CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The results of this study so far underscore both the complexity involved in investigating the reading problems in English of secondary school learners and, the complexity of understanding factors associated with problems of reading. In the study we examined the students’ responses to the questionnaires, their performance in a series of Cloze and Reading Comprehension tests. Observations were also made by the researcher on the teaching of Reading in the schools. Their compositions were also examined to shed more light. In addition, the teachers’ views regarding the teaching of reading were sought.

We propose to discuss the findings that have emerged from the analysis of the data in the previous chapter, under the following domains: Reading Problems of Students and Problems in the Teaching Process. Let us now look at them one by one.

5.1 READING PROBLEMS

From the analysis in the previous chapter, it was observed that the students exhibited poor reading ability, as well as poor expression in their written work. This indicates that the students have yet to master the reading skills and also their overall proficiency is low. As was seen in chapter four (tables 7 and 8) the teachers seemed to emphasize more on the students’ ability to pass examinations and their ability to communicate rather than the ability to read and write.

Reading as a skill is important in any language instruction and one can hardly afford to ignore or downplay its place in the teaching of language. The reading problems that emerge in the study cast doubts on the effective teaching of the language. In the
schools, particularly Pemwai, Kasok, Kapkawa and Kabartonjo, it was observed that actual teaching of reading as a skill was at a low key and that the teachers only asked the students to read a certain passage in the textbook and answer the questions that follow. The assignments were marked but no room was given for class discussion. Neither were they taught speed reading or reading with a purpose. Thus it was observed that many students thought that reading meant reading only to answer questions and not so much to master the reading skill or to develop the other skills that go with it.

Indeed because of this, several other problems emerge that tend to hamper their comprehension ability. For example, for lack of thorough training, it was observed that the students tended to give the same amount of attention to each word in a text, viewing each sentence to have equal importance in the passage. When reading, the students try to understand individual sentences, but they do not understand the connections among the sentences. They do not think about the main idea of a paragraph and how the sentences contribute to the development of that main idea. Thus they do not try to understand the passage as a whole. They have difficulties summarizing or reconstructing passages they have read. They see sentences as existing independently without any relationship among them. As was seen in Chapter four (table 17a) students showed difficulties in understanding nouns, pronouns, or referents which connect and give meaning to sentences. Similarly as was seen in the questions that tested for detail and inference, they showed poor performance, meaning that they do not understand or have yet to master the skill of extracting fact or detail from the passage. This also goes a long way to show that they do not understand the writer's point of view.

Psycholinguistic studies (see Kitao & Kitao 1995:233) for example indicate that "there is a positive correlation between reading speed and reading proficiency and that it is by reading that readers learn to read and improve their reading skills". Reading
fast and reading more is a good training to improve reading proficiency. In the study it emerged that this is one area which was lacking in the teaching of the skill. If the students are taught and encouraged to practise and master the reading skills, then they will be able to read any text with few problems. This seems to be in keeping with the findings of researches in the area.

McDonough & Shaw (1993:105) for example argue that it is generally recognised that the efficient reader versed in ways of interacting with various types of texts is flexible, and chooses appropriate reading strategies depending on the particular text in question. Pugh (1978) in McDonough & Shaw (cited above), further show how efficient readers “Switch” styles according to the type of text they are reading. Teachers ought to teach the students how to match reading skill to reading purpose. Indeed to illustrate the importance of purpose in reading, Pugh asserts that ‘we do not read seventeen century poetry in the same way as we read a television page in our newspaper.’ Skilled readers scan to locate specific information in a text and skim to extract general information from it.

In a similar argument, Berg (1971:2) describes the characteristics of a successful reader as one who has a purpose, can concentrate, comprehends what he reads, remembers what he reads, has a good vocabulary and can read rapidly but with a rate depending on the same material. Knowing how to select the right combination of skills for a particular purpose – to change the rate of reading in a coordinated reaction to purpose and difficulty is the mark of an effective reader. Berg calls this flexibility and goes on to describe an effective reader thus: ‘the flexible reader is a purposeful reader. He knows how to skim for previewing an article or comprehension passage before reading and he knows how to scan for specific information in a selection. He learns from his preview skimming to know whether to read the selection rapidly, at an average rate or slowly.’
As was seen in tables 16 and 17b in chapter four, apart from Kabarnet, Kapopita, Kituro and Ossen Secondary Schools, the general performance of the rest of the schools in both Cloze and Comprehension is poor indicating that they have yet to master the skill. Like other skills their ability to read English rapidly and accurately and to answer questions correctly depends upon careful instruction and purposeful reading. From their performance it can be concluded that the teachers have not been effective in their work.

Another possible explanation could be drawn from the larger perspective of the general language competence of the students. Perhaps their performance in the tests is poor because their language proficiency is low. But even then the role of the teacher in enabling the students attain proficiency is paramount.

In her investigation of the relationship between general language competence and second language reading proficiency, Joanne Devine (1988:261) observes that ‘despite the emphasis on similarities in the reading process in all languages, even during the heyday of the psycholinguistic period of second language reading, most researchers remained sensitive to the role of language competence in second language reading success’ as evidenced by Clarke & Silberstein’s observation:

‘Our students’ efficiency in using reading skills is directly dependent upon their overall language proficiency – their general language skills’ (1977: 145).

The critical interaction of language proficiency and reading ability is now generally well accepted. Most researchers and indeed classroom teachers in fact, presume that second language readers must reach a certain level of second language competence before they can effectively read in the second language. Reading requires a relatively high degree of grammatical control over structures that appear in whatever readings are given to the students.

The results revealed in chapter four tables 18a and b show that the students have yet to master the use of content and structure words to get meaning or fact from
comprehension texts. The findings also point to the fact that the students’ have not attained a second language competence level that could facilitate their reading texts with few problems.

Another possible explanation could be that the students have not been adequately taught the readings skills in particular, and more so, in the second language in general in the lower classes prior to their promotion to the higher class (form three). The reading problems that we see from the analysis may be problems carried over from the lower classes or accumulated over a long period of time.

Looking back at the previous research done in this area (see Yorio 1971, Alderson, Bastien & Madrazo 1977) it appears that the findings and observations made in the study fit into the general trend of findings made in the above cited work. For example in our study it emerged that the reading problems of the students seem to have a bearing on their overall language competence. Yorio in his study claimed that the reading problems of language learners are due largely to imperfect knowledge of the language and to native language interference in the reading process. The Alderson, Bastien and Madrazo study in Mexico seems to point also in this direction in its findings. The study showed a higher correlation between English language proficiency, and reading comprehension in English. The study concluded that the best predictor of reading ability in a foreign language was not reading ability in the mother tongue, but rather proficiency in the second language.

Similarly Nation & Snowling (1997:30) while acknowledging that reading is a complex skill which depends on more than just phonological ability, in their study conclude inter alia that:

> Our results demonstrate that linguistic comprehension ability is an important determiner not only of reading comprehension but also of text reading and to a lesser extent word recognition.
In their observation, they note further that one way in which comprehension ability may influence reading accuracy is via the use of contextual cues to facilitate word recognition. When faced with an unfamiliar word embedded in meaningful text, learners may use the semantic and syntactic framework of the text in combination with information from a partial decoding attempt in order to read the word. In the study it was found that the learners’ propensity to use contextual information in this way is intimately related to their comprehension skills.

The two researchers, Nation & Snowling (1997:367) further noted that ‘learners bring a range of cognitive and linguistic strengths and weakness to the task of reading’. Accurate and full assessments of the nature of reading difficulties are important as they allow for the most appropriate type of intervention to be chosen. With an integrated approach to teaching reading in mind, Hatcher, Hilmer & Ellis (1994) and Kigotho (1992) argue that as poor readers (defined as poor decoders) have weak phonological skills, training should combine reading instruction with phonological linkage and indeed, this intervention it was observed, was more successful than any other.

Likewise accurate assessment of comprehension will allow teachers to identify areas of specific difficulty at which intervention can be identified, and remedies found early enough for the learners to master the skills. Yuill & Oakhill (1991) in a similar study reported that poor comprehenders with weak construction processing skills benefited greatly from a training programme that included training in inference making skills. Specific reading comprehension difficulties are typically not noticed in the classroom unless learners are regularly assessed in comprehensive skills, and in their ability to deduce meaning from text. (For a thorough discussion of inferential and memory skill in children’s comprehension of stories see Oakhill 1984: 31-39).
In our study it was noted that individually administered tests of comprehension are required if poor comprehenders’ difficulties are to be recognised and their needs met. These findings point to the fact that for learners to attain sufficient reading abilities, they should be taught not only the language for proficiency but also they should be encouraged and given opportunities to practise reading comprehension.

Ideally a good reader makes use of his experience and knowledge to evaluate the content or facts of what he reads as he reads. This helps him to decide which parts of the text can be skimmed quickly and which will require close attention. This is also how a reader makes sense of the text, and in the process learns to practice the reading comprehension skills. However in our observation such opportunities were scarcely available to the learners in the schools. Students must not only practise faster reading but also overcome mechanical faults, which impair reading efficiency.

The poor performance of the subjects in doing the English language cloze test underscores the importance of language skills for reading. These findings seem to support the traditional activities of grammar lessons and vocabulary instruction (see Kanyab & Tahirian 1989:51). The study seems to confirm the idea that reading comprehension cannot take place unless the reader is aware of grammatical and lexical meaning of discourse. The students’ high level sensibility to syntactic cues and their failure in observing the semantic cues as was seen in the tests is perhaps an indicator of the present emphasis on grammar rules rather than meaning in the general English classes in the schools. Although knowledge of grammar has its own value in reading ability, it should not be emphasized at the cost of meaning consciousness.

Arguing for the teaching of grammar also, Troike (1979) observes that ‘there is a higher correlation between reading achievement and knowledge of grammar’. In the same vein Rivers (1981) believes that it is useful in teaching reading to make a distinction between recognition and production of grammar. The syntactic details that
a reader needs to extract the important elements of the message are few and may be
different from those which are important when producing ones’ own message in
speech or writing.

In lessons primarily concerned with reading only, such as the ones we observed in the
schools, the details important for the extraction of meaning need to be emphasized.
Therefore, to improve reading ability, there should be a shift of emphasis from
grammar to semantics and or comprehension.

From the observations and the students’ responses in their work, a great number of
them showed that they read the text sentence by sentence and that they are not able to
see the text as a whole. This perhaps could explain for the generally poor performance
in content and structure words as was seen in tables 18a and b in chapter four. To help
such students, a good teacher of reading would resort to acquainting his students with
discourse structures.

In a test of advanced reading comprehension given by Sim and Bensousan (1979) to
Israeli students, it emerged that ‘function-word questions appeared to be as difficult as
content-word questions’. This seems to tally with the results of our study. If we
suppose that the process of reading a comprehension passage involves the ability to
follow a logical argument, function word as well as content-word should be included
in tests of reading proficiency exercises for the students to practise the skill. Tests of
this nature measure a students’ level of reading proficiency. They attempt to elicit the
students’ understanding of the cohesive relationship between the components of a
text, as well as an understanding of each component separately. Thus from the
research findings as shown in tables 18a and b, it would seem that in the teaching of
the reading skill decoding or interpreting function words is no less important a lexical
skill than content-word decoding or interpreting, while facility in interpreting the
interaction of the two kinds of words is necessary for effective comprehension of the
text in which they operate.

While there is no evidence to suggest that teaching the contextual operation of function words is more important than teaching content words, the results, within the limit of the research study, support the contention that these words, being an apparent cause of reading difficulty need to be taught and tested to the same extent as the other.

The considerable number of blanks left unanswered by the subjects, as was observed and discussed in chapter four, can also be looked at as an indicator of the subjects' reluctance to take chances. This behaviour is highly related to the psychology and the inner personality of the reader (for an elaborate discussion on this see Kanyab & Tahirian 1989). Some students are innately cautious and over prudent; they lack the courage to try the unknown. To assist such students Kanyab & Tahirian (cited above) suggest that the reading teacher can retain his students' confidence in reading by selecting texts and providing them for reading for pleasure, that is reading for reading's sake which is not tested at all but if regularly encouraged it would improve the learners' extensive reading skills. The reading material selected should be of the level of the learners. If the subject matter is too abstract or highly descriptive, students cannot understand it and thus will lose confidence in their reading ability thus impairing their proficiency.

It may also be inferred from the relatively weak performance in the subject that reading comprehension does not depend only on linguistic proficiency. Something else seems to be involved which is often referred to as reading strategies or reading skills, (Nuttall 1982, Carrell et al 1988). This component involves the reader's hypothesis production and testing, guessing and identification of meaning, categorization of information, fitting new information, to prior knowledge, sampling and predicting the forthcoming information etc. Among these strategies predicting the forthcoming word, sentences or ideas is considered the most useful skill in reading.
comprehension and this should be taken into consideration when teaching.

In the preceding chapter, it was observed that most teachers do not actually teach reading comprehension but that in class they ask students to read and answer comprehension questions from a passage. Thereafter their answer books are collected for marking without any provision for class discussion before or after their work has been marked and returned. If one asks the teachers why they teach comprehension, one sometimes gets answers such as 'to test how well the students have understood the passage.' There are several reasons for regarding this as an unsatisfactory answer, the chief reason being that it reveals confusion between teaching and testing. The teacher should not be testing anything until he has made sure that he has taught it. (Carver 1978 gives a thorough discussion on the differences between teaching and testing). Teachers should not just test without an objective or a follow up with a view to helping those students who did not do well in the test.

Other scholars however have begun to critically examine the whole concept of reading and comprehension and its role in teaching language. Carver (1978:291-297) for example while questioning whether there is such a thing as Reading Comprehension poses several important questions about a comprehension test. He asks inter alia; 'so the teacher finds out that Ahmed has understood six-tenths of the passage, while Suleiman has understood seven-tenths of it – or does he really? What does a mark of 6/10 for comprehension really mean? It is hard to believe that it means an understanding of six-tenths of the passage, then consider what happens next. Usually nothing, but if we find that Ahmed does not understand 4/10 of the passage, surely we should go on to help him to understand the four-tenths. This stage should not be merely ‘going through the answers’ but some real re-teaching.'

Unless a test has some specific purpose, such as making decisions about promotion
up by further teaching. If it is not, then the teacher is making no use of the information which he gains from the test. A test tells the teacher something, it does not tell the students much apart from showing how many marks they have scored. Since it is the students, not the teachers who are in school to learn, then a test is useless if the teacher does not use it as the basis of teaching. Instead of asking questions ‘to see how well the pupils have understood the text’ the teacher’s task should be one of helping the student to learn from the text. It is from the test that the teacher can diagnose the weaknesses of the students and thus assist accordingly.

This implies that normally the stage after the reading of the passage should be an oral one. Asking questions would be a useful well established way of helping students to learn, but the questions at this stage should help the students to get more out of the passage than they may have got from a sample reading. If a student cannot answer a question the teacher must help him to answer, by re-phrasing the question, by leading up to it in simpler questions or by drawing the students’ attention to something he may have overlooked. It is also good however, for the teacher to remember that questioning is not the only way of helping someone to learn. Initiating, asking students to find certain things in the text, asking students to reproduce part or all of a text, or even simply pointing things out to the students, are ways of varying the pattern of question and answer. This is a more meaningful and effective way of teaching reading comprehension.

Students and teachers alike, it was observed, seem to have the mistaken impression that the point of a lesson is to ‘see who can give the right answer’ but this is not a good approach for teaching Reading Comprehension. Carver (1978:292) in his research likens a reading comprehension lesson to a guided tour. He writes ‘it is truer to the nature of teaching to regard a lesson as a guided tour through territory which may be new or familiar to the students. The teacher is the guide who knows the territory well and his job is to make sure that the tourists notice and remember the
most important things which are to be seen on the tour. The way in which the guide points them out (by questions or by some other device) is less important than the fact that they are pointed out. To put it another way, questions in teaching are devices for getting the students' attention. They are not really questions--because the teacher knows the answer already. However, questioning will always remain among the teacher's basic techniques of teaching. In the data analysis, it was observed that the teachers in the schools that tended to perform poorly in the tests did not use this skill extensively in their teaching (see table 17a, in chapter four).

The results of our study therefore indicate that the students are not taught reading skills adequately and this explains the reasons why the students scored poorly in the tests. The research studies cited support the usefulness of the teaching of reading strategies to second language learners.

From the tests and observations it also emerged that the students have a number of difficulties in reading texts, many of which are related either to lack of familiarity with effective reading strategies or use of ineffective reading strategies. Thus, their vocabulary is low and they have difficulties making inferences, see tables 17a and b. They do not know how to guess the meaning of words from the context and they tend to stop every time they encounter an unfamiliar word to look it up in a dictionary. It was observed that they do not know how to vary their reading strategies or reading speed based on the purpose of their reading.

The students it was further observed, treat every sentence in a reading passage as having the same importance and also had difficulty finding the main idea of the passage and understanding the relationship of detail to that main idea (see the mean percentage error per student/ school performance in table 17b). They tended to read a passage through from the beginning to the end, without surveying the reading before hand or making predictions based on the title, illustrations etc. Therefore the teaching
of reading strategies could address many of these problems and in the process enable the students improve their vocabulary. More research is necessary, however, on various aspects of the teaching of reading strategies, including what methods are best, at what levels they should be taught, how best to balance between teaching reading strategies and extensive reading etc.

5.2. LOW VOCABULARY SKILLS

In Chapter four table 17a, we noted that the average percentage error score for all the sampled schools in vocabulary is very high (65.1%), which indicates that the students are weak in vocabulary. It also means that they have not been taught adequately the skill of deriving meaning from words as used in a passage. It may also mean that they have not been encouraged to practise the skill. The ability to get meaning from a text is very important in reading. Indeed readers may ignore such words as articles, auxiliary etc. and still understand a passage if the passage is familiar and enough of the vocabulary is understood.

Apart from the teaching of vocabulary, the only other way in which students can be taught the skill is through both intensive and extensive reading. While most specialists favour balanced intensive-plus-extensive programmes (e.g., Nuttall 1982, Eskey 1973), the implication of some recent research is that extensive reading should receive more attention, not only because of general acceptance of the dictum that one becomes a good reader through reading, but also because extensive reading is claimed to be an effective means of improving writing (Hafiz & Tudor 1989), enlarging vocabulary, or improving language (Williams & Moran 1989). Nuttall (1982:168), for example, claims that, next to going to live among native speakers, the best way of acquiring proficiency in a language is to read extensively in this language. Moreover, it is argued that using graded readers in self access mode while teaching has the potential to provide comprehensible input (Krashen & Terrell 1983), to allow for stress-free deep processing and to allow for personal interests in the learner, thus making reading
as a learning activity interesting and satisfying.

From our observations these methods were rarely used in the teaching of reading comprehension. Studies have shown that there is indeed a relationship between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. In a meta-analysis of studies of this relationship for example, Nagy and Herman (1987) found that 'there are strong correlations among vocabulary knowledge, general verbal ability and reading comprehension'.

Based on their analysis, Nagy and Herman (cited above) noted that the vocabulary programmes that were successful in increasing reading proficiency were those which ‘incorporated institutional techniques aimed at developing both a network of semantic relationships among instructed words and ties between instructed words and prior knowledge’. Words they asserted:

"Must be treated as labels for concepts that are embedded in larger schemata. Instruction must aim at establishing rich ties between new words and prior knowledge and must present new words and concepts in the context of larger domains of knowledge. It is important to emphasize that such an approach to vocabulary is not just a better way to teach words, but apparently a necessary condition for improving reading comprehension" (p.30).

For vocabulary instruction to be successful, it must include at least some of the following characteristics: multiple exposure to target words, exposure to words in meaningful contexts, rich or varied information about each word, the establishment of ties between instructed words and students’ own experience and prior knowledge, and an active role of students in the word learning process. Although intensive vocabulary instruction with the above characteristics is useful, the regular experience of extensive reading is the most effective way of achieving these characteristics. The Nagy and Herman research findings indicate that teaching vocabulary does indeed bear fruit in increased reading proficiency.
In pursuit of the same subject using a different research method, Nation (1990) developed a procedure to teach students to guess the meaning of an unknown word from the context. Nations' procedure involves determining the part of speech that the word is and then looking at the relationships between the unknown word and other words in the same sentence and then between that sentence and other sentences and paragraphs. Nation advises readers to try to determine relationships such as cause and effect or contrast. While such relationships might be signalled, often there is no signal, and the reader must depend, at least in part, on knowledge of the subject area to recognise these relationships.

Though Nation does not use Schema theory to support her explanation, it seems obvious that a Schema would be necessary for the context and for the concept represented by the unknown word. Obviously the better developed a reader's Schema is on the topic of a reading passage, the more accurately the reader can guess the meanings of unknown words. Thus her research seems to indicate that the most effective way to teach vocabulary involves using context.

However, while acknowledging that it is vital that teachers of reading prepare students for reading outside of the classroom, Kitao (1995:33) cautions that in using context to teach vocabulary, it is equally very important to keep in mind the background knowledge that the students can be expected to have. Teachers who use context to teach vocabulary must be sensitive to the background knowledge that students are likely to have.

Reading outside of classroom entails encouraging the students to read extensively short stories, novels etc. In this way they build their vocabulary and/or English phrases for expression. Nuttall (1982) (see chapter two) maintains that nothing can take the place of extensive reading for learning the large quantity of words necessary to become a truly proficient reader and, that activities like these are useful for
developing an indepth understanding of lexical items that is difficult to develop through incidental encounters.

Since it is easier to acquire new information when it is related to something previously known, activities that relate new words to known words are particularly effective as was observed in Kituro mixed secondary school, where the teachers used newspapers to teach reading comprehension and vocabulary. This could also be a good way to teach students to practise in order to understand reference words such as pronouns. In tables 18a and b (see chapter four) we observed that the students in the sampled schools performed poorly on average in both content and structure words. If a reader does not understand what a word, for example a pronoun refers to, it may be difficult to understand the meaning of the passage. In order to teach about referents, the teacher could give students sentences or sets of two or three sentences and ask them to find the referents of pronouns. Such exercises enable students to learn and hopefully find little problems in reading comprehension texts.

From the foregoing we can see that context in reading is very important. Various writers (Bright & McGregor 1970, Carrell et al 1988, Kitao 1995, Nuttall 1982, Yorkey 1970, Alderson 1980) have argued that poor readers do not use contexts well in reading. Decoding skills and grammatical, semantic and background knowledge are important factors in the use of context. In our observation of teaching reading in the schools, these sub-skills were not taught adequately to the students and neither were opportunities given to the learners to practise the skills. From their work it appeared that they do not use different strategies when they are reading for different purposes, but they seem to depend on only one strategy. For them, it appeared that all reading is the same. This clearly indicated that they have not been exposed adequately to the various reading skills and strategies of coping with the text.
In table 4b, 63.6% of the teachers responded that the students read books sometimes. This means that the reading culture is low and the same has not been encouraged among the learners. It could also be argued that the low reading scores of the students in the tests perhaps could be explained by the fact that the students do not read books regularly apart from their textbooks and hence their vocabulary is low. Secondly, this could be explained by the fact that previously from tables 6 and 8, we noted that passing examinations was encouraged and emphasized in the teaching, which lead the students to feel that they should read just to pass their examinations.

Looked at from a wider perspective, the other problem could also be the lack of a national book policy (Bosire 1996:22) which has hindered the development of a reading culture in the country. As was shown in chapter four, the education system in the country and indeed the syllabus is geared towards examinations which to some extent has hindered leisure reading. In the absence of extensive reading, learners are not able to build sufficient vocabulary knowledge which is crucial in reading comprehension.

Reading comprehension is a highly integrated process. It is primarily based on the text-reader dynamics (Srivastava 1995). If the reader is not sufficiently equipped with the skills to read the text, then meaning may not be derived from the text. Srivastava (1995:115) while discussing strategies for Reading Comprehension raises the controversy that involves the question: what poses a greater problem in text comprehension—vocabulary or structure? In his discussion Srivastava cites research done by Cooper (1994) in which he argues that it is vocabulary which causes more problems in text comprehension than structure. Contrary to this however, there is also another research evidence from Berman (1994) in Srivastava (1995) that indicates that structural properties of texts are a source of much more difficulty than lexis. In the context of reading comprehension, such difficulties are identified on the basis whether the text contains vocabulary items or structural properties unknown to the readers.
Thus it is only prudent for any teacher to teach not only vocabulary but also structure and context in any reading comprehension text.

In any reading comprehension passage or text, a reader needs to understand the grammatical structure of the sentences and most of the lexical (or vocabulary) items. Not only must the reader ‘know’ the grammar and vocabulary, but he must of course be able to recognize them when he reads them. In order to answer the comprehension questions he must also perform other operations. For example, he must first understand the question and, this may involve new grammatical structures and new vocabulary items. He must also ‘compose’ his answer again probably using a different grammatical structure though the lexical items may be the same as those in the passage or the question. All these operations need practice and above all a teaching method that incorporates or integrates not only vocabulary but also grammatical skills.

In the class it was further observed that the students seemed not to have been taught to discern relationships among words. This is another crucial problem concerning vocabulary, which the learners showed. It was evident from their work that they do not know antonyms or synonyms or words with similar meaning. Thus, in reading a passage, they often do not realize that two words have the same meaning or that the two words are opposites. Without understanding the relationships among words, it is hard to understand the passage. This is one area which the teachers seem not to have included in their integrated English language teaching method as prescribed by the K.I.E.

5.3. POOR READING SPEED

While administering the Cloze tests and also observing the students as they answered the reading comprehension tests and also in their lessons, it was observed that many of them spend too much time reading and quite often many of them do not complete
their assignments. This was especially evident in Kasok, Pemwai, Kapkawa and Kabartonjo schools. The students seemed to think that it is necessary to read carefully each and every word and to re-read sections and hopefully to understand everything in the text. This is a mistaken attitude because slow reading does not necessarily help to make the reading efficient. In fact it is believed (Ellis & Tomlinson 1980:126) that an increase in the speed of reading often leads to an increase in the level of understanding.

As was revealed in chapter four table 4b, a large percentage (63.6%) of the students do not read books on a regular basis. Similarly as shown in table 10 the library facilities are either poor or non-existent, thus the students lack the necessary facilities to read and to practise the skill. Inspite of this however the teachers ought to improvise and try to teach the students the skill of efficient reading. This is because a faster reading course builds up the students’ reading speed through practice. This is useful, however since reading is not a single unvarying process and the students should be taught to adapt various strategies when confronted with different reading texts. In this way they will hopefully be able to achieve efficiency in reading.

Efficiency in reading means adapting the manner of reading to the nature of the material and to the purpose of reading it. The students therefore should not be encouraged to read at a single uniform speed as already observed but to read as fast as the content and expression of the text allow and at a speed suited to the purpose of reading. The teaching methods used by the teachers whose classes were observed, were inadequate and this perhaps could explain for the students’ poor performance in the reading comprehension tests. This factor will be further discussed in section 5.5.0 below. In order to enhance the reading speed of the students the teachers should encourage regular speed reading practice so as to allow the learners to practise and to learn the skills. Indeed some of these skills can be adequately developed by the ‘guided tour’ approach where the students are taught, guided and encouraged to
practise against a planned language activity which comprises a variety of skills. Adequate reading speed is best developed by regular practice with a course-book or class readers. The K.I.E as described in chapter one has prescribed quite a number of books and these could be used.

Reading as a habit and reading for enjoyment cannot be developed through short reading passages alone, but should be among the objectives of the extensive reading programme which one would like to assume is an integral part of every well planned English syllabus.²

Several other researches³ have shown that a fast approach to reading i.e. high reading speed has several very marked advantages for the learner, for example:

1. Comprehension is higher
2. The main ideas can be isolated
3. The student is not held up by unknown vocabulary and can be trained to read unsimplified texts from the start
4. The fact of being able to read a ‘live’ text is a very great motivator
5. Confidence is built up, and
6. The text can subsequently be studied, completely or in part, in order to examine new words and expressions; these will be held together by the framework that has already been established.

From these advantages we can see that reading speed is very important to reading comprehension, and if the teachers could integrate both these skills together in their teaching, then the students’ overall reading efficiency would be enhanced. Reading

² See for example Timothy Lights’ ‘The reading Comprehension Passage and a Comprehensive reading Programme’ ELT XXIV, 2 1970.
³ Nicolas Ferguson while discussing Speed in Reading in ‘Some Aspects of the Reading Process’ ELT XXVIII, 1 1973, pp.29-34 describes the importance of teaching this and goes on to enumerate its value to the learner.
efficiency in the light of this may be defined as a function of reading comprehension and the speed of reading, usually measured in the number of words read per minute. The speed and comprehension rating is also capable of expressing all aspects of the students' reading performance. Thus it enables the teacher to identify needs and adopt remedial action. An expression of total performance also makes streaming possible. In this way the teacher would be able to plan lessons and prepare teaching materials specific to a particular stream (be it a stream of slow readers or fast readers).

Teachers cannot afford to ignore teaching reading speed while at the same time concentrate on teaching reading comprehension only. They should be treated equally because both of them are important. It has been the experience of reading specialists (Carrell et al 1988) that the student who reads slowly will have poor comprehension. Reading speed cannot be measured in any meaningful way without taking comprehension into account. In our observation of the teaching of reading in schools, it was noted in chapter four that teachers in Kasok, Pemwai, Kapkawa and Kabartonjo concentrate on teaching reading comprehension and even then the teaching was basically teacher-centred which gave little chance to the learners to practise the skill. Similarly efforts were not made to improve their reading speed.

Research in reading (Seliger 1972:48) indicates that there is a direct relationship between comprehension and the speed of reading. Thus it is desirable that the teachers should teach this in order to increase their reading speed, their comprehension ability and also, their enjoyment of reading in a second language.

From the data analysis in chapter four, we see that the teaching of reading comprehension was not effective nor was it wide enough to expose the students to the different kinds of reading skills. Efforts should have been made to help the students to be able to read fast when they need to, to skim, to look for required information, and so on – and also to be able to examine a complicated text when necessary and
understand it as fully as possible. It could also be argued that the reason why the students performed poorly in the tests is because they are slow readers and this has tended to hamper the learner’s bid to read and extract information in the passages.

These findings tend to fit into the pattern of results arrived at by other researchers in similar studies. For instance Yoshida & Kitao (1986) in Kitao (1995:155) found that Japanese students could read only 105 words per minute in a situation where they were asked to read fast, and when they did read at that rate, their comprehension was only 54%. The researchers speculated that many students believed that if they read slowly, they could answer comprehension questions better. This is a myth. In fact, if a reader reads too slowly, it is more difficult to relate the ideas in a passage, and it is more difficult to understand the passage. Short term memory does not retain information for long, and it is impossible to relate previous information with new information if the reader reads too slowly. Thus, reading slowly hinders comprehension.

5.4 LOW COMPREHENSION ABILITY

In table 16 of the data analysis, it was observed that on average apart from Kabarnet, Kapropita and Kituro, the average comprehension level of the learners in the sampled schools is low. Consequently, their ability to extract meaning, ideas or facts from the passage was poor. This means that the students have not been sufficiently taught and given opportunities to practise the skill.

This finding tends to support our first hypothesis in chapter three viz. the assumption that students who have not fully mastered the reading skill needed to decode or interpret function or content words, have difficulty in reading texts. Their difficulties are manifested by the low comprehension scores. What this means also is that the students have yet to master the ability to retain information and recall it when
information or the ideas expressed in a passage. Nor do they have the ability to select important points from a text. For instance in the class reading exercises which the students were asked to do, the researcher observed that the learners were not able to differentiate major facts and/or ideas from minor ones in their answers. Some of the questions in passages A, B, and C, (see Appendices 1, 5, & 9) required the learners to interpret information and ideas and also make deductions from what has been read. The students showed that they had difficulties answering these questions in their answers.

These reading difficulties could be improved if the teachers adopt creative and flexible methods in teaching reading. For example learners could be gradually encouraged to read faster while being tested as they do this. This would take care of their speed and accuracy. Retention of information as already mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, improves as a result of being tested on what they read, especially when parts of most tests consist of questions which cannot be answered unless they have remembered well what they have read. By the same token if the learners are encouraged to read with a purpose by asking them to take the trouble to define their reasons for reading before they begin to read every time, then they shall be able to achieve efficiency in reading. This also has the attendant effect of boosting their comprehension skills.

Similarly from the percentage error scores in passage C in table 17a, we note that the students have yet to master the skill of understanding the meaning of lexical items. The teachers should put more effort in this area so that the students are able to learn the skill and hence understand the denotative and connotative meanings of lexical items in the passage (i.e. they must understand what the items refer to and the emotional and attitudinal suggestions of the items). It is not necessary for the teacher to teach the learners to know every word in order to understand the text. The learner should be able to deduce the meanings of new words as used in the passage. The same can be said of grammatical meaning.
When teaching reading comprehension, the teachers tended to emphasize the students' ability to answer the comprehension questions correctly rather than “arming” them with the appropriate skills in order to perform these tasks correctly. One way of equipping the students with the skills is by teaching them the use of discourse in texts which includes, structural devices. The structural devices which students must learn and understand according to Ellis & Tomlinson (1980: 141) are:

1. Basic sentence structure of statements and questions.
2. Concept of reason, result, contrast conditions etc. as signalled by subordinators and co-ordinators.
3. Connectives like ‘on the other hand’, ‘moreover’ in addition, furthermore etc.
4. Structural devices which enable the writer to refer back to some previously mentioned item. For example ‘This’ in “The colonial government failed to build schools or send Africans abroad for education. This meant that when independence came there were few educated Africans.”

Once they have mastered the skill of deriving meaning from these grammatical structures the students will be able to answer the comprehension questions easily. Failure to understand the various structural signals in a text will result in a far more serious failure in understanding than will an inability to understand individual lexical items. Therefore the teachers should always concentrate on whether the student has demonstrated that he has understood the meaning rather than on correcting grammatical mistakes. Grammatical accuracy is however the main aim of the structural lesson and not comprehension lesson.

As described in section 5.1 it is not enough for the reader to understand each sentence in isolation. The student must be able to understand the reasoning sequence or logic that untie the sentences into a whole. He must therefore be able to relate and to deduce additional meaning from what is stated in the text. For example in passages A: questions 2,3,4,5,9, 11, & 12, passage B: questions 1,2,3, and Passage C: questions

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1, 4, 5, 6, 8, & 9 (see appendices 1, 5 & 9), the students were expected to infer meaning, extract facts, make a reasoned judgement and answer the questions correctly. Reasoning skills are often conceptual rather than linguistic. They do not always depend on how well the reader knows the language but on his capacity to see connections between ideas. Reasoning skills are vital in grasping the meaning of a text as a whole. These can be learned by constant practise and from our observation, the teachers from the sampled schools seemed not to have emphasized on these skills in their lessons.

As second language learners of English, the students should receive explicit strategy training in order to improve their reading skills: skills such as guessing the meaning of unknown words, identifying anaphoric reference, identifying the main idea and inference. The emphasis on guessing word meaning is supported by research into cognitive strategies which claim that a willingness to guess is characteristic of good learners and readers (see for example William & Moran (1989:218) Carrell, Pharis & Liberto (1989:647-678). Because of their deficiency in these strategies, it has been observed that syntactic processing accounted in large measure for the slow reading rate of L2 readers, (for detailed discussion on syntactic processing see Carrell, 1988). Thus it is recommended that classroom techniques that encourage readers to make syntactic guesses as a strategy for increasing reading speed should be used. This is in keeping with our earlier observation that the students' inability to infer meaning or derive facts from the passages is indicative of their poor reading skills and hence the above teaching strategies need to be used to enable the learners master the skills.

In the preceding pages we have discussed the reading problems of the students in the sampled schools as they emerged from the data analysis. These findings consistently point to the work of the teachers in the classrooms as hardly effective, nor are they adequate to impart skills to the students, more so reading skills which are necessary for them to read texts and answer questions correctly. Various researches done elsewhere were also looked at in order to shed more light on the subject. In the
following section, attempts will be made to discuss problems in the teaching process and other allied factors observed in the study which have contributed in part to the reading problems discussed in Section 5.4 above.

5.5 PROBLEMS IN THE TEACHING PROCESS

In any educational process, teaching is very important. It is through this activity that objectives are achieved such as the imparting of skills to the learners. There is always a close relationship between the teacher and the learner roles in any educational process. If these roles are clearly defined and each performs his/her duties well, then the objectives of that education programme can be realized. In general it might be said that teachers would be expected as a minimum part of their role to have adequate knowledge of their subject matter, to know something of how learners learn and develop, and to be able to devise appropriate learning/teaching experiences in the light of these two considerations. Learners on the other hand would be expected on their part to be interested learners, to develop the skills of listening to a teacher’s exposition of a topic and to acquire the skills of reading and understanding the subject matter as well as using these skills in their work (Wright 1987).

However in the absence of proper teaching, learning may not be achieved, no matter how highly motivated the learners may be. Proper teaching is usually realized by the use of good teaching methods. In section 5.5.1 below we shall look at these as used by the teachers in the sampled schools in relation to our study.

5.5.1 Teaching Methods

From our observation of the teaching of reading in the schools, it was noted that teachers to varying degrees may also be seen to be a factor in the poor performance of the students not only in reading but also in learning the English language in general. Their method of teaching it was observed was heavily teacher-centred and opportunities were not given to the students to participate in the learning process.
Regarding the methods of teaching language skills, it was noted and discussed in our observation that for the most part, most teachers use dull methods such as the reading of texts in the class and dwelling on one or the other lexical item. Besides the teachers give the meanings of words and the answers to the comprehension questions, instead of encouraging the learners to give and defend their answers with evidence from the text. Quite often it was observed that the majority of the teachers ‘tell’ rather than ‘teach’ the students the skills and little provision for practice is given to them. This in itself is a flaw in the teaching.

One way of motivating students is to give them frequent quizzes. These encourages them to keep up with the class and it also gives them concrete goals, (for discussion of how to motivate students see Kitao & Kitao 1995:278). Students could be given quizzes as frequently as possible after they have finished answering the questions; they could be asked to exchange papers and to grade each others’ answers. In this way, students are able to find out and also understand the correct answers and thus see how well they have done. Readings are most successful if there are meaningful activities related to the learners’ interests.

Skills can only be acquired through practice which is something teachers cannot do for the students. The students have got to do it for themselves, which means that the good teacher of language, even more than the teacher of other subjects should spend a great deal of his time listening, reading and not talking. Of course the learners will have to talk, read and write very much more under his guidance, if they are to make progress. Practice is vital and the students have got to do it. (Bright & McGregor 1970). The teacher must always give his students as much opportunity as possible for the correct practice of language skills and as little opportunity as possible to make mistakes.
In our observation, reading as a skill is not taught adequately and neither are opportunities given to the learners to practise the skill. Similarly the use of teaching aids, to assist learners was minimal. In the teacher’s questionnaire (see table 11), 69.7% indicated that they do not use teaching aids in their lessons. This means that the teachers do not prepare their lessons thoroughly and consequently the students are not taught effectively. If one, however, were to argue that perhaps they do not have the facilities to prepare these teaching aids, then one would be hard put to explain because the evidence points to the contrary. For example, in table 14 the same teachers by a large majority of 93.9% affirmed that they get administrative support, which means that whatever they need, be it instructional materials or otherwise is provided for by the school administration.

In consequence to the use of teacher-centred methods of teaching, and the lack of support materials such as teaching aids for teaching, the teachers fail to teach language skills and instead concentrate on ‘rote’ learning. In their teaching, they make students learn from their mistakes instead of learning their mistakes. This was particularly prevalent in the reading comprehension lessons in many of the schools. It was observed that the teacher marks and returns the students’ reading comprehension assignments in the class by calling out the answers for the learners to note and moves on to the next passage. The learners were not given a chance to discuss nor were they explained why one answer was wrong and the other correct.

Similarly in vocabulary lessons the same thing was observed, the teachers asked the students to give the meaning of certain words in the passage. Here it was observed that quite often teachers mark and give the meaning of the words themselves. The ability to infer is a skill that can only be acquired by practice and this has been confirmed by many scholars (see for example Yorkey 1970, Bright & Mcgregor 1970) who warn that “everytime we tell a student what a word means we are robbing him of a chance to practise this skill.” The teachers seemed not to follow this canon
and in many instances even in the other skills, they tended to dominate the classes and the students were reduced to mere passive listeners.

From their work, the teachers seemed to be parochial in the coverage of the syllabus. Instead of concentrating on teaching the learners skills that have to do with grasping useful reading skills, grammatical concepts etc. that would provide situations where they are able to employ heuristic methods of language learning, and where they are able to ‘find out’ for themselves various grammatical, hidden facts, ideas, inference or derivation of meaning and other aspects of language, they did not seem to do this, as the results have shown.

For example in table 7, in their rating of the most important and useful skill for the students, the teachers rated writing and speaking as most important and useful to the students. Similarly when asked about the skills they prefer to teach most, many of them indicated that they preferred teaching speaking/listening skills and also examination skills than reading (see table 8 and 12). This clearly shows that there is a problem in their teaching, because one would have expected the teachers to place much more emphasis on reading because without this the learners will have difficulty writing the examination. One can understand the fact that the current thinking among curriculum planners and innovators in Kenya (KIE) may be on emphasizing the communicative approach to language teaching, but even then some form of balance should be arrived at to take care of the other equally important skills like reading. Could this problem be emanating from the syllabus? This is looked at in the next section.

5.5.2 The Integrated English Language Syllabus

In chapter four, table 5 we noted that the majority of the teachers (75.8%) affirmed that the aims and objectives of the syllabus were clear, and that it served as a good guide in their teaching. In such circumstances one would have expected that their
teaching therefore would have been efficient and effective. However in table 6 we see that the syllabus and even the textbooks according to the teachers, emphasize the developing of students’ ability to pass examinations and also the communicative aspects of the language such as the learning of English for use in everyday life. Reading as a skill is not given due emphasis. Thus this could explain in part the reasons why the students’ reading scores are so slow.

In the observation on the teaching of the learners in the class and the comments of the teachers, most of them complained that the curriculum was too broad and that they are expected not only to teach English but also other subjects like history, geography, social ethics etc. and hence they stated that they have little or no time to prepare. Similarly they complained that the five lessons per week allocated to the teaching of both English and Literature are extremely inadequate to teach the two subjects.

Indeed the question of the 8:4:4 education system in general and the integrated English syllabus in particular remains a contentious issue in Kenya to date even among teachers and the public (see Wayianzuvo 1996:26, Bosire 1996, Maina 1997:11 and Kamotho 1996:3). The original idea behind the policy change (see chapter one) was laudable but its implementation seems to have left a lot to be desired as is shown by the student performance in the data analysis in chapter four. As a result, classroom teachers are in a quandary especially with the integration of language and literature. The question they keep asking is, how is English language integrated with literature in the context of the KIE’s interpretation of the syllabus? Reading, writing and speaking will always be the top priority to anyone trying to master English or any other language.

Indeed while recognising the weaknesses of the education system as “grossly flawed and unsustainable in its current form” and also, while accepting the demands from the public and the members of Parliament for a review of the education system, President Moi has formed a Commission of inquiry to look into ways and means of improving it to suit the aspirations of the Kenyan people now and in the future. (See Weekly Review 18 May, 1998, p.7 and Kenya Times, 10 August 1998, p.10).
At the early stages of language learning, the students need to be extensively exposed to conditions and situations that stimulate interest in the subject. Having learned the a, b, c of the language in primary school, the students are expected to acquaint themselves with the most common forms of reading and writing in secondary schools. These include comprehension skills, those related to facts, information, ideas, arguments and creative expression of human experiences (Composition) and summary.

The third category is the so-called utility writing, which though treated conventionally as an exercise in composition, really exposes the students to various forms of writing—letters, reports, minutes etc. All these components form what is traditionally called English language. On the other hand, there is literature in English. The integrated syllabus presupposes that literature does not have a soul of its own. Indeed from the syllabus it seems that the KIE treats it as a subordinate partner in the integrated syllabus.

English is the tool required to operate effectively in the field of literature and it may be true to say that one cannot teach or appreciate literary works without the language. In that case the proponents of the integrated syllabus at the KIE may be right when they state that ‘literature is the study of language in context.’ However this may not be realised because in table 6, it was shown that the same syllabus emphasizes the students’ ability to pass examinations and to communicate. How then are they expected to study and learn literature when they are not equipped with the reading skill which is vital in this regard?

If we look at the facts on the ground, we find that as a subject, literature is treated or taught as distinct from English language. At the University, as described in chapter one, it is a distinct discipline and has its own department. English language is taught
in the department of linguistics and languages. Literature is the study of society but not quite in the same way as sociology. Language is not its main concern. Basically literary works are vehicles through which the writers present their view of life, ideology and philosophy. This is regardless of whether it is in the form of a novel, a play, a short story or a poem. It would be odd, for instance, to argue that philosophy is the study of language in context.

The syllabus allocates three lessons for English and two for literature a week. (All the five lessons were originally for English language only). This is not enough for effective teaching of any literary work. The analysis of a literary piece of work goes much deeper, it is more critical, not just from a language (stylistic) perspective, but more from the issues that the writer is discussing. The key words here are *issues* and *ideas*. This particular point seems to be recognised by the Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC 1987,1989) as evidenced by their mode of marking examination scripts.

A student whose work is full of grammatical errors can still get a good score if the points required are there. Grammar is not credited in literature and the paper is marked the same way as for any other subject. Even in the classroom, the situation is not much different. A close look at the integrated syllabus shows that there are indeed two different subjects involved. Teachers are advised by the KIE to treat English language and literature separately and yet in the syllabus they are thought to complement each other, and more critical of all they are expected to share the little time allocated to them.

As for the role of literature in language teaching, although much has been said with regard to the inclusion and/or exclusion of literature in language teaching—each presenting the case with equal conviction, it has been established (Legenhausen, 1991:60; Bright & McGregor 1970) that the study of literature is of great importance
in language learning. If used appropriately in teaching, the learners can benefit in many ways from it. For example, since it is the effort of constructing meaning which provides the student with the important tool of the ability to interpret a discourse, it can be used as 'a way of exploring, understanding, and reflecting on the strategies by which readers generate meanings in the act of reading.'

The stance against the inclusion of literature in language teaching perhaps may lose its force in the face of the now established fact by Legenhausen that, 'whatever the pitfalls involved, the use of literature can best serve the function of familiarizing the student with the strategies involved in the construction of meaning'. By the same token it is argued that literature can best help the student in understanding the complex interplay between cognitive framework of the reader and the devices employed by the author in anticipating and guiding the orientation of the reader that is involved in any interactive effort. However this is only possible if sufficient time is allocated in the timetable for effective teaching.

From our observation, many teachers preferred teaching literature to teaching language. This means that English language skills such as reading are not taught as adequately as required. Also it means that the time that would have been used to teach reading is used for literature. If the idea of integrating English language and literature was to enable learners ‘shoot two birds with one stone’ (i.e. learn reading skills while at the same time appreciate literature), this was not apparent in the schools. If literature is actually used to teach skills in the English language, it can be rewarding. For example students can learn to see in literary texts the significance of the writer’s linguistic and rhetorical choices in classroom discussions of specific linguistic and rhetorical clues in the text, and thereby, develop their ability to talk and write more clearly and cogently about them (Akyel & Yalcin 1990:179). In such a context the teacher can do various things: during group discussions for example, teachers can take notes on areas of misunderstanding in student’s reading or inference and assumptions
on the text. They can give the necessary background information related to the author and the text to help students understand why the writer expresses himself or herself as he or she does. Teachers can also clarify the underlying meaning of text by devising teacher-guided group discussions on the inaccurate assumptions and inferences of students which may have been noted previously. In these ways the teacher can bridge the gap between the students' content schemata and the underlying meaning of text (Carrell 1984: 47). If what is prescribed in the KIE integrated syllabus is diligently followed, both the literary and language competence of the students can be improved provided that as argued elsewhere the classroom activities are primarily student-centred, which unfortunately was lacking.

The idea of integrating these subjects may have been well intentioned but in view of the fact that it is not working, the KIE should perhaps consider the possibility of reverting to the old system which offered English language and literature as two separate subjects with specific hours allocated to each separately. In this way the teaching of both subjects will hopefully be effective. After all this will not affect the complementary aspect of both subjects on each other if separated. Let us now look at teacher training as a factor in the teaching of reading.

5.5.3 Professional Training of Teachers.

In any educational programme the training of the school teachers is very crucial. If the teachers are trained, then they are likely to teach well if given support. In table 1 in chapter four we noted that the majority of the teachers have Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) degrees and specialised in the teaching of both English language and literature. In tables 7 and 8 of the data analysis, the teachers rated writing and speaking as the most important and useful skills for the students. Regarding the importance of the abilities (See table 8), they indicated that the ability to converse in English and to study and pass examinations are most important. Here reading is not considered as most important and yet a student cannot pass his examination if he cannot read
properly. This perhaps could show that in their training the teachers may not have been trained to treat each skill equally and to strive to teach each skill so that no skill is neglected.

In the observation it was also noted that many teachers showed preference and confidence in the teaching of literature than in English language teaching (see chapter four section 4.28). This may mean that either the training of these teachers particularly in the teaching of the methods of teaching English, may not be thorough or comprehensive or that, more emphasis is being placed in the teaching of literature. Tables 7 and 8 clearly show that the perception of the teachers with regard to the importance of the various skills in the English language is patently flawed and this has a bearing on their training.

From the analysis it would appear that English language is not given its due position even in the teacher training colleges because the teachers from our observation, seemed to be avoiding the teaching of certain skills. This shows that they are not adequately trained and that they have not mastered the subject content which is crucial. When arguing for classroom competence and attitudes towards pedagogical principles of beginning teachers, Preece (1994: 295-299) emphasizes “Pedagogical knowledge and subject mastery” as essential if teachers have to be competent in the classroom. Krashen (1985) while discussing the role of the teacher in imparting language skills notes that ‘the teacher is both the primary source of input and the model for the learner.’ Unlike in the L1 learning situation where the acquisition is natural and the learner is exposed to a rich form and variety of the language twenty four hours a day, the L2 learner is limited both in terms of the quantity and quality of raw linguistic data available to him and in terms of the amount of time he has for learning the language. In essence therefore, what the L2 learner is able to get from the language classroom and school environment constitutes the primary data available, while there is little or no reinforcement outside of school. In situations like this the
role of the language teacher is therefore crucial.

The English language teacher needs to be properly trained and constantly re-trained in in-service workshops, seminars, conferences etc. He must know the theoretical aspects of the English language, the rules governing language and its teaching, and be able to apply them and impart his knowledge to his students as creatively and as interestingly as possible.

Indeed studies that have dealt with teacher effectiveness (See Avalos 1980:45-54) have found that adequately trained teachers 'exhibited less of an authoritarian mode of teaching, better professional attitudes and relationships and better lesson preparations.' Such was reported as the case in India, Iraq and Sierra Leone especially. From these studies, the effects of properly trained teachers upon pupil achievement in both primary and secondary schools was also noted as significant, especially in the mastery of the subject content, and in the use of classroom techniques characterised particularly as role playing, using modern aids and inquiry procedures.

Therefore from our data analysis, the training of the teachers seems not to be up to the mark if we go by their responses to the questionnaires and their teaching performance in the lessons observed. From their responses, training appears to be an important area of concern, and questions regarding its contents and possible combinations with pre- and in-service training are equally of great importance if efficient and effective teachers for the schools are to be produced. Issues such as practical experience during teacher training and greater emphasis on student-teaching practice over other aspects of academic training have to be considered. If this is done, then perhaps teachers who are well versed in their teaching subjects and also well equipped with an assortment of teaching skills for their use in the classroom to enable the students master the language skills easily, would be produced by the teacher training colleges. While
comprehensive training for the teachers is important, follow-up programmes such as in-service training are equally important in keeping the teacher abreast with the recent developments in pedagogy, education and in their specialised subject areas. This is discussed in the next section.

5.5.4 In-Service Training.\(^5\)

Although the teaching experience of the English language teachers who participated in the study ranged between two years (33.3%) and five years (24.2%), 51.5% indicated that they attend seminars, workshops and in-service once a year (See table 14). As indicated in the previous chapter, a year is too long and if in-service training, seminars or workshops are to have any impact in the teaching, these should be held as frequently as possible. It is clear therefore that on-the-job training programmes which would improve the quality of the teachers through exposure to recent developments, research and new teaching approaches in their field were conspicuously lacking.

In a fast developing field such as the teaching of English as a second language, experience in terms of years of service alone cannot be relied upon to produce effective results. Teachers need to be constantly kept abreast of developments in the field. Otherwise, outdated and unproductive teaching methods and classroom practices will be prevalently used in the schools, which does not augur well for effective learning. In a situation like the one observed where there is a dearth of circulation and exchange of ideas, research findings and developments, the teacher is denied an opportunity to polish his skills and also gain additional knowledge which would benefit not only the teachers but also the students.

\(^5\) In-service here will be used as defined by Bolam (1982) as “those education and training activities engaged in by primary and secondary school teachers and principals, following their initial professional certification, and intended mainly or exclusively to improve their professional knowledge and skills and attitudes in order that they can educate children more effectively.”
Educationists (see Aggarwal, 1988:72, Bolam 1982:3), indeed recognise the importance of in-service or continuing education of teachers. Aggarwal for example argued that ‘teacher education is a continuous process and its pre-service and in-service component inseparable’. In line with this perspective the third regional conference of Ministers of Education of Asian Countries observed inter-alia that “As long as education is needed and knowledge about education and children continues to increase, the teacher has always something to learn. Learning to teach is a life long pursuit and as for teacher’s education it must be a continuous process (Aggarwal op. cit.: 73).

While noting that experience alone is not sufficient for a teacher to be effective when teaching in school, the Government of India for example, (Aggarwal 1988), while encouraging in-service training puts succinctly that ‘we must realize that experience needs to be supplemented by experiment before reaching its fullness and that a teacher, to keep alive and fresh should become a learner from time to time. Constant outpouring needs constant intaking, practice must be re-inforced by theory and the old must be constantly tested by the new.’ That in-service is essential for the teachers is therefore not in doubt.

What has emerged from our study is that the teachers have not been provided with opportunities to attend in-service courses or attend seminars by the school administration. In-service training should be organised in the schools. It is here that learning and teaching take place, curricula and techniques are developed, and needs and deficiencies revealed (Bolam 1982). Indeed every school should regard the continued training of its teachers as an essential part of its task for which all members of staff share responsibility. An active school is constantly reviewing and reassessing its effectiveness, and is ready to consider new methods, new form of organisation (eg. Streaming, Time-tabling etc) and new ways of dealing with the problems that arise. It
will set aside time to explore these questions, as far as it can within its own resources, by arranging for discussion, study, seminars with visiting teachers, education officers etc, and visits to other institutions to exchange ideas.

It will also give time and attention to the introduction of new members of staff, not only those in the first year of teaching but all those who are new to the school. School headmasters, heads of departments and other senior teachers should be specially concerned to assess the needs both of their schools and of teachers on their staff and to encourage teachers to take the opportunities offered, for example, outside the school for in-service education and training, whether this involves part time day release, attendance at full time courses, workshops, seminars or participation in vacation, weekend or evening activities. Such fora provide the teacher with new ideas, skills etc. for use in the classroom. In this way good results are achieved.

Similarly in table 15 we see that the schools are inspected mostly once a year by the Ministry of Education inspectors. This means that if a teacher in some school may have been using the wrong teaching methods, by the time the inspectors come around to advise and correct it, it would be too late. In table 5 also it was observed that though most of the teachers rate the syllabus as good, there seems to be no follow-up on the part of the ministry of education officials to check if the teachers are experiencing any problem in its implementation. Frequent communication and contact between the curriculum planners/designers, and the teachers who implement it in the schools is extremely important. It is through this contact that they are able to gauge the strengths and weaknesses of the syllabus and thus correct it in time. Seminars, workshops or in-service training are therefore very essential. Unfortunately in our study the teachers seemed not to be exposed to them as frequently as is required.
5.5.5 Teachers’ Workload

From the teachers’ responses, 45.5% indicated that their class size ranged between 40-50 students, while 30.3% indicated that they had classes of less than 39 students (see table 4a). However, if we look at table 2 we find that their workload is between 20-25 lessons a week excluding other subjects which they are expected to teach. We can see therefore that the teachers are really over-worked.

Although the amount of time spent on preparing lesson notes, quizzes, marking and/or correcting students’ work, and other supervision duties, were not obtained, it is very likely that if these were quantified, the English language teachers would require more than even their colleagues in other subjects to perform these roles. After all, there are more students to each teacher of English language than that of any other subject, and perhaps as a subject, English language would require more class work too. One thing is clear however, that the English language teacher spends more of the time allocated every week in the classroom, and there is little time left for other important aspects of his duties as a language teacher.

For instance duties like giving attention to each student that may have specific language problems, marking the students’ work, or spending more time in remedial work with a view to assisting them learn the language skills. It was observed that the teachers were so overburdened with teaching tasks and other disciplinary or administrative tasks that they had no time for the cumbersome task of preparing materials for teaching or setting up word games, quizzes, problematic situations, tests etc for the students to practise and learn.

In pursuit of the same theme, it has been argued that the curriculum is overloaded and thus has hampered the teaching and learning in the schools. Indeed while presenting a paper in the First East African women writers Symposium in Kisumu (Kenya), author
Muhiuddin Likhaani (1996) blames the education system. She asserts that:

"The heavy workload in the 8:4:4 system of education is to blame for lack of a reading culture in the country. The situation is made worse by the older generation. People even those who graduated from the university no longer read and the 8:4:4 has made our children rehearse for examinations even on Sundays."

She argued that even at book exhibitions, people were no longer interested in books for general reading but instead went for classroom textbooks.

From these findings therefore we see that there seems to be a great pressure on the English language teachers, both in terms of the number of students they have to teach, and the number of classroom contact hours they have. Given these conditions the efficiency of the English language teachers is greatly reduced and they can hardly be expected to perform their roles adequately unless their overall condition in the workplace is improved.

5.5.6 Teacher Attitude

In section 5.5.5. it was noted and discussed that the teachers were overloaded with too many lessons and also overworked for they have to teach many students as was shown by the huge class sizes. In our observation in chapter four, it was indicated that the teachers had poor terms and conditions of service, thus their morale was low. From our findings it emerged that a great number of the teachers did not feel happy nor were they satisfied with their job as it was emphatically manifested in their successful strike for better terms and conditions of service described in chapter four.

While discussing the role of motivation in language learning, Allwright (1977: 267) suggests thirteen potential sources of motivation. Among these are the language teacher, parents, siblings, classmates and other school children. There is no doubt that the teacher has a major responsibility to motivate his students to learn. But when the teacher himself is not motivated, as the results of our study have shown, it is only natural to expect that he will not himself be a source of motivation for his students.
After all, no one can give others what he himself does not have. Oladejo (1990) in his study of teacher effectiveness in Nigeria arrived at similar conclusions. Lack of happiness and of job satisfaction are certainly related to the observed responses of the majority of the teachers who felt they could not motivate their students to learn the English language skills. They saw teaching as a difficult and little valued profession, expressing strongly the feeling that it is just a means of earning a living in the absence of an alternative (see chapter four section 4.27). Thus their morale was observed to be low and this seems to have impacted negatively in their class effectiveness. This is further compounded by the inadequate instructional infrastructure in the schools. This is discussed in the next section.

5.5.7 Lack of Instructional Materials

In chapter two, the importance of school facilities in student achievement was discussed. In our study, it was observed that the schools that did not have sufficient books, novels, plays, magazines etc. to supplement their classwork, performed poorly. These schools were Kasok, Pemwai, Kapkawa and Kabartonjo. However it was also observed that some schools for example Kituro mixed secondary school improvised by using newspapers and magazines to teach reading (See Section 4.24) and this has tended to improve their students' reading and test performance. Kabarnet and Kapropita comparatively performed better than the rest of the schools due in part to their having class libraries, although not well stocked with sufficient books.

Indeed the importance of instructional materials such as libraries, classrooms, desks, chairs etc in education have been recognised by the Government for many years. However little has been done to assist the schools and quite often, as was discussed in chapter one, the burden has been passed on to the parents. For example, when the Government introduced the 8:4:4 system of education, it set up a committee to draw up policy guidelines on school libraries (Kamotho 1996:3). The essence of the effort was to ensure that there were enough teaching/reading materials in the schools as the
8.4:4 system was demanding, and required a lot of resources. In its findings, the Committee noted that school libraries are 'very important' and emphasized on the 'updating of library equipment, diversifying book collection and engagement of qualified staff.' However, the Committee did not tackle issues related to funding and the integration of the library in the curriculum. To date the establishment and running of school libraries has remained under-developed with inadequate books as was noted in the data analysis (table 10). Similarly the absence of the use of teaching aids (table 11) is indicative of a flaw in the teaching approach adopted by the schools' administration to this important area.

In the data analysis it also emerged that the education system is too oriented towards examinations and rarely rewards other abilities outside good performance in the examinations. Many of the teachers spend too much time drilling the students to pass the examinations rather than teaching them to master the reading skills.

In view of the importance placed on examinations, the Government ought to assist fund these schools more, to equip and stock their libraries. In the schools in our study, due to lack of Government funding, they rely on donations or money paid for books by parents. In some instances parents are asked to buy at least one novel to be brought to school by their sons or daughters. In this way it is hoped that the library would be stocked gradually.

One other method observed was that to make the cost of providing book and non-book material more manageable, there is now a trend where communities around the schools are starting collective libraries or resource centres. The facility is accessible to students and teachers from a given area as long as they are registered users. Others form self-help groups to raise money to buy desks, chairs and even to build classrooms for the students' use. This is in recognition of the importance of these facilities in the education of their children. This is indeed a good thing that needs
governments' additional support if the teacher is to perform well in his work. The teacher alone cannot provide everything, he is not a sufficient source of information, especially when we consider the fact that he is dealing with large class sizes as was seen in table 2. Hence he is not able to provide for every individual student, given also the fact that the time allocated for teaching English is not adequate. Whatever information is received from the teacher, has to a great extent, to be augmented by reading on the part of the student. This contributes not only to his/her accumulation of knowledge, but also to the improvement of what has been taught. Instructional facilities are thus very essential.

Therefore the finding from this study lends credence to the argument that instructional materials are integral to academic achievement in that it supplements what is taught in class thus enabling students in our case to perfect their reading skills.

To conclude then, in this chapter we have noted and discussed the reading problems that emerged from the study. We noted that the reading abilities of the learners were low and that they could not read and answer questions correctly in the given comprehension passages. Their reading speed was also found to be low and this has tended to hamper their reading abilities. The students' ability to infer meaning from text was also found to be very low and so was their overall language proficiency level as their compositions or essays revealed.

These problems were attributed to the teaching methods used by the teachers, and other allied factors such as inadequate instructional materials and teacher attitudes. It was observed and discussed that a teacher-centred approach to teaching reading was not good enough and that it does not impart the vital skills necessary for any learner to read efficiently and successfully. In the discussion it was suggested that the teachers should adopt a more student-oriented approach to teaching reading comprehension in particular, and reading skills in general. In this way it was indicated that the students
would be able to practise the reading skills and in the process master the skill. It was also noted that the teacher should always bear in mind that when he gives a comprehension lesson, and encourages class discussion before and after the comprehension task, he is helping to develop the students' basic reading skills. The comprehension lessons provide the learners with concentrated practice in using these basic reading skills—thus in their general reading, these skills would be utilised.

The teachers' workload and morale were also discussed and we noted that these tended to inhibit their efficiency and effectiveness. Similarly the integration of literature and English in the syllabus was found to have caused some serious pedagogical problems and suggestions were made to correct them.

Finally the training of teachers was looked at in view of their performance in the schools, and suggestions were made to revamp their effectiveness. As a collateral to this, it was also noted that such extension services as in-service, seminars or workshops etc were not utilised in enabling teachers to be exposed to the latest state of the art in education, teaching or in their specific teaching subjects. These, it was discussed may have been some of the factors that could have contributed to the poor reading skills of the learners, as it denied teachers opportunities to learn new techniques of teaching which could have had a positive impact on the students in the learning of the English language skills.