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The Influence of Socio-affective Factors on Students' Reading Ability

1 Introduction

Students' reading abilities have been explored from various angles. Linguistic and cognitive processes including word recognition, syntactic processes, vocabulary, fluency, and inferencing skills involving interactive use of background knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, reading strategies, and discourse organisation have been researched extensively, mainly in first language contexts[1].

However, the socio-affective factors that influence students' reading comprehension abilities have not been much explored. Students' motivations, attitudes towards reading, and self-image as readers have not received in-depth research in either first language (L1) or second language (L2) contexts, even less so in L2 contexts. Yet these socio-affective factors have been known to influence reading just as the linguistic and cognitive processing factors do[2]. For instance,

students' motivations and attitudes influence their willingness to participate in reading classes and related activities, which ultimately affect the success of their reading development. Students with low motivation do less reading, encounter difficulty in text comprehension, use ineffective strategies and have poor reading ability[3]. The need to research the influence of affective factors on reading comprehension is therefore essential, particularly in the case of L2 readers, as they bring different attitudes to reading and possess differing motivations for reading, which, according to Grabe and Stoller[4], are linked to students' previous experiences with reading, such as their exposure to people who read and their perceptions about the usefulness of reading.

This study investigates the socio-affective factors of motivation, attitude and self-efficacy using the categories given above. These three affective factors were selected for investigation due to their strong influence on reading comprehension[5] and their relatedness to the categories listed by Grabe and Stoller[6]. The

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[1] Grabe, W. & Stoller, F. 2002, *Teaching and Researching Reading,* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education), p. 57.; Alderson, 2000, *Assessing Reading,* (New York: CUP), p. 41; Anderson, N. 1999, *Exploring Second Language Reading: Issues and Strategies.* Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
[2] Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op cit.,* p. 19; Verhoeven, L., & Snow, C. 2001, *Literacy and Motivation: Reading Engagement in Individuals and Groups,* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers), p. 2.

[3] Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op cit.*; Alderson, N. 2000, *op. cit.*
[4] *op. cit.*, p 242.
[5] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, Engagement and Motivation in Reading. In Kamil, M., Mosenthal, P., Pearson, P., & Barr, R. (eds.) *Handbook of Reading Research,* 111, pp. 403-420.
[6] *op. cit.*

group used for the study consisted of first year students who were enrolled for the elective Academic Reading course at the University of Pretoria. The results of the investigation are discussed and suggestions are made for improving the reading program and learning materials currently in use.

The objectives of the research were therefore primarily to:

1 explore students' reading background in relation to socio-affective factors;
2 investigate students' experiences of reading in relation to both English L1 and L2 speakers; and
3 suggest possible changes that might be useful in developing students' reading comprehension ability based on the results of objectives one and two.

The larger objective is to contribute to research data on socio-affective factors and reading comprehension.

First, we discuss the influence of socio-affective factors on reading comprehension and academic achievement. Then we consider the concept of engagement as a way of addressing any negative influence that socio-affective factors may have on students' reading abilities. The responses to the questionnaire are analysed and recommendations made.

2 Factors Influencing Reading Comprehension

2.1 Motivation/attitude/self-efficacy in Reading Comprehension

Reading motivation, defined as the individual's personal goals, values, and beliefs with regard to the topics, processes and outcomes of reading[7] and reading amount (the frequency of reading) have been known to correlate with each other. Wigfield and Guthrie[8] report on a correlation between reading amount and several aspects of motivation, including curiosity, involvement, challenge, recognition and competence. Their study shows that highly motivated students tend to increase their reading amount and therefore the length of time they spend reading. A further study by Guthrie et al.[9] considered extrinsic motivation (recognition and competence) and intrinsic motivation (enjoyment and involvement) separately with reading amount, and confirm the correlation between motivation and reading amount. Motivation and reading amount both influence text comprehension or reading comprehension. Text comprehension is defined by Guthrie et al.[10] as "the capacity of the learner to construct new knowledge or information from written texts". Highly motivated students spend more time reading, and frequent reading increases conceptual understanding of texts, which contributes to reading achievement[11]. Specifically, students who read daily for enjoyment have higher reading achievement levels than those who indicate reading only yearly or never[12]. From

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[7] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit.*, p. 405.
[8] *Ibidem.*
[9] Guthrie, J., Wigfield, A., Metsala, J., & Cox, K. 1999, Motivational and Cognitive Predictors of Text Comprehension and Reading Amount, *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 3:3, pp. 231-256.
[10] *op. cit.*, p. 232.
[11] Stanovich, K., & Cunningham, A. 1993, Where Does Knowledge Come from? Specific Associations between Print Exposure and Information Acquisition, *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 85:2, pp 211-229; Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op. cit.*; Guthrie, J., Wigfield, A., Metsala, J., & Cox, K. 1999, *op. cit.*
[12] Guthrie, J., et al. 1999, *op. cit.*

their study, Guthrie et al.[13] state categorically that text comprehension develops from reading amount. Anderson et al.[14] also reported on a study showing that reading amount indicates the level of text comprehension.

With regard to the benefit of frequent reading of different text types, Guthrie et al.[15] write "controlling for the contribution of past achievement and prior knowledge to passage comprehension, reading amount added significantly to the predictability of conceptual learning from multiple texts". In other words, reading amount correlates with text comprehension across text types and genres[16]. Gottfried[17] reports significant correlation for reading amount, academic intrinsic motivation and text comprehension using students' self reports, which to him were more predictive than grades or test scores. Our present study therefore focuses on self-report using questionnaires.

Attitude refers to a student's liking for a task. A student with a high motivation for reading will have a positive attitude towards reading[18]. A positive attitude is usually shaped by students' educational background, and it influences their self-esteem and willingness to persist under challenging reading situations[19]. An added aspect of motivation is self-efficacy,

defined by Bandura (1986) and adopted by Schunk and Rice[20] as "people's judgments of their capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances". When applied to reading it has been shown that having positive self-efficacy, that is, holding the idea that one is able to read and comprehend texts, even difficult texts, is closely linked to motivation[21]. Obviously, students who do not feel that their reading ability is adequate for understanding complex texts, will not be motivated to read, and so their reading ability will not improve.

2.2 Engagement as a Factor in Reading Comprehension

Although motivation, attitude and self-efficacy contribute to reading amount and invariably, to text comprehension, engagement in reading has been propounded to be the link between these factors and reading achievement. That is, not only is the amount (frequency) of reading important but so too is the involvement in the reading, the focus on the text to obtain meaning, what Guthrie and Wigfield[22] refer to as *engagement*. Engaged reading demands the coordination of the cognitive (conceptual application), social (community of literacy) and motivational (enjoyment and involvement) aspects of reading. When all three dimensions are in play, engagement occurs and reading achievement is obtained. When students read actively and frequently; and are involved with text to obtain meaning, cognitive abilities are

[13] Guthrie, J., et al. 1999, *op. cit*., p. 232.
[14] Anderson, R., Wilson, P., & Fielding, L. 1988, Growth in Reading and how Children Spend their Time outside of school. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 23, pp. 285-303.
[15] Guthrie, J., et al. 1999. *op. cit*., p. 243.
[16] Guthrie, J., et al. 1999, *op. cit*.; Anderson, R., Wilson, P., & Fielding, L. 1988, *op. cit.;* Gottfried, A. 1990, Academic Intrinsic Motivation in Young Elementary School Children, *Journal of Educational Psychology,* 82, pp. 525-538.
[17] Gottfried, A. 1990, *op. cit*.
[18] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit*., p. 407.
[19] Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op cit.,* p. 56.

[20] Schunk, D., & Rice, M. 1993, Strategy Fading and Progress Feedback: Effects on Self-efficacy and Comprehension among Students Receiving Remedial Reading Services, *Journal of Special Education,* 27, pp. 257-276.
[21] Guthrie, J., et al. 1999, *op. cit*., p. 236.
[22] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit*., p. 403.

Figure 1

Engaged reading mediates reading background and text comprehension
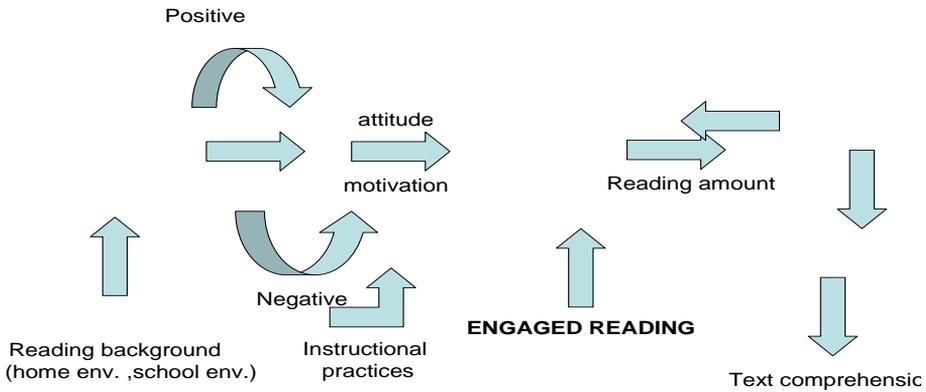
enhanced and their text comprehension improves. Thus engaged reading is strongly associated with reading achievement[23]. Engaged readers discuss ideas and interpretation of texts with peers, have a high interest in reading, transfer interest to a variety of genres, obtain valued learning outcomes, select appropriate strategies to obtain conceptual understanding, and have intrinsic motivation (interest and enjoyment). On the other hand, disengaged readers are inactive and passive, they tend to avoid reading, minimise effort in reading, are not absorbed in literature during free time, and rarely enjoy reading[24]. These features of engaged and disengaged readers as outlined by Guthrie and Wigfield have implications for improving reading comprehension. Engaged reading should therefore be an area of focus in developing students' literacy levels, in order to overcome any deficiencies in reading skills. This means that reading instruction needs to include strategies to

develop engaged reading in students, especially in L2 contexts, where reading comprehension is poor.

A factor worth noting is that engaged reading can even substitute for literacy levels not obtained in formal schooling[25]. Its importance is therefore further evident in its compensation for low income and low education in family background. Although students from high income and high education families have easy access to books and are more likely to become engaged readers and high achievers, students from low income and low education background can obtain high achievement if they become engaged readers. Thus, motivating students to become engaged readers can help to improve their reading ability, regardless of their social and educational background. The following model explains the relationship/the link between socio-affective factors, engagement and reading comprehension (**Figure 1**).

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[23] *Ibidem*.

[24] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit*., p. 407.

[25] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit*., p. 404.

Thus, the factors here worth exploring are motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, reading amount, and engagement. To investigate our students' profile and find out our students' position with regard to these socio-affective factors, a study was conducted using a questionnaire adapted from Grabe and Stoller[26]. As students' motivation, attitude and self-efficacy were linked to the categories outlined by Grabe and Stoller[27], we analysed the data using these categories and related each question to the corresponding socio-affective factor. Students' responses in relation to their previous experiences to reading, exposure to print (reading amount) and to people who read, and their perceptions about the usefulness of reading showed their level of motivation and the kind of attitude they have towards reading. Our aim was to use the information to understand the students' affective position towards reading. We also wanted to find out which areas needed to be reviewed regarding instruction, teaching and study materials, and the reading program as a whole.

3 The Study

The questions we posed were:

• do students have a rich literacy background (a strength) or poor literacy background (a weakness)?
• do the L1 and L2 English speakers within our group of students differ in motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, literacy background, reading engagement and, if so, how?
• are there any differences in students' motivation, attitude, and self-efficacy in relation to gender? This last question was included because we were interested in finding out whether there is a relation-ship between gender and the socio-affective factors that influence reading.
• based on the results of the above, is there a need to revise the current Academic Reading program and in which direction?

3.1 Method, Procedure, Respondents

Data were collected via a questionnaire adapted from Grabe and Stoller[28] (see Appendix). The responses were on a scale of 1 to 4: 1 for *always*, 2 for *yes,* 3 for *no* and 4 for *never*. The questions were grouped under: previous experiences in reading, exposure to print and to people who read, and perceptions about the usefulness of reading. These, according to Grabe and Stoller[29], are linked to the socio-affective factors of motivation, attitude, self-efficacy and socio-economic background.

Respondents were first-year students taking the elective Academic Reading course. These are students who have passed the Academic Literacy test and are therefore perceived to be academically literate. The course is offered in the first term of the academic year and the questionnaire was instituted during that period. Students had therefore not had much exposure to academic reading in their various courses when the questionnaire was administered. Whatever reading background information they presented was therefore mainly from their previous school and home experience.

4 Findings

The responses were considered on three levels. First, students' reading backgrounds were analysed as strengths or weaknesses. Secondly, responses were analysed in relation to English as a first

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[26] *op.cit.*
[27] *op. cit.*, p. 243.

[28] *op. cit.*
[29] *op. cit.*, p. 243.

or second language of the students. Thirdly, the responses were analysed in terms of gender.

4.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

The responses were analysed in terms of students' strengths and weaknesses in relation to the socio-affective factors relating to reading background. The responses from the questionnaire were grouped from the highest to the lowest mean. A low mean, below two, indicated that students responded positively with *yes* or *always*. A high mean, above two, indicated negative responses, that is, *no* and *never*, indicating that the situation either rarely existed or was absent.

The three questions that had the lowest mean responses were questions 5, 15, and 21. Responses to these questions were mainly *yes* or *always*. The mean for question 21 ("Reading well will help with studies") was 1.21, with a standard deviation of 0.41. Since this question relates to motivation and attitude[30], one could conclude that students have a positive attitude towards reading and are instrumentally motivated. Question 15 ("I can learn a lot from reading") shows a very strong positive attitude towards reading. Question 5 ("There have always been books in my family home") also had a low mean of 1.47. Although the question did not require students to state the language in which the books were written, nor the kinds of books they were, students stated that they had books available at home. If one can assume that this meant reading had taken place, whether in English or another language, then a certain level of reading fluency could be predicted. Research indicates that L1 reading abilities can be carried

over to L2 reading, but of course this is only possible if there is enough competence in the L2. In other words, a language threshold[31] should be achieved to make transfer possible. If this is the situation with our students, then the positive responses to Question 5 are encouraging. However, it may not be so, and having books around may not have led to students reading, which, unfortunately, was the case in our study. Responses to Question 8 ("I read one novel each week/month") showed that students had not read much (**Table 1** and **Table 2**).

The questions with the highest mean were Questions 13, 8 and 10, indicating that students responded negatively. The standard deviations were also high, indicating a wider variation in student responses. This means that student responses were spread along the continuum of one to four, and did not converge on any particular level. This scenario also shows that students varied greatly in their reading background with regard to these questions. This may be the result of the multicultural composition of the group, as well as the different educational background of students – former model C schools, private schools and public schools.

Of the 21 questions, Question 13 ("My friends and I discuss books that we read") had the highest mean and the highest standard deviation, pointing to the fact that the responses to this question were mostly negative and varied greatly. Since this question relates to what Guthrie et al.[32] refer to as engagement in reading, the negative responses are therefore a cause for concern.

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[30] *op. cit.*

[31] Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op. cit.*; Alderson, 2000, *op. cit.*; August, G. 2006, *op. cit.*

[32] Guthrie, J., et al. 1999, *op. cit.*

Table 1: Strengths

Number	Question	Mean	Std Dev.	%Y	%N
5	There have always been books in my family's home	1. 47	0.65	93	7
21	Reading well will help me with my studies	1. 21	0. 41	100	0
15	I can learn a lot from my reading	1.28	0.47	99	1

Table 2: Weaknesses

Number	Question	Mean	Std Dev.	% Positive	% Negative
8	I read one novel each week/month	2.67	1.07	38	61
13	My friends and I discuss books that we read	2.73	1.10	37	63
10	My siblings read a lot	2. 37	1.02	50	50

Also of concern is the amount of reading students do. Question 8 ("I read one novel each week/month") had a high mean (2.67), indicating that very few students read for pleasure outside of schoolwork. And yet this is the kind of reading that instills the intrinsic motivation which is vital for reading comprehension[33]. It is interesting that students have a positive attitude, shown in responses to Question 15, and are instrumentally motivated (Question 21), but are lacking in activities that contribute to intrinsic motivation (Question 8).

The question that shows the third lowest interaction with reading is Question 10 ("My siblings read a lot"). The mean is relatively high (2.37) and the standard deviation indicates a wider variation in student responses. This question refers to student exposure to print and to people who read and therefore relates to their literacy background. So do Questions 9 ("My parents read a lot"), 11 ("I know people who can help me with my

reading") and 12 ("My friends like reading"). Although the means of Questions 9 and 11 are below 2, they can be considered fairly high as they are very close to 2, that is, 1.95 for Question 9 and 1.98 for Question 11. When the means of the responses to these questions are considered, it is evident that students have a low literacy background. Responses to these questions, suggest that the reading experience students obtain from friends, parents, siblings, and others is very low. This would have a negative effect on their attitudes to reading[34], which could influence the amount of reading they do, and consequently the level of reading comprehension they achieve[35].

Responses to Questions 4 ("Members of my family used to read to me") and 6 ("My siblings read books") were mainly negative as shown by the high mean of 2.25 and standard deviation of 1.08 for Question 4. The responses to Questions 4 and 6 thus show that on the whole

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[33] Guthrie, J., et al. 1999, *op. cit.*

[34] Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op. cit.*

[35] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit.*

Table 3: Literacy Background

Number	Question	Mean	Std Dev.	% Positive	% Negative
4	Family members read to me	2.25	1.08	57	43
9	My parents read a lot	1.95	0.95	68	32
10	My siblings read a lot	2.37	1.02	50	50
11	People can help me with reading	1.98	0.95	65	Uage. 35
12	My friend like reading	2.37	0.97	54	46

students do not have a solid reading background, and, as children, did not have much exposure to print outside of school. One wonders why they gave an overwhelmingly positive response as to the presence of books in the home (Question 5) and yet parents, siblings and the students themselves do not read much (**Table 3**).

4. 2 English First and Second Language Speakers

This analysis relates student reading background to their mother-tongue, and to English as a first or second / additional language. Of the 21 questions, only responses to Question 4 showed statistical significance, $p = 0.0027$, where $p < 0.05$. Responding to the question "Members of my family used to read to me", English first language speakers differed significantly from the Indigenous South African Languages (ISAL) mother-tongue speakers. The ISAL mother-tongue speakers had family members reading to them less often than the English mother-tongue speakers. A similar difference occurred between the ISAL group and the Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers. The Afrikaans group had a mean of 1.94, indicating that they were read to more often than the ISAL group, which had a mean of 2.69. There

was not much difference between the English group and the Afrikaans group: a mean of 1.92 for English and 1.94 for Afrikaans. The 'Other' group was not taken into consideration here, as there were very few of them and included all other language groups, ranging from European to Asian to African.

Table 4: L1/L2 English Speakers Distribution to Question 4 ("Members of my family used to read to me")

Mother-tongue	Mean
English N = 37	1. 92
Afrikaans N= 35	1. 94
Indigenous SA N = 42	2. 69
Other N=14	2. 64

Responses to Questions 5 and 17 showed a tendency and were significant only at ten percent. P values were 0.0602 for Question 5 and 0.0729 for Question 17. Although the responses to Question 5 ("There have always been books in my family's home") were positive, there were salient differences among the different mother-tongue speakers. The English mother-tongue speakers mostly responded *always*, the Afrikaans and the South African languages groups responded mostly *yes*. The tendency towards differences in the responses to Question 17 ("I have favourite subjects

that I read about") was greater between the Afrikaans group and the African languages group. The ISAL group had favourite subjects they read about more than the Afrikaans group who probably read on various topics and subjects. The attitude of the ISAL group on subjects they read about has implications for reading engagement. Engaged readers read across genres, subjects and topics[36].

Table 5: Question 17 ("I have favourite subjects that I read about")

Mother-tongue	Mean
English	1.54
Afrikaans	1.86
ISAL	1.46

4. 3 Responses in Relation to Gender

Although the gender aspect was introduced purely for interest's sake, a number of interesting and significant results were obtained, which make the findings worth sharing. The results show that responses to several of the questions had a statistically significant association to the gender of the students. Question 1 ("I have always enjoyed reading"), a question that probed motivation in the form of interest and enjoyment in reading, was statistically significant in relation to gender, p= 0.0053. Females responded that they had always enjoyed reading whereas the males were not so positive: females 1.9 and males 2.8. This question is closely related to Question 20 ("I read for pleasure"). Pleasurable reading is important in promoting intrinsic motivation, an important factor for reading achievement[37]. Here, too, a statistically significant difference was recorded, p= 0.0002. The females read

for pleasure more than did the males (females=1.5; males=2.23) (**Table 6**).

Responses to Question 3 ("When I was a child I was often taken to the library") were significant at ten percent, p=0.076. Responses show that girls had an earlier introduction to books than did boys. This may have led to the enjoyment in reading which the females have over the males (Question 1). The results point to the fact that early introduction to books instill pleasure and enjoyment in reading. Question 4 ("Members of my family used to read to me") was linked to Question 3 in relation to exposure to print. Responses are statistically significant. One could say that the females in this study have had a more frequent and earlier exposure to print than males. The results of Questions 3 and 4 are implied in Question 8 ("I read one novel every week/month"). As the females were taken to the library more often than the males, were read to more often, and consequently enjoyed reading more than the males did, it is obvious that they would read more. Responses to both Questions 12 ("My friends like reading") and 13 ("My friends and I discuss books that we read") showed a significant association with gender. Unlike the males, the females are surrounded by friends who read. This association relates to the level of interest, enjoyment and consequently motivation for reading (**Table 7**).

4. 4 Exposure to Texts

This analysis was done to find out if students read often, since frequent reading has implications for reading amount which consequently influences motivation and reading comprehension. Further questions in relation to Question 22 ("Do you read every day?") were questions to probe the type of genres stu-

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[36] Guthrie, J., et al., 1999, *op. cit.,* p. 404.
[37] Guthrie, J., et al., 1999, *op. cit.*, p. x.

Table 6: Questions 1 and 20

	Females			Males		
Questions	**% Positive**	**% Negative**	**Mean**	**% Positive**	**% Negative**	**Mean**
1	84	16	1.9	55	45	2.8
20	88	12	1.5	59	41	2.23

Table 7: Female/Male Exposure to Print: Mean and P Values

Questions	Mean Females	Mean Males	P-values at P< 0.05
3	1.96	2.82	0.0001
4	2.08	2.65	0.0076
8	2.52	2.97	0.0161
12	2.15	2.80	0.0008
13	2.48	3.17	0.0007

dents read. Each of the six questions (22-27) was analysed statistically in relation to the mother tongue of students.

An analysis of Question 22 ("Do you read every day?") with the different mother-tongue groups showed that most students read every day. However, the analysis of responses to other questions showed that students have had little exposure to literature outside of school. This response on reading every day may mainly refer to the reading of academic texts for study purposes. Indeed, this seems to be the case as there was overwhelming response from all groups to the reading of text books (English 96%; Afrikaans 90%; ISAL 91%; other languages 100%). On whether students generally read every day, and not in relation to any specific genre, responses were statistically significant for those who did not read. Although most students responded that they read, 23% of the Afrikaans group and 29% of the ISAL group did not read every day, as compared to the English group that had 0% for those who did not read everyday.

Table 8: Question 22 ("Do you read every day?")

English L1 / L2	Yes	No
English L1	100%	0%
Afrikaans (English L2)	77%	23%
ISAL (English L2)	71%	29%

The differences between the English mother-tongue speakers and the English second language speakers were statistically significant, p=0.0187. This has implications for instruction and teaching material. Though the percentages for *no* are less than 50 in each group (Table 8), the fact that there are students who do not read indicates lack of interest, a negative attitude or even lack of motivation to read on the part of these students. The responses also showed varying motivations and attitudes among the second language speakers. Whereas 100% of the first language English speakers said they read every day, almost a third of the English Second Language groups (Afrikaans and ISAL) indicated that they do not read every day. This confirms Grabe and Stoller's[38] view that

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[38] Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op. cit.*

second language readers have varying motivations and attitudes. The need to deal with students' socio-affective issues in relation to reading becomes overwhelmingly important. As far as the type of genre students read is concerned, there were no statistical differences in relation to students' mother tongue. However, the analysis of these different genres, in the form of newspaper, magazines and novels in relation to gender showed a number of statistically significant results.

5 Discussion

Since Question 13 relates to what Guthrie et al.[39] refer to as engagement in reading, the negative responses do not augur well for reading comprehension. Guthrie et al., expounding on engagement in reading, propose that students' reading achievement should be obtained on three dimensions – cognitive, social, and motivational. They state that the social dimension should include a community of literacy which calls for discussions with peers and friends on topics and subjects read. This social aspect is obviously lacking in students' reading contexts and should be developed. The significance of the community of literacy is that it promotes engagement, which is a vital ingredient in reading comprehension[40].

Responses to Question 8 show that most of the students do not read for pleasure. And yet the advantages of intrinsic motivation to promote reading amount and text comprehension cannot be over-emphasised. Given that students hardly ever read novels outside of school, the amount of reading they engage in is

minimal and this may influence their text comprehension. Reading amount contributes to automaticity in word recognition, fluency in reading and overall reading comprehension[41].

The responses to Questions 9, 10, 11 and 12 are predominantly negative. These responses contradict the positive attitude portrayed in their responses to Questions 15, 7 and 21. It seems this positive attitude to reading does not translate into activity, perhaps because of the reading experiences of the people around them. This then could have led to the low reading amount reported in Question 8, which may have a reciprocal effect on motivation and text comprehension. The more extensive the reading, the higher the motivation. Likewise, high motivation leads to an increase in reading, which contributes to text comprehension. There is a need to increase students' reading amount by raising their level of motivation in order to promote text comprehension.

The responses to Questions 4 and 6 show that on the whole students do not have a solid reading background and, as children, did not have much exposure to print outside of school. One wonders why students gave positive responses to the presence of books in the home (Question 5), yet parents, siblings, and the students themselves do not read much. A further probe into the kinds of books in the home would be of interest, as the presence of books contradicts the fact that parents and siblings do not read a lot and that students were not taken to the library as children.

Responses to Questions 1 and 20 show that girls read more than boys. The un-

[39] Guthrie, J., et al., 1999, *op. cit.*

[40] *Ibidem.*

[41] Guthrie, J., et al., 1999, *op. cit.*; Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit.*; Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op. cit.*

derlying variation may have been produced by the mother-tongue differences of the students, as the second language speakers showed wide variations in their attitudes and motivations to reading. Enjoyment and pleasure in reading relate to motivation, which has implications for reading achievement. Instruction and reading material should therefore be devised to promote these positive attitudes in students. Considering the benefits of the motivational implication of enjoyment in reading, reading amount, and consequently reading achievement, the absence or low levels of these aspects of reading in our male students needs to be addressed. Various ways to promote reading enjoyment among the males and to enhance this in the females need to be adopted in class, for example, more gender-mixed peer group discussions on texts should be facilitated in class and encouraged outside class.

Although many explanations could be offered for the less frequent reading of family members to the mother-tongue speakers of ISAL during their childhood, one explanation attached to this is cultural. Whereas the Afrikaans and English groups were exposed to the culture of reading in the home as children, many of the students in the ISAL group were not. The African society is fundamentally oral and parents would rather tell stories to children than read to them. This, of course, may have implications for student attitudes and motivations for reading. In addition, the responses of the South African language group show a higher standard deviation, indicating more variation in responses, in contrast to the English and Afrikaans groups which had similar responses. The variation in the ISAL group's responses could be attributed to the variation in their economic and educational background.

Whereas students from the other two groups may share similar economic and educational backgrounds, students from the ISAL group may have very different backgrounds; from an affluent middle or upper class to a very low economic class. Those from the upper and middle class societies will probably be exposed to reading as much as the English and the Afrikaans groups, but those from a very low economic and educational background would be inclined towards more traditional African experiences of oracy. These varying experiences among the ISAL group may lead to varying attitudes and motivations towards reading.

The attitude of the ISAL group on subjects they read about has implications for reading engagement. Engaged readers read across genres, subjects and topics[42]. Since engagement in reading has benefits for reading achievement, students – specifically L2 students – have to be motivated to read on various subjects and topics in order to develop engagement in reading. Also, students' interest in reading on various topics and subjects needs to be developed in reading classes so that they do not have negative attitudes or become demotivated in reading academic texts which may not be on their favourite topics or subjects. In addition, students should be made aware of the benefits of extensive reading, as reading solely on favourite subjects reduces reading amount and consequently limits background knowledge.

5. 1 Summary

Although there are varying responses to questions relating students' reading background, on the whole: exposure to print is limited; literacy background is

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[42] Guthrie, J., et al., 1999, *op. cit.*

poor; home environment has a negative influence; reading amount of family and friends is low; past reading experience is poor; perceptions about the usefulness of reading are positive.

Although students showed varying levels of socio-affective factors in reading, on the whole: motivation is high; attitude is positive; self-efficacy is high; but engagement is low; and a social dimension of reading is lacking.

Whereas students' motivation is high, exposure to print and reading amount, which both influence motivation, are low. Motivation is probably more instrumental than intrinsic. Although instrumental motivation (an extrinsic motivation) is beneficial, its effects are temporary. It is performance-oriented and therefore involves surface strategies, which are short-lived. Intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, involves learning goals, is long lasting, and commands the use of complex underlying strategies that are involved in reading comprehension. It is therefore necessary to structure reading programs and instructional activities to instill intrinsic motivation in students. As engagement in reading is low, students need to be trained in this aspect of reading in order for them to become fluent readers. Engaged readers can overcome obstacles and become fluent readers.

5. 2 Implications

The data analysis and the conclusions drawn have the following implications for our Academic Reading course. As a number of the students in this group do not often read outside school work, the study material should be structured to help students develop a reading habit. Extensive reading, book clubs and class

libraries would be vigorously introduced. The following instructional practices in relation to Guthrie & Wigfield's[43] engagement model are proposed.

5.2.1 Motivation

The use of interesting texts that have personal significance for the students instills motivation[44]. A short questionnaire could be used to find out which texts interest students. Usually texts that are personally significant and easily comprehended will gain students' interest[45]. Advanced academic texts that are more challenging could be introduced systematically in subsequent sections of the course. If texts are too difficult to comprehend, students, especially L2 students, tend to adopt surface strategies such as guessing and memorising. If these texts are predominant, students become demotivated and lose interest in reading and in academic tasks[46].

5.2.2 Reading Amount/ Authentic Texts

The present workbook does not give students the opportunity to engage in frequent class reading. If reading amount has a reciprocal effect on motivation, and both influence reading comprehension, then the number of texts in the workbook needs to be increased and frequent reading encouraged. Texts should be appealing to students (i.e., personally significant from area of study and from area of interest). Texts should make connections between the academic curriculum and the personal experiences

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[43] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit.*
[44] Guthrie, J., et al., 1999, *op. cit*; Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op. cit.*
[45] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit.*
[46] Grabe, W., & Stoller, F. 2002, *op. cit.*

of the students. They should be authentic, enjoyable and immediately interesting. Texts that are removed from the students' area of interest and real life experiences lower motivation.

5.2.3 Engaged Reading

The oral culture of most L2 speakers, which may have deprived them of early interactions with routinised forms and formats of literacy[47], is not entirely disadvantageous. This oral behaviour can be harnessed to promote a community of literacy where readers discuss texts they have read and interpret texts, to promote engaged reading[48] .

5.2.3 Autonomy Support

This relates to students being given choice and can be developed by asking students to write their own questions based on texts they have read. These activities give students some autonomy and ownership, which increase motivation and promote text comprehension[49].

5.2.4 Strategy Instruction

Strategy instruction in language learning and reading development has been supported by many researchers[50]. In order to develop reading skills, students should be taught the necessary strategies. Strategies, such as application of prior knowledge; identification of text structure and text organisation; identification of main ideas and supporting detail, increase comprehension[51]. These strategies can be taught through small group discussions, peer modeling, teacher modeling, and individual feedback on progress. Such reading instructions increase self-efficacy, which leads to high levels of motivation, and an enhanced reading ability[52].

5.2.5 Awareness/ Learning and Knowledge Goals

Students should be made aware of the learning goals so that they can focus on learning and not merely on test scores. Focus on learning goals, unlike performance goals which are scores-oriented and temporary, is long-lasting, creates ownership, produces engaged readers, and motivates students. Although we practise student-centred evaluation to a certain extent – for example, some of the assignments require students to assess their reading capabilities – other subjective student-centred tasks such as compiling portfolios of texts read, and formulating comprehension and critical analysis questions could be included.

Finally, the implementation of the above suggestions to increase motivation and self-efficacy in order to develop engaged readers and enhance students' reading ability is a process which would require dedication and patience from both instructors and students. An intervention program implementing the above activities to develop cognitive reading ability through the promotion of reading engagement is being introduced in the unit for Academic Literacy. The efficacy of the program will be reported in a subsequent article.

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[47] *Ibidem.*

[48] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit.*

[49] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit.*

[50] Oxford, R. 1994, Language Learning Strategies. http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/oxford01.html [Accessesd 4 July 2007]; Brown, H. 1994, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.; Anderson, R. 1999, *op. cit.*; Dreyer, C., & Nel, C. 2003, Teaching Reading Strategies, *System*, 31:33, pp. 349-365.

[51] Anderson, R. 1999, *op. cit.*

[52] Guthrie, J., & Wigfield, A. 2000, *op. cit.*; Anderson, R. 1999, *op. cit.*

6 Conclusion

This paper has examined students' reading background in relation to socio-affective factors of motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, and engagement. It has shown that a large number of the students in this group have poor literacy background and lack the main ingredient – engaged reading – that is needed to develop reading comprehension. It has suggested some guidelines and instructional practices that would increase motivation, develop engaged reading and improve students' reading comprehension. It is hoped that it has in some way shed more light on students' reading backgrounds relating to their reading (in)ability and contributed to research on socio-affective factors and reading comprehension.

Appendix: Questionnaire on Students' Reading Background

Please respond to the following questions by circling the appropriate number. Please be completely honest, as the results are purely for research purposes.

Section A

	Always/yes		No/Never	
1. Think about your past experiences with reading.				
1. I have always enjoyed reading.	1	2	3	4
2. I think I read well and with understanding.	1	2	3	4
3. When I was a child I was often taken to the library.	1	2	3	4
4. Members of my family used to read to me.	1	2	3	4
5. There have always been books in my family's home.	1	2	3	4
6. My siblings read books.	1	2	3	4
7. I always believed that reading was a good thing to do.	1	2	3	4
8. I read one novel each week/month.	1	2	3	4
2. Think about people you know who read				
9. My parents read a lot	1	2	3	4
10. My siblings read a lot.	1	2	3	4
11. I know people who can help me with my reading.	1	2	3	4
12. My friends like reading.	1	2	3	4
13. My friends and I discuss books that we read.	1	2	3	4
14. I know people who read all kinds of texts.	1	2	3	4
3. Think about reading. How useful is it?				
15. I can learn a lot from reading.	1	2	3	4
16. I like to read books that make me think.	1	2	3	4
17. I have favourite subjects that I like to read about.	1	2	3	4
18. I read to learn new information about topics of interest.	1	2	3	4
19. I like to read about new things.	1	2	3	4
20. I read for pleasure.	1	2	3	4
21. Reading well will help me with my studies.	1	2	3	4

Section B

	Yes	**No**
22. Do you read every day? **What type of genre do you read?**		
23. Newspapers		
24. Magazines		
25. Novels		
26. Textbooks		
27. Any other		

Place a cross over the answer that applies to you:
28**. Gender:** M   F
29**. Matric English:** 1st lang   2nd lang
30. **Mother tongue:** English   Afrikaans   S African   Other