CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Reading is probably the most important skill one would need in order to function successfully in this highly technological world, be it in education, industry or commerce. In education, for example, students are expected to master the skill in order to read lengthy arguments. If one reads a text inaccurately then one will fail to understand some of the ideas and information contained therein. If one reads slowly one will have to spend too much time reading the assignments, thus other work may suffer, (Yorkey 1970:91) and consequently, one may fail in the examination.

Srivastava (1995:210) while looking at the teaching of reading notes that recent systematic research in the field of education has convincingly shown a positive nexus between education and language, on the one hand, and between language engineering and societal development, on the other. He observes further that scholars have gone to the extent of saying that behind every educational failure of an individual or a social group there lies some kind of language failure.

Indeed while recognizing the importance of reading in the educational process, the Open University (1975:5) argues that if we accept that reading is a major element in the educational process, then the continuous development of efficient and effective reading is clearly the concern of teachers of children of all ages and in all areas of curriculum. It further suggests that teachers of different age groups and with different responsibilities will also have rather different areas of special concern. Thus the teacher of older pupils may be mostly concerned with developing higher levels of comprehension and study
skills, while the teacher of infants, or the remedial teacher will include the development of a basic reading vocabulary as a concern.

In pursuit of the same theme Alderson and Urquhart (eds.) (1984:1) argue that in many parts of the world a reading knowledge of a foreign language is often important to academic studies, professional success, and personal development. This is particularly true of English as so much professional, technical and scientific literature is published in English today. In fact it is frequently the case that the ability to read in English is required of students by subject departments and they often assess it by a test of reading comprehension. A reading ability is often all that is needed by learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) as well as of other foreign languages. Yet despite this specific need for the foreign language, it is the common experience at least of English Language Teaching (ELT) pedagogues, that most students fail to read adequately in the foreign language. Very frequently, students reading in a foreign language read considerably slower than they reportedly read in their first language.

Results of research also support the view that reading in a language which is not the learner's first language is a source of considerable difficulty. For example McNamara (1970) quoted in Alderson et al (eds.) (1984) found that the Irish-English bilingual students he studied were reading in their weaker language (Irish) at a slower rate and with lower comprehension than students reading in their first language. In the study, it was found that subjects have difficulty understanding text despite knowing the words and syntactic structures, i.e. grammar and vocabulary which seemed to be the main factor in reading performance in the second language than in the first language. According to the author, the problem seems to be whether reading in a foreign language is 'simply' a problem of knowing the words and the grammar of the language, or whether there are other causes of the difficulties learners experience.
Other researches however, have shown that with proper reading skills, a learner is not only able to study successfully but also able to improve his/her language proficiency (Nuttal C. 1982:20). McNeil in Krashen (1984:5) in his research has also shown that people skilled in reading ... 'showed significantly greater writing fluency and wrote with greater complexity and that they also gained in self esteem, improved in attitudes towards reading and were superior in reading comprehension'.

What then are the skills that contribute to effective reading? In the following pages, we will look at the techniques, strategies, purposes of reading and the relationship between reading and achievement. But before we do this, perhaps it would be appropriate to answer the question what is reading or what are the psychological processes that take place in a reader while reading?

2.1 DEFINITION: READING - A PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESS

Scholars of first and second language learning have defined reading in various ways, some similar, others dissimilar. A few of these definitions are hereby looked at. While discussing the teaching of reading, Pattanayak (1979) in Bhat (1990:18) describes reading as the sharing of experience between the writer and the reader, and involves, critical judgement on the part of the latter. Berg (1971:10), on the other hand, looks at reading as a multifaceted process. He states that reading has many factors, first, reading he claims is a visual process. It is the ability to see symbols clearly with the eyes. It is a perceptual process, perception meaning that our thought processes are able to take these symbols and to invest them with meaning, and that it is an experiential process because without experience there can be no perception, for without experience the mind will be unable to invest meaning to the symbols that we see. According to Berg reading comes about when
we take meaning to the printed page, not first the act of taking meaning from the printed page.

Hudson (1982:3) however views reading as an active process of Prediction, Selection and Configuration in which the reader brings to bear not only knowledge of the language, but also internal concepts of the processing of language information encoded in graphic symbols, past experiential background and general conceptual background. While a message is "encoded" in print the reader is not required to "break" the code. Rather, Hudson argues that the reader ‘Samples the message in order to confirm or reject a hypothesis already formed.’

While acknowledging that reading is dependent on graphic input, Muriel Saville-Troike (1979:25) limits the term to mean reconstructing the meaning of the writer, to processing the semantic content. She argues that just as in listening, reading involves the use of syntactic information in determining meaning and that both listeners and readers should process words in groups rather than as single lexical items.

Goodman (1970:260) in MacKay et al (1979:48) looks at reading from a psycholinguistic perspective and summarizes it thus:

Reading is a selective process. It involves partial use of available minimum language cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectation. As this partial information is processed tentative decisions are made to be confirmed or rejected or refined as reading progresses ...

In pursuit of the same theme, Goodman (1971) in Alderson and Urquhart (1984:3) views the reading process as ‘involving the reader ‘guided’ by his/her knowledge of the native language, picking up graphic cues and relating them to syntactic, semantic and phonological cues’. According to Goodman, the reading process of the reader is aided by
his/her knowledge of the native language.

However, with non-native learners in mind, some scholars claim that the lack of sufficient knowledge of the target language serves as a big hindrance to a successful process. Yorio (1971) in Alderson and Urquhart (1984) for example, claims that the reading problems of foreign language learners are due largely to imperfect knowledge of the language and to native interference in the reading process. In his view reading involves four factors:

Knowledge of the language, ability to predict or guess in order to make the correct choices, ability to remember the previous cues and ability to make the necessary associations between the different cues that have been selected: (Yorio, in Alderson and Urquhart, 1984:3)

These scholars seem to agree that reading is a thinking process concerned with the comprehension of ideas. To them what a reader brings to reading is as important as the text being read. Twinning J.E. (1985:3). Indeed while defining reading as the act of responding to printed symbols so that the meaning is created, Staiger (1973) argues further that it has long since been recognized, however, that getting meaning from the printed page is too limited a definition of reading. Bringing meaning to the printed page indicates more accurately the reciprocal process between the printed symbols and the mind of the reader. Constructing meaning is a vital prerequisite of all reading. But reading is also a form of thinking, problem-solving or reasoning, which involves analyzing and discriminating, fudging, evaluating and synthesizing. All these mental processes are founded on past experiences, so that the present context of the reading matter must be scrutinized in light of the reader's own experience, Jenkinson (1973:45).

This is what has come to be regarded according to Srivastava (1995:112-113) as the interactive model of information processing which tries to view reading (text comprehension) in terms of interaction inviting both text-based processes and
knowledge-based processes. The interaction model, Srivastava argues, assumes that reading skills at all levels of language organization are interactively available and, further, that information gained at any level can compensate for deficiencies at any other level. The interactive model as conceived by Rumelhart (1977) in Srivastava (1995:112) and the Simplified interactive parallel processing involved in Reading Comprehension are given in figure (i) and (ii) below to graphically demonstrate the processes involved in interactive reading.

Fig (i) Interactive model of reading

[Diagram showing the interactive model of reading with nodes for Syntactical Knowledge, Semantic Knowledge, Orthographic Knowledge, Lexical Knowledge, and Feature extraction device connected to Pattern synthesizer.]

Fig (ii) A Simplified Interactive Parallel Processing Sketch

[Diagram showing the simplified interactive parallel processing with Graphic features, Letters, Words, Phrases, Sentences, Local cohesion, Paragraph structuring, Topic of discourse, Inferencing, and World knowledge connected to Reading.]
A student’s previous experience and his/her previous knowledge of a subject helps him/her decide how to read a text and how to think about and comprehend the information. What the reader knows helps him/her understand what he/she reads. To think of reading as a process also means that the purpose of reading is important. This is because different purposes require different reading processes.

Similarly according to Carrell P. et al (1988:12) ‘reading is a receptive language process’. These authors further explain that ‘it (reading) is a psycholinguistic process with a linguistic surface representation encoded by a writer and ends with meaning which the reader constructs’. In their explanation they state that ‘there is an essential interaction between language and thought in reading’. The writer encodes thought as language and the reader decodes language to thought. In this way comprehension takes place.

Lunzer and Gardner (1979:7) however observe that comprehension is not merely the outcome of a phonetic transcription of a written language, rather it is present at least in embryo, as reading proceeds. They argue that ‘meanings occur in the mind of the reader before words are decoded’.

Meaning according to Carrell et al (1988) is the end product of receptive language, both listening and reading, but that meaning is also the context in which reading takes on reality. To them listeners/readers, bring meaning to any communication and conduct themselves as seekers of meaning.

Though reading is a process in which information is dealt with and meaning constructed continuously as indicated earlier on, Carrell et al (1988) report that reading is a series of cycles as shown in the diagram below. According to her, readers employ the cycles more or less sequentially with focus on meaning as they move through a text or story, and as
the readers move through the cycles of reading, they employ five processes with the brain as the organ of information processing. This is illustrated as follows:

1. Recognition - Initiation: here the brain recognizes a graphic display in the visual field as written language and initiates reading.
2. Prediction: here the brain anticipates and predicts as it seeks order and significance in sensory inputs.
3. Confirmation: If the brain predicts, it must also seek to verify the predictions.
4. Correction: the brain reprocesses when it finds inconsistencies or its predictions are disconfirmed.
5. Termination: the brain terminates the reading when the reading task is completed.

These processes, according to the authors, have intrinsic sequence and that predication
precedes confirmation which precedes correction. Yet the same information to them may be used to confirm a prior prediction and to make a new one: (Carrell P. et al 1988:15).

Similarly Darkin in Morrow K. (1980:10) suggest that there are three elements involved in reading, that is 'recognition of visual input, structuring of the input into meaningful stretches and interpretation of the input'. Darkin goes on to recognize that these reading processes usually occur virtually simultaneously and that the relationships between them are complex, the three being interdependent on one another.

From the above discussions, we note that they all assume that reading is an active process, that the reader while reading, forms a preliminary expectation about the material, then selects the fewest, most productive cues necessary to confirm or reject that expectation. Clarke (1979:48) calls this the sampling process in which the reader takes advantage of his knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, discourse and the real world. Here we see therefore that skill in reading depends on precise coordination of a number of special skills. With the teaching of reading in mind, Clarke suggests that providing students with practice in these skills and helping them develop consistent attack strategies, should be viewed as a twofold phenomenon involving process-comprehending and product-comprehension. What has been discussed so far seems to indicate that any definition of the reading process, therefore, must include interpretation and evaluation of meaning as well as construction of meaning.

From the definitions above, what comes out clearly is that scholars seem to agree that reading is to do with reader, text and meaning. Moran & Williams (1993:65) puts it succinctly that the most widely accepted current review of reading in both first and second language is that, it is an ‘interactive’ process. Whereby, low-level ‘bottom-up’ processes involving the physical text on the page, such as letter and word recognition,
interact with higher-level ‘top-down’ processes such as prior knowledge type, or topic. According to this model, deficiencies at one level may be compensated for by proficiencies at another. For example, knowledge of text topic might be an adequate clue to the meaning of an unknown word; conversely, sounding out a word might help a learner to recognize it. Thus, Goodman’s highly influential view of reading as a “psycholinguistic guessing game”, in which readers predict meaning on the basis of their prior syntactic and semantic knowledge, Moran & Williams argue, ‘is no longer regarded as sufficient, although it is a necessary and enriching perspective. That readers attend to what is on the page, as well as what is in their minds is now more widely acknowledged’.

In this section we have looked at reading and the psychological processes. We have also seen that for a reader to succeed in his/her reading process, knowledge of the target language and a previous knowledge of the subject he/she is reading are important. In the next section we will look at the purposes of reading.

2.1.1 Reading Purposes

People read books and other print materials for various reasons. Some people read books for entertainment while others read for language improvement since language is seen as a natural by-product of reading. It is the most important single skill in study. (Maddox H. 1980:98).

In foreign language learning, reading is used to teach the language itself, develop the student’s ability to extract information from a text, and to get the learner to use the knowledge he/she already has in order to acquire messages.

With language teaching in mind, Nuttall (1982) comments that the focus of interest in the reading lesson is both language and content. In reading, the aim is to equip students with
skills to become independent readers.

Reading among individuals however differs from one to the other. Books or articles, journals etc. may vary in difficulty and in clarity of presentation, and what is difficult for some to read may be easy for others. The rate of reading depends on the familiarity of the material and on the purpose of reading. (Maddox H. 1980).

The purpose of reading serves as a directional and motivating influence to the reader. It has been found that versatile readers adjust their reading rate to their purposes and to the nature and difficulty of the material being read. (Stauffer R.G. 1980:190). Since good reading is purposeful reading, the purpose of reading often determines the most appropriate technique of reading. In the following section we will discuss the teaching of reading.

2.1.2 The Teaching of Reading

Guided by the need to develop instructional methods that can equip learners with skills that can enable them to be successful readers, scholars and experts in pedagogy have researched and have come up with suggestions for teachers. Clarke (1979:49) for example argues that our responsibility as reading teachers goes beyond presenting our students with passages followed by comprehension questions. He suggests that ‘we must construct reading tasks which reward students as much for trying as for getting the correct answer’.

Krashen and Terrell (1983:131), however, while acknowledging the wide range of pedagogical options that currently exist in reading instruction, call for an ‘interventionist approach’ to the teaching of reading and to do this they recommend the use of appropriate texts. They argue that:
... a text is appropriate for a reader if it meets two criteria: first, it must be at an appropriate level of complexity and second, the reader has to find it interesting. Complexity in a text can have several sources: vocabulary, syntax and semantics and all these may determine the comprehensibility of a text.

Margaret Clark (1975:92) on the other hand, while looking at the research trends in language and reading, argues that if one approach the teaching of reading from an analysis of the skills and knowledge the student has already acquired. And of the additional knowledge and skills required for fluent reading, “one may be led to the conclusion that the present approaches to the initial teaching of reading miss some of the crucial features required for the development of such a skill”. She observes that too much emphasis, ‘may be placed on training skills such as precise visual scanning of words’ while the important features may indeed be discrimination and anticipation rather than identification.

Significant also within the area of language, readiness, and the initial teaching of reading, is the analysis of the extent to which a child’s success in learning to read may be influenced. Not only by his competence in the language of the reading materials but also the language of reading instruction employed by the teacher. In recognition of this fact, the Open University (1979:20) has emphasized that:

it is particularly important for those who are concerned with the teaching of reading to have a thorough understanding of the foundations on which they are building-foundations which may have been laid well or badly in the early years.

They urge teachers to be well informed of the demands that are to be made on reading in the later years so that they can lay a foundation that is broad enough to support the latter learning. Failure to develop all aspects of reading from the early stages results in the development of a reader who is not efficient in the skill.
Widdowson (1979:117-121) however looks at it from a wider perspective. He observes that the problem is that students, and especially students in developing countries who have received several years of formal English teaching, frequently remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language and to understand its use, in normal communication, whether in the spoken or written mode. The problem, he notes, has come into prominence in recent years as a result of an enormous increase in educational opportunity. This has led to large numbers of students in developing countries entering universities and technical institutions taking up subjects which can only be satisfactorily studied if students are able to read textbooks in English efficiently. He opines and suggests, that the root of the problem is to be found in the approach to ‘the teaching of English itself’. And that to do a good job, ‘one has to continually make compromises and adjust one’s approach to the requirements of students and the exigencies of the teaching situation’.

Ronald MacKay and Alan Mountford (1979:121) seem to be in agreement with Widdowson’s assertion. With the use of reading texts in mind, they suggest that the teacher while teaching the skill of reading comprehension should avoid selecting advanced texts, which may confound the students. Sood’s (1991:197) research seems to point to this direction. His research findings showed that instructional training in the nature of written discourse as a dialogue between the writer and his prospective reader(s) would facilitate and improve reading comprehension with particular reference to expository texts.

While acknowledging the importance of the teaching of reading, in the larger quest to enable learners learn the English language, Munby (1979:142), Lunzer and Gardner (eds.) (1979:15), Srivastava (1995:115) Finnocchiaro and Bonono (1973:119) Sareen (1991:1-56) etc. further emphasize the teaching of subskills such as intensive and
extensive reading, text attack and word attack skills. They also emphasize on the importance of teaching reading comprehension, without which they argue that the teaching of reading will not be complete. Let us now look at what these subskills entail. First we will discuss the two types of reading.

2.1.3 Types of Reading

Most of the skills and strategies students need to develop are taught by studying short texts in detail (Nuttal 1982). However others have been developed with the use of longer texts and even complete books.

The use of short texts has been referred to as intensive reading (sometimes called reading for accuracy) and the use of longer texts and books often referred to as extensive reading or reading for fluency.

2.1.4 Intensive Reading

The characteristics of intensive reading as a strategy is that 'exercises consisting of short passages are used as a basis for activity to promote reading' (Brumfit in Kinsella V. 1978:175) Brumfit further states that 'reading ability will develop naturally if the activity is insisted on, that the main role of reading passages is to provide exposure of the language'.

While describing intensive reading, Nuttal C. (1982:23) also states that it involves approaching the text under close guidance of the teacher or under the guidance of a task which forces the student to pay great attention to the text.' The aim of intensive reading is to arrive at an understanding of the text: not only of what it means but also of how the meaning is produced. It is intended primarily to train students in reading strategies which is hoped would help them in their studies.
Bright and McGregor (1970:6) in their book indicate that 'their own experience of being trained, and in training students and pupils in intensive reading techniques, has convinced them that improvement in the comprehension of the text studied, always takes place. To them an intensive study of one text helps in understanding others better'.

### 2.1.5 Extensive Reading

This skill involves the reading of many books. It has been found that extensive reading benefits the learner greatly. It improves the learner's fluency and increases his/her reading speed. (Nuttal C. 1982:168).

With extensive reading, a learner's knowledge is widened and this is essential in his/her other studies. Brumfit in Kinsella V. (1978:177) states that 'extensive reading plays a part in study, library work and also in the study of literature.'

It helps students discern relationships between the various parts of a longer text, the contribution made by each to the plot or argument, the accumulating evidence of the writer's point of view and so on. The skill contributes a part in moulding learners to become competent readers not merely of brief extracts but of books.

Students are generally destined for further training or studies, and therefore some training in, for example, the accurate location of data in reference books will ultimately be very valuable. They can develop a taste for literature in a wider sense if they are given the opportunity and encouragement to follow an extensive reading programme. Extensive

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1 In his discussion on 'English for academic Purposes' Jordan (1989) argues that a good example of teaching the intensive skill is the SQ3R Method. This is a good technique for reading textbooks. It consists of Survey, Question, Read, Recall, Revise (or Review) and is intended for reading texts which need to be thoroughly known. *Language Teaching Journal, July, 1989 Vol. 22 No. 3 p.157.*
reading enables students to develop a sense of self-reliance – the awareness that they can investigate a subject by themselves. Indeed extensive reading is sometimes called reading for fluency because the students’ overall skills in English are improved through extensive practice in discussing with one another, as well as with the teacher the tasks or exercises that have been set.

While most specialists, for example Nuttal (1982) favour balanced intensive plus extensive programmes, the implication of some recent research (William and Moran 1989:225) is that extensive reading should receive more attention. Not only because of the general acceptance that one becomes a good reader through reading, but also because extensive reading is claimed to be an effective means of improving writing, enlarging vocabulary or generally improving language.

Krashen & Terrel (1983:131) for example in their ‘input hypothesis’ suggest that ‘comprehensible input gained in reading, however, may contribute to a general language competence that underlies both spoken and written performance’. Some support for this hypothesis is provided by the only study which has explicitly examined the role of extensive reading on the development of proficiency in a second language. Elley and Mangubhai (1983) in Hafiz and Tudor (1989:5) in a two year study conducted in a number of Fijian schools, examined the effects of an extensive reading programme (using simplified reading materials in English, the second language) on language-skill development of an experimental population of nearly four hundred students. Results at the end of the first year of the study showed that subjects receiving extensive reading had made a substantial improvement in receptive skills (reading and word recognition). By the end of the second year of the study, however, this improvement had extended to all aspects of the subjects’ L2 abilities, including both oral and written production, thus lending credence to the efficacy of extensive reading in improving language proficiency.
Intensive reading also plays an important role in language proficiency; what makes it different from extensive reading is the quantity of reading material the learners are expected to use when learning. In their elaborate discussion, Hafiz & Tudor (1989:4-10) state that the difference between extensive and intensive reading ‘lies firstly in the amount of L2 material which learners are required to read, and secondly in the degree of intensity with which this material is studied and explicitly exploited for language-learning purposes’. In intensive reading activities, learners are in the main exposed to relatively short texts which are used either to exemplify specific aspects of the lexical, syntactic or discoursal system of the L2, or to provide the basis for targeting reading strategy practice. The goal of extensive reading, on the other hand, is to ‘flood’ learners with large quantities of L2 input with few or possibly no specific tasks to perform on this material. The pedagogical value attributed to extensive reading is based on the assumption that exposing learners to large quantities of meaningful and interesting L2 material will in the long run, produce a beneficial effect on the learners' command of the L2.

However there is no absolute divide between intensive and extensive reading, the same material or text for example can usefully be employed for training students in both. The two can be integrated and each complements the other.

In the next section we will look at the skills involved in reading.
2.2 READING SKILLS

For a student to read a text successfully he/she must be equipped with reading skills. A reading skill according to Williams E. and Moran C. (1989:223) may be defined as ‘an acquired ability which has been automatised and operates largely subconsciously’. Nuttal C. (1982:199) on the other hand sees skills and strategies as synonymous, and that they can be used interchangeably.

What then are these skills? According to Nuttal (1982) the student would be better off if he/she is versed with word-attack skills such as phonics, which enables the reader to identify in its written form a word he/she already knows in its spoken form. This is discussed in detail in the next section.

2.2.1 Word-attack Skills

When the student is conversant with a word-attack skill like structural clues, Nuttal (1982:66) believes, it would aid the learner in his/her reading. She argues:

> the use of structural clues to establish not exactly the meaning, but at least the type (grammatical category) of word represented by the new item ... tells the student the kind of meaning to look for and thus a first step on the road to understanding is achieved.

The inference of meaning from context is another skill. Here the student does not rely on the dictionary but relies on the information from the text he/she is reading to deduce the meaning of a certain word. To do this properly one needs training and practice. With reference to this skill Nuttall (1982:70) observes that ‘training students to infer meaning from context gives them a powerful aid to comprehension and will ultimately greatly

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2 Although the focus in this section is on reading, it is seldom possible in practice to separate reading from other skills, for example writing or speaking. This is clearly demonstrated in many of the published teaching or practice materials for reading which are usually very closely related to, or integrated with writing activities.
speed up their reading ... it challenges the students to make use of their intelligence'.

Other scholars, William E. and Moran C. (1989:223), argue however that the reader's purpose and the text are important in determining the skill to be employed by the reader. They state that:

'...the reading style is motivated by the reader's purpose and mediated by the accessibility of the text to the reader'.

Cognitive psychologists Newell and Simon (1922) quoted in Hendry A. (1982:98) also found in their research that reading strategies are selected and implemented by readers according to their purpose or goal.

In reference to reading, Lunzer and Gardner (1979:26), Nuttal C. (1982:34) and Ulijn J.M. (1984:261) have distinguished several reading skills, namely, scanning, skimming, receptive and reflective reading.

Scanning, according to Nuttal (1982), involves the reader glancing rapidly through a text either to search for a specific piece of information or to get an initial impression of whether a text is suitable for a given purpose.

Similarly, according to Nuttal (1982), skimming means glancing rapidly through a text to determine its gist. In these skills the learner is trained to read the general drift of a text (skimming), and to narrow his/her reading down to some specific information. For example, a date, a number, a place etc. (scanning) and to keep track of various words in a semantic field similar to the topic in which he/she is interested. (Ulijn 1984).

Skimming and scanning are therefore useful skills. They do not remove or replace the need for careful reading, but they enable the reader to select the texts or the portions of a
text that are worth spending time on. While in receptive reading the student reads for thorough comprehension, in responsive reading however, the student reads beyond thorough comprehension, for interpretation or reaction to the message in the text, or in study for instance, Ulijn (1984:261).

Brown and Hirst, quoted in Williams and Moran (1989), while sympathetic to the view of reading as a unified process rather than as a set of discrete skills, point out that the latter view is highly productive. In that, it provides many ideas for setting tasks and exercises especially in pedagogy.

Other scholars, for example Nuttal (1982:34), do not attach so much importance to the differences in the skill. For illustration, she says, that the distinction between scanning and skimming is not particularly important because in both, the reader is not reading in the normal sense of the word. But is forcing his/her eye over the print at a rate which permits him/her to take in only perhaps the paragraphs, chapter headings, subtitles and so on'.

The division of the skills is perhaps artificial. What is important is the success of the learner in his/her reading. We now move on to text-attack skills.

2.2.2 Text-Attack Skills

For a student to grasp a text he/she must understand the message in the text. It is argued, (see Bright and McGregor 1970, Nuttal 1982), that understanding a text involves understanding different kinds of meanings at the same time. For example, Nuttal (1982:80) argues that understanding a text ‘means understanding the conceptual meaning, that is the meaning a word can have on its own, and prepositional meaning, that is the meaning a sentence can have’. It also means understanding the contextual and pragmatic
meaning of a sentence or text.

Students may encounter problems in understanding a text especially in features like concepts, vocabulary and cohesive devices in discourse. The problems that arise with the reader or student may concern the signification of sentences. For example, the reader who does not know what a pronoun refers to or who cannot supply the full version of an elliptical sentence will not be able to establish its signification.

Similarly discourse markers such as ‘however’, ‘although’, ‘furthermore’, ‘namely’, and so on are useful features which a reader needs to grasp. Since they are useful signals, they help a careful reader to establish the signification.

In order to help students overcome these problems, Nuttal (1982:84) suggests that students ‘should be trained in text attack skills by the use of exercises for students to interpret references, elliptical expressions, substitution and lexical cohesion and also to infer meanings’. There has been a debate on the issue of meaning. For example, Alderson in Beard R. and Hartley J. (1984:225) challenges the assumption that texts have predictable meanings which can be extracted only if the reader is sufficiently skilful.

Widdowson, quoted in Beard and Hartley (1984), however suggests that a text has potential for meaning which will vary from reader to reader depending upon a multitude of factors.

Despite these divergent views however, tasks, exercises and other comprehension questions designed to develop reading skills still continue to be used in language teaching. The tasks and exercises as Beard and Hartley (1984) puts ‘are based on the notion of correct meaning’. In a bid to assist readers extract meaning easily from a text,
diagrams are also used. This will be discussed in the next section.

2.2.3 The use of Non-Text Information

The use of non-text information, especially the non-verbal information to convey meaning, has been found to be useful to readers, see Chapman and Czerniewska (1978:203), Chepkuto (1989). Non-verbal information such as illustrations, diagrams, graphs, pie charts and even maps help students in learning to read effectively. They are of great assistance to the reader in interpreting the text or concepts, for further discussion on this see Barras R. (1978).

For example, an obscure section of a text may be clarified by studying a diagram or the significance of a diagram may be clear from the text. The non-verbal information is therefore of immense value to the reader as it enables him/her to draw conclusions by simply analyzing the diagrams or graphs etc. Nuttal (1982: 52) while recommending their use in language teaching, states that:

the ability to interpret diagrams etc. is largely independent of language so that skills in interpretation can readily be transferred from first language (L1) to foreign language (FL) contexts and while teaching to encourage this transfer is to readily stress the positive contribution that the student brings to the task of making sense of the language.

However, non-verbal information not only helps the learner in learning a new language, but it also aids in the reading and understanding of other subjects. Such illustrations like diagrams, charts, etc. are an aid to precise description. They are effective in conveying a message and for this reason skills in analyzing and interpreting these illustrations would help the reader a great deal.

In view of their value to the student's reading, these skills are therefore important and students need to be well versed in them. However, the mastery of these skills depends
among other factors on how effective the teacher is in his teaching.

2.2.4 Teacher Effectiveness

That reading is one of the most important tools of communication leading to learning and to the enrichment of human lives is not in doubt. Although there are many students who are not learning to read as well as they should, there are many who are reaching new heights of reading achievement, not only in literature but in all content subjects. The learner's success in reading has been attributed among other factors to the teacher.

Research results seem to support parental intuition that children learn more from some teachers than from others (see Harbison and Hanushek 1992). But why are some teachers particularly effective?

In a study done in Belize by Mullens et al (1996) on 'the contribution of training and subject matter knowledge to teaching effectiveness', it was found that students in Belize learn more Mathematics when their teachers have a strong command of the subject. It was also found that the teachers' level of schooling was a useful secondary predictor of teaching effectiveness, as students of teachers with higher levels of formal schooling generally learn more than students of teachers with less education.

Teacher subject matter competence was also found to be the best predictor of student mathematical achievement in rural Brazil. The sex of the teacher has also been found to be a factor in academic achievement among school learners. For example, the recent International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) study of reading achievement (Fuller et al 1994:350) found that, in a subset of countries, including Singapore, Trinidad and Tobago, girls performed at higher levels when their teacher also was female. In the same study it was revealed that in the United States women who teach
tend to feel more efficacious in their work when their school Principal is also a woman.

However, no similar classroom observation was detected in studies in Africa except that specific teaching practices were found to be related 'to achievement levels in Nigeria. But that the magnitude of these effects is modest relative to the pupils’ basic factors such as time in school and opportunity to learn' (Fuller et al op.cit).

Similarly while looking at family effects in reading achievement, Fuller, Singer and Keily (1992) in Fuller et al (1994:353) found that parenting practices related to school achievement vary widely among households within Southern African societies. The IEA study of reading achievement cited above for instance, found that, in several countries, children’s propensity to read at home, spend time on homework, and borrow library books was related to school achievement. A household survey of rural Botswana villages found that the mothers’ literary levels and reading practices were highly related to their daughter’s level of school attainment.

From these studies we note that the teacher’s sex, level of education and his mastery of the subject and also time and family background do indeed matter. They significantly influence the performance of the learners in the subject taught. Other studies have also shown that out-of-school and in-school factors also have a bearing on the students’ performance. In the following sections we will look at these studies.

2.2.5 Socio-Economic Status (SES) and Achievement

Many studies have been undertaken in an effort to identify the main determinants of academic achievement. Some have analyzed a variety of school based factors, while others have examined the balance between school based and out of school factors (see Johnstone and Jiyono 1983). Common to a large number of studies of the latter kind is
the consistent finding that the home background is an important determinant of level of achievement. What is not clearly established is just how important the home background factors are. Their degree of influence relative to the influence of the school factors appears to differ between developed and developing countries.

Studies conducted in developing countries show a different pattern. Heyneman (1980) after his review of previous findings is much more positive in rejecting the belief that the strongest influence on achievement always comes from home background, not from the school. He concludes:

It is simply not true that the determinants of school achievement are basically the same in both developing and developed countries.

Postlethwaite (1980) agrees and, on the basis of his experience with the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) Project as a whole, claims “there is only a weak relationship between home background and school achievement in developing countries”.

Similarly Johnstone and Jiyono (1983) in their study of out-of-school factors and educational achievement in Indonesia, found that if a young person lives in a place where encouragement and support are provided for study. Where people in the home actively participate to support learning. And where facilities are available, even to a small degree, to enable the child to read a book or just a magazine or newspaper outside of school. Or to listen to a radio, then that child is in a better position to raise his or her level of academic attainment.

However, in the study on ‘why impoverished children do well in Ugandan schools’, Heyneman (1979) found that the socio-economic status had little influence on the academic performance of the primary school children. The reason he advanced for this
phenomenon was that the school children of the wealthy 'are no more self-confident than are the school children of the impoverished. The data seemed to indicate that academic advantage is not an inevitable condition of economic privilege'. Let us now look at the school facilities and their impact on learning.

### 2.2.6 School Facilities and Pupils' Academic Achievement

Heyneman (1980) and other researchers have stressed the importance of school facilities such as books, furniture and classrooms for the quality of education and for academic achievement. It is argued that one of the reasons why pupils’ performance in Science, Mathematics and languages in developing countries is inferior to the performance of pupils in the West can be attributed to a lack of adequate provision of school facilities. On the other hand, in the context of the West, it has been contested that such provision has very little impact on academic achievement (see Coleman 1966, Jencks et al 1972). In the view of these researchers, what contributes to pupils’ achievement in the context of the West are “the characteristics of the entering students”.

In their study of ‘School Facilities and Pupils’ Academic Achievement’ in Botswana, Mwamwenda and Mwamwenda (1987) found that ‘pupils from schools with enough books performed significantly better in their final examination than pupils from schools without enough books’. Similarly statistical analyses showed that pupils who belonged to schools with enough classrooms performed significantly better than pupils who did not have enough classrooms. There seems to be overwhelming evidence therefore in favour of a positive relationship between academic achievement and the availability of classrooms and reading materials.

These researches were however carried out among primary school pupils and it is in view of this that our study tries to examine whether the same obtains among the Kenyan
secondary school students. It tries to investigate their reading problems in the English language. Other variables such as the availability of reading materials, school facilities etc. will also be looked at.

In the preceding pages, the teaching of reading, teacher effectiveness, the socio-economic factors and the facilities in schools were discussed as factors that influence the academic achievement of the learners. In the next section we look at the place of reading in achievement.

2.2.7 Reading and Achievement

Paul Witty in Berg (1971:25) did one of the earliest scientific studies on rapid reading. He asked the students to read any easy reading material in thirty minutes a day. They were to read as rapidly as they could and to make a summary after every reading. The students were encouraged to read extensively in different subjects. After one semester, results in testing showed that the students had increased their rate of reading by fifty per cent. The programme was continued in the second semester and students showed even greater improvements. This and good many other studies since 1930 have shown that one of the best ways of improving reading is simply doing the very thing – reading.

With the reader texts as a specific area of focus, Bhatia (1988:65) conducted experiments on their effects on learners' performance. He reported that the subjects performed better on cloze tests based on texts from familiar subject areas than those from unfamiliar subject areas. These findings have several implications for reading courses in language education. The author argues that firstly, they favour the use of reading materials specifically related to the specialist areas in the teaching and testing of reading in ELT courses and secondly, the findings strongly recommended a renewed interest in the teaching of vocabulary, particularly specialist lexis.
Ulijn (1978) and Ulijn and Kempen (1976) in Alderson et al (1984:12) however argue that poor foreign language reading comprehension is not due to insufficient knowledge of grammar, but to lack of conceptual knowledge, the meanings of words and subject knowledge. To them content words rather than function words are important. From their research they conclude that:

Under normal conditions reading comprehension is little dependent on a syntactic analysis of text's sentences ... that second language reading comprehension is possible without mastery of the contrasting parts of the second language's syntax. Usually, the reader's conceptual knowledge will compensate for the lack of knowledge about linguistic contrasts between L₁ and L₂ ... (p.499).

For any reader and, particularly students, to understand content in the diverse subjects taught in school, they must be good readers and also adept in using the English language to comprehend, analyze, interpret, synthesize, compare and contrast the information before them. They must understand what instructions and questions are expected of them. All these depend on two things: their language ability and reading ability.

Cripper and Dodd (1984) in a study done in Tanzania showed that students who were competent in English, the language of instruction, tended to perform equally well in other academic subjects taught in the language. Thorndike (1973) also in his study of Reading Comprehension in fifteen countries found reading as a determiner of achievement in the subject matter skills.

In a study done by Campbell and Quorro (1987) on the reading abilities in English of primary school pupils in Tanzania, it was found that students did not have the necessary skills needed to cope with their studies and hence, the failure rate was high in all the subjects taught in English. In this study it was not established whether pupils could not read with ease because they were deficient in English or whether they had simply never
acquired the reading skills, even in their national language - Kiswahili, to enable them transfer these to English language tasks. At the same time the tests given in these tests were mainly cloze type and did not perhaps test in-depth comprehension and reading skills.

In their quest to study the relationship between reading ability and language proficiency, Alderson, Bastien and Madrazo (1977) quoted in Carrell et al (1988:263) in a study of Mexican subjects reading in both their native Spanish and in English, found a significant correlation between proficiency in English and reading comprehension of a text in English. This finding led them to conclude that language competence was the best predictor of reading success in a second language.

Other researches (Devine 1988:264) suggest that low language competence may hinder the L2 reader in yet another significant way by restricting reading speed. Cohen et al (1979) in Carrell (1988) for example, found that ESL (English as a Second Language) readers often took up to six times as long as native readers to complete a text. Presumably at least some of that time was spent trying to process difficult syntax. Indeed, the readers in his study evidenced inability to process syntactic cues critical to text comprehension. This is because reading time spent on cloze decoding is more often than not, reading time misspent.3

While making a review of the several researches investigating the relationship between general language proficiency and L2 reading ability, Devine (1988) concludes:

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3 With specific interest in the role of the schema theory in Reading and Achievement, Anderson et al (1977) and Anderson and Freebody (1983b) in their studies quoted in Williams and Moran (1989) found that the interpretations of an ambiguous passage depended on the background knowledge and experience of the reader. It was also found to be more significant than vocabulary difficulty in the comprehension of texts. The study also showed that activating the schemata before reading, improved the students’ comprehension and recall. *Language Teaching Journal*, Oct., 1989 Vol. 22 No. 4 p. 218.
1. First, success in reading in a second language is related to the level of proficiency in the language; the higher the levels (to a point), the better chances that a reader will successfully comprehend a text.

2. Second, knowledge of syntax enhances L2 reading ability. The research according to her seems to suggest that poor second language reading is in part the result of the failure to manipulate the syntactic features of the target language. Nuttal (1982), Bright and McGregor (1970) also argue in this vein and they seem to agree with Devine's suggestion that the slow reading rate of L2 readers with the problems that rate creates for comprehension, can be traced to low general competence in the second language. While acknowledging that there is a lot that is not understood about reading, Nuttal however affirms that there are indicators that show some relationship between reading ability and language proficiency. Indeed Bright and McGregor (1970) state that where there is little reading, there is also little learning. These are crucial factors that do inhibit excellence in academic work.

In Kenya several studies (see Wanga 1986, Wegesa 1985 and Khamala 1980) have been conducted but on the lower stages of schooling. For example, Khamala (1980) carried out a survey on the reading habits of Nairobi primary and lower secondary school children. In this study it was found that the pupils had poor reading habits.

Wegesa (1985) on the other hand did a survey on teacher perception of reading. He argued that the teacher concept of reading may be one of the factors that determine the approaches to planning and instruction. The subjects in the study consisted of thirty two (32) secondary school teachers of English in Bungoma district in Kenya. From the study he had the following findings:
1. that teachers, irrespective of their level of training, had only a vague concept of reading.
2. that as a result of the above they themselves approached reading with a blurred understanding and not in a clear systematic methodology.
3. that they could not isolate and train pupils in individual reading skills as they themselves were not aware of them.

Thus from these findings we see that much concern is raised on whether the second language learner, indeed the reader, is getting adequate training in reading skills. Williams & Moran (1989:220) argue that although this concern has been evident even in the research literature, the evidence from published material suggests that it has proved difficult to incorporate all aspects of research findings into material for second or foreign language learner readers.

In their survey of reading in a foreign language, they further argue that ‘the common sense notion of linguistically difficult texts demand a higher degree of linguistic competence from the reader’. This is supported by Alderson (1984:19) who talks of a “threshold level” of linguistic competence, which will vary according to the demands of the text. But below which the reader cannot engage meaningfully with the text. Such views are in line with Cummins’ work (Cummins & Swain 1986) in bilingual education. Cummins hypothesizes that a threshold level of language competence is a prerequisite for significant academic development, which would obviously involve reading, and further, that this level would be different from that required from non-academic interpersonal communication presumably of a largely spoken nature. Clarke (1988) likewise speaks of a language ceiling, which if it is too low, will restrict a reader’s ability to interact with text, although Hudson (1988) suggests that the effect of low language proficiency may be partly offset by the reader’s ability to activate appropriate background knowledge.
From these researches about the academic performance of students in general, it would appear that inspite of complaints raised by the various people discussed in the introduction no one really knows where the problem emanates from, especially with respect to the higher classes of secondary school. Secondly, the studies also tend to point a quizzical finger on the teaching of English.

Since studies done in Kenya on the subject focused on primary and lower secondary schools, there is a need to look at the reading problems in the higher classes of secondary school. This is therefore the gap that the study aims to fill.

In this chapter, attempts have been made to review literature related to the study. In our discussion, we noted that inspite of the variations in the definition of reading most scholars agree that for a successful reading, what a reader brings to a text is as important as what the text conveys. That successful reading is an act of creation, with the reader creating meaning through interaction with the text. We also noted that for a reader to be proficient in reading, he/she must master the reading skills or strategies. This means that the language teachers must be creative and effective in teaching the learners these skills. In the chapter we also looked at the role of reading in academic achievement, various researches were cited which indicated that reading does indeed play an important role in learner achievement. In studies reviewed, the past research from the Third World showed that the school-related factors have stronger effects on students' achievement than do family background factors (Heyneman 1976, 1982, 1983). This finding contrasts sharply with evidence from industrialized countries, where family background characteristics explain substantially larger proportions of variations in educational achievement. This has led to the optimistic inference that Third World schools are more effective than are schools in industrialized countries, both in raising achievement and in providing routes
for social mobility (Lockheed et al 1989:239). Indeed Heyneman and Loxley (1982:19) in their study argue emphatically that despite the current ambiguity in many high-income countries as to whether the impact of school quality on academic achievement makes "no difference", no such ambiguity exists in low income countries. The fact is that when data on school and teacher characteristics are allowed to express the full measure of impact in their country of origin, these characteristics in low income countries can explain between two to three times the amount of achievement variance than in high income countries. And that the poorer the country is in economic terms, the greater is the impact on achievement depending on school quality and teachers.