

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The study was carried out on a small sample of 16 Form Four students from a rural secondary school. The focus of this study was to establish the role of schema theory in understanding reading texts. From the information obtained in the recall protocol assessment, questionnaires and semi structured interviews; the researcher has made a general study of the subjects' ability in reading a familiar and unfamiliar text. The study looked at cultural familiarity, prior knowledge and subjects' reading habits in determining the influence of schema in influencing the understanding of reading texts.

This study established that cultural familiarity had a positive effect on subjects' recall and retell assessment (Chapter 4, Table 1, p 42). This was established by relating the marks obtained by the subjects in their recall protocol assessment to their responses in the semi structured interviews and questionnaires to determine their cultural familiarity of the text and their reading habits. The good readers who had prior knowledge and had cultural familiarity scored between 20-29 marks in the familiar text and scored between 08 – 20 marks in the unfamiliar text due to the lack of the two elements mentioned earlier.

The low achievers however scored higher in the familiar text between 10 – 18 marks in the familiar text and between 8 – 14 marks in the unfamiliar text. The higher scores in the familiar text could be attributed to cultural familiarity and prior knowledge. However the lower marks obtained by subjects in this group as compared to the subjects in the high achievers group could be attributed to their low language proficiency levels as displayed in their low PMR English Language results. The good

readers benefited more from cultural familiarity and good language proficiency, as compared to the poor readers. It was also revealed that good reading habits had encouraged higher language proficiency and accumulation of prior knowledge, which played a crucial role in understanding of the familiar text. The measure of their reading time per day was indicated in their response to the questionnaire. Another positive point, which could have encouraged the good readers to achieve a higher grade, is that most of the high achievers in the survey could picture in their mind the game of top spinning. Hence, this can be considered as prior knowledge which had been stored in their schemata was activated to facilitate understanding. This is again attributed to their exposure to the event through either reading or through the mass media namely seeing it on television. These mental pictures are considered important in aiding the subjects to understand the familiar text and recall it in greater detail in their recall protocol assessment. Therefore this study has established to a certain extent that prior knowledge and cultural familiarity is a crucial component in understanding a text depicting a particular culture.

Another aspect of this study appears to indicate that subjects with good reading habits and those who had the opportunity to see a game of top spinning, were able to recall more pausal-ideas in the recall assessment. Therefore it could be inferred that exposure to familiar culture can help the reader to connect prior knowledge to information obtained in their reading of the of a text of a similar culture. Hence the interaction of both these elements enables the top-down understanding of the text. However this is not evident in all the subjects' recall marks of the unfamiliar text. There could be three probable reasons why subjects with cultural familiarity prior knowledge and good reading habits benefit and achieve high recall protocol grades.

One reason could be that the text used could have been of the suitable level to the level of the good readers in this study. As such prior knowledge helped them in creating meaning from the text. As for the poor achievers in the recall protocol assessment, the text might have been too difficult for them in terms of vocabulary and structures. This coupled with little or no prior knowledge of the two texts adding on to their low proficiency levels hampered understanding of the text resulting in low recall levels.

Secondly, from the data gathered in the questionnaire it was evident that those who obtained high marks in the recall protocol assessment had indicated that they spent more than one hour per day reading. Wilga Rivers (1981) states that reading is the most important activity in any language. When adequate reading skills are mastered, learners would acquire the ability to read between and beyond the lines, which is essential for the comprehension of any texts. Rivers (1981) states;

“comprehension on several levels requires three abilities, the ability to read the line and merely repeat what the author says, the ability to read between the lines to interpret and appraise what the author says, and the ability to read beyond the lines to reflect on what the author says, and the ability to read beyond the lines to reflect on what the author says, to arrange his ideas into a new pattern to draw inferences and conclusions” (pg:256)

Lastly, both the group of subjects, (low and high achievers in the recall protocol assessment) performed better in the familiar text as compared to the unfamiliar text. This could reveal that cultural familiarity had a role in these differences in marks obtained by the subjects in this study.

5.2 Pedagogical implications for ESL teachers

In view of the discussion in the preceding section, the pedagogical implications of the current study are discussed in the following paragraph.

This study revealed that good and poor readers who had the schema of the familiar text scored better than the subjects with no text schema did at all. The low achievers in the recall category on the familiar text (top spinning) had lower achievements than the good readers, but the low achievers had indicated that they had schematic knowledge as stated in their response to the semi structured interview. However all the subjects in this study had little or no prior knowledge which appears to have caused severe incapability in the understanding of the unfamiliar text. More proficient readers tend to benefit more, using prior knowledge and linguistic competency to read, understand and recall the texts. This further adds weight to the notion that both prior knowledge and language proficiency are closely related in understanding a reading text.

Therefore ESL teachers should recognise the important role played by language and prior knowledge when they help readers create meaning form text. ESL teachers should attempt to pinpoint the cause of the problems amongst subjects in understanding reading texts. The problems could be due to poor language proficiency hence causing difficulties in the understanding of a text; Insufficient prior knowledge hence subjects have no cultural familiarity with the text.

ESL teachers should complement teaching strategies that could help students activate their background knowledge. One way of doing this is to introduce familiar texts to the students. Teachers can introduce a pre reading activity to build up the students' background knowledge on a topic prior to reading the actual reading text.

Therefore the role of a teacher should be as one as viewed by Stevens (1982:328) “*a teacher of relevant information as well as a teacher of reading skills*”.

The Reassessment of the Role of Teacher in Helping Pupils to learn culture specific reading text. To promote the reading habit in pupils, teachers must change their classroom behaviour. In place of the traditional authoritative role, teachers will need to act as facilitators and motivate learners’ to become independent and responsible for their reading activity. Yu (1993), who conducted a project in Hong Kong on extensive reading, explains the new roles of teachers as follows:

i. The teacher as a facilitator

In reading programme, a teacher should ideally monitor the learners’ progress in reading by checking their reading records and discussing with individuals the books they had read. The teacher’s job is to help the learners’ process linguistic information effectively and develop useful reading strategies with the aim of building up confidence so as to inculcate the habit of reading.

ii. The teacher as motivator

It is vital for a teacher to provide a reading model for their learners. A teacher who does not read or recommend books s/he has read, s/he will unlikely to able to motivate the learners to become readers or convince them of the benefits and importance of reading.

However if a teacher is enthusiastically involved in discussing books with the students, then this will generate a good response from them. Nuttall (1982:192) states that “Readers are made by readers” hence the role of the teacher as motivator is very important.

5.3 Conclusion

This study revealed that subjects who possessed cultural familiarity and prior knowledge which was related to the reading text derived better understanding of the text. This study did not reveal any contradictory findings but seemed to affirm earlier studies about content knowledge (cultural familiarity), prior knowledge, reading habits and factors that could influence the readers. This study also revealed that reading habits played a significant role in enabling the subjects to understand the content of the familiar text as compared to the unfamiliar text.