail "comprehension" and sometimes not, and any dispute about whether reading does or does not necessarily entail comprehension is a dispute about language, not about the nature of reading (Smith, 1978: 102).

2.4.1 Word-Recognition Skills

Word-recognition skills are seen as a "critically important" factor in the reading process (Stanovich, 1993: 112) and to progress, the reader must discover the spelling-sound system and decode the written language (Juel, 1993).

Dauzat & Dauzat (1981) have described word-recognition as converting letters into orally equivalent words. In other words, corresponding grapheme to its appropriate phoneme. This skill is also known as decoding, word attack or word analysis skill. As a result of this skill, we get pronunciation, either, vocally, sub-vocally or mentally, of the printed words.

Citravelu, Sithamparam & Teh (1995) state that word-recognition skills could be divided into two major categories i.e. sight word skills which represents the ability to recognise words instantly and word attack skills which includes the various skills used by a reader to recognise unfamiliar words. These word attack skills comprise

phonic analysis, configuration clues, contextual clues, picture clues, structural analysis and dictionary analysis (Mercer, 1991).

McCormick (1995: 250) describes word-recognition as the recall of words in which the reader resorts to no obvious mechanisms to discriminate them as in "automaticity processing" described in the LaBerge & Samuels (1974) reading model. On the other hand, word-identification is when a reader directly calls into play one or more strategies to help in "figuring out" a word. These strategies could be one of the word attack skills. Word-identification skills provide optimal conditions for comprehension (Durkin, 1983). Due to severe limits on the number of written word patterns that may be held in memory as "rote" associations, a general strategy for "cracking the code" is required for handling new words (Venezky, Calfee & Chapman, 1970: 46).

2.4.2 Comprehension Skills

Reading involves an active search for meaning (Smith, 1993) and comprehension builds meaning representations of the text (Perfetti, 1985). There are many areas that contribute to successful reading comprehension. One of the most valuable taxonomies of comprehension skills is Barrett's Taxonomy. Hunter (1977: 28) illustrates the various skills in the taxonomy. Literal comprehension focuses on explicitly-stated information and the reorganisation of these ideas and information. Inferential comprehension requires the reader to make conjectures and hypotheses based on the ideas and information, intuition and other variables. As for the evaluation skill, the reader is required to make responses that indicate an evaluative

judgment and finally the appreciation skill requires the reader to use the affective domain in reacting to the reading text.

Mercer (1991) proposed a similar framework with the addition of vocabulary development skill. This skill is essential for the reader to understand the words a writer has used and paves the way for further comprehension of the text. Knowledge of word meaning is a prerequisite to understanding sentences or passages and vocabulary builds more rapidly when words are met often in varying circumstances (Lass & Davis, 1985).

The skilled reader makes predictions based on his or her knowledge of language and experience with similar content and verifies them by extracting sufficient samples from the materials to be read. They are able to read "between the lines and beyond the lines" (Dauzat & Dauzat, 1981: 137).

2.5 Reading Problems

Many students in today's schools exhibit various reading problems. In fact, Kaluger & Kolson (1978) suggest that the reading problem is the principal cause of failure in school. Reading failure can lead to misbehaviour, anxiety and a lack of motivation. Hence, students with reading problems encounter great difficulty in developing healthy attitudes toward themselves and others.

Smith (1994) has cited that older children with low reading ability tend to read as if they neither expect nor care that the material might make sense, but seem determined to get all the words right. He also claims that word identification suffers as a problem reader generates anxiety. This will lead to a reluctance to predict and

the poor reader engages in word-for-word reading, and his difficulty becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Most reading problems arise from deficits in decoding or comprehension skills. With regard to these skills, there are three kinds of poor readers: those with deficient decoding skills but normal comprehension, those with adequate decoding skills but poor comprehension and those with deficits in both areas. Reading problems common in students of one age group may differ from problems associated with a different age group. Understanding these developmental differences is also important when trying to sort out the various causes of serious reading problems.

The various degrees of difficulties in reading have produced numerous labels that are used to describe the problem readers. McCormick (1995) has given the definition of some of these. A disabled reader is someone who is reading significantly below potential level. A retarded reader is someone reading below grade level. A reluctant reader is an individual who can read but does not like to. An underachiever is an individual whose achievement is below the level expected according to intelligence tests. A non-reader is an individual who has been unable to learn to read despite normal intelligence and absence of gross neurological or sensory defects.

By grouping problem readers into the following categories namely, mild, moderate, severe or non-readers, one can also observe McCormick's classification. The majority of students with reading problems are mild readers. They are able to progress when the classroom teacher supplies them with perceptive individualised instruction. The moderates ones are also known as poor readers who need personal attention. The severely affected readers' lack of reading achievement affects other

learning activities. The non-readers are the ones who cannot read at all despite having gone through reading instruction.

Bryant & Bradley (1985) have described problem readers as backward readers and claim that all children face the same kind of difficulty but the backward readers' difficulty is greater in degree and kind. Based on this opinion, Bryant & Bradley proposed a continuum ranging from children who are very poor at analysing sounds and read poorly to children who are particularly good at analysing sounds and better at reading than expected.

2.6 Factors Affecting the Development of Reading Ability

Learning to read is a "journey with stops and starts" (Baynham, 1995: 73) and readers differ in how they approach a text. Learners learn differently, and it is the match between "how the learner learns and how the method teaches that determines who learns what- and how much" (Carbo et.al., 1986: 1). The diversity in reading ability is the result of many interrelated factors involving the reader and his environment.

Many students in schools exhibit various reading problems. In fact, it was suggested that reading problems are the principal cause of failure in school (Kaluger & Kolson, 1978). Reading failure can lead to disciplinary problems, anxiety and a lack of motivation besides the difficulty in developing healthy attitudes towards the problem readers themselves and others.

Since it is an established fact that reading is important to the individual and society, the question thus arises: Why do students today fail to make progress in such

an essential and necessary skill? Nuttall (1982: 167) describes this situation as the "Circle of Frustration" and the "Circle of Growth". She adds that "many of us teach students who are trapped in the vicious circle." The needs of students who have problems reading are not met to enable them to enjoy reading and gain from the years of education they go through.

In the vicious circle, the problem reader is seldom able to evoke interest in what he reads. Since he derives little or no pleasure from reading, he reads as little as possible and continues to lag in his reading ability. In contrast, in a virtuous circle, the reader is interested in what he reads, understands better and thus, enjoys reading the text. Enjoyment and understanding could be one of the factors to get poor readers out of the vicious circle into the virtuous circle.

Difficulty in acquiring reading ability can occur due to the mismatch between the ability to extract and organise appropriate information to understand the world and the information processing demands of the reading act at the perceptual level. The process of perception is described as the ability to gather information from the environment through experience. A reader may mature physically but not his perceptual systems, which involves absorbing information, comprehension of the information and the ability to store this information for future recall. Hence, the quantity and quality of information obtained depends upon these perceptual capabilities. The particular reader could be lagging maturation and development of the perceptual systems (Sawyer, 1980). The following are some factors that influence the development of reading ability.

2.6.1 Psychological Factors

Having to face repeated failures in reading and being unable to meet expectations can result in frustration and an unfavourable attitude toward reading. These accumulated inabilities in reading can be due to various psychological factors that determine a student's learning experience. The following psychological factors are relevant to this research to explain the reading problems exhibited by students.

2.6.1.1 Intelligence

An IQ (Intelligence Quotient) test score does not necessarily predict how well a student will perform in reading since it is not a fixed entity (Dauzat & Dauzat, 1981). Mental ability should increase with age but not all children experience this. Many fall behind and develop difficulties in reading.

Students display various individual differences in a classroom and IQ scores alone is not sufficient to determine the educational path (Child, 1993). It appears quite evident that everyone possesses resources that can be used effectively to one's benefit and success depends on how these resources are used rather than how many one has (Bruning et.al., 1995). Unless teachers are aware of these resources, students may be deprived of the appropriate opportunities to learn. A student with high IQ can be trapped in this situation and develop reading difficulties (McCormick, 1995).

According to Bruning et.al. (1995), teachers' beliefs about intelligence can also affect students' goal orientation – learning orientation with positive response to failure or performance orientation with negative response to failure. Associating

failure with low ability due to genetic factors can be demotivating and lower a student's self-esteem.

Besides biological factors, an individual's environment has some bearing on his intellectual development (Biggs & Watkins, 1995). Environmental factors appear crucial to teachers who can provide the relevant guidance to increase reading ability. Biggs & Watkins (1995) are of the opinion that intelligence is the result of the interaction between genetic endowment and environmental factors. They feel that external stimulation can develop intelligence.

2.6.1.2 Attitude towards Reading

Gardner (1985) views attitudes as a subset of motivation and favourable attitudes influence students' motives to learn. The result of any attempt to learn is a direct function of the attitude the learner brings to the learning task and a favourable outcome of the learning will affect the students' attitudes. In other words, "success breeds success" (Vaughan & Estes, 1986: 235). Likewise, failure breeds failure as described by Nuttall (1982) in her explanation of the vicious circle of frustration.

Vaughan & Estes (1986) further elaborate that what a reader experiences and realises during reading is the result of the reader's attitude towards the topic, the context and the purpose of reading. A positive attitude towards reading can develop potential reading ability and the child must want to learn and see himself as a reader. A child who has been read to at home and has pleasant associations with reading will have the tendency to improve reading for himself and that improves his attitude towards reading (Dauzat & Dauzat, 1981). The attitude one has towards reading as

an intellectual activity will affect one's motivation to read, one's reading ability and consequently one's reading habits (Smith, 1993).

Children who face difficulty in developing reading ability will slowly develop an "antagonistic or futile attitude toward reading" and when they reach secondary school, they expect failure and hence avoid the "unpleasant situation" (Kaluger & Kolson, 1978: 47). Teenagers then become more difficult to handle, as they are more independent and reject remedial attempts.

2.6.1.3 Motivation

Motivation is a crucial force which determines whether a learner embarks on a task at all and how long he lasts. Brown (1994) views motivation as an inner drive, an impulse or a desire that moves one to act. However, inner drive minus effort and favourable attitudes do not ensure satisfaction (Gardner, 1985).

Teachers have often lamented that their students lack motivation and therefore are at risk of falling behind in their achievement (Reid, 1972). To further complicate the situation, they often encounter diverse learners who cannot see any purpose in learning or feel that they cannot learn, and this perception can inhibit their learning potential (Kaluger & Kolson,1978). Such being the scenario, it definitely seems an uphill task for teachers but Carbo et.al. (1986) are of the opinion that teachers need only make the students believe that they can achieve in order to motivate them.

Students' motivational needs, therefore, have to be met to produce favourable results. These needs have been described as extrinsic motivation, intrinsic

motivation, social motivation and achievement motivation (Biggs & Watkins, 1995). Extrinsic motivation employs environmental factors to motivate the reluctant students in the form of incentives. In addition, knowledge of their performance has positive motivational effects on the students if the news is good (Child, 1993).

As for intrinsic motivation, students need to be interested in the activity to seek satisfaction. A teacher has to identify these internal drives to influence the performance. According to Biggs & Watkins (1995), students will be intrinsically motivated based on the right mix of incoming experience and what is already known or perhaps on performing the task for their own joy and satisfaction (Bruning et.al., 1995). Social motivation refers to pleasing people, especially teachers. Students will like the subject taught by their role model and thus show commitment to achieve (Biggs & Watkins, 1995). Finally, achievement motivation or the strong desire to achieve is regarded as "a constant source of hope and encouragement to teachers" (Child, 1993: 47). However, if the fear of failure seeps into the learner, it leaves very little confidence in his abilities (Glover et.al., 1983). Achievement motivation among failure avoiders is dependent on external factors such as approval and praise.

Ramage (1990) states that teachers need to instill the motivation to continue or maintain the existing motivation. Students learn from a mixture of motives but good self-esteem is the key to achievement (Glover et.al., 1983).

2.6.1.4 Learning Styles

Citravelu et.al. (1995) define learning styles as ways a student prefers to go about learning. Child (1993) defines learning style as a person's preferred approach

to problem-solving. Learning styles are crucial to the learning process and every student has his own learning style and the classroom teacher constantly faces these varieties. If the individual styles are not met, learning can be unsuccessful.

Carbo et.al. (1986) have cited numerous factors that can affect an individual's learning styles : environmental and emotional factors, sociological needs, physical characteristics and psychological inclination. With all these factors, it seems an impossible task to meet each and everyone's style in a large mixed ability class. Yet, this is a task worth pursuing. Studies conducted by Marie Carbo et.al. (1986) have proven that students' attitudes toward reading, reading achievement and discipline problems improve when students learn through their individual styles.

Students can be categorised according to individualised variations in learning styles. Usually, students who prefer reading are visual learners. Visual learners utilize their visual input unlike auditory style learners who perform better through listening. In addition, a field-independent learner is considered a more successful language learner than a field-dependent learner. The field-dependent person perceives the total field but has difficulties figuring out the components while the field–independent learner experiences the reverse i.e. he sees the parts but not the whole (Brown, 1994).

Reflectivity and impulsivity are among the learning styles found among readers. Individuals with an impulsive style of reading have been found to be fast readers who make more errors but without neglecting comprehension. In contrast, a reflective individual will be slower but makes less errors while reading (Brown, 1994). Students who are impulsive may use contextual clues to aid comprehension unlike the reflective individual who may need patience, as response is slower.

A language teacher should be aware of these different learning styles and plan his teaching accordingly. As Brown (1994: 109) states:

> The burden on the learner is to invoke the appropriate style for the context. The burden on the teacher is to understand the preferred styles of each learner and to sow the seeds for flexibility.

A mismatch between the teaching and the learner styles can cause the failure to increase reading achievement.

2.6.2 Teacher Expectations

Biggs & Watkins (1995) describe teacher expectations as beliefs about students' performance and this set of beliefs has a significant effect on the teachers' attitudes and behaviour in the classroom especially on student-teacher relationship and instructional planning (Bruning et.al., 1995). A teacher can form expectations based on direct contact with the student, or indirectly or extrapolated from a previous experience of encountering a similar type of student (Biggs &Watkins, 1995).

The students' performance will be affected by these expectations either positively or negatively. Favourable behaviour and achievement can be noticed among students depending on the teachers' expectations (Zintz, 1972). A student may give up if the teacher has no confidence in his ability or falls behind because no teacher expects him to perform better.

In fact, Nuttall (1982: 147) feels that one of the reasons for students' failure could be the teachers' expectations. If the teachers expect them not to succeed, the students may fail. Students are very sensitive to teachers' attitudes and a positive attitude may produce better results. Hence, it has been suggested that poor readers should not be made aware that their performance is unacceptable to a fixed standard in the school (Zintz, 1972). Pressuring these students can be damaging to the students' progress and interest. Instead, a positive view should be exercised to motivate these struggling readers.

2.6.3 Sociological Factors

Education is the responsibility of both the school and the parents. The home environment plays a crucial role in influencing a student's reading ability. There are many aspects in the home environment and parent-child relationship which may stimulate or inhibit school progress and low reading ability can be due to a lack of stimulation to learn to read (Reid, 1972). Dauzat & Dauzat (1981) are also of the opinion that parents are able to shape the child's attitudes toward reading and they either motivate towards or against reading tasks. Similarly, Sawyer (1980: 30) state that

> Children in our classroom are profoundly
> influenced by their families, and this influence
> is, perhaps, the single most overriding factor that
> affects their learning and behaviour through their
> school years, and indeed their entire lives.

Socio-economic factors do stimulate conditions that may advance or hinder the learning progress. The availability of reading materials at home is a contributing factor to reading achievement. Children from deprived homes with low SES (socio-economic status) may encounter difficulties accessing sufficient reading materials. To complicate matters further, these students may be victims of teachers' negative attitudes i.e. teachers have low expectations of such students resulting in low achievement in reading (Dauzat & Dauzat, 1981).

Parents are expected to provide the basic necessities for their children including education. Most parents may rely on schools to fulfill the child's educational needs but a combined effort from both parties is needed to enhance educational achievement. Pike et.al. (1994) suggest that since parents may not have the ability to educate their children as desired, the school should assume an active role in guiding parents to provide the positive conditions at home to promote school learning. According to them, the school should not expect the same degree of participation from all parents and should be aware of parental barriers such as illiteracy and lack of fluency in English.

In addition, McCormick (1995: 51) is of the opinion that due to the low academic levels of some parents, certain children may not be encouraged to deal with conceptual problems. She states that these children are not challenged to think independently to develop strategies for language and problem solving besides lacking purposeful stimulation in reading at home. Hence, these children arrive at school with no interest to learn to read and lack exposure to book language. Therefore, these children from low SES homes are considered more at risk of having reading problems.

2.6.4 Educational Factors

Various learner characteristics and how the needs of such learners should be met through appropriate instruction in reading have been discussed. Bond et.al. (1984: 89) state that usually "a faulty learning or a lack of educational adjustment" can be traced during diagnosis. Here, some of the language related factors pertaining to an individual's proficiency in the language and the school environment are considered.

2.6.4.1 Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence is referred to as the ability to use a language from a knowledge of how the language works in terms of phonological, grammatical and semantic control of the system in addition to social features of the system. With regard to this, visual and auditory discrimination is considered relevant to linguistic competence. Visual discrimination is the ability to differentiate the various letter forms i.e. to see the variety in letters and words, whereas auditory discrimination is the ability to differentiate the various sounds or phonemes i.e. to hear the variety in letters and words (Dauzat & Dauzat, 1981).

An individual can make the appropriate letter-sound correspondence only if he has the ability in visual and auditory discrimination (Harris & Sipay, 1980). Harris & Sipay state that the problem occurs when deficiencies appear in the ability to associate visual and linguistic sequences. The individual is unable to analyse a whole word into its parts and vice versa. This lack in phonemic awareness in turn results in

difficulty with word-recognition skills. In a project by Levy & Hinchley (Carr & Levy, 1990: 125), it was found that poor readers demonstrate less phonemic awareness and are less sensitive to text structure as an aid in reading comprehension.

Poor linguistic backgrounds and the type of language environment one is exposed to can determine one's reading achievement in that language. According to Reid (1972), individuals who are not provided with the relevant explorations of the environment and the opportunity to express verbally may be reading well mechanically but with poor comprehension. He also adds that individuals from deprived homes with limited exposure to a language environment have difficulty understanding the language used by others, including teachers.

Language differences due to cultural differences is another aspect that needs to be considered since the various social classes use differing language patterns and only sufficient language exposure can help one to discriminate the speech of the language taught in school. Bilingual students have a tendency to rely on their own sounds and structures (Taylor, 1990). Familiarity with more than one language can result in interference of either language, thus indicating one to be the dominant language (Harding & Riley, 1986). For students with reading problems, their native or mother tongue can play this dominant role and a strong interference occurs. Sometimes even if they can understand a statement, the search for the appropriate words to express a response can be a problem.

2.6.4.2 Prior Knowledge

Whenever we read, we must draw not only on our knowledge of language but also on our knowledge of the world. A reader has to go beyond what is explicitly stated in order to make sense of the text. Baynham (1995) states that a reader needs contextual information such as background knowledge of the socio-cultural context and orders of discourse to aid comprehension. According to Sawyer (1980: 5), "the mind is a storehouse of information about previous experiences in the world" which are stored in categories known as schemata. However, she adds that the accuracy of the information depends very much on the ability of the brain to process the information or, in other words, to activate the appropriate schemata to facilitate the reading process. A successful reader may not even realise that he is retrieving knowledge from his schemata to comprehend a text unlike a poor reader who may have to struggle with his inadequate schemata.

Similarly, Vaughan & Estes (1986) concur that readers relate the information in a text to an existing framework of knowledge from their experience. This framework is constantly modified and adjusted through reading activities. Hence, success or failure in the reading process depends on the extent of adjustments that take place during each reading. The accumulated misadjustments can hinder future comprehension of similar knowledge since a reader relies on this prior knowledge to comprehend a text.

Readers are often asked to use contextual clues to facilitate comprehension but the information has to trigger the relevant schema in order to achieve the desired results. However, Schumm & Saumell (1994) discovered that the level of

involvement in the topic of the text brought about a better interpretation than prior knowledge. In other words, 'hands on' experience is more reliable than knowledge alone. Readers who cannot find a relevant schema may find the text totally incomprehensible. However, this seems not the case if the readers have been given ample opportunity to personally experience or be involved in the activity mentioned in the text.

2.6.4.3 School Environment

The majority of school procedures are carried out to meet the needs of the educational establishment. Sometimes, these may even take precedence over the students' needs. Bond et.al. (1984: 90) are of the opinion that schools need to consider a child's needs when implementing administrative policies especially reading instruction. They state that "reading instruction suffers" if due importance is not given to reading in the initial stages. They are also of the opinion that promotion by age, year after year, without taking into consideration reading ability can be detrimental to the poor readers' reading achievement in future. The reading tasks may not be of their level of reading competence and the reading problem accumulates.

A student with reading problems needs the necessary educational adjustments in the reading instructions at school. A favourable environment would mean "a teacher guides rather than tells, understands rather than acquiesces, provides experience rather than using laissez-faire approach" (Strang, 1968: 130). Strang feels that teachers should be aware of reading problems and be able to utilise the

appropriate methods to facilitate success in reading. However, with a classroom enrolment of between thirty to fifty in the Malaysian context, a proper balance in differential reading instruction to cater to all the students' needs is difficult to achieve. Often, the curriculum requirements may take priority and individualised programmes may suffer (Bond et.al., 1984).

Classroom setting plays a major role in a student's physical surroundings in school. Vaughan & Estes (1986) concur that teachers may have some control over the physical surroundings in their respective classroom that can determine their teaching setting. In other words, teachers can make the difference in the learning environment by creating a favourable atmosphere for learning. It is believed that the language environment can affect mood and attitudes toward learning. Hence, a stimulating atmosphere will encourage meaningful learning to take place unlike an oppressive atmosphere.

School administrators have the obligation to be a catalyst for change by involving themselves in planning and implementing reading programmes (Carlson, 1972). They have the power to bring about changes to the quality of reading instruction in the classroom by studying the obstacles that inhibit effective reading instruction. An active role by school policy makers can help teachers to handle problem readers and to provide sufficient instruction in reading.

2.7 Teaching of Reading

The complex process of reading includes many types of skills and abilities. Reading is a part of almost every subject and is considered a tool in facilitating other

types of learning. Teaching reading involves equipping a person with the skills, strategies and attitudes required to comprehend texts and this means teaching basic word, phrase, and sentence recognition together with the ability to extract information found in texts (Chitravelu et.al., 1995). However, the process of teaching reading varies according to the level, type of material used and the purpose of the reader.

Chitravelu et.al. (1995: 91) have given various aims of teaching reading besides teaching reading skills. Among others, they mention that teaching reading should help students become independent and mature readers who read with adequate understanding at an appropriate speed and read silently. According to Nuttall, (1982) a teacher can achieve these aims by guiding the student to develop his own skills consciously i.e. being aware of what he is doing. However, it is stressed that too much help from the teacher can cause reading problems if the guidance becomes "a crutch the student cannot do without" (Nuttall, 1982: 22).

Dauzat & Dauzat (1981: 10) state that the appropriate techniques used "can help the child before he becomes a victim of poor habits". The teachers teach the specific skills required in reading texts and the students need to generalise these skills to varied purposes. The transition can be a difficult task for some students and here, the teacher plays a vital role to make sure that "the bridge is built between the specific and the general" (Nuttall, 1982: 23). Creativity and knowledge can be used to accommodate this bridge-building in the reading instruction to tap every student's reading potential.

2.7.1 Diagnostic Teaching of Reading

Walker (1988) defines diagnostic teaching as a process of using assessment and instruction at the same time to establish the instructional conditions that produce optimal learning so that problem readers can become independent learners. The teachers provide specific instructional alternatives that can help problem readers to improve their reading performance. This identification of alternative reading strategies is carried out in a "test-teach-test-teach" cycle (Karlin, 1973: 75). This involves the teacher's observation and testing before teaching to ascertain the students' strengths and weaknesses. The effective strategy is identified and tested; the teacher constantly reflects on her own teaching instructions and aims to improve her techniques. Karlin (1973: 78) also states that this sort of teacher action is "problem solving" and is on-going throughout the reading instruction. However, he does foresee the problems that a teacher will have to face if the class size is large.

Walker (1988) states that in diagnostic teaching, the teacher constantly makes decisions on the next course of action based on the assessment. First, the teacher identifies the reading problem exhibited and establishes the appropriate reading level the student is at. From that entry point, the teacher works on adapting the selected reading material and a relevant instructional technique to remediate the reading problem. As the materials and activities are adapted to the problem readers' needs, the diagnostic teacher has to keep in mind to match the text and the readers' reading ability. The students' responses provide feedback to the teacher to review the instructional technique undertaken and the necessary adjustments have to be made for the next lesson and the process goes on.

2.7.2 Remedial Reading

Students with reading problems may not be able to benefit much from an ordinary classroom situation. These readers' needs may differ vastly from the needs of other students. Such differing needs can be met in a remedial reading environment. Remedial reading instruction is aimed at correcting students' reading level or narrowing the gap between the present functioning level and the potential (Zintz, 1972). In other words, remedial reading instruction is a way of helping students whose progress in reading is below expectation (Harris & Sipay, 1980). These students seem to possess the potential to improve but for one or more reasons, they have lagged in their reading ability.

Gilliland (1978) labels remedial reading based on how the remedial reading is carried out - corrective reading if done as part of a normal classroom reading programme or remedial reading if conducted by a special remedial reading teacher. The main difference between these two labels is that in remedial reading instruction, the student gets individualised instruction to suit his needs (Harris & Sipay, 1980). This means that remedial reading and classroom instructions differ in opportunity provided for individual needs and the competence of the problem readers. The remedial teacher adopts a diagnostic approach to reading instruction to fit the problem readers' needs.

Remedial instruction starts at the students' current reading level and with this in mind, the teacher selects the appropriate relevant reading materials to match their reading level and age. The age factor is also important because older students requiring remedial help with their reading may be uninterested if the materials are for

children or considered "baby-stuff" (Harris & Sipay, 1980: 334). Here it is emphasised that the selected material may be of a very low level of reading but the topic, to a certain extent, should be on par with their maturity level. Otherwise, it can discourage these students from participating in the remedial reading programme actively.

In remedial reading, certain basic principles need to be adhered to. Malmquist (1973) states that a problem reader should be allowed to work at his own pace in order to build his confidence to proceed in the reading activity and each success observed should be accompanied with positive reinforcement. The techniques used should be varied to sustain the student's interest. A wide range of materials with various levels of difficulty can interest the problem reader toward a meaningful remedial reading activity.

2.7.2.1 Remedial Reading Approaches

Remedial programmes and approaches are designed to teach students who have difficulty learning to read in the regular classroom reading programme. Among the many strategies or interventions that teachers may use are those that are intended to be total reading approaches and variations of them. The following are among those often used as suggested by Mercer (1991: 524).

2.7.2.1.1 DISTAR

The Direct Instruction Systems for teaching Arithmetic and Reading (DISTAR – Englemann & Bruner, 1969) consists of a Reading Mastery basal reading series. It is an intensive and highly-structured programmed instructional system designed to remediate below-average reading skills of students through third grade in the American school programme. The students are grouped according to their current abilities with no more than five students in a group. Each day, one 30-minute lesson is presented. Each student receives positive reinforcement (praise or points) for correct responses. A student who masters skills (indicated by his performance on tests) changes groups.

2.7.2.1.2 SRA Corrective Reading

The rebus approaches to readiness and beginning reading instruction involves the use of picture words - rebuses, rather than spelled words. Reading materials use pictures instead of printed words. Each picture has only one obvious meaning, so reading is quite easy. For example, "dog" is simply a picture of a dog in a square. The SRA Corrective Reading Programme (CRP – Englemann, Becker & Johnson, 1980) is based on the concepts of DISTAR. The programme is divided into sections on decoding and comprehension for year 4 through 12 of the American school programme. The programme consists of 680 lessons. Each lesson lasts 35 – 40 minutes and includes teacher–directed activities, independent work and tests to

determine mastery. Emphasis is placed on reinforcement by the use of contracts and progress charts.

2.7.2.1.3 Phonic Remedial Reading Lessons

The Phonic Remedial Reading Lessons (Kirk et.al., 1985) are designed to teach phonic skills to students who are reading below third grade level, especially those who have failed to learn to read after a number of years in school. The lessons are systematic presentations of various letter sounds, with repeated practice with phonetic elements that are eventually blended into words. The student is encouraged to write the letter from memory as the sound is produced. The lessons provide a sequential presentation of phonic principles as well as much repetition and practice for those who may benefit from such approaches.

The researcher has attempted to provide a relevant literature review on various areas related to this study. An exposure to these areas will aid in understanding the discussion in the following chapters. The researcher has used these areas as a basis for preparing the questionnaire and interview schedule that will be discussed in the next chapter.