UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA
FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY
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STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION AT ENGLISH SECONDARY SCHOOL
PAŅĒMIENI LASĪŠANAS IZPRATNES PILNVEIDEI ANGĻU VALODAS STUNDĀS VIDUSSKOLĀ

DIPLOMA PAPER

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RIGA
2009

LATVIJAS UNIVERSITĀTE
PEDAGOĢIJAS UN PSIHOLOĢIJAS FAKULTĀTE
SKOLOTĀJU IZGLĪTĪBAS NODAĻA

ANGĻU VALODAS SKOLOTĀJA PROFESIONĀLĀS AUGSTĀKĀS IZGLĪTĪBAS BAKALAURA STUDIJU PROGRAMMA 42141
KVALIFIKĀCIJA : ANGĻU VALODAS SKOLOTĀJS

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PARAKSTS:

RĪGA
2009

DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I declare that this study is my own and does not contain any unacknowledged work from any source.

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AN ABSTRACT

There was an opinion that young adults don't like to read and don't read because they haven't got time, they have too much homework, that they prefer to watch television, play with computers, and listen to music rather than read.

But recent large-scale national surveys in Britain, the United States, Canada, and Australia show that the majority of young adults do read. A large percentage of young people surveyed say that they choose to read for pleasure, relaxation, or entertainment.

The Diploma Paper was written with the aim to find out whether young adults in Riga's Secondary school 3 like to read, what they read, and what strategies can be used to improve their reading comprehension.

Students needed a range of strategies to deal with the text. Various researchers have identified the main comprehension strategies that should be taught at all grade levels such as predicting, answering and forming questions, visualizing, using text structures and features, and summarizing.

The Diploma Paper deals with reading comprehension strategies that could be applied to improve students' reading comprehension at secondary school.

In the first three chapters of the Diploma Paper the author analyzed the literature about the reading and reading comprehension of different authors. In order to obtain practical results, the case study was carried out. Firstly, questionnairing before the reading activities of students was carried out to find out their attitude towards reading. Then the reading activities were selected and tried out. Then a second questionnairing after the reading activities was carried out to check students' learning outcomes after the reading activities.

The collected data showed that students like to read; they read different kinds of materials and used some strategies such us predicting, imagining, looking for important words etc. to improve their reading comprehension.

ANOTĀCIJA

Pastāv viedoklis, ka jauniešiem nepatīk lasīt, ka viņiem nav laika, viņiem ir daudz mājas darbu, ka viņi dod priekšroku tādām aktivitātēm, kā televizora skatīšanās vai datorspēlēm un mūzikas klausīšanai nekā lasīšanai.

Bet nesenie plaša mēroga pētījumi Lielbritānijā, Amerikas Savienotajās Valstīs, Kanādā un Austrālijā rāda, ka vairākums jauniešu lasa. Liels procents aptaujāto jauniešu teica, ka izvēloties lasīt sava prieka pēc, lai atpūstos vai izklaidētos.

Diplomdarbs tika rakstīts ar mērķi, lai izpētītu, vai jauniešiem Rīgas 3. vidusskolā patīk lasīt, ko viņi lasa, un kādus paņēmienus varētu izmantot viņu lasīšanas izpratnes pilnveidei.

Studentiem vajadzīga virkne paņēmienu, lai darbotos ar tekstu. Dažādi pētnieki ir noteikuši galvenos paņēmienus, kurus var mācīt visos valodu līmeņos, tādus kā prognozēšana, jautājumu atbildēšana un formēšana, iztēle, teksta uzbūves lietošana un pazīmes, un rezumēšana.

Diplomdarbā tika aplūkoti lasīšanas izpratnes paņēmieni, kurus varētu izmantot skolēnu lasīšanas izpratnes pilnveidei vidusskolā.

Pirmajās trīs Diplomdarba nodaļās autore analizēja dažādu autoru literatūru par lasīšanu un lasīšanas izpratni. Lai iegūtu praktiskos datus, tika veikts atsevišķa gadījuma pētījums. Pirmkārt, pirms lasīšanas aktivitātēm tika izveidota anketa skolēnu aptaujāšanai, lai uzzinātu viņu attieksmi pret lasīšanu. Pēc tam tika izvēlētas un izmēģinātas lasīšanas aktivitātes. Pēc lasīšanas aktivitātēm notika atkārtota skolēnu anketēšana, lai pārbaudītu viņu ieguvumu pēc lasīšanas aktivitātēm.

Savāktie dati parādīja, ka skolēniem patīk lasīt, viņi lasa dažādus materiālus un izmanto tādus lasīšanas paņēmienus, kā prognozēšana, iztēle, nezināmu vārdu meklēšana u.c.

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AN INTRODUCTION

Learning to be the effective reader is a vital part of becoming a successful user of English, whether for work or for study. Reading is a key skill for success in examinations, work and study. Without the ability to read well, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success inevitably will be lost.

Reading consists of the process of reading the author's message and decoding the information. But not everything is understood fully even reading in the mother tongue. This is the reason why the teachers of any language have to think of ways to help the learner to get the right idea of the author. They need to raise students' motivation to read, make them interested in reading and persuade that reading is important.

Lapp and Flood refer to Tierney et. al. (1990), the basic goals of reading are to enable students to gain an understanding of the world and of themselves, to develop appreciations and interests, to find solutions to their personal and group problems, and to develop strategies by which they can become independent comprehenders. Locally, comprehension should be considered the heart of reading instruction, and the major goal of that instruction should be the provision of learning activities that will enable students to think about and react to what they read-in short, to read for meaning. Durkin(1993) agrees that comprehension is "the essence of reading"

Lapp and Flood refer to Pressley (2000) who suggests that proficient comprehension is dependent on word-level skills, background knowledge, and comprehension strategies. Good readers utilize strategies before, during, and after reading; i.e., they have a purpose for reading, they monitor their understanding and make predictions as they read, and they are able to summarize after they have read the text.

Lapp and Flood refer to authors Tracey and Morrow (2002), and Pearson and Duke (2002) who concur that comprehension ability is directly linked to decoding, word recognition, and prior knowledge. Yet knowing that comprehension is a complex task, it is still possible to identify characteristic skills and strategies that can be taught, including in the primary grades.

The aim of the **Diploma Paper** is to investigate the applicability of the strategies for improving Reading Comprehension.

The **objectives** are:

1) To review the literature about reading comprehension strategies.
2) To find out what strategies can improve students' reading comprehension.
3) To find out how can reading strategies be applied in developing students' reading comprehension.
4) To prepare and carry out a questionnaire with an aim to explore students' attitude towards reading.
5) To select the activities and try them out in the lessons.
6) To prepare and carry out a questionnaire after the reading activities.
7) To analyze the data and draw the conclusions.

The **research** questions:

1. What reading and reading comprehension are.
2. What the reading approaches are.
3. What the reading skills and strategies are.
4. How to use the reading comprehension strategies in the classroom.

The **hypothesis** of the Diploma Paper is: applying a definite set of reading comprehension strategies improves students' reading comprehension.

According to Nunan's (1992) classification of foreign language learning research methods, a **case study** was used.

The research took place at Riga's secondary school No. 3 during the author's teaching practice from 9th of February till 4th of April. 29 participants from forms 10c and 11c took part in the research.

The **methods of data collection** are two questionnaires for students: the first questionnaire before the reading activities with the aim to find out students' attitude towards the reading, and the second questionnaire after the reading activities to check students' acquirement about the reading comprehension.

The Diploma Paper consists of two parts: the 3 chapters provide a study of theory and then follows a case study.

The **outline** of the chapters:

Chapter 1 deals with what reading and reading comprehension are.

Chapter 2 describes the reading approaches, skills and strategies.

Chapter 3 provides applying reading strategies in the classroom.

Chapter 4 describes a case study.

Different sources of literature were examined to collect the necessary information.

The Diploma Paper represents the ideas of various authors, most of who express similar ideas. Views of some authors dominate, for example, Nutall, Grellet, Grabe and Stollen, Urguhart.

1. READING AND READING COMPREHENSION

1.1 Reading- a vital skill in the life

What is reading? According to Anderson (1985), reading is the process of constructing meaning from written texts. It is a complex skill requiring the coordination of a number of interrelated sources of information.

Reading is a process in which information from the text and the knowledge possessed by the reader act together to produce meaning. The meaning constructed from the same text can vary greatly among people because of differences in the knowledge they possess. Readers must be able to decode words quickly and accurately so that this process can coordinate fluidly with the process of constructing the meaning of the text.

Reading, like playing a musical instrument, is not something that is mastered once and for all at a certain age. Rather, it is a skill that continues to improve through practise.

Ross et al (2006) refers to Roger Chartier (1994) who points out, “Reading is not uniquely an abstract operation of the intellect: it brings the body into play, it is inscribed in a space and a relationship with oneself or with others.”

Grabe and Stollen (2002) define that reading is the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information appropriately. Reading can be thought of as a way to draw information from text and to form an interpretation of that information. Grimes (2006) agrees that reading is an active process of constructing meaning; those who understand the process must make explicit and active what good readers do subconsciously and internally.

Nutall (1998) emphasizes that the text is full of meaning like a jug full of water; the reader’s mind soaks it up like a sponge. In this view, the reader’s role is passive; all the work has been done by the writer and the reader has only to open his mind and let the meaning pour in. She admits that the reader assumes:

- that he and the writer are using the same code (the same language);
- that the writer has a message;
- that the writer wants the reader to understand the message.

Birkerts (2007) thinks that the long-term work of reading is to discover, one by one, the books that hold the scattered elements of our nature, after which the true consummation can begin. One undertakes the gradual focused exploration, nuance by nuance, of their meanings, their implications; one follows out the strands that mysteriously connect the words of another with the unformulated stuff of the self.

Ross et al. (2006) note that reading helps one understand who one is and what one's place in the world is and might become. Furthermore, self-identity is based on shifting understanding of the self in relation to various social structures and social constraints. In the context of reading, the relationships that readers create with fictional characters and fictional worlds allow readers to test and explore interpretations of various and competing identities.

According to Urguhart (1998), reading means dealing with language messages in written or printed form. Reading involves processing language messages, hence knowledge of the language. The process of reading, certainly above the level of decoding, makes demands on linguistic competence which are more immediate and more pervasive than appeals to other competence areas. The texts which one reads, then, are language texts. So reading is involved with language texts. But what is the relationship between reading and language? Roughly speaking, there are two answers to this found in the literature. The first defines reading as *decoding*, as Perfetti (1985, found in Reading in a Second Language) glosses it, 'the skill of transforming printed words into spoken words.' This decoding definition offers some good arguments. It delineates a restricted performance and allows a restricted set of processes to be examined. However, as Perfetti points out, it has limited popularity partly because it has limited application to the demands of actual reading. Moreover, it is not really feasible to view decoding as the initial process which is over by the time other cognitive linguistic processes begin. In one of the best-known papers on reading, Goodman (1967, found in Reading as a Second Language) argues that syntactic, semantic and pragmatic knowledge are involved in the decoding process.

The second answer defines reading as a whole parcel of cognitive activities carried out by the reader in contact with a text. Thus, Nutall (1998), having considered definitions of reading in terms of reading aloud, or decoding, settles for the extraction of meaning from written messages. Similarly, Widdowson (1979, found in Reading as a Second Language) has defined reading as 'the process of getting linguistic information via print'. And Perfetti, as the alternative to a definition in terms of decoding, suggests that reading can be considered as thinking guided by print, with reading ability as skill at comprehension of text. Urguhart (1998) considers reading to be a language activity, involving at some time or another all the cognitive processes related to language performance. Thus one considers that any valid account of the reading process must consider such cognitive aspects as reading strategies, inferencing, memory, relating text to background knowledge, as well as decoding, and obvious language aspects as syntax and lexical knowledge.

Elkin et. al. (2003) emphasize that reading offers endless pleasure. Through books, readers can be transported into another time, another place, another planet, into numerous situations vastly different from their own. Through shared experiences, shared emotions and feelings, readers can begin to get a better understanding of others, as well as themselves. Through stories, readers repeat their experiences and feelings to help them formulate their own ideas; they experience new feelings and begin to see their lives in perspective. Reading can give access to more experience than anyone can encompass in a single lifetime. Himmelweit (1958, found in Reading and Reader Development) claims that stories can offer a vein of experience richer than that obtainable through any other medium and Stratta (1973, found in Reading and Reader Development) argues that literature extends experience, offering a 'complex kaleidoscope for one's contemplation', in a way which is not possible with film or television, since reading allows for greater reflection about the complexity of relationships and events.

As both an adults' and children's librarian in the 1960s and 1970s and as an academic from the mid-1980s onwards, Elkin (2003) has worked with many groups of librarians, teachers, parents, children and students of education, English and librarianship, both in the UK and abroad. Working from the premise that books are one of the most valuable possessions anyone can have, she taxed groups at numerous workshops and seminars to reflect on the value and meaning of reading to themselves as individuals and to adults and children. Below is an amalgam of their ideas.

Reading:

- generates ideas and stimulates creativity: readers think creatively as they bring the reader's text alive through their imagination,
- stimulates the imagination and aids intellectual development,
- helps develop a critical and thinking mind,
- aids personal growth and emotional development,
- helps one to shape, store and reflect on one's past and one's future, by experiencing the life of other periods,
- gives a better understanding of human nature and insight into life; offers role models,
- offers cultural and ethnic awareness and understanding of moral codes/ethics/values
- offers social awareness of different regions, communities and peer groups, and understanding of the complexities of relationships,
- enables the reader to see things from other angles, to appreciate and understand

other people's problems, aiding tolerance and understanding,

- gives an opportunity to relive and re-experience the adventures and ideas of others,
- gives insights into the reader's own personality and problems; means of self-discovery,
- helps people learn and practise literacy skills and develops concentration and reflection,
- makes people feel good and has health benefits: stress relieving, relaxation, mental balance.
- widens horizons,
- offers escapism,
- develops worthwhile tastes and permanent interest in good literature,
- fosters independence,
- informs and educates.

Elkin et al. (2003) conlude that readers talk about being 'lost in a book' – distanced from the world around them, suspending disbelief, totally absorbed in their reading. Readers of all kinds feel that reading has made a difference to their individual lives. Reading can give joy, satisfaction and pleasure throughout life, from babyhood to old age and at varying levels from intellectual satisfaction to a simple vicarious experience. Reading can educate, inform, help to develop language and vocabulary, and enrich the imagination. Reading can be life enhancing, health enhancing, and stress relieving and therapeutic. Reading can bring freedom, empowerment and personal development for the human being, maybe particularly in those countries in which individual freedom is severely restricted. The importance of introducing children to language and reading early in life is recognized throughout the world. Early reading brings life-long reading.

Brumfit & Caster (1986) conclude that one might enjoy reading, be amused by it, want to read again because it is worth reading for itself.

To the author's of the Diploma Paper opinion all these authors give unrepeatable, original definitions of reading. The author of the Diploma Paper agrees that the reading gives people flake and charged feelings. The reading expands people's horizon, gives love and life. The author of the Diploma Paper considers that the reading is the main source of information.

1.2 Reading comprehension- understanding of the written text

> *Thus, contrary to conventional wisdom, which states that comprehension is the process of getting meaning from a page, comprehension is…the process of bringing meaning to a text.*
>
> (Samuels and Kamil, 1988, found in Reading in a Second Language)

The most important thing about reading is comprehension. It is the reason that one read.

According to Grabe and Stollen (2002), reading can be thought of as a way to draw information from a text and to form an interpretation of that information. However, this 'definition' does not really tell one much about what happens when one reads and how one comprehends a text. Reading comprehension is remarkably complex, involving many processing skills that are coordinated in very efficient combinations. Because one also reads for different purposes, there are many ways to read a text, further complicating any definition. Seen in this light, the ability to read is a remarkable type of expertise that most humans develop; it is not generally well understood, nor is its development widely recognised for the significant cognitive achievement that it is.

Grellet (1990) states that understanding a written text means extracting the required information from it as efficiently as possible. For example, ones apply different reading strategies when looking at a notice board to see if there is an advertisement for a particular type of flat and when carefully reading an article of special interest in a scientific journal. Yet locating the relevant advertisement on the board and understanding the new information contained in the article demonstrates that the reading purpose in each case has been successfully fulfilled. In the first case, a competent reader will quickly reject the irrelevant information and find what he is looking for. In the second case, it is not enough to understand the gist of the text; more detailed comprehension is necessary.

It is therefore essential to take the following elements into consideration.

What do people read?

Here are the main text-types one usually comes across:

- Novels, short stories, tales; other literary texts and passages (e.g. essays, diaries, anecdotes, biographies),
- Plays,

- Poems, limericks, nursery rhymes,
- Letters, postcards, telegrams, notes,
- Newspapers and magazines (headlines, articles, editorials, letters to the editor, stop press, classified ads, weather forecast, radio/TV/ theatre programmes),
- Specialized articles, reports, reviews, essays, business letters, summaries, accounts, pamphlets (political and other),
- Handbooks, textbooks, guidebooks,
- Recipes,
- Advertisements, travel brochures, catalogues,
- Puzzles, problems, rules for games,
- Instructions (e.g. warnings), directions (e.g. How to use…), notices, rules and regulations, posters, signs (e.g. road signs), forms (e.g. application forms, landing cards), graffiti, menus, price lists, tickets,
- Comic strips, cartoons and caricatures, legends (of maps, pictures),
- Statistics, diagrams, flow/ pie charts, time-tables, maps,
- Telephone directories, dictionaries, phrasebooks.

Why do people read?

There are two main reasons for reading:

- Reading for pleasure,
- reading for information (in order to find out something or in order to do something with the information one gets.

How do people read?

The main ways of reading are as follows:

- Skimming: quickly running one's eyes over a text to get the gist of it.
- Scanning: quickly going through a text to find a particular piece of information.
- Extensive reading: reading longer texts, usually for one's own pleasure. This is a fluency activity, mainly involving global understanding.
- Intensive reading: reading shorter texts, to extract specific information. This is more an accuracy activity involving reading for detail.

Urguhart (1998) describes that a focus on comprehension is in line with one's feeling that this is what reading is 'about', i.e. getting information from written texts. And there is

no doubt that one's monitoring of one's own reading comprehension is of major importance. A judgement that ones have not understood a text may well leave ones unsatisfied or lead ones to re-read it, or perhaps reject it in disgust.

In spite of this, however, comprehension in some areas remains a somewhat elusive entity. Rayner and Pollatsek (1989, found in Reading in a Second Language), for example, give neither definition nor description of comprehension itself. For them, comprehension equals '"the meaning of the text" that is being read'.

It is, in fact, one's contention that in the teaching and testing of reading, 'comprehension', as generally defined, has been either not very helpful or positively dangerous. Urguhart (1989) summarises common assumptions behind the pedagogical view of comprehension as follows:

Assumption 1. There is such a thing as 'total' or 'perfect' comprehension of a text.

Assumption 2. Careful reading, which aims to extract perfect comprehension, is superior to any other kind of reading, e.g. skimming, and is, in fact, the only kind of reading which deserves the name.

Urguhart (1989) points out, if each reader brings meaning to a text, then each comprehension is likely to be different. Variations in comprehension are likely to come from different background knowledge brought to the text (though this is not the only possible source).

Urguhart (1989) distinguishes between 'comprehensions', referring to differences brought about readers setting themselves different levels of acceptable comprehension (i.e. between reading a book for an examination and reading it for light amusement), and 'interpretations', referring to differences resulting either from different readers bringing different information to a text, or the same reader at different times, bringing a different mind-set. While the terms may not be perfectly chosen for keeping the different factors apart, the distinction should serve as a reminder of the number of variables likely to be present in many teaching or testing situations.

One should mention here the notion that the 'ideal' comprehension consists of the recovery of 'author's meaning'. One does not think that it can be doubted that readers often strive to do this; it is an important aspect of careful reading, and, since it involves close attention to textual features such as use of conjuncts, headings, the ordering of information, and so on, it is something that can partly be taught. One has only two doubts about it being used as the 'ideal' comprehension. First, it can never be fully achieved. One can never be sure that ones have totally entered the writer's mind. It could be said, however, that it is in the nature of all good ideals never to be achieved. Secondly, a careful attempt to recover

author's meaning is not characteristic of all reading; the reader engaged in scanning, for example, may pay little attention to author's intentions. Such attention is, in fact, characteristic of careful reading, particularly where this is submissive. As such, it is important, but cannot be a definition of comprehension in general.

Urguhart (1989) concludes that it is clear that comprehension cannot be viewed simply as the product of any reading activity. Rather, in any reading situation, comprehension will vary according to the reader's background knowledge, goals, interaction with the writer, etc. Comprehension is a useful term to contrast with decoding; otherwise it is best perhaps taken as the product resulting from a particular reading task, and evaluated as such.

Grabe and Stollen (2002) state that reading for general comprehension will use a balanced combination of text model comprehension and situation model interpretation. Reading to learn will first emphasis the building of an accurate text model of comprehension, and then a strong interpretive situation model that integrates well with existing or revised background knowledge.

Grabe and Stollen explain that reading comprehension processes, seen in this way, highlight the miraculous nature of reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is an extraordinary feat of balancing and coordinating many abilities in a very complex and rapid set of routines that makes comprehension a seemingly effortless and enjoyable activity for fluent readers.

Three conclusions become clear when one considers the number of reading processes occurring each and every two seconds:

1. Reading comprehension processes work in parallel when some skills are relatively automatic.
2. Some processes need to be relatively automatic if reading is going to work efficiently.
3. Fast and efficient processing is the hallmark of fluent reading comprehension abilities.

Grabe and Stollen emphasize at this point, that these processes do not operate efficiently of effortlessly when readers encounter texts (and accompanying tasks) that are too difficult for them. Difficulties may arise when readers do not have adequate background information, do not have the necessary linguistic resources or have not read enough in the language to have developed efficiencies in reading. Readers, especially L2 readers, who encounter such difficulties can try to understand the text by using a slow mechanical translation process; alternatively, they can make an effort to form a situation

model from past experience and try to force the text to fit preconceived notions. In the first case, working memory efficiencies cannot operate well; in the latter case, a situation model unconnected to text information is imposed on reading comprehension, activating inappropriate background information and leading to poor comprehension, In either case, successful reading comprehension is not likely to occur.

In L2 reading contexts, where such problems commonly arise, readers resort to coping strategies by translating or by guessing to form a coherent account of the text, whether that account matches the text or not. If this experience is repeated on a continual basis, it is not hard to see why these learners would lose any motivation to become fluent readers.Yet; this problem also suggests a likely long-range solution. Students need to engage in reading for many hours at text- and task- levels appropriate to their abilities. It is only through extended exposure to meaningful print that texts can be processed efficiently and that students will develop as fluent readers.

The author of the Diploma paper understands that reading comprehension is a subject that has been explored for decades. Through these explorations ones have discovered that comprehension is an essential component in the ability of a person to succeed in the reading and in life. Comprehension is defined as the act or action of grasping with the intellect the capacity for understanding fully. Comprehension is important because it allows people to gain knowledge of new concepts; without comprehension it would be impossible to learn anything.

To sum up, this chapter dealt with the reading definitions of different authors and explained reading comprehension processes.

In the next chapter the reading approaches, skills, and strategies will be described.

2. STUDYING THE READING PROCESS

2.1 Models and approaches of reading

What goes on in the visual system and the brain during the process of reading?

Davies (1995) points out that this is not an easy question to answer. None the less there is a long history of attempts to answer the question through the formulation of abstract models of the reading process. Such models have been directly influential in the formulation of educational policies and hence have played a central, if sometimes 'hidden', role in shaping teaching methods. It is for this reason that teachers need to gain some understanding of different models and of their implications for teaching.

Davies (1995) states that the term 'model' refers to a formalized, usually visually represented theory of what goes on in the eyes and the mind when readers are comprehending (or miscomprehending) text. Thus one might characterize a model as a systematic set of guesses or predictions about a hidden process, which are then subjected to 'testing' through experimental studies.

In its most basic and simplified form, a model could represent the reading process as shown below, albeit supported by a detailed explanation of each stage in the model, and of what is going on in the mind at each stage.

1. Eyes' look
2. Letters identified and 'sounded out'
3. Words recognized
4. Words allocated to grammatical class and sentence structure
5. Sentences give meaning
6. Meaning leads to thinking.

A model of this kind provides a description of the reading process one might consider to be a 'common sense' description; at first sight it seems to fit what ones observe in oral reading, though not perhaps with what goes on in ones own reading. In addition, the model reflects certain approaches to the teaching of reading, such as phonic-based approaches, in which the sequence of instructions is intended to reflect the assumed sequence of processing: from letters to sounds, to words, to sentences and finally to meaning and thinking. A model that represents such a sequence is known as a **bottom-up** model of the reading process.

There are, however, alternative ways of representing the process of reading. One alternative is a model of reading in which the processing sequence is almost the reverse of that above. This is illustrated below.

1. Eyes' look
2. Thinking-prediction about meaning
3. Sample sentence as a whole to check meaning
4. To check further, look at words
5. If still uncertain study letters
6. Back to meaning predictions.

By contrast with the bottom-up model, this model includes thinking and meaning at a very early stage, and the processing sequence proceeds from predictions about meaning to attention to progressively smaller units. Such a model is known as a **top-down model** and is one which may appear to capture something of the essence of one's own experience of reading.

In the literature on the reading process, both bottom-up and top-down models are represented, and both have been influential in the development of policies and methods for the teaching of reading.

Nutall (1998) notes that they both are used whenever one reads; sometimes one predominates, sometimes the other, but both are needed. And, though normally unconscious processes, both can be adopted as conscious strategies by the reader approaching a difficult text.

Nutall (1998) defines that in **top-down** processing, one draws on one's own intelligence and experience – the predictions one can make, based on the schemata one has acquired – to understand the text. This kind of processing is used when one interprets assumptions and draws inferences. One makes conscious use of it when one tries to see the overall purpose of the text, or gets a rough idea of the pattern of the writer's argument, in order to make a reasoned guess at the next step (on the grounds that having an idea of what something *might* mean can be a great help in interpreting it).

In **bottom-up** processing, the reader builds up a meaning from the black marks on the page; recognizing letters and words, working out sentences structure. One can make conscious use of it when an initial reading leaves one confused. Perhaps one cannot believe that the apparent message was really what the writer intended; this can happen if one's world knowledge is inadequate, or if the writer's point of view is very different from one's own. In that case, ones must scrutinize the vocabulary and syntax to make sure one has

grasped the plain sense correctly. Thus bottom-up processing can be used as a corrective to 'tunnel vision' (seeing things only from ones own limited point of view).

Nutall (1998) admits although logically one might expect that one ought to understand anything else, in practise a reader continually shifts from one focus to another, now adopting a top-down approach to predict the probable meaning, then moving to the bottom-up approach to check whether that is really what the writer says. This has become known as **interactive reading**.

Aldersen (2000) defines that bottom- up approaches are serial models, where the reader begins with the printed word, recognises graphic stimuli, decodes them to sound, recognises words and decodes meanings. Each component involves subprocesses which take place independently of each other, and build upon prior subprocesses. Subprocesses higher up the chain cannot, however, feed back into components lower down. This approach was typically associated with behaviourism in the 1940s and 1950s, and with 'phonics' approach to the teaching of reading that argue that children need to learn to recognise letters before they can read words, and so on. In this traditional view, readers are passive decoders of sequential graphic-phonemic-syntactic-semantic systems, in that order.

On the other hand, much research has emphasized the importance in reading of the knowledge that a reader brings to text. Models of reading that stress the centrality of this knowledge are known as **schema-theoretic models**. They are based upon the schema theory, which accounts for the acquisition of knowledge and the interpretation of text through the activation of schemata: networks of information stored in the brain which act as filters for incoming information for much more detail. In this view, readers activate what they consider to be relevant existing schemata and map incoming information onto them. To the extent that these schemata are relevant, reading is successful. **Top-down** approaches emphasize the importance of these schemata, and the reader's contribution, over the incoming text.

Grabe and Stollen (2002) point out that **bottom-up** models suggest that all reading follows a mechanical pattern in which the reader creates a piece-by-piece mental translation of the information in the text, with little interference from the reader's own background knowledge. In the extreme view, the reader processes each word letter-by-letter, each sentence word-by-word and each text sentence-by-sentence in a linear fashion. One knows that such an extreme view is not entirely accurate.

Top-down models assume that reading is primarily directed by the reader's goals and expectations. Again, such a view is general and metaphorical. Top-down models characterise the reader as someone who has a set of expectations about the text information

and samples enough information from the text to confirm or reject these expectations. To accomplish this sampling efficiently, the reader directs the eyes to the most likely places in the text to find useful information. The mechanism by which a reader would generate expectations is not clear, but these expectations might be created by a general monitoring mechanism. Inferencing is a prominent feature of top-down models, as is the importance of a reader's background knowledge. Top-down views highlight the potential interaction of all processes with each other under the general control of a central monitor. In extreme interpretations, there is a question about a reader could learn from a text if the reader must first have expectations about all the information in the text. In fact, few reading researchers actually support strong top-down views.

The author of the Diploma Paper agrees that both approaches are essential for the reading process.

2.2 Reading skills and strategies

According to Nutall (1998), reading for general comprehension, when accomplished by a skilled fluent reader, requires very rapid and automatic processing of words, strong skills in forming a general meaning representation of main ideas, and efficient coordination of many processes under very limited time constraints.

Nutall describes that these abilities are often taken for granted by fluent readers because they usually occur automatically; that is, ones make use of these abilities without giving them much thought if ones are fluent readers. In L2 contexts, however, the difficulties that students have in becoming fluent readers of longer texts under time constraints reveal the complexities of reading for general comprehension. Because of its demands for processing efficiency, reading for general understanding may, at times, can be more difficult to master than reading to learn, an ability that is when assumed to be a more difficult extension of general comprehension abilities.

Before defining fluent reading, one would like to comment on two terms commonly used to describe the activity of reading: **skills** and **strategies.** Nutall (1998) refers to (Anderson, 1995; Proctor and Dutta, 1995; Schunk, 2000) that *skills* represent linguistic processing abilities that are relatively automatic in their use and their combinations (e.g. word recognition, syntactic processing). In most educational psychology discussions of skills, they are seen as general learning outcomes of goal-given tasks, acquired gradually and eventually automatised. *Strategies* are often defined as a set of abilities under conscious control of the reader, though this common definition is not likely to be true. In

fact, many abilities that are commonly identified as strategies are relatively automatic in their use by fluent readers (e.g. skipping an unknown word while reading, rereading to re-establish the text meaning). Thus, the distinction between skills and strategies is not entirely clear precisely because that is part of the nature of reading (and not a definitional problem).

According to Urguhart (1998), a reading skill can be described roughly as a cognitive ability which a person is able to use when interacting with written texts. Thus, unlike comprehension, which can be viewed as the product of reading a particular text, skills are seen as part of the generalized reading process.

Urguhart (1998) refers to Olshavsky and Sarig who both view reading as 'a problem-solving process'. Admittedly there may be some problems defining 'problem', but, in commonsense terms, ones can regard strategies as ways of getting round difficulties encountered while reading. Thus, initially at least, strategies can be seen as responses to local problems in a text. Authors should include in their definition a reference to the fact that the response must be a conscious one. Olshavsky claims that a strategy is 'a *purposeful* means of comprehending the author's message'. Urguhart also refers to Pritchard and Cohen. Pritchard defines a strategy as 'a deliberate action that readers take voluntarily to develop an understanding of what they read'. Cohen points out that the question is controversial but comes down firmly on the side of a conscious choice.

There is a fair amount of confusion in the literature as to what distinguishes a skill from a strategy. Some writers (e.g. Nutall, Grabe) refer to 'skills/strategies' as if the two were interchangeable. Urguhart (1998) points out that some of this apparent confusion may be due simply to the fact that the skills proponents did not attempt to separate skills from strategies. However, it would be satisfying, for the sake of clarity, to arrive at some generally accepted distinction are possible differences:

- Strategies are reader-oriented, skills are text-oriented. It is certainly true that skills taxonomies tend to focus on text.
- Strategies represent conscious decisions taken by the reader, skills are deployed unconsciously. Another way of phrasing this is that skills have reached the level of automaticity.
- Strategies, unlike skills, represent a response to a problem, e.g. failure to understand a word or the significance of a preposition, failure to find the information one was looking for, etc.

On the whole, Urguhart (1998) agrees with the distinction drawn by Williams and Moran:

A skill is an ability which has been automatised and operates largely subconsciously, whereas a strategy is a conscious procedure carried out in order to solve a problem.

Aldersen (2000) refers to Munby who distinguishes the following reading skills:

- recognising the script of a language
- deducing the meaning and use of unfamiliar lexical items
- understanding explicitly stated information
- understanding information when not explicitly stated
- understanding conceptual meaning
- understanding the communicative value of sentences
- understanding relations within the sentence
- understanding relations between parts of text through lexical cohesion devices
- understanding cohesion between parts of a text through grammatical cohesion devices
- interpreting text by going outside it
- recognising indicators in discourse
- identifying the main point or important information in discourse
- distinguishing the main idea from supporting details
- extracting salient details to summarise (the text, an idea)
- extracting relevant points from the a text selectively
- using basic reference skills
- skimming
- scanning to locate specifically required information
- transcoding information to diagrammatic display

According to Nutall(1998), sample reading strategies are:

- specifying a purpose for reading
- planning what to do/what steps to take
- previewing the text
- predicting the contents of the text or section of text
- checking predictions
- posing questions about the text
- finding answers to posed questions
- connecting text to background knowledge
- summarising information

- making inferences
- connecting one part of the text to another
- paying attention to text structure
- rereading
- guessing the meaning of a new word from context
- using discourse markers to see relationships
- checking comprehension
- identifying difficulties
- taking steps to repair faulty comprehension
- critiquing the text
- judging how well objectives were met
- reflecting on what has been learned from the text

The author of the Diploma Paper understands that reading strategies are deliberate, goal-directed attempts to control and modify the reader's efforts to decode the text, understand words, and construct meanings of the text.

This chapter described the reading approaches: top-down and bottom-up models, their importance in the reading process, as well as the reading skills and strategies.

In the next chapter the reading process in the classroom will be described.

3. READING IN THE CLASSROOM

The best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it.

(Nutall, 1998)

Snowball (2006) sets a question: If a student can read words but doesn't comprehend their meaning, is he or she really reading? The answer is no. Therefore, teaching and learning about comprehension is of paramount importance, from the very beginning of reading instruction and right through all years of school, in all curriculum areas.

Scharlach (2008) states that teachers often lament that their students can *read* but they do not *understand.* She emphasizes that the most important thing about reading is comprehension. It is the reason that ones read. However, she admits, that many teachers express concern about their ability to effectively teach all of their students to become strategic metacognitive readers. Scarlach refers to authors (Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey, & Stecher, 2000; Linn, 2000) who describe that schools today are spending enormous amounts of time and money preparing students for high-stakes tests even though such a narrow focus on test preparation does not translate into real learning. She also refers to Guthrie that one of the most well-established findings in reading research is that comprehension develops through a variety of purposeful, motivated reading activities. By fostering students to become active, engaged readers, teachers enable them to gain competence and a sense of self-efficacy.

Sharlach (2008) refers to Block, Gambrell, & Pressley, 2002 that although comprehension improves through extensive reading, researchers have concluded that comprehension could improve more if all readers were taught to use the comprehension strategies that good readers use.

Sharlach refers to Hilden & Pressley, 2007 who state that teachers often struggle with teaching reading comprehension strategies due to the complexity of designing purposeful comprehension strategy instruction, and many reading comprehension programs are overwhelming in terms of time to learn and requirements for implementation.

Sharlach refers to authors (Block et al., 2002; Keene & Zimmermann, 1997; Pearson, Roehler, Dole, & Duffy, 1992; Pressley, 2002a) who have concluded that comprehension strategies should be taught to students as they are immersed in reading rather than separate from reading. She refers to (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997) who states that good readers are active and use a variety of strategies as they read. Likewise she refers to (Guthrie, 2002)

who points out that direct instruction in comprehension strategies includes the teacher modelling and explaining when and how to use the strategies, repeated opportunities for guided practise, and extended independent reading. Pressley (2006) concluded that effective comprehension instruction includes teaching a small repertoire of strategies, modelling and explaining, and facilitating scaffolded practice. These comprehension strategies include making predictions and connections to ideas in text based on prior knowledge, constructing mental images that represent ideas in text, asking questions and seeking answers, and constructing summaries of what has been read. As students practice reading comprehension strategies through active, strategic reading, the use of the strategies will gradually become self-regulated and students will reach a level of metacognition where they will not only be able to use the strategies but will also know when and where to apply them.

Nutall (1998) defines that the overall aim for the reading programme should be proposed:

To enable students to enjoy (or at least feel comfortable with) reading in the foreign language, and to read without help unfamiliar authentic texts, at appropriate speed, silently and with adequate understanding.

After completing the reading programme, the student will read in the foreign language for his own purposes, and in doing so will:

- recognize the importance of defining his purpose when he reads;
- read in different ways according to his purpose and the type of text;
- respond to the text a fully and accurately as his purpose demands;
- recognize that both top-down and bottom-up approaches to text are valuable, and use each as appropriate;
- be aware, when necessary, that he has not understand the text and be able to locate the source of misunderstanding and tackle it;
- not worry if he does not understand every word, except where accuracy is important;
- use skimming when necessary to ensure he reads only what is relevant, and to assist subsequent comprehension;
- make use of non-linear information (figures, titles, layout, etc) to supplement the text and increase understanding;

- make use of word attack skills of interpreting syntax and cohesion, in order to establish the plain sense of the text;
- be aware that a sentence may have a different functional value in different contexts, and be able to identify the value;
- make use of rhetorical organization to help interpret a complex text;
- be aware that his own expectations influence his interpretation and recognize those occasions when writer's assumptions differ from his own;
- be aware that a writer does not express everything she means, and be able to make inferences as required to fill out the meaning;
- recognize that a good writer chooses her words carefully and would have meant something different if she had chosen A rather than B (advanced students will also be able to explain the difference);
- use library catalogues, titles, contents pages, etc. to identify relevant material.

Singer & Doulan (1985) describe that reading development consists of two overlapping phases: (1) learning how to read and (2) learning from text.

Learning how to read (reading acquisition) can be mastered by most students. Indeed, many students master the process of learning how to read prior to eighth grade. Individual differences in this first phase of reading development consequently *decrease* as a group of students progresses through the grades. But, even though students have mastered the process of reading , they will still have to learn how to pronounce and read technical terms, symbols, and other features of text peculiar to each content area.

Learning from text is a process that is highly correlated with general mental ability. In progressing through school, students increase their ability to learn from text as they acquire new information, vocabulary, and concepts; as they improve in their reasoning abilities; and as they learn modes of thinking that are characteristic of each content area. This improvement is related not only to learning and instruction in the content areas, but also to mental age which increase from grade to grade. Therefore, the ability to learn from texts also *increases* as students progress through school. Hence, the major task of teachers shifts from teaching students how to read towards teaching them how to learn from texts in the content areas (Singer & Doulan, 1985).

According to Brumfit & Caster (1986), a literary text is an authentic text, real language in context, to which one can respond directly. It offers a context in which exploration and discussion of *content* (which if appropriately selected can be an important motivation for study) lead on naturally to examination of language. What is said is bound up very closely with how it is said, and students come to understand and appreciate this.

Literary texts provide examples of language resources being used to the full, and the reader is placed in an *active* interactional role in working with and making sense of this language. Thus, literature lessons make for genuine opportunities in group work and/or open-ended exploration by the individual student. Not all works of literature are fiction, but the reader does not read literature for factual truth or information, and this fluidity of representation prohibits restriction to formulaic language practice. It is this open, questioning spirit with which ones would hope students might face a literary text. It also helps them to explore the nature of the object itself and learn about it as communication. It is basis for students to work out why they like reading what they read, and for extending their language into the more abstract domains associated with increasingly advanced language competence.

Wallace (1992) notes that when one encounters texts, whether written or spoken, one recognizes them as pieces of communication rather than mere strings of words or sentences. This is because of the way parts of a text relate to each other to create a meaningful whole, and the whole takes on meaning from its situational and cultural context. It is possible to look at texts in three different ways (1) in terms of their *formal features,* that is , at ways features of the grammatical system are used to link sentences or paragraphs; (2) in terms of their *propositional meaning*, that is how ideas or concepts are expressed and related to each other, and (3) in terms of their *communicative function*, both the ways in which sections of a text can be interpreted in relation to other sections and of the function of any text as a whole.

Once reading of a continuous text begins, the strategy-oriented teacher will be as concerned to observe readers in the course of reading as to assess outcomes in the form of answers to the comprehension questions which generally follow a reading task. He or she is likely to be interested not merely in the surface fluency with which a text is rendered aloud, but also in the nature of miscues, or, with silent reading, the reader's own perception of problems during the reading process. In this sense a strategic approach to the teaching of reading demonstrates interest in processes as much as products, that is what goes on during reading itself as well as the nature of goals and outcomes.

The successful readers tend to select from a range of strategies. For example, they skip inessential words, guess from context, read in broad phrases, and continue reading the text where they were unsuccessful in decoding a word or phrase (Wallace, 1992).

Hedge (2001) describes that, if extensive reading is to serve a useful purpose in terms of developing reading skills, then ones can see that there are implications for the type of material which should be made available to students. For example, if students are to develop strategies for guessing word meaning from the context, then texts need to present

new and unfamiliar words or new meanings of known words, but they should not be so difficult as to undermine the students' confidence by defeating all attempts to understand.

One reads books mainly for information of for pleasure. Successful reading is determined on the one hand by the students' abilities, knowledge and interest and on the other hand by the language, content and presentation of the reading book.

Hedge (2001) emphasizes that talking to students about their reading is one way of preparing students 'psychologically' for reading extensively in a foreign language. The teacher can ask students what they read in their first language, how often they read, what sorts of books they enjoy most. And questions can be asked about their attempts to read in English, too. With the advice of a teacher if necessary, students can select books, according to their own reading interests and abilities. Individual private reading is a way of organising language learning, which recognises that students have different experiences, interests, motivation, intellectual capacities, tastes and levels of maturity. Success in developing reading skills depends on respecting and allowing for these differences.

Grellet (1990) states that reading is a constant process of guessing, and what one brings to the text is often more important than what one finds in it. This is why, from the very beginning, the students should be taught to use what they know to understand unknown elements, whether these are ideas or simple words. She agrees with other authors that it is important to use authentic texts whenever possible. Authenticity means that nothing of the original text is changed and also that its presentation and layout are retained. Reading comprehension should not be separated from the other skills. When constructing reading comprehension exercises on a given text, it is always preferable to start with the overall meaning of the text, its function and aim, rather than working on vocabulary or more specific ideas. Reading is an active skill. It constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself questions. This should therefore be taken into consideration when devising reading comprehension exercises. A second aspect of reading as an active skill is its communicative function. Exercises must be meaningful and correspond as often as possible to what one is expected to do with the text. Another important point when devising reading comprehension exercises is that the activities should be flexible and varied. Few exercise-types are intrinsically good or bad. They only become so when used in relation to a given text. Reading comprehension activities should be suited to the texts and to one's reasons for reading them. It is essential to take into account the author's point of view, intention and tone for a full understanding of the text. This may be covered by open questions, multiple-choice questions, right or wrong questions, etc. the aim of the exercises must be clearly defined.

The students must be taught how to approach and consider the text in order to become independent and efficient readers. It is also important to remember that meaning is not inherent in the text, that each reader brings his own meaning to what he reads based on what he expects from the text and his previous knowledge. This shows how difficult it is to test competence in reading comprehension and how great the temptation is to impose one's own interpretation on the learners (Grellet, 1990).

Snowball (2006) points out although comprehension strategies may be learned informally to some extent, teacher's instruction should include:

- Explaining the purpose of the instruction
- Specifically describing the strategy plus how and when it is helpful for reading
- Demonstrating use of the strategy in authentic reading situations
- Thinking aloud about strategy use as you read (nut not every time you read)
- Encouraging your students to collaboratively use the strategy with you and with each other
- Asking your students to explain how they are processing texts
- Guiding your students' practice of the strategy in small groups and individually
- Emphasizing that different strategies may be used in different situations
- Integrating the use of different strategies and explaining why, how and when
- Relating the strategy to your student's independent reading
- Providing many opportunities for your students to use all comprehension strategies Independently, across all curriculum areas and with a range of texts.

Nancy Frey (2006) emphasizes that when looking for a comprehensive reading program, look for one that builds on a solid foundation of research, features reading comprehension strategies and offers an instructional model that begins with teacher modelling and ends with students working independently. In addition, a good program should help students build the habits of mind that great readers possess including seeing themselves as readers. Making sense of text, knowing what they know, understanding how stories work, reading to learn, monitoring and organizing ideas and information, and thinking critically about text.

According to the USA National Reading Panel's (2000) report on the teaching of reading, five strategies should be taught to ensure good reading comprehension. These are: **prediction, questioning, clarifying, imagining and summarisation.** To varying extents, these skills draw upon linguistic and cognitive resources. In concert they can be used to ensure that students are able to build coherent mental models of the texts they read.

The following is a more detailed look at those strategies.

Prediction

It could be argued that the ability to predict what a text entails is the first step to successful comprehension. A reader obtains the first clues to what a text is about via its title. Together with the opening sentences this can help the reader decide if the text is appropriate to their purpose (in the case of non-fiction) or to activate a story schema (in the case of fiction). The good reader then actively looks for cues to enrich their mental model of the text as reading proceeds, In turn, the developing representation of the text can be used to set up **expectancies** at the word, sentence and text levels. This will facilitate reading fluency and deepen understanding.

Questioning and clarifying

An actively engaged reader can use **self-questioning** to monitor his/her reading comprehension and to help clarify points that they fail to understand. Closely related to this is the use of the look back strategy to find information that is needed to resolve ambiguities. A successful comprehender knows how to generate pertinent questions, and can fall back on their mental model of the text to know where to locate relevant information.

Imagining

Imagining refers to the use of **mental imagery** to enhance text comprehension by enriching the mental model of a text. Many successful comprehenders translate the story they are reading into a series of images, almost like a film that can be replayed during story recall. Students who do not this spontaneously can be taught to use the strategy to incorporate the details of what they read around a central theme.

Summarisation

The process of **summarisation** is perhaps most closely allied to the development of the situation model. Summarisation involves the extraction of the gist and main themes of what is read (while putting aside the irrelevant details), and integrating the details into a coherent whole. Additional processes may include the evaluation of style and mood and making generalisations. Summarisation depends on basic language skills, inferential abilities and knowledge and engagement with texts.

Reciprocal teaching is a classic method for teaching reading comprehension strategies. Students are first shown how to apply the strategies by their teacher who models the process. Students then read a piece of the text, paragraph by paragraph, and they learn to practise the strategies of:

- generating questions
- summarising
- attempting to clarify word meanings or confusing text, and
- predicting what will happen in the next paragraph.

The teacher supports students while they practise, giving feedback and additional modelling (guiding) as necessary. Gradually it is intended that the guided practise becomes a dialogue in which groups of students work together with a text, asking questions of one another, commenting on answers, summarising and improving the summary. In a similar vein, activities can include helping one another to infer the meaning of a word or to reason about story events.

The author of the Diploma Paper understood that building good readers begins in knowing what actions good readers take while reading and what teachers can do to teach students to take those actions.

This chapter provided an insight into reading in the classroom and described the main reading strategies. Therefore, teaching and learning about comprehension is of paramount importance, from the very beginning of reading instruction and right through all years of school, in all curriculum areas.

The next chapter will describe a case study.

4. CASE STUDY

The aim of the practical research was to find out strategies for improving students' reading comprehension based on the ideas studied in the theoretical part. The research took place at Riga's secondary school No. 3, where the author of the Paper had the teaching practice from 9th of February till 4th of April. To carry out the research 29 students were involved from forms 10 and 11 where the author had the English lessons.

The case study was used as a research method and questionnaires were used as a data collection method.

One of the first steps to be done to complete the aim was to find out students' attitude towards reading giving them the questionnaire and to get different tips which later could be used in the selection of the reading tasks in the case study.

The second step was to work out the criteria for the selection of the tasks based on the study of the literature.

The third step was to select of activities according to the criteria worked out and trying them out in the lessons.

The fourth step was to carry out the questionnaire after reading activities to find out students' reflections about the reading tasks.

The fifth step was to analyze the data and to draw conclusions.

4.1 Data of the questionnaire before the reading activities

The first questionnaire was given to students in order to get the necessary information of students' attitude towards reading. The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions.

The author of the Diploma Paper started the questionnaire with a question whether students liked to read in general, and why or why not.

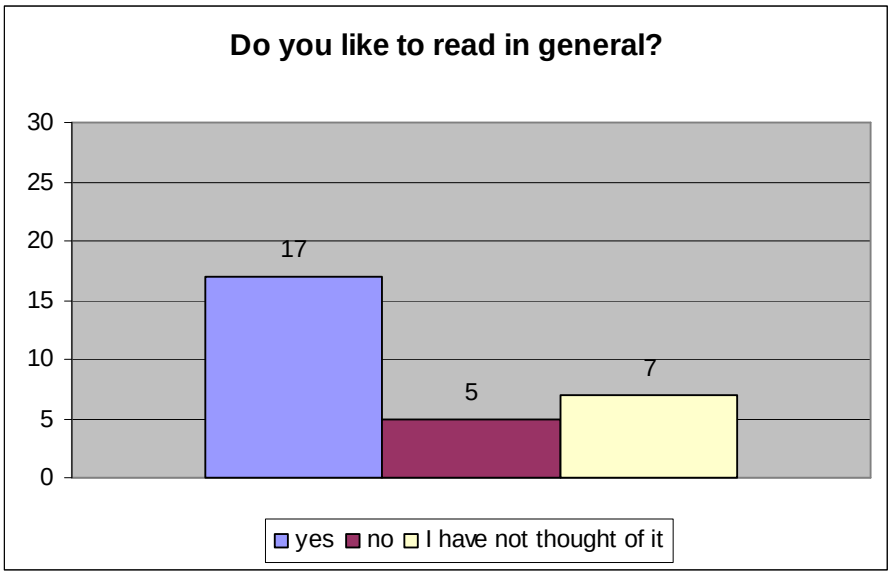

Figure 1. Students' answers to the question: "Do you like to read in general?"

As Figure 1 showed, the most part of students which is 17 from 29 liked to read in general, 5 students did not like, and 7 students had not thought of it.

To the question why or why not they like to read some students did not answer, the others' answers varied from that they just liked the books to because it was interesting, it was possible to get new knowledge from books, one could think about things one did not think in one's daily routine. For the rest who did not like to read the author thought that to attract these students the teacher had to think of interesting tasks and texts to provide the opportunity also for them to enjoy reading. All in all, the results showed that students liked to read.

In the second question students had to rate on scale of 5 to 1 how much they like reading.

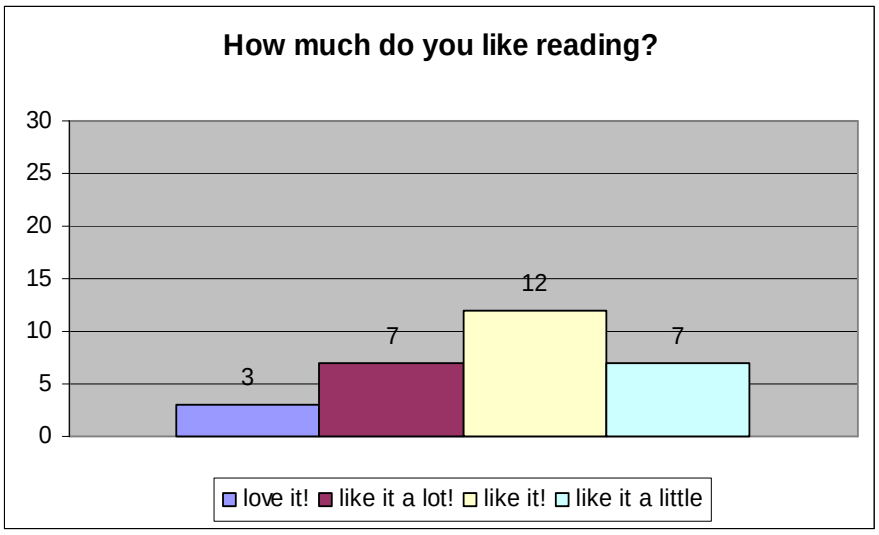

Figure 2. Students' rating of their liking of reading.

Figure 2 showed that the great part of respondents which is 12 from 29 simply liked reading, 7 liked it a lot, 7 liked it a little, and 3 students, nicely to say, loved it. This meant that students understand the worth of the reading that it was a vital skill in English language learning.

The author of the Paper was interested in what students thought about themselves as readers. Whether they read well, it is, fluently and understanding well what they read, or read quickly or carefully trying to understand every word.

The third question was connected with students' thoughts about themselves as what kind of readers they were.

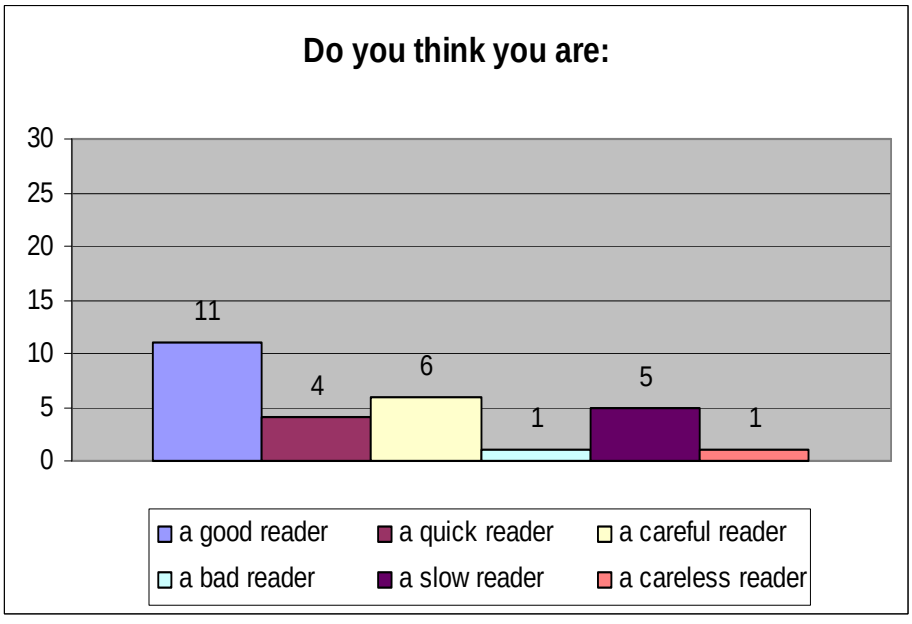

Figure. 3 Students' thoughts about themselves as readers

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Figure 3 represents students' thoughts about themselves as readers. 11 students from 29 students consider that they are good readers, 4 students think about themselves as quick readers, 6 students are careful readers, 5 students - slow readers, 1 student - a bad reader, and 2 students consider that they are careless readers. This means that the teacher should pay more attention to weaker students

In the next question the author asked students how often they read on average.

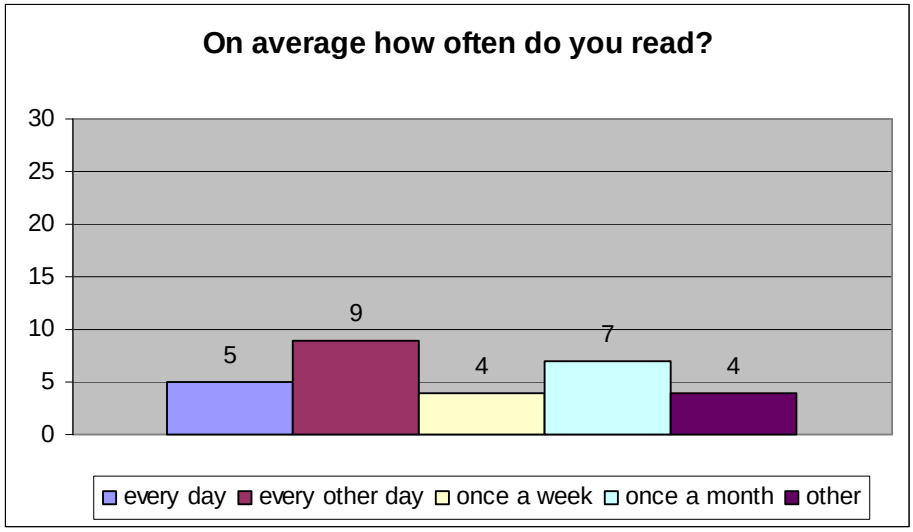

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Figure 4. Students' answers to the question on frequency of reading.

As figure 4 shows, 5 students from 29 read every day, 9 students read every other day, 4 students read once a week, 7 students read only once a month, and 4 students has other answers such as; it depended if students were able to find a good book they read every day if not, they did not read for months. This meant that the teacher for these students who read a little may be could suggest some interesting books.

The author of the Paper was interested in how much time on average students spent on reading daily.

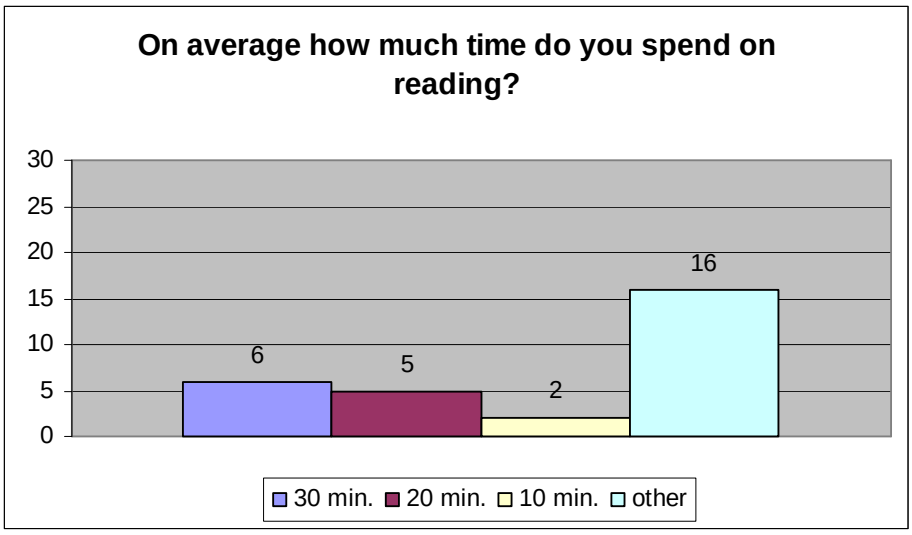

Figure 5. Students' answers to the question concerning the average time spent on reading daily.

Figure 4 demonstrated that on average 6 students from 29 read 30 min. daily, 5 students read 20 min, 2 students read 10 min., and 16 students gave other answers, such as 1 hour, 1 student read even 5 hours, 1 student did not know, and 1 student answered that he read till he was fed with it. It is pleasing that, all in all, all students read some material daily.

When asked about what kind of materials students enjoy reading they could choose three the most popular for them.

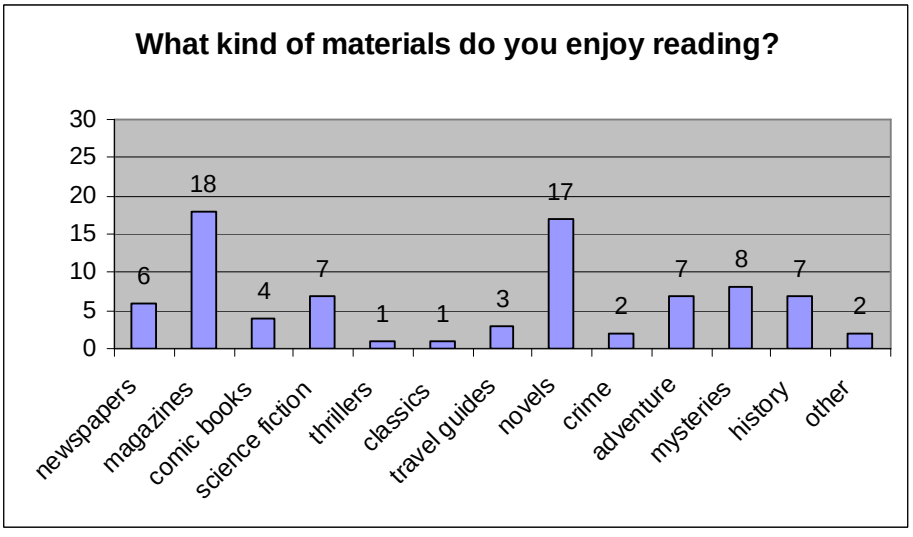

Figure 6. Materials students enjoy reading.

The most popular are magazines. 18 students from 29 read them. Then come novels which 17 students read. Mysteries are popular among 8 students. 7 students enjoy reading

science fiction, adventure and history. 6 students like to read newspapers, 4 students read comic books, 3 students enjoy reading travel guides, 2 students like to read crimes, 1 students enjoys reading thrillers, 1 student- classics, and 2 students have other answers; they read autobiographies and philosophical or psychological articles. These results were important for the author of the Diploma Paper to find the appropriate texts.

The author of the Diploma Paper wanted to clarify whether students decided in advance what their reading purpose was and then read with that goal in mind or not.

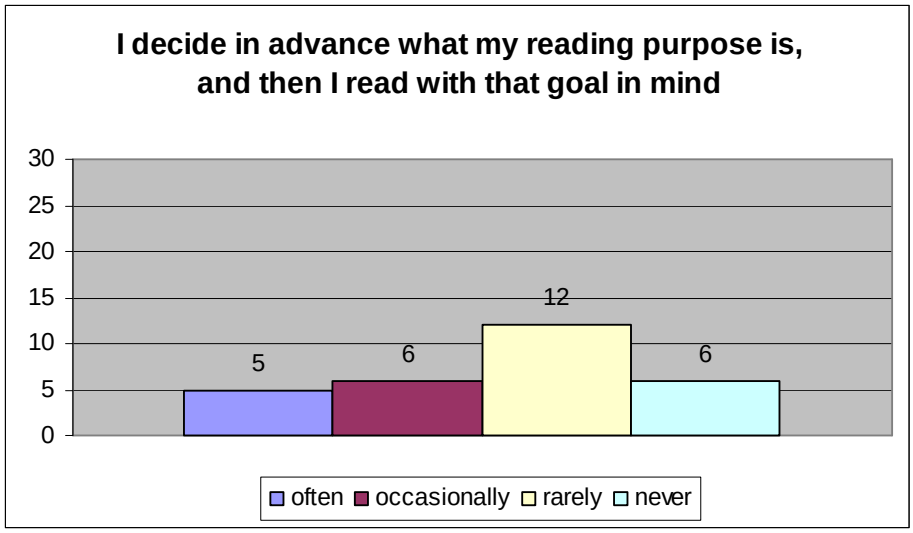

Figure 7. Students' reading purpose.

As figure 6 shows 5 students from 29 often decided in advance what their reading purpose was, 6 students occasionally, 12 students rarely, and 6 students never decided in advance what their reading purpose was. Results showed that, more or less, the most part of students decided in advance what their reading purpose was and then read with that goal in mind.

The next question asked students to decide if they had to choose the adjective to describe the reading activities in their course books, which one would they underline.

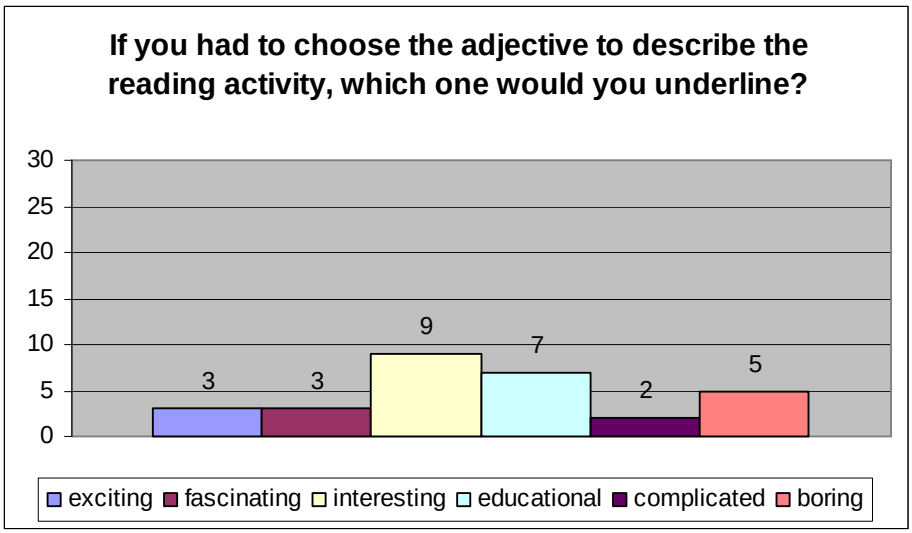

Figure 8. Adjectives describing reading activities.

Figure 7 showed that students' answers are different: 9 students from 29 answered that reading activities were interesting, then followed 7 students who considered that reading activities were educational, for 5 students they seemed boring, equally 3 and 3 students called reading activities exciting and fascinating, and for 2 students they seemed complicated. This meant that students' attitude towards reading activities depended on how they like to read in general.

The next question asked students about how they feel themselves while reading.

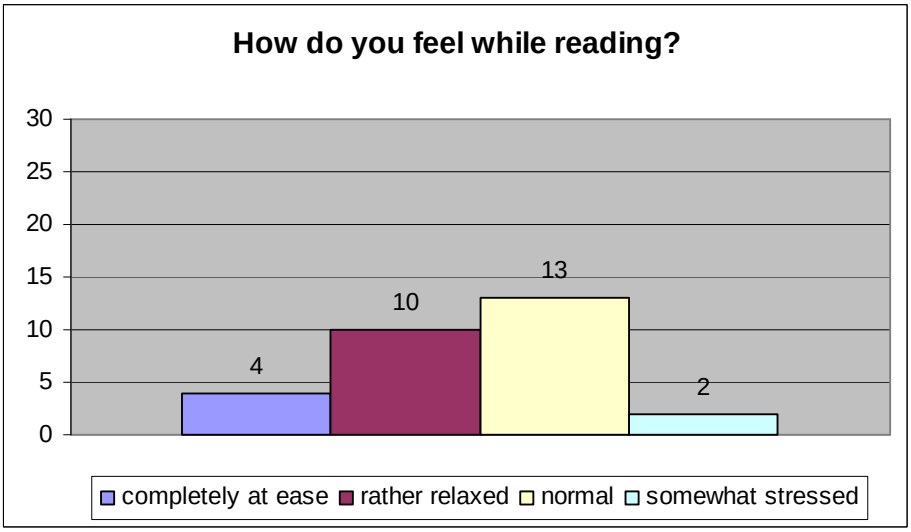

Figure 9. Students' feelings while reading.

As figure 9 demonstrates, the great part which is 13 students from 29 felt normal, 10 students felt rather relaxed, 4 students completely at ease, and 2 students felt somewhat stressed while reading.

And the last question asked students whether they felt it was necessary to understand every word.

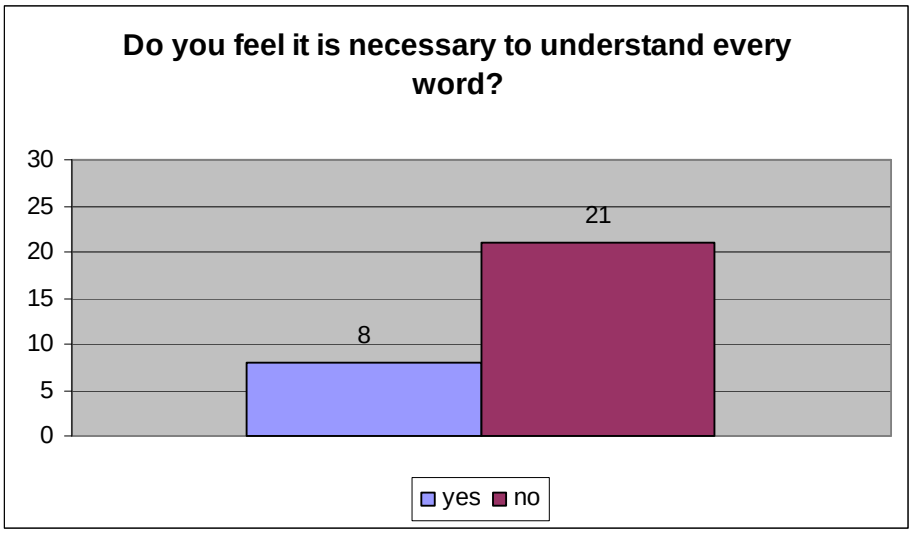

Figure 10. Students' answers to the question about the necessity to understand every word.

Figure 10 represented that the great part of students considered that to understand every word is not necessary that the main goal is to understand the idea of text; however, for 8 students it was important to understand every word.

After the distributing and collecting the results the next step was working out criteria for selecting the tasks, which were based on the study of the literature about the development of reading comprehension, the possibilities to increase students' interest during the reading and to teach them some reading strategies.

4.2 Activities

The authors Flood and Lapp (1991) identify the following actions that are part of a competent reader's generalizable plan (strategy):

The student:

- previews the text by looking at the title, the pictures, and the print in order to evoke relevant thoughts and memories
- builds background by activating appropriate prior knowledge trough self-questioning about what is already known the topic or selection, the vocabulary,

and the form (structure) in which the topic or selection is presented

- sets purposes for reading by asking questions about what he or she wants to learn during the reading episode
- checks understanding of the text by paraphrasing the author's words
- monitors comprehension by using context clues to understand the meanings of unknown words and by imaging, imagining, inferencing, and predicting
- integrates new concepts with existing knowledge, continually revising purposes for reading
- summarizes what has been read by retelling the plot of a story or the main idea of a text
- evaluates the ideas contained in the text
- makes applications of the ideas in the text to unique situations, extending the ideas to broader perspectives

At the beginning of the teaching practice the author of the Diploma Paper introduced students with some of the reading comprehension strategies such as prediction, questioning, imagining, summarizing etc.

The first activity

The first activity was home reading. Students had home readings approximately once in two months. It happened that the author had home readings with her students at the very beginning and the end of the teaching practice. Students had to read a book or an article from the magazine or internet sources for the home reading. Their first task was to summarize the story retelling it and give the main ideas. The second task was to find in the text or an article five unknown words, write them on the board and explain to others. While the student presented a book or an article, other students had the task to listen carefully, fill in the home reading observation sheets the author, title, one sentence of plot (what was the book about?) and the main characters. Also they had to write words that the presenter had found in their notebooks and then after home reading activities make their own sentences and read. These home reading activities were very interesting because each student brought his or her own interests, opinions and suggestions in the class.

The second activity

In the second activity students read a scientific article “Pulp friction”. The first task was to find the main idea of each paragraph choosing the right answer from four variants. There were five paragraphs in the text. In the second task students had to reread the text and select the right answer to the comprehension questions given to the text. The third task gave sentences from the text and students had to choose the right explaining to the unknown words, for example:

“In British Columbia, where, since 1990, thirteen rainforest valleys have been clear-cut, 142 species of salmon have already become extinct.”

What does “clear-cut” mean?

a few trees have been cut down

many trees have been cut down

all the trees have been cut down

Students worked individually, then they compared their answers with the pair, and then a whole class discussion followed.

Students successfully managed this activity, however, the author of the Diploma Paper should admit that for some students this text seemed too complicated and boring.

The third activity

In the third activity students were given a text about the sea turtles. Before students began reading the text they had to write down everything they knew about the subject. What they had heard others said about it, what they had read or seen in television programs about these sea animals. Next, students had to write down what would they like to know about the subject. After students had done their pre-reading notes on what they knew and what they wanted to know they went ahead and read the text. When students had finished, they returned to their notes and wrote a paragraph on what they had learned. They compared the reading with what they already knew about the topic. Then a discussion followed about if there were any ideas that were seemed surprising, what things they already knew, if there was any new information, whether the text answered any of the questions that students wanted to know.

Students liked this activity. They did not know many facts about sea turtles but they actively put their background knowledge on the notes about what they knew, for example, that they lived in the ocean that turtles laid eggs in the sand etc.

It was funny that after the reading all students wanted to taste the meat of turtles.

The fourth activity

In the fourth activity students were given the text “Sumatra Ghoshal”, which consisted of fourteen paragraphs. Paragraphs A – F have been removed from the text. Students’ task was to read the text of the lecture and put the missing paragraphs in the correct places. At first students had to read the paragraphs which had been removed from the text. Then they read the text of the lecture and decided where each paragraph should go. One of the answers was given as an example.

Students worked in pairs then a class discussion followed. Although students managed this activity, they complained that the text was too long and not interesting.

The fifth activity

The fifth activity was an activity of prediction. Students were given sheets of paper with a title and pictures. Students had to think what this story would be about, what the title was, what characters they saw in the pictures, and what they were doing. Then students were given worksheets where they had to write down what they thought the story would be. After the making prediction students began reading the story. As they read, they had to think about their prediction. If after some sentence their predictions were not correct they had to go back and write different predictions.

Students liked this activity very much. The text was very easy and short, however, students had different predictions and this funny, as they called it, activity gave them good relaxation.

The sixth activity

In the sixth activity students were given worksheets with title the “What Is a Newspaper?” At first students had to look at the title and answer what they expected from the text. Then they read the text about what a newspaper was and what its structure was. After they had read students had to answer each of the following questions. Then they read the following news story and answered the questions.

After students read the information about the classified section of a newspaper where ads were placed: people who wanted to apply for a job, buy a house, or make any other

similar transaction were very interested in this section. Students had to read the following ad and explain what was being sold.

The next task was connected with an advertisement for a job placed in the newspaper. Students had to read the ad and answer the questions which followed.

Students worked in pairs and then a whole class discussion followed. Students managed this activity successfully.

The seventh activity

The seventh activity was connected with history. Students were given two texts about Alexander the Great. The first text's title was "Persian warriors defeated". Before reading the story students had to answer questions connected with the phrases from the text. To find the explanation of these phrases they used dictionaries. Then students read the text and tried to guess the meaning of underlined words without looking under the text where explanations were given. The author suggested that students also tried to visualize what they read. In the following task students had to answer the review questions. After that students had the task with multiple choice and then followed a matching task.

The second text's title was "Persepolis goes up in flames". The tasks were the same as in the first text.

Students liked this activity. They got to know new facts about Alexander the Great, acquired new vocabulary, they managed this activity successfully.

4.3 Data of the questionnaire after reading activities

To see students' progress in the reading comprehension during the case study, there was a questionnairing after reading activities carried out. The questionnaire consisted of 14 questions, where the first 10 were connected with reading strategies which students acquired during the teaching practice; if they knew them, if they used them and how often they used them. The other 4 questions were given to find out students' opinion about texts and tasks. Students had to rate on a scale from 5 to 1, where:

5= I used this strategy very frequently

4= I used this strategy frequently

3= I used this strategy sometimes

2= I did not use this strategy

1= I don't know this strategy

According to literature about reading strategies to improve reading comprehension, one of the reading strategies is rereading. The first question was asked to students if they used this strategy.

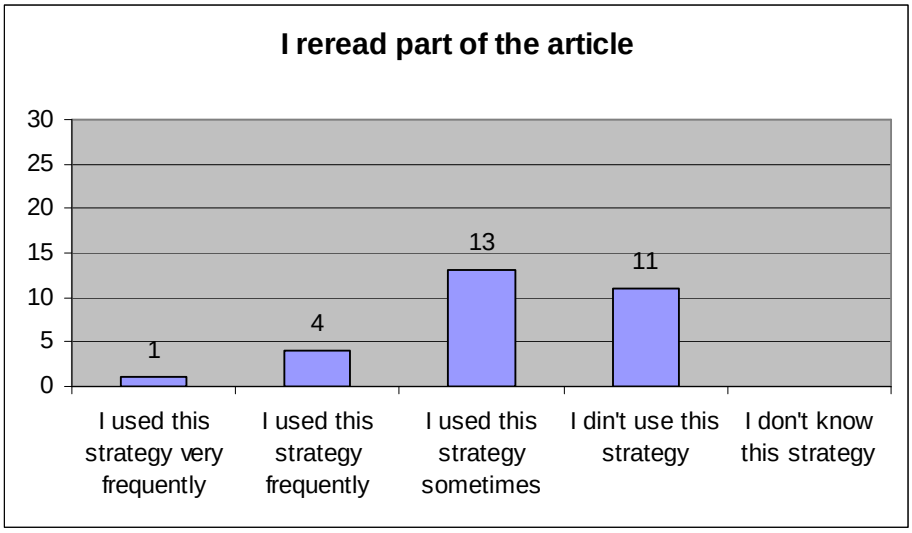

Figure 11. Students' answers to the question about rereading a part of the article.

As figure 11 showed, only one student from 29 used this strategy very frequently, 4 students answered that they used this strategy frequently, 13 students used sometimes, and 11 students did not use this strategy. This meant that not all students understood the utility of this reading strategy and they needed further explanation.

The next strategy is picturing article or reading material in the mind and students were asked if they pictured what they read in their minds.

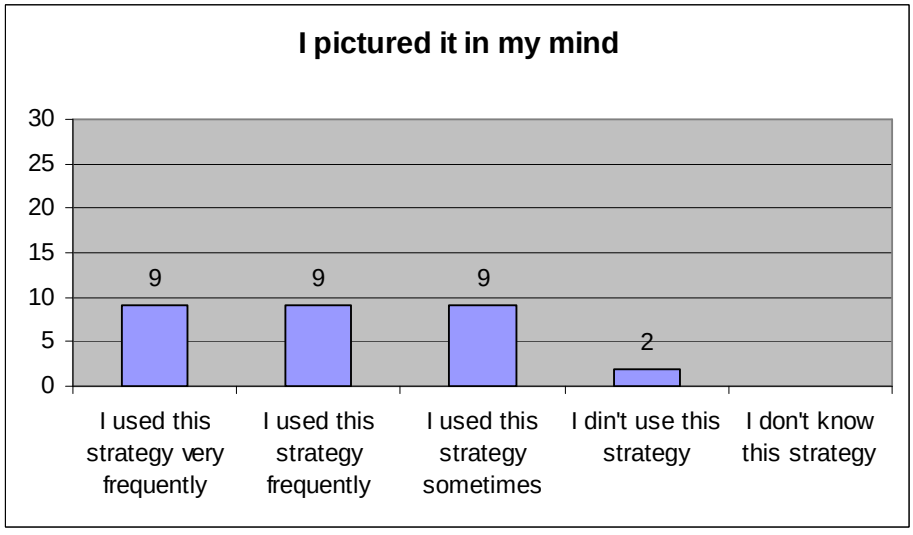

Figure 12. Students' answers to the question about making pictures in their mind.

Figure 12 represents that, all in all, all students, except 2 used this strategy, they pictured reading material in their minds, respectively 9 students used this strategy very frequently, 9- frequently, and 9- sometimes. Concerning to these 2 students who did not use this strategy, they did not like to read at all and it was rather hard to work with them.

The next strategy was based on students' previous knowledge if they thought about what they already knew about the subject.

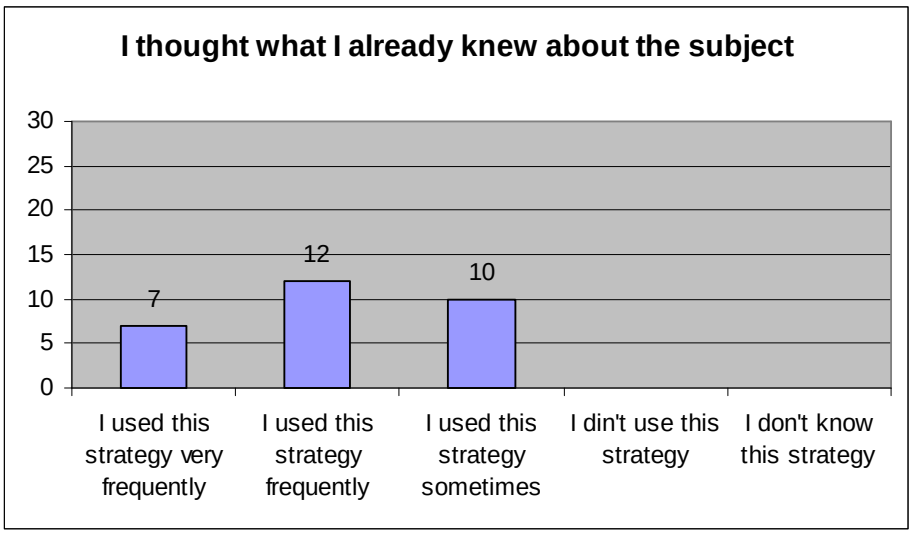

Figure 13. Students' answers to the question about the previous knowledge on the subject.

Figure 13 demonstrated that all students knew and used this strategy, 7 students from 29 used this strategy very frequently, 12 students frequently, and 10 students used sometimes. This meant that students built background by activating appropriate prior knowledge through self-questioning about what they already knew about the topic.

The next strategy was concerned whether students substituted words in the article with their own words.

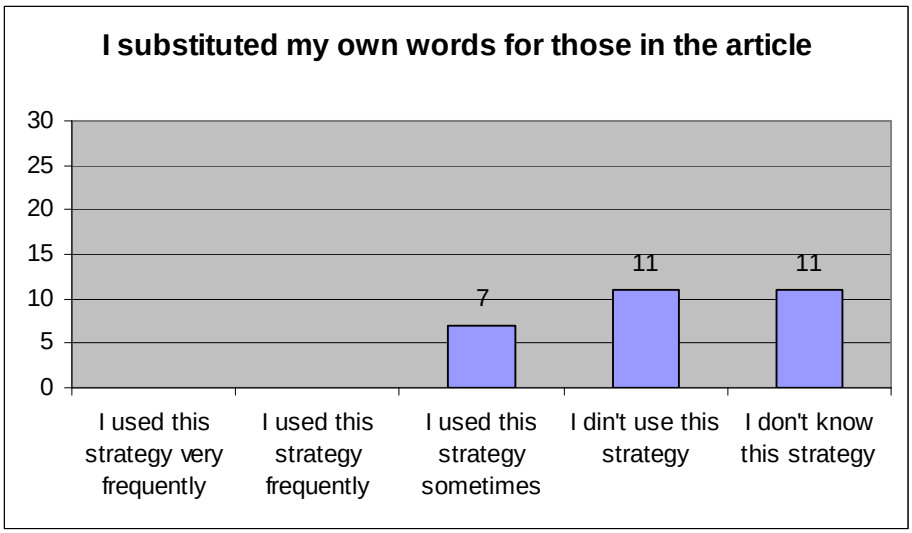

Figure 14. Students' answers to the question on the substitution of words in the article.

As figure 14 showed, students had difficulties with this strategy. Only 7 students from 29 used this strategy sometimes, 11 students did not use this strategy, and 11 students did not know this strategy. Students unwillingly used their own words they better tried to use the author's words. This meant that this strategy needed further work with students because it was checking understanding of the text by paraphrasing the author's words.

The next strategy was summarizing what had been read by retelling the plot of a story or the main idea of the text.

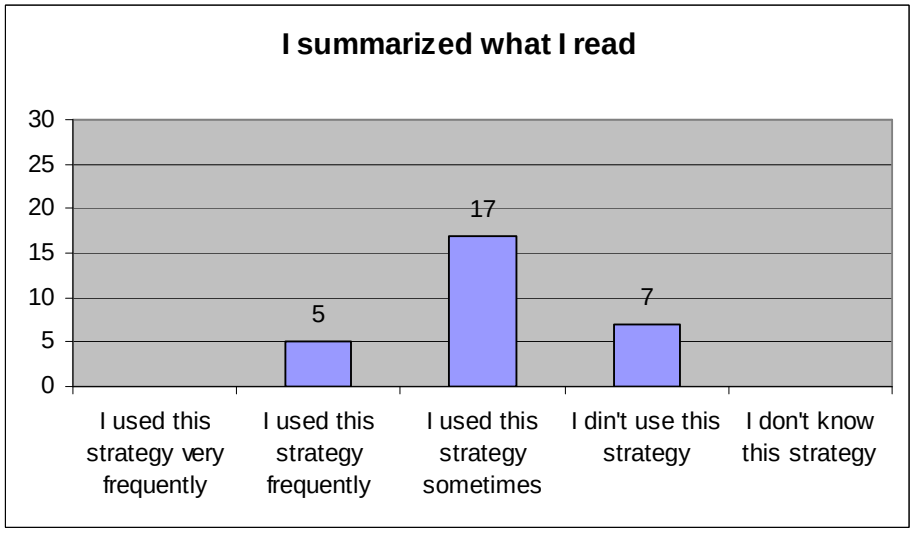

Figure 15. Students' answers to the question about summarizing.

Figure 15 represented that 5 students from 29 summarized frequently what they read, 17 students used this strategy sometimes, but 7 students did not use this strategy.

The author was amazed for these answers who answered that they did not use this strategy and thought that students did not understand the essence of this question because, all in all, in home reading all students summarized what they had read.

The next question was whether students looked for the main idea in the text and related other ideas to that.

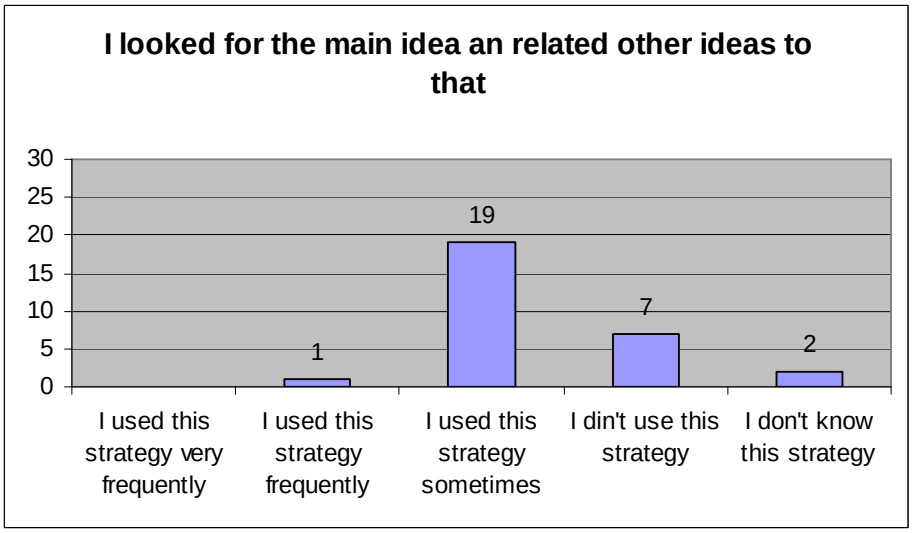

Figure 16. Students' answers to the question concerning looking for the main idea and relating other ideas to that.

As figure 16 showed, only 1 student from 29 used this strategy frequently, 19 students used this strategy sometimes, 7 students did not use this strategy, and 2 students did not know this strategy. Overall, students easy found the main ideas in the texts but they did not try to relate other ideas to that. Particularly it was, may be the fault of the author who could not explain enough this strategy to the students.

The next question was connected with the author's interest in how students read, all in turn or skipped parts that they did not understand.

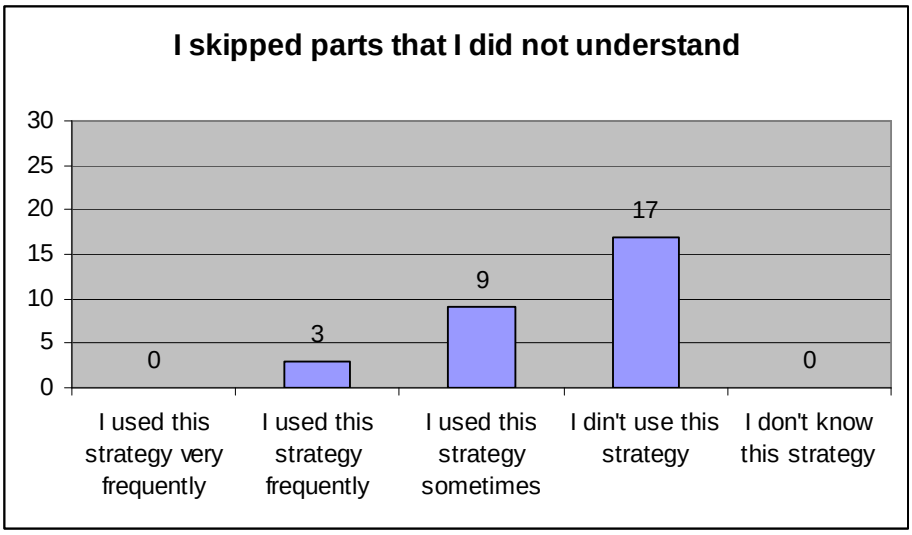

Figure 17. Students' answers to the question about skipping parts that they did not understand.

Figure 17 demonstrated that only 3 students from 29 skipped parts frequently that they did not understand, 9 students skipped parts sometimes. It was pleasing to say that the great part which was 17 students did not skip parts that they did not understand but tried go through them.

The next strategy was about predicting whether students made a guess about what some part of the article meant.

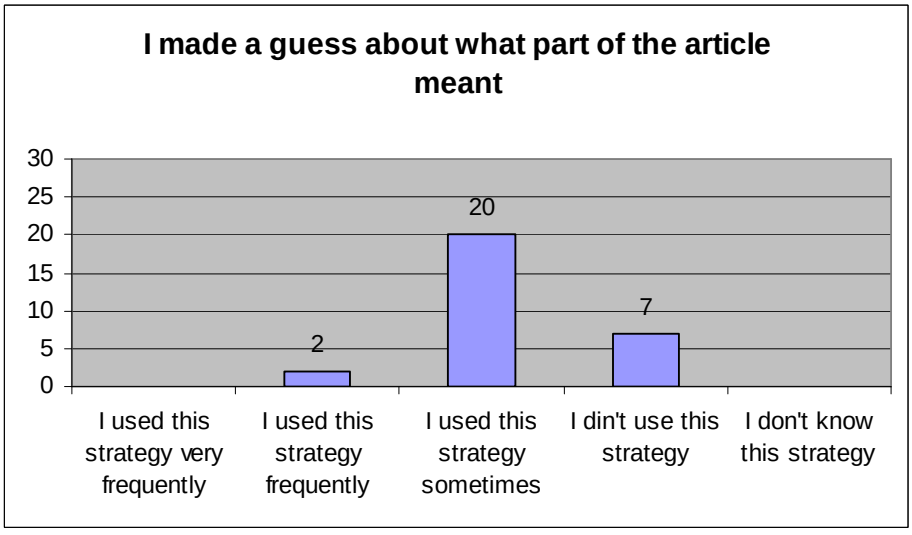

Figure 18. Students' answers to the question concerning predicting .

As figure 18 represented, only 2 students from 29 used this strategy frequently, 20 students made guess sometimes, and 7 students did not use this strategy at all.

Actually students said that when they read individually they did not guess what would be further they tried to read quicker to the end of the book or article.

The next strategy is connected with the information whether students looked for important words and their definitions.

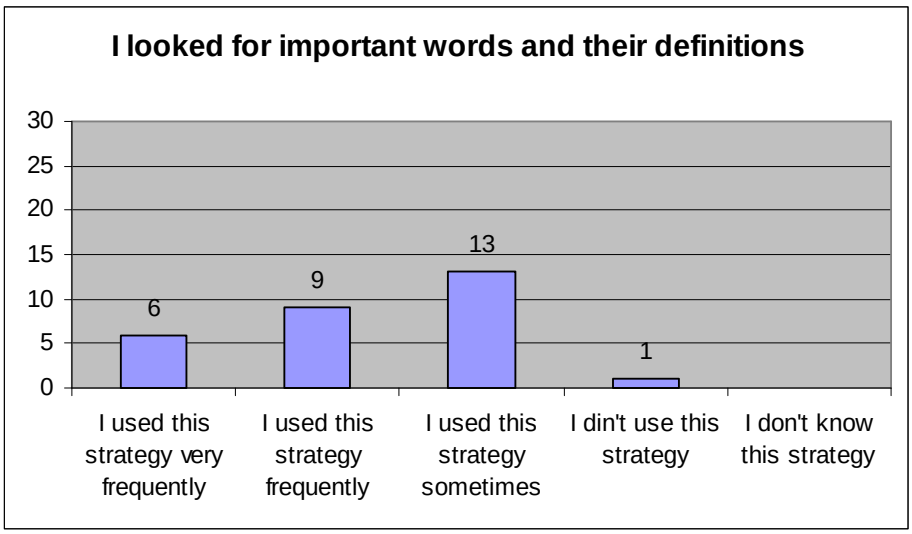

Figure 19. Students' answers to the question about looking for important words and their definitions.

As figure showed 6 students from 29 looked for important words very frequently, 9 students frequently, 13 students sometimes, and one student, did not look. It was pleasing that, overall, students considered that it was important to look for important words.

The last strategy in this questionnaire was about asking questions, whether students asked questions as they went along.

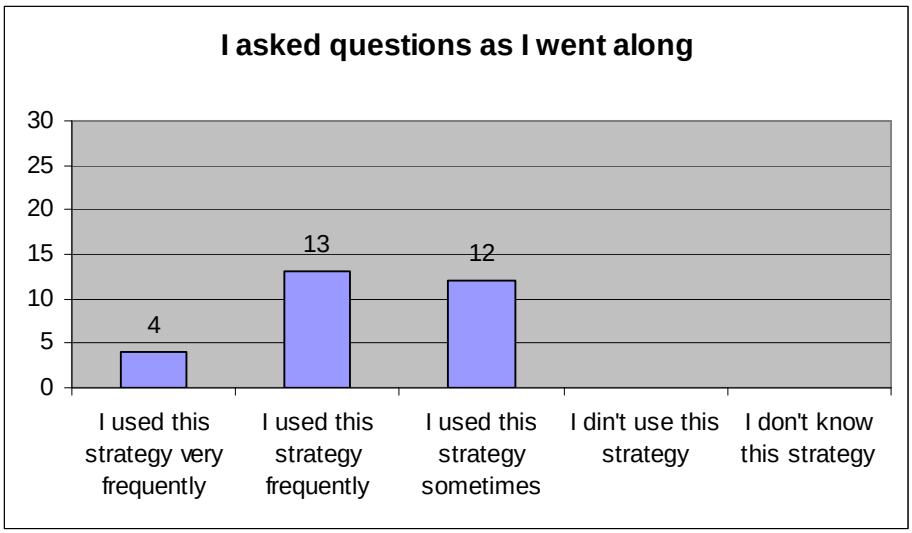

Figure 20. Students' answers to the question about asking questions as they went along.

Figure 20 showed that 4 students from 29 used this strategy very frequently, 13 students- frequently, 12 students- sometimes. This meant that all students more or less wanted to understand the text completely.

The following question asked students to express their opinion how interesting for them seemed the texts given them by the author.

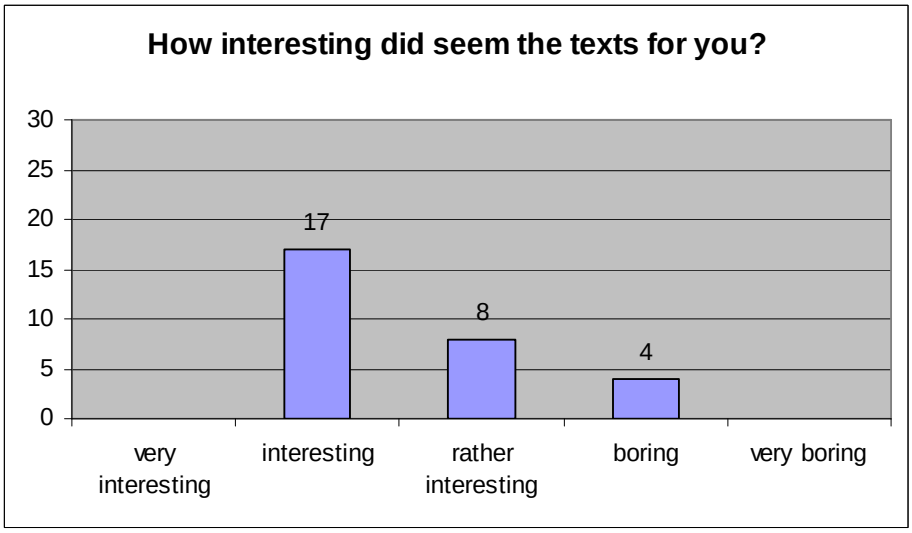

Figure 21. Students' answers to the question:" How interesting did the texts seem for you?"

Figure 21 demonstrated that for 17 students from 29 texts seemed interesting, for 8 students rather interesting, and for 4 students texts seemed boring.

The next question asked students on how interesting tasks seemed for them.

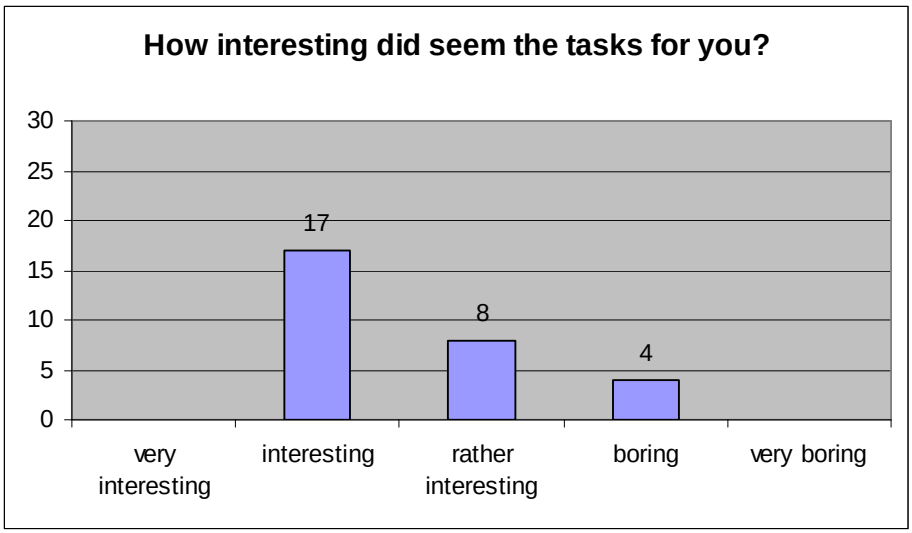

Figure 22. Students' answers to the question:" How interesting did the tasks seem for you?"

Figure 22 demonstrated that for 17 students from 29 tasks seemed interesting, for 8 students rather interesting, and for 4 students tasks seemed boring.

The following question was asked to find out if students understood the teacher's instructions for the tasks.

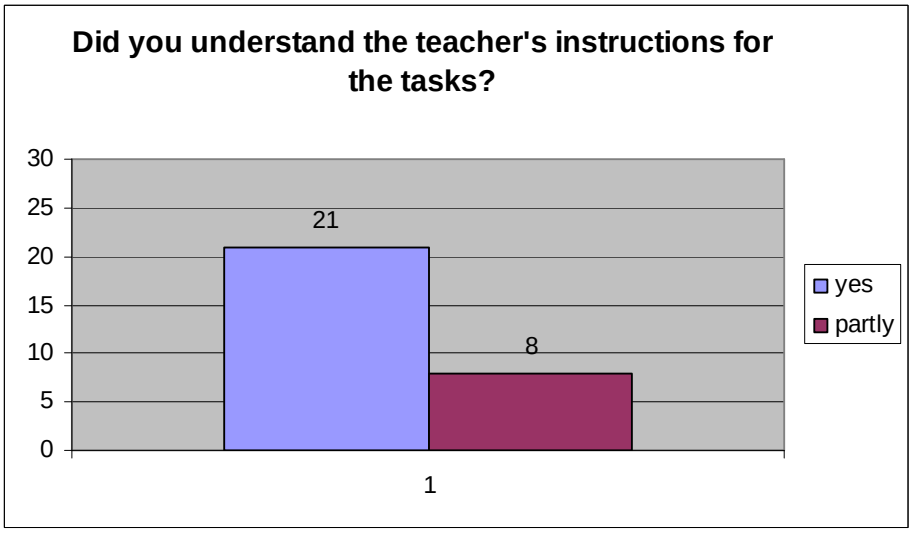

Figure 23. Students' answers to the question:" Did you understand the teacher's instructions for the tasks?"

The figure showed that 21 students from 29 understood the teacher's instructions for the tasks, but 8 students understood partly. This meant that the teacher needed to pay more attention to these students.

The last question was connected with students' views on the percentage they thought their reading comprehension had improved.

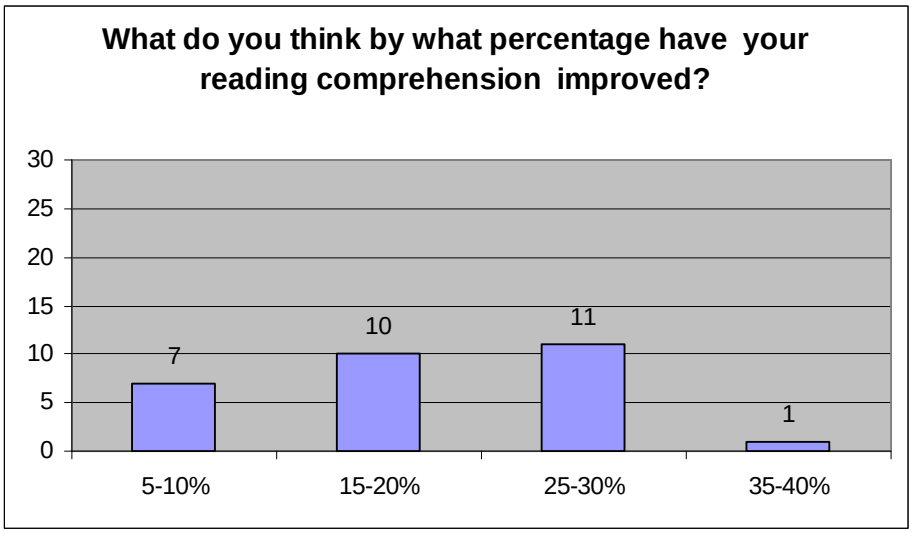

Figure 24. Students' answers to the question:" What do you think by what percentage has your reading comprehension improved?'

Figure 24 showed that 7 students from 29 thought that their reading comprehension had improved by 5-10%, 10 students- 15-20%, 11 students- 25-30%, and one student- 35-40%

Research had shown that comprehension strategies improved the reading comprehension of all students of about 20-25%.

CONCLUSION

The author of the Diploma Paper was interested in researching the question about the applicability of the strategies for improving reading comprehension in English lessons at secondary school. The author had studied literature of different authors about reading and reading comprehension. The most important thing about reading is comprehension. It is the reason that one reads. Comprehension could improve more if all readers were taught to use the comprehension strategies. Knowledge of reading includes knowledge of reading strategies- knowledge of the goals of the reading, the various factors affecting the reading process, what reading strategies to apply, how to apply them effectively, when each strategy should be applied and why. Such knowledge allows the reader, under various reading conditions, to identify, select and use appropriate strategies, such as: clarification of information in the text, self-evaluation by questioning one's understanding, generation of intermediate summaries and prediction of what is to come in a text. As authors from studied literature pointed out, students practiced reading comprehension strategies through active, strategic reading, the use of the strategies would gradually become self-regulated and students would reach a level of metacognition where they would not only be able to use the strategies but would also know when and where to apply them.

According to the theoretical part during the research which was carried out in Riga's Secondary school No. 3 the author of the Diploma Paper applied some strategies to improve students' reading comprehension. 29 participants from Forms 10 and 11 took part in the research. Particular reading activities were selected. During reading activities the author provided explanations of the reading strategies applied as well as contribute mental modelling of their use. For example, within the context of the reading passage, the author explicitly stated which strategy was being taught and when it would be used.

Students had to fill two questionnaires before and after reading activities. The first questionnaire was carried out with the aim to find out students' attitude about reading, the second to check students' learning outcomes after reading activities.

The study on reading asked students why they liked to read and what they chose to read gave overwhelming evidence that reading played an important role in helping students understand the world and their place in it, namely:

- reading allowed students to envision and create potential futures
- reading meant gathering and organizing information about the wider world and

how it worked and how one fit into it

- reading enabled students to mediate competing claims for truth in their lives
- reading was an escape from the pressures of every day life
- reading transformed lives.

Students tended to select from a range of strategies. For example, they skipped inessential words, guessed from the context, read in broad phrases, and continued reading the text where they were unsuccessful in decoding a word or phrase.

Research had shown that comprehension strategies improved the reading comprehension of all readers. They helped students to understand, remember and communicate with others about what they read. The author of the Diploma Paper is certain that they would help students want to read more.

The implications for the author of the Diploma Paper for the further work would be the improvement of the reading comprehension strategies. Thus the aim of the Diploma paper was achieved, the objectives set were fulfilled and the hypothesis was verified.

THESES

1. The text is full of meaning like a jug full of water; the reader's mind soaks it up like a sponge.

2. Thus, contrary to conventional wisdom, which states that comprehension is the process of getting meaning from a page, comprehension is…the process of bringing meaning to a text.

3. In the literature on the reading process, both bottom-up and top-down models are represented, and both have been influential in the development of policies and methods for teaching of reading.

4. A skill is an ability which has been automatised and operates largely subconsciously, whereas a strategy is a conscious procedure carried out in order to solve a problem.

5. The best way to improve your knowledge of a foreign language is to go and live among its speakers. The next best way is to read extensively in it.

6. The students should be taught to use what they know to understand unknown elements, whether these are ideas or simple words.

7. Reading is an active skill. It constantly involves guessing, predicting, checking and asking oneself questions.

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APPENDICES