

Investigating students' motivations and attitudes towards reading

A B S T R A C T This paper reports on an investigation into students' attitudes to and motivations for reading. These socio-affective factors relating to students' reading abilities have been largely ignored in L1 and L2 reading research, especially in L2 contexts. Yet, L2 students tend to display differing motivations and attitudes for L2 reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2002:41). According to Grabe and Stoller (2002:242) students' attitudes and motivations are linked to their previous experiences of reading, exposure to print and people who read, and to perceptions about the usefulness of reading. These experiences shape students' perceptions of how successful they are as readers, and influence their willingness to participate in reading classes and related activities, which in turn affects the success of their reading development. Understanding students' attitudes can help teachers design and prepare appropriate reading programmes to meet students' needs and to counteract negative attitudes. A questionnaire adapted from Grabe and Stoller (2002) was administered to first-year students enrolled for an elective first-year course in Academic Reading at the University of Pretoria. The results of the study are discussed, and implications for reviewing the workbook presently in use are suggested.

Keywords: motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, engagement, reading, text comprehension

1. Introduction

Students' reading abilities have been explored from various angles. Linguistic and cognitive processes, including word recognition, syntactic processes, vocabulary, fluency and inference skills involving interactive use of background knowledge, metacognitive knowledge, reading strategies, and discourse organisation have been researched extensively, mainly in first language contexts (Grabe & Stoller, 2002:57; Alderson, 2000:41; Anderson, 1999).

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 first language (L1) contexts, even less so in L2 contexts. Yet these socio-affective factors have been known to influence reading just as much as the linguistic and cognitive processing factors do (Grabe & Stoller, 2002:19; Verhoeven & Snow, 2001:2). 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 (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Alderson, 2000). 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 (2002:242), 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* of first-year students who were enrolled for the elective Academic Reading course at the University of Pretoria. These three affective factors were selected for investigation due to their strong influence on reading comprehension (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) and their relatedness to the categories listed by Grabe and Stoller (2002:242).

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. Thereafter the methodological details are explained, and the responses to the questionnaire analysed. The results of the investigation are discussed and suggestions are made for improving the reading programme and learning materials currently in use.

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 (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000:405), and reading amount (the frequency of reading) have been known to correlate with each other. Wigfield and Guthrie (2000) 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.* (1999) considered extrinsic motivation (recognition and competence) and intrinsic motivation (enjoyment and involvement) separately with reading amount, and confirms the correlation between both kinds of motivation and reading amount. Motivation and reading amount both influence text comprehension or reading comprehension. Text comprehension is defined by Guthrie *et al.* (1999:232) 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 (Stanovich & Cunningham, 1993; Guthrie *et al.*, 2004; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Guthrie *et al.*, 1999). Specifically, students who read daily for enjoyment have higher reading achievement

levels than those who indicated reading once a year or never (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999). From their study, Guthrie *et al.* (1999:232) state categorically that text comprehension develops from reading amount. Anderson *et al.* (1988) also reported on a study showing that reading amount indicates the level of text comprehension.

With regard to the benefit of frequent reading (reading amount) of different text types, Guthrie *et al.* (1999:243) 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 (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999; Anderson *et al.*, 1988; Gottfried, 1990). Gottfried reports significant correlations between 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 utilised self-reports in the form of questionnaires to elicit information on students' attitude, motivation and self-efficacy.

Attitude refers to a student's liking for a task. A student with high motivation for reading will have a positive attitude towards reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000:407). A positive attitude is usually shaped by students' educational background, and this influences their self-esteem and willingness to persist under challenging reading situations (Grabe & Stoller, 2002:56).

An added aspect of motivation is *self-efficacy*, defined by Bandura (1986) and adopted by Schunk and Rice (1993:391) 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, having the idea that one is able to read and comprehend texts, even difficult texts, is closely linked to motivation (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999:236). 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 (Guthrie & Wigfield 2000:404). 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 (2000:403) 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 enhanced and text comprehension improves. Thus, engaged reading is strongly associated with reading achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). 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 (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000:407). 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 the claim by Guthrie and Wigfield (2000:404) that engaged reading can even substitute for literacy levels not obtained in formal schooling. 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 became 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 between socio-affective factors, engagement and reading comprehension.

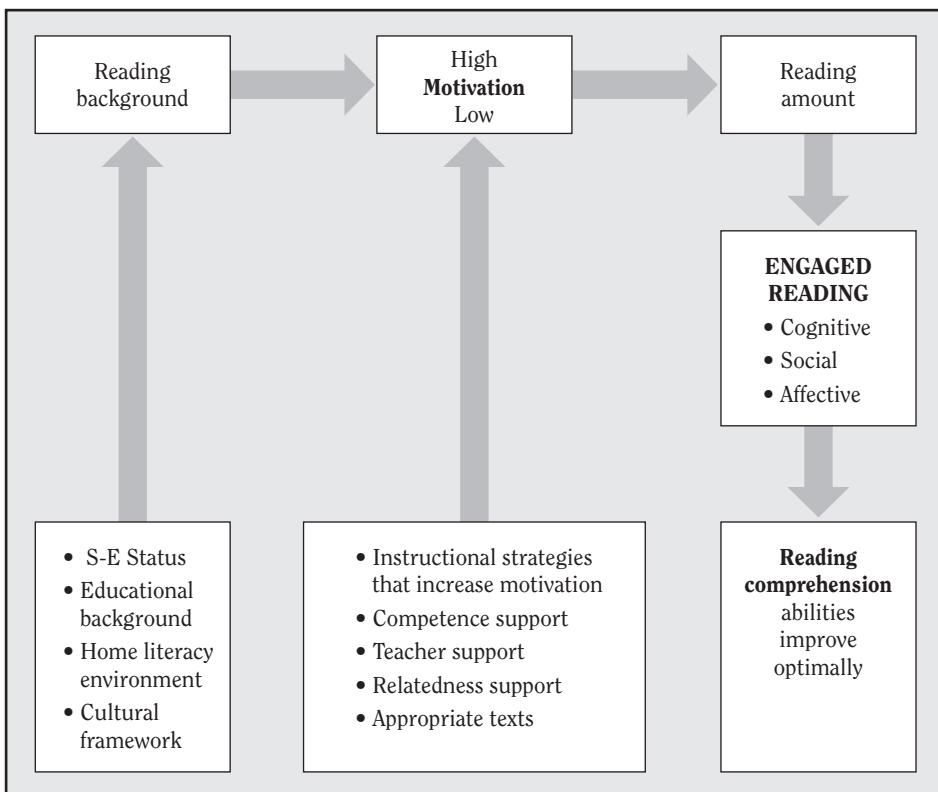


Fig 1: Engaged reading mediates reading background and text comprehension

The above model shows that reading background is determined by socio-economic status, home environment, educational and cultural background and culminates in high or low

motivation, which influences reading amount and invariably text comprehension. A poor reading background will result in low motivation. As a result, instructional strategies are needed to raise motivational levels in order to increase reading amount. Frequent and increased reading resulting from the instructional strategies will produce engaged reading (cognitive, social and affective) which will result in increased reading comprehension. Thus, besides the socio-affective factors of motivation, attitude, and self-efficacy, other factors worth exploring are reading amount and engagement.

To investigate our students' profile and their reading background with regard to socio-affective factors, reading amount and reading engagement, a survey was conducted using a questionnaire adapted from Grabe and Stoller (2002:243). As students' motivation, attitude and self-efficacy were linked to the categories outlined by Grabe and Stoller (2000:243), the responses were analysed using these categories and each question related 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, level of engagement, amount of reading, and the kind of attitude they have towards reading. Exposure to print and to people who read were linked to motivation and engagement, previous experiences in reading were linked to self-efficacy and perceptions about usefulness of reading were linked to attitude. Our aim was to use the information to understand the students' affective position towards reading. On the basis of these findings we identified areas that needed to be reviewed regarding instruction, study materials and the reading programme as a whole.

3. The study

3.1 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives were:

- to examine students' literacy profile in relation to socio-affective factors;
- to investigate students' experiences of reading in relation to the use of English as L1 or L2;
- to explore students' affective levels, literacy background and reading engagement in relation to gender;
- to suggest possible changes that might be useful in developing students' reading comprehension ability based on the results of objectives one and two.

In relation to the aims and objectives, the following research questions were posed:

- What is the literacy profile of the group in terms of its strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the differences between English L1 and L2 speakers within our group of students in terms of motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, literacy background and reading engagement?
- What are the differences between the males and the females of the group in terms of motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, literacy background and reading engagement? This last question was included because we were interested in finding out whether there is a relationship 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 programme and if so, in which direction?

3.2 Participants

Participants were first-year students taking the elective Academic Reading course. These are students who have passed the Academic Literacy test (a test administered to all first-year students at the institution to determine their level of academic literacy) and are therefore perceived to be academically literate. Although a total of 1 200 students had registered for the course, only 130 students participated in the study, as they were in the groups assigned to the researchers and therefore readily available to them. The course is offered in the first term of the academic year and the questionnaire was administered 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.

3.3 Data collection

The data were collected via a questionnaire adapted from Grabe and Stoller (2002) (see Appendix) in February 2007. 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 the following subdivisions: previous experiences in reading, exposure to print and to people who read, and perceptions about the usefulness of reading. These aspects of reading, according to Grabe and Stoller (2002:243), are linked to the socio-affective factors of motivation, attitude, self-efficacy and socio-economic background. Questions that related to each socio-affective factor (according to Grabe and Stoller's categorisation) were identified: *motivation*: questions 1, 12, 18, 19, and 20; *attitude*: questions 15 and 21; *self-efficacy*: questions 2, 7, 11; *engagement*: questions 13, 16 and 17; *reading experience*: questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 14.

3.4 Data analysis

The data were analysed in three categories. First, students' reading backgrounds and profiles (past experiences with reading, motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, engagement) were analysed as strengths or weaknesses. The mean scores were used to determine the strengths and weaknesses. Chi square tests were also used to test for significant differences in students' levels of motivation, attitude and self-efficacy. Secondly, responses were analysed in relation to students' use of English as a first or second language. A non-parametric equivalent of the parametric ANOVA was used to test for any significant relationships between students' reading backgrounds/profiles, their mother tongue and their use of English as first or second language. Thirdly, the responses were analysed in relation to gender. Using chi square tests students' reading backgrounds/profiles were analysed for any significant differences in relation to gender.

4. Findings

4.1 Literacy background and profile

In order to address the first research question, namely what the literacy profiles of the students were in terms of their strengths and weaknesses, the responses were grouped from the highest mean to the lowest. A low mean, below 2, indicates that students responded positively: *yes* or *always*, which points to a strength. A high mean, above two, shows negative responses: *no* and *never*, indicating that the situation either rarely existed or was entirely nonexistent, pointing towards a weakness.

Items on students' literacy profile 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 me with my studies') was 1.21, with a standard deviation of 0.41. Since this question relates to motivation and attitude (Grabe & Stoller, 2002), 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 (Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Alderson, 2000; August, 2006) 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: Items showing positive literacy background (strengths)

Item	Question	Mean	Std. Dev.	% Positive	% Negative
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: Items showing poor literacy background (weaknesses)

Item	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

The items 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 students' responses. This shows that students' responses were spread along the continuum of one to four, and did not converge on any particular level. This scenario also shows that the group of students varied greatly in their reading background with regard to these items. This may be the results of the multi-cultural composition of the group, as well as the different educational backgrounds of students – former model C schools, private schools and public schools.

Of all the items, 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 item relates to the construct of *engagement* in reading (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999) the negative responses are therefore a cause for concern.

Also of concern is the amount of reading students do. Question 8 ('I read one novel each week/month') has 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 instils intrinsic motivation, the pleasure and joys of reading, which leads to frequent reading and the gains thereof (Guthrie, 1999). 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 students' responses. This question refers to students' 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 on the whole the majority of these students have a low literacy background. Responses to these questions suggest that generally, the reading experience students get from friends, parents, siblings and others is very low. This could have a negative effect on their attitudes to reading (Grabe & Stoller, 2002), which could influence the amount of reading they do, and consequently the level of reading comprehension they achieve (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

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 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: Items relating to literacy background

Items	Question	Mean	Std. Dev.
4	Family members read to me	2.25	1.08
9	My parents read a lot	1.95	0.95
10	My siblings read a lot	2.37	1.02
11	People can help me with reading	1.98	0.95
12	My friends like reading	2.37	0.97

4.2 English first- and second-language speakers

This analysis relates students' reading background to their mother tongue, and to English as a first or second / additional language (objective two). Of the 21 questions, nonparametric statistical tests show that only responses to Question 4 had 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: English L1/L2 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 SAL N = 42	2.69
Other N = 14	2.64

Responses to Questions 5 and 17 showed a tendency and were significant only at ten per cent ($p = 0.0602$ for Question 5; $p = 0.0729$ for Question 17), as shown by the nonparametric statistical test. 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 L1 speakers and the ISAL L1 speakers, 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 ISAL group as shown in the table below.

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

Mother tongue	Mean
English N = 37	1.54
Afrikaans N = 35	1.86
ISAL	1.46

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 (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999:404).

4.2.1 Exposure to texts/reading amount: Questions 3, 4, 8, 10

In order to address the second research question, namely whether English L1 and L2 speakers within our group of students differ in motivation, attitude, self-efficacy, literacy background, and reading engagement, the responses were analysed in relation to the different mother-

tongue groups. This analysis was done to find out if students read often, since frequent reading has implications for reading amount which consequently influences motivation, self-efficacy, attitude and ultimately, reading comprehension (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). Additional questions in relation to Question 22 ('Do you read everyday?') were asked in order to probe the type of genres students read. Each of the six questions (22-27), indicating students' exposure to print, was analysed statistically in relation to the mother tongue of students.

An analysis of Question 22 ('Do you read everyday?') with the different mother-tongue groups showed that most students read everyday. However, the analysis of responses to other questions showed that students have had little exposure to literature outside of school. This response on reading everyday 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 everyday, 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 everyday, as compared to the English group that had 0% for those who did not read everyday. Table 6 illustrates these differences.

Table 6: Question 22 ('Do you read everyday?')
English L1 / L2 Yes No

English L1	100%	0%
Afrikaans (English L2)	77%	23%
ISAL (English L2)	71%	29%

The differences between English L1 speakers and English L2 speakers were statistically significant, $p = 0.0187$. This has implications for instruction and teaching material. Though the percentages for *negative responses* are less than 50 in each language 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 show varying motivations and attitudes among the L2 speakers. Whereas 100% of English L1 speakers said they read everyday, almost a third of the English L2 speakers (Afrikaans and ISAL) indicated that they do not read everyday. This confirms Grabe and Stoller's (2000) view that L2 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, in relation to gender, the analysis of the different genres, in the form of newspaper, magazines and novels showed a number of statistically significant results.

4.3 Responses in relation to gender

In order to address the third research question, namely whether there are any differences in students' motivation, attitude, and self-efficacy in relation to gender, chi square tests were conducted for the responses to each question using the gender variables of male/female. Although the gender aspect was introduced purely as a point of interest, 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 with 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 (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999: 235). Here too, a highly significant difference was recorded ($p = 0.0002$). The females read for pleasure more than the males (females = 1.5; males = 2.23). The distribution is presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Questions 1 and 20

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

Responses to Question 3 ('When I was a child I was often taken to the library') were significant, $p = 0001$. Responses show that on the whole, girls had an earlier introduction to books than 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 instils pleasure and enjoyment in reading (Gallik, 1999). Question 4 ('Members of my family used to read to me') was linked to Question 3 in relation to exposure to print, and was significant at ten percent, $p = 0076$. 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. The differences in male–female exposure to print are illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8: Male / Female exposure to print: mean and P-values

Questions	Mean females	Mean Males	P-values
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
20	1.57	2.23	0.0002

5. Discussion

Since Question 13 relates to what Guthrie *et al.* (1999) 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 context and should be developed. The significance of the community of literacy is that it promotes engagement, which is a vital ingredient in reading comprehension (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999).

Responses to Question 8 show that most of the students do not read for pleasure. And yet the advantages of intrinsic motivation in promoting reading amount and text comprehension cannot be overemphasised. Given that students hardly read novels outside of school, the amount of pleasure 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 (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Grabe & Stoller, 2002; Gallik, 1999).

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 levels 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.

Responses to Questions 1 and 20 show that girls read more than boys do. The underlying variation may have been produced by the mother-tongue differences of the students, as the L2 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 promote these positive attitudes in students. Considering the benefits of enjoyment in reading, reading amount, and consequently reading achievement, the absence or low levels of these aspects of reading in the male students of this group raise concerns. 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 L1 and English L1 groups were exposed to the culture of reading early in childhood, 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 students' attitudes and motivations for reading. In addition, the responses of the ISAL 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 backgrounds. 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 L1 and the Afrikaans L1 groups, but those from very low economic and educational backgrounds would be inclined towards more traditional African experiences of orature. 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 (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999). 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.

Although there are varying responses to questions relating to students' reading background, on the whole the results from this pilot study show that for a number of students, there has been limited exposure to print; poor literacy background; negative influence from home and school; and poor past reading experience. Although students showed varying levels on socio-affective factors in reading, on the whole, students' responses revealed that 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 programmes and instructional activities to instil 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 (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Although, a number of insights have been gained through the study, there are also a number of limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted on a very small scale using only groups assigned to the researchers. In addition, the study was based solely on

self-report. An additional means (e.g. Author Recognition Test-ART; Title Recognition Test-TRT) to ascertain students' exposure to texts, would have given more accurate results. Also, a comparison of the self-report (questionnaire responses) to students' performance on the Academic Literacy test would have strengthened the reliability of the self-report.

5.1 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 academic texts the study material should be structured to help students develop a reading habit. Extensive reading, book clubs and class libraries would be vigorously introduced. Although, it has been argued that students at tertiary level do not have extra time to engage in this type of reading activity, proper time management could make this possible. Students could replace a social activity with an hour of reading. Also, the link between reading and academic performance could be explained to students. Besides, the benefits of extensive reading are enormous (increased reading comprehension and higher academic achievement) and should not be dismissed easily. In addition to extensive reading, the following instructional strategies in relation to Guthrie and Wigfield's (2000) engagement model are proposed.

The use of interesting texts that have personal significance for the students instils motivation (Guthrie *et al.*, 1999; Grabe & Stoller, 2002). 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 (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). 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 (Grabe & Stoller, 2002).

Students should be given 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 coursebook needs to be increased and frequent reading encouraged. Texts should, however, 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 of students. Texts should be authentic, enjoyable and immediately interesting. Texts that are removed from students' area of interest and real-life experiences lower motivation.

The oral culture of most L2 speakers, which may have deprived them of early interactions with routinised forms and formats of literacy (Grabe & Stoller, 2000), could be harnessed to promote a community of literacy where readers discuss texts they have read and interpret texts, to promote engaged reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Choice is motivating. Students could be given choices by being asked 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 (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000).

Strategy instruction in language learning and reading development has been supported by many researchers (Oxford, 1994; Brown, 1994; Anderson, 1999; Dreyer & Nel, 2003). In order

to develop reading skills, students should be taught the necessary strategies. Reading strategies, such as application of prior knowledge; identification of text structure and text organisation; identification of main ideas and supporting details, increase comprehension (Anderson, 1999). These strategies can be taught through small group discussions, peer modelling, teacher modelling, and individual feedback on progress. Such reading instructions increase self-efficacy, which leads to high levels of motivation, and an enhanced reading ability (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Anderson, 1999).

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 score-oriented and temporary, is long lasting, creates ownership, produces engaged readers, and motivates students. Although we practise student-centred evaluation to an extent, for example, assignments that 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 programme 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 programme remains to be tested.

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 activities that will 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.

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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

1. Think about your past experiences with reading.		Always/Yes	No/Never
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

22.	Do you read everyday?	Yes	No
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: | 1 st Lang | 2 nd Lang | | | |
| 30. Mother tongue: | English | Afrikaans | S African | Other | |