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ESL/EFL Students Lack the Skills to Cope with Reading Comprehension Tests

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Abstract

English is a very important school subject for Israeli students. Knowledge of English paves the way to academic studies and higher earning jobs. Getting high marks in English as a second and foreign language reading comprehension tests means success in the core subject. Students are anxious to get high scores.

Testing is not dangerous. Yet, many students cannot perform well under testing conditions. ESL/EFL students feel anxious when taking reading comprehension tests. The problem is that students in grade nine lack the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests. They do not have the tools to perform well in taking reading tests.

This action research project studied the reasons for the anxiety students feel and ways of helping them deal with it so that they can succeed in raising their academic performance in ESL/EFL reading comprehension tests.

Students learned to apply test taking and reading techniques to prepare them for reading comprehension tests. Reading and test taking skills provided ESL/EFL students with the tools to cope with reading comprehension tests. After applying reading strategies and relaxation exercises, students scored higher on their reading comprehension tests.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Problem Statement

The problem was that English as a second and foreign language students in grade nine lacked the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests. Students did not have the tools to achieve high scores in reading comprehension tests. They did not have effective reading strategies to guide them on their reading comprehension tests.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the causes of this problem and provide a workable curriculum program for grade nine students on the skills they lacked and improve student scores on reading comprehension tests within a particular junior high school setting. ESL/EFL learners found reading for information easy in their first language but more difficult in a second or foreign language. Reading comprehension tests caused anxiety and a sense of failure for students who did not have the skills to cope with the tests. Reading in a second language was not easy but taking tests made it even more difficult.

Reading comprehension tests make up over 60% of the overall final mark of English in the national "Bagrut" test. Students take the test at the end of high school. ESL/EFL students lack the skills to cope with reading and taking a test in a foreign language. They display symptoms of anxiety and score poorly on their reading comprehension tests. The aim of the study was to develop a curriculum program to improve students' reading and test taking skills.

Description of the Community

The population in the district has been experiencing a rapid transition from an agriculture-based community to an urban community. Only 10% of the population still works on the farmland. The other 90% work in the surrounding cities. The schools in the district used to have specialized curriculum that included agriculture as a core subject. The agricultural school district administration is in the process of merging with the city districts. Each rural school district will join the nearest city for its new urban district administration.

There are approximately 10,000 students in the rural district administration. There are 3000 students studying in 4 comprehensive junior and high school buildings under the jurisdiction of the regional municipal council. One of the schools is a religious boarding school. Each of the regional schools has both a junior high and a high school building. The council employs about half of its 600 teachers. The Ministry of Education pays for the other 300 posts.

There has been a transition from the cities to the area. Many families have moved away from the nearby towns in pursuit of better living conditions and educational opportunities for their children. The area resembles suburbia since most of the people commute to the cities. Very few families work the farmland.

The socio-economic situation is excellent for most families who invest money in after school activities and private tutoring for their children in English and mathematics. Most parents pay additional fees for extra curriculum activities organized by the regional council after and during school hours. Parents participate in many after school events organized by the school buildings.

The school district focuses on academic excellence in ESL/EFL reading comprehension programs for all students. One of the schools uses an online English website to facilitate student

reading (Snunit, 2004). The Ministry of Education conducts standardized testing in grades 8 and 12. All the schools in the district prepare their students for these examinations. The results are very high for the district when compared to other districts in the country.

English (ESL/EFL) and mathematics are the two most prestigious subjects in school. Many students take extra tutoring in these throughout the year. Academic achievements and grades are top priority for most families in the district. Success in school for many parents correlates with high grades in English. There is parental pressure on students to get high marks in ESL/EFL on the final national "Bagrut" examination at the end of grade 12.

In order to meet the standards of the national "Bagrut" exam in ESL/EFL, the Ministry of Education rural school district has started adding reading comprehension tests to the schools' curriculum program to prepare students for their final national ESL/EFL exams. Practicing reading comprehension tests may be a partial solution to improving students' marks in the final exam. Students may need reading and test skills to benefit from these drill, and practice tests.

The community views the national ESL/EFL "Bagrut" examination as an indicator of success in school and life. On the English section of the "Bagrut" exam, 60% consists of reading tests while the remaining 40% includes writing, speaking, and listening. English is compulsory at every university and community college in the country. High marks in English guarantee acceptance to higher schools of learning and better paying jobs.

English has a high status for parents who are anxious for their children to get into universities. Parents openly express their concern about English as an important subject in school. Parental pressure on students to get high marks in their ESL/EFL "Bagrut" scores is very high. ESL/EFL starts in elementary school. Usually it begins in grade 4 but in some schools, it starts in grade 1. There is a trend to learn English before elementary school. Some parents send

their children to special ESL/EFL private nursery schools and kindergartens so that their children will succeed in learning English from an early age. The community believes that the English language is a good investment in their children's future.

Description of Work Setting

The research project took place at a junior high and high school located in this suburban community. The student population of the district consisted of approximately 1500 students. The cultural make-up of the schools was approximately 60% of European origin, 39% of Eastern origin, and 1% of Ethiopian origin. There were no special education classes in ESL/EFL although the school had diagnosed 30% of the student population as learning disabled. There were two physically handicapped students.

One of the schools was religious. The school had a junior and high school building. The religious school's high school had a live-in boarding school housing facility. Some of the junior high school students also resided in the boarding school.

The schools divided classes (grades 7 to grade 12) into 3 levels of ESL/EFL proficiency. The levels coincided with the levels of the ESL/EFL "Bagrut" examination modules. All students received 4 hours of ESL instruction from grade 7 to grade 12. Students received ESL/EFL instruction according to their proficiency level. The school policy was to remove non-readers from regular class settings during lessons. They received extra help during class hours and in the afternoons.

All ESL/EFL teachers, students and their parents participated in the research project. Parents provided background information on their children's reading habits and test taking preparations. They revealed their attitude towards English and express how they felt when they discovered their child had a reading test. Parents were role models for their children. Parental

attitude had a bearing on their children. Parental attitude to ESL/EFL tests helped the writer understand students' display of anxiety during reading comprehension tests.

Students from all three ESL/EFL proficiency levels participated in the study. Non-readers with learning disabilities took the reading comprehension tests by listening to audio cassettes. The principals of both schools knew about the study so that they could help the writer study the problem and implement the improvement program. Their involvement was crucial to its success.

Writer's Role

The writer has been teaching ESL/EFL for 30 years. During that time, the writer has observed students in both testing and non-testing situations. It seems that most students score higher under non-testing conditions. They perform better in a more relaxed and non-threatening environment.

The writer has been teaching ESL/EFL in the district for 12 years. The writer's role at the schools is that of an ESL/EFL teacher in four buildings and ESL/EFL coordinator in one of the schools. The writer is responsible for coordinating individual ESL/EFL teachers and monitoring student progress at all levels. The writer consults with the other ESL/EFL teachers, students, paraprofessionals associated with special education and principals on student progress in English as a core subject. The writer administers and monitors academic achievement and testing for all ESL/EFL students in one of the buildings.

The writer has been integrating technology into the ESL/EFL classroom for the past 11 years. The writer has developed learning objects (interactive tools), Web Quests, and lesson plans for teachers and students. The lesson plans implement technology, teamwork, peer teaching (Jigsaw) and class discussions. Students collaborate on projects that utilize the Internet and Microsoft applications such as *FrontPage*, *PowerPoint*, and *Word*. The writer has also built

an educational website (Deutsch, 2003) to help integrate technology into the ESL/EFL classroom and enhance learning.

The writer is currently working in an ESL/EFL reading comprehension program called Neta Project headed by the Cisco Systems for underprivileged students. This program teaches reading strategies and tests students' reading comprehension online on a website called Making Waves (Snunit, 2005). The project integrates technology and ESL/EFL learning.

In addition, the writer is a graduate of the advanced Silva Method program and is familiar with various memory and meditation techniques for improved learning and relaxation exercises. The writer has taken courses in Yoga, breathing exercises, Chi Kung and Reiki. The writer believes that stress-relieving techniques enhance learning and lower test taking anxiety.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Description

The problem was that ESL/EFL students in grade 9 lacked the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests. Many ESL/EFL students received low or failing grades in English as a core subject because they performed poorly on the reading comprehension parts of the tests. They did much better on oral and listening comprehension.

Every student in Israel must learn English for at least 8 years, from grade 4 to grade 12. At the end of grade 12, there is a final examination called the English "Bagrut" which evaluates 4 skills: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Most of the final exams consist of reading comprehension passages.

Deciphering the text does not guarantee understanding. Students struggle with the text due to cultural differences between English speaking nations and Israel. Israeli students often lack background information to comprehend the reading passage.

Reading comprehension tests are very difficult for most learners because of Hebrew interference and lack of worldly knowledge. The questions are very tricky and demand more than knowledge of the English language. They require a broad knowledge of world events and of different cultures. Most students find the questions very ambiguous.

One of the reasons for this is Hebrew interference. Hebrew is very different from English. It reads from right to left the letters are completely different since it does not use European letters. ESL students of Hebrew are at a disadvantage just like other learners of eastern languages. There is a tendency for ESL learners to translate the questions. The technique of translating the questions makes understanding very difficult. It frustrates students during the exams. Once learners feel discomfort, anxiety and fear take over. It becomes very difficult to perform well on reading comprehension tests under stress.

The writer has observed ESL/EFL students taking reading comprehension tests for 30 years. They move around in their chairs and show signs of discomfort. When interviewed and asked, students mentioned anxiety and lack of motivation as factors that prevented them from starting or focusing on the reading. It appears that ESL/EFL students do not know how to manage test anxiety during reading tests.

They lack the skills to relax and not worry during the reading comprehension test. They feel anxious but do not have the techniques to apply stress relievers. They benefit from techniques on how to relax so that they can read more efficiently.

Reading efficiently needs practice. ESL/EFL students do not receive instruction on how to improve their reading so that it is efficient. Instead they waste time aimlessly looking for the wrong answers. They lack the skills needed to cope with the reading. Students do not have

reading comprehension strategies to access information. They need guidelines on how to search for the relevant answers.

It is important to teach students reading techniques to facilitate their reading comprehension especially under testing conditions. Students are unaware of reading strategies such as skimming and scanning that could help them access information. They feel lost and frustrated because they lack the tools necessary to succeed in reading comprehension tests. Teachers do not equip ESL/EFL students with the necessary tools to take reading comprehension tests.

Problem Documentation

The writer conducted two online (Deutsch, 2004a, and b) and one off-line surveys (see Appendix A) to find out how ESL students, their parents, and teachers feel about reading comprehension tests. There were some inconsistencies about what students claimed and what parents and teachers observed about their reading comprehension test taking skills.

Teachers and parents claim that students lack the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests (see Deutsch, 2004c). ESL/EFL students do not read effectively. Teachers and students report low and failing grades on reading comprehension tests. ESL/EFL students speak English with greater ease than they read. Reading does not come as easily to them as speaking. They hear English more than they read it. Most Israeli students are very proficient in speaking English but less so in writing and reading. They do not read for pleasure even in their first language. ESL/EFL students spend a great deal of their free time watching television programs and listening to music in English.

When questioned, 47% of ESL/EFL students reported having knowledge of reading comprehension strategies such as KWL, scanning, and other skills when taking reading

comprehension tests, 35% were undecided as to what those skills were, and 18% said they did not use any reading strategies (Deutsch, 2004a). Their parents and teachers felt differently. On an average 69% of the parents claimed that their children lacked reading strategies, 14% were neutral, and 17% disagreed.

When interviewed, parents of ESL/EFL students expressed concern over their children's low marks in reading comprehension tests. Parents felt that because English is an important subject, (100% agreed that it is important), it should receive more attention. As much as 66% of the parents claimed the tests were very difficult for their children. When asked how they reacted when they found out their children had a reading test, 21% felt anxious and 17% suggested tutoring lessons, 28% asked about the content of the test. Only 34% did not react. This clearly indicates parental involvement in English as a core subject. It also shows that parents are anxious about their children's success in English. They obviously feel that English is an important subject.

Only a minority of the students reported feelings of discomfort while waiting for the tests, during and before receiving the results. Their parents had a different story: 59% claimed their children were anxious when there was a test, 23% were neutral, and 18% disagreed.

While waiting for the tests 35% claimed they felt uncomfortable, 23% felt they knew nothing, 26% felt fine and 16% felt they were going to do well. When asked how they felt after the test 33% said they needed more time and 41% wished they had prepared themselves better. When asked what thoughts went through their minds during the test, 39% mentioned the fear of not having enough time, 14% wished they could be somewhere else, and 26% wished they had prepared themselves better. Only 21% said they were doing great. When asked how they felt

after the test 51% claimed they worried about the grade they would receive, 13% did not want to see their grade, 8% felt uncomfortable, and 28% felt fine.

A review of students' test scores indicated that many ESL/EFL students taking the ESL/EFL reading comprehension tests were receiving low grades. Teachers' grade rosters showed that ESL/EFL students received low marks when they were anxious. Teachers compared students' work before and after they learned to apply relaxation exercises and reading techniques. Grade rosters indicates an improvement in marks when students used stress relievers and relaxation exercises before reading comprehension tests

Reading strategies helped students focus on the reading and access relevant information. Reading the questions carefully, scanning, and finding the main and supporting ideas helped students read more efficiently and improve their scores. Teachers' rosters showed a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension tests.

Teachers' grade rosters indicated that when students heard the reading of the comprehension tests, they performed better. Students found it easier to follow a text when they heard it than when they had to read it on their own. They struggled with the words. Once they heard the sound of the words, they recognized them much faster. Most students preferred to hear the word for recognition and not use a bilingual dictionary because it took time.

Teachers and parents agreed that ESL/EFL students did not have the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests.

Literature Review

The literature review summarized the research done on the problem that ESL/EFL students lacked the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests. The study focused on what it meant for ESL/EFL students to take a reading comprehension test without any tools to guide them. The research demonstrated that students lacked the skills to read effectively.

The literature covered the symptoms that ESL/EFL students exhibited because they lacked the skills needed to perform well on reading comprehension tests. The literature also reviewed studies on motivation, attitude, meta-cognition, first language interference, prior world knowledge, cultural differences, and other variables that cause difficulties in ESL/EFL learning.

Junior and high school ESL/EFL students experienced problems when taking reading comprehension tests. Reading in a foreign language causes anxiety and poor language achievement "in conjunction of students' levels of reading anxiety and general foreign language anxiety" (Saito, Thomas, & Horwitz, 1999, p. 202). Unfamiliar scripts, writing systems, and unfamiliar cultural material cause ESL/EFL reading anxiety (Saito, et al, 1999, p. 215). "Low language proficiency and teacher diversity may be causing an emotional block" (Zhang, 2000, p. 31) in ESL/EFL students when they take a reading comprehension test. Foreign and second language students have irrational beliefs that cause anxiety and affect language achievement (Tittle, 1997).

"Anxiety is a basic human emotion [that] consist [s] of fear and uncertainty" (Sarason, 1988, p. 19). Anxiety has its good and bad sides. On the one hand it helps avoid dangerous events that can be life threatening. On the other hand, it causes people to freeze as they avoid non-dangerous situations. The mind cannot distinguish between what is life threatening or just a stressful situation. "One such event [that causes minds to freeze but is not dangerous], is testing"

(Harris & Coy, 2003, p. 1). Testing is not a dangerous situation. What can a learner do to trick the mind into believing that testing is not dangerous? "The aim of stress management is to break the link between irrelevant stress reactions (diffused attention, fear, etc.), and academic tasks" (Rubenzer, 1988, p. 2). This research review will explain the relationship between anxiety and academic reading performance on English as a second language comprehension tests.

"Foreign language anxiety and irrational beliefs" (Tittle, 1997, p. 3) are important issues that need consideration for a better understanding of what ESL students experience in the ESL classroom. Mathew Tittle claims that ESL students "experience [a kind of] anxiety that is related [to] test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension"(1997, p.1). His studies do not conclusively indicate that there is a correlation between foreign language anxiety and irrational beliefs in learners of foreign languages. There seems to be a correlation when it comes to Russian ESL students. Eleni Pappamihie conducted a similar study on ESL language anxiety in Mexican girls. The study concluded that ESL "girls are significantly more anxious about using English in their mainstream classes"(Pappamihiel, 2001, p. 1). The study used English Language Anxiety Scale based on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale to examine the fears and intimidation ESL students feel when confronted with the option of moving into a larger and higher level classroom. This is a very important point to consider when determining ESL class size. How ESL students feel is very important. It has a direct connection to the way they perform in the ESL classroom. "The emotional discomfort of worry, [students'] feelings of being overwhelmed, and unpleasant physical sensations of anxiety distract attention from subtle cognitive tasks" (Rubenzer, 1988, p. 2). ESL students cannot perform under pressure.

Feelings of discomfort and anxiety in the classroom do not enhance learning of any kind. Cristina Sanz has written a research paper on the relationship between reading, anxiety, and reading comprehension in foreign language learners (1999). Unfortunately very "little research has been conducted to date on the role of anxiety in reading comprehension" (1). She conducted her research studies on Spanish and not on ESL. In another reading comprehension research done on Japanese ESL students, Cristina Sanz tried to find the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety scales and foreign language reading anxiety scales. It seems that the two are not related. The two measure completely different components (Saito et al., 1999. p. 202). It would be interesting to repeat the research in another setting where English is the foreign language and Hebrew is the first language. Foreign language anxiety only increases students' problems with "decoding of a text and the actual processing of textual meaning" (Saito et al., 1999. p.215). The research implications concede that there may be differences between beginners and advanced ESL students. "In the case of beginning students confronted with unfamiliar phonology and scripts, the anxiety might be more immediate" (Saito et al., 1999. p.215).

In the case of Hebrew ESL learners, unfamiliar phonology is an important variable to consider. The latter may cause undue anxiety with regular and learning disadvantaged students who may still be struggling with the phonetic skill of decoding English. "Processing difficulties" may cause "reading avoidance" (Saito et al., 1999. p.215). ESL students will just give up if they are unable to process the words. The graphic system of Hebrew is difficult to learn. Does that mean that English is, therefore, problematic for Hebrew ESL learners? If so, how do disadvantaged students cope with it?

Dealing with phonetics and reading comprehension is difficult for ESL learners. A study done on the phonological working memory and reading in test anxiety situation, demonstrated that "anxious subjects showed poorer comprehension than non-anxious subjects" (Calvo, 1996, p. 291). What the researcher also found was that "high-anxiety subjects produced overt articulation more frequently than low-anxiety subjects" (Calvo, 1996, p.291). This information is relevant for ESL teachers. It can help them identify students who articulate as anxious. The study indicates that there is an "interaction between anxiety and interference on [reading] comprehension performance" (Calvo, 1996, p. 289).

Anxiety and reading comprehension performance can be misleading. Sometimes many other variables enter the picture. Many ESL learners also have reading disabilities. According to Karen Woodman, a linguistics professor at the University of New England in Australia, the challenge teachers need to face "is deciding when a student's problem relates to learning English, and when it is a disability" (SER, 2001, p. 2). Marjolaine Limbos and Esther Geva have conducted a study on accuracy of teacher assessments of second language students at risk for reading disability. The study sets out to "examine the accuracy of various teacher assessment methods for screening children for reading disability" (Limbros & Geva, 2001, p.136).

Anxiety over tests makes parents nervous. Children acquire this anxiety by the way their parents "react to [their] performance on tests" (Anderson, 2002, p. 1). Parents are models for their children. Parents should "make sure [their] child doesn't equate ...grades on a specific test with [being] ... smart" (Anderson, 2002, p. 1). Tests don't evaluate how good a student or person is...efforts and [confidence do]". "Test taking doesn't have to lead to test anxiety" (Jackson, 2001, p. 1), but it does.

"Anxious language learners may focus their attention on their perceived inadequacies, the potential for failure, and the consequences of that imagined failure, rather than concentrating on the task itself" (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997, p. 269). Fear of failure is what stops students from performing well on tests. It is a vicious circle. "The test-anxious person generally believes that not succeeding on a test means [he] will be judged unworthy. This feeling of unworthiness translates into increased test anxiety "(Jackson, 2001, p. 1). Furthermore, "many students are afraid of failure in any effort they might make to read. This anxiety prevents their willingness to begin reading (Adams, 1996, p. 1). Fear and anxiety hinder ESL/EFL students from coping on reading comprehension tests.

Pauline Jackson warns that parents can double their children's chances of being anxious unless they learn how to manage their own anxieties. "The best predictor of how a child will cope with stress is how the parents cope" (Stolberg, 2002, p. 2). Parents can be role models for their children. Their reactions and attitudes can teach their children stress management or mismanagement. "If a stressed mother slams the door and throws down her keys, she is teaching her child one way to relieve stress...If she goes out for a jog, mediates or practices yoga, she is teaching other ways" (Stolberg, 2002, p. 1).

"Test anxiety affects every student; at least occasionally" (Toronto Star, 2003, p. 1). The research has stated a few reasons why ESL learners exhibit anxiety when doing reading comprehension tests. This literary research has provided the writer with a better understanding of the variables that influence ESL students' anxiety. The variables are test anxiety, second language anxiety and reading comprehension testing anxiety.

The second aspect of the literature review summarized students' reading attitudes and the strategies they used to cope with reading comprehension tests. According to research findings,

learners' first language influence second and foreign language reading strategies and motivation (Yamashita, 2004, p. 10). "Readers with different levels of second language proficiency; make use of their first and second language to different events in their attempts to make sense of a text they are reading" (Upton, 1997, p. 18). "The students [language] learning strategies have a powerful impact on the students' [EFL] learning outcome (Lengkanawati, 2004, p. 1).

The findings on first and second language showed that "EFL readers' meta-cognitive knowledge of reading strategies had close links to their EFL proficiency" reading (Zhang, 2001, p. 268). "Accomplished readers in their first language tend to use many of the same strategies that successful native English-language readers do—skimming, guessing in context, reading for the gist of a text—when they are reading in a second language" (Drucker, 2003, p.1).

Learners' attitude and feelings played an important role in ESL/EFL learning. Motivational problems affect ESL/EFL reading proficiency (Lynch, 1999). "An awareness of individual differences in learning develops students' potentials in ESL and EFL learning"(Kang, 1999). "An awareness [of] personal learning process, contributes [to] effective learning, and raises self-esteem" (Ozmen, 2004, p.1).

The final aspect of the literature reviewed studies on reading comprehension strategies and prior world knowledge. ESL/EFL learners did not have the reading strategies to cope with the reading tests. Reading comprehension strategies are tools that students use to help them determine the meaning of what they read. Reading strategies enable students to understand and answer questions on the text. Many ESL/EFL students lack these reading skills in their first language.

The problem was that students who lacked reading skills were at a disadvantage. Their reading was ineffective in ESL/EFL. "Reading strategies are activities that readers deliberately

engage ... to understand or acquire information from a text" (Steiner and Garb, 2002, p. 1).

Those who lack reading skills are inactive readers (Pressley, 2000). They are unable to comprehend and answer questions on the text.

Prior background information about culture and world knowledge influenced ESL/EFL students' understanding of the text. Many researchers stressed the importance of prior knowledge on students' comprehension of the text. Michael Pressley claimed, "Reading comprehension can be enhanced by developing reader's prior knowledge" (Pressley, 2000, p. 5). Ely and Lea Kozminsky examined "the relationship between general knowledge, skills in applying reading strategies, and reading comprehension for ninth-grade students at varying educational levels ... in Israeli comprehensive schools" (2001, p. 187). McNamara and Kintsch also conducted an experiment on the "effects of prior knowledge and text coherence" (1996, p. 247). They concluded that prior knowledge was important in enhancing student understanding of the text.

There is a connection between first and second language reading habits. "Accomplished readers in their first language tend to use many of the same strategies that successful native English-language readers do—skimming, guessing in context, reading for the gist of a text—when they are reading in a second language" (Druker, 2003, p. 1). Lawrence Jun Zhang's research showed that "readers' metacognitive knowledge of reading strategies [in their first language] had close links to their EFL proficiency" (Zhnag, 2001, p. 268). Mokhtari and Sheorey developed an instrument that "measures adolescent and adult ESL students' metacognitive awareness and perceived use of reading strategies" (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002, p. 1). They called the instrument "Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS)". The writers believe that there is a strong research support for the positive relationship between students' metacognitive awareness

of reading processes and their ability to read and excel academically" (Mokhtari & Sheorey, 2002, p. 1).

Many ESL/EFL students are proficient readers in their first language but choose not to read. These students are "aliterate" (Alvermann, 2003, p. 1). Alvermann defines "aliteracy [as] the capacity to read but electing not to do so" (Alvermann, 2003, p. 1). Many of the writer's students struggled in their native Hebrew language "with school-related reading" (Alvermann, 2003, p. 1). They did not engage in reading in their first language. This attitude to reading seemed to be prevalent with today's adolescents: "They opt not to get their information through traditional print sources" (Alvermann, 2003, p. 5). This made reading in ESL/EFL very difficult.

Another kind of first language reader chooses not to read because of "failure" (Adams, 1996, p. 1). "Students [who] are afraid of failure [will not] begin reading" (Adams, 1996, p. 1). Some students who have dyslexia, ADD/ADHD and other disorders may be reluctant to cope with reading comprehension tests.

Diverse learning styles and personality traits are variables that determine ESL/EFL learners' reading proficiency (Kang, 1999). Very little research appeared on reading strategies for differing learning styles in ESL/EFL students and at risk students. Limbos and Geva conducted research studies on "early identification of learning disabilities in second-language learners" (2001, p. 136). Developing assessment tools to detect reading disability in ESL/EFL learners in junior high would provide teachers with valuable information on reasons for student anxiety and poor scores on reading comprehension tests.

Causative Analysis

ESL/EFL students in grade nine lacked the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests at a junior high school. Their grades showed that they were performing at a low level. Getting high grades in English indicated high status and an opportunity to enter any university in the country. Students felt anxious about English tests because they realized their importance to their future. The drive to succeed caused them to use ineffective reading strategies and to score low. This lack of direction and skills during tests caused anxiety.

Many of the causes that led to student anxiety during the ESL/EFL reading comprehension tests involved parents, and teachers. Parents and teachers could encourage students to learn about learning styles and reading strategies to become proficient readers. ESL/EFL students did not have effective reading comprehension skills and strategies necessary to cope with reading comprehension tests. They lacked the strategies and skills needed to access information and the appropriate reading skills to do well on reading comprehension tests. A reason for this was that students had not received instruction in reading comprehension skills and strategies.

Reading strategies provided helpful guidelines on how to approach the reading passage. They helped the reader organize the passage into main and supporting ideas for a better understanding of the test. Scanning and skimming for relevant cues such as number and capital letters made the reading less threatening and more readable. Reading strategies should be an integral part of the curriculum for ESL/EFL learners. Students lacked direction on how to cope with reading comprehension tests.

Students required meaningful drill and practice in both test-taking strategies and stress management. ESL/EFL students, who were anxious, did not receive good grades on reading

comprehension tests. The problem was that students were not proficient in test strategies. They had not developed test anxiety management skills.

Parents pressured students to get high marks in ESL/EFL reading comprehension tests. Parents did not have information on test stress management. Parents did not know how to help their children relax on the day of the test. Parents expected their children to have high grades on ESL/EFL reading comprehension tests. They did not understand why their children were receiving low and failing marks in ESL/EFL reading comprehension tests.

Teachers also contributed to the problem of ESL/EFL students lacking the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests. ESL/EFL teachers did not consider test anxiety when giving reading comprehension tests. They were not aware of how students feel and did not provide them with direction and ways of dealing with stress because of tests. ESL/EFL teachers did not instruct students in test taking stress management strategies and relaxation exercises.

ESL/EFL teachers did not practice relaxation exercises in class in preparation for the test. They did not encourage students to use stress-relieving techniques before and during reading comprehension tests. This would have helped students relax so that they could use all the reading skills they acquired.

ESL/EFL teachers did not practice reading comprehension skills and strategies for reading comprehension tests. They thought it was a waste of time to practice reading comprehension skills and strategies. ESL/EFL teachers were not aware of the importance of preparing students for reading comprehension tests. Many ESL/EFL teachers believed students applied the same strategy they used in their first language. Teachers should not depend on this since students did not always have reading strategies in their first language. The techniques may be similar but they are not the same in every language. Hebrew does not have capital letters or

special forms for the passive. Teachers should teach reading strategies appropriate to English. They should not take it for granted that students know about reading skills.

The causes for the problem that ESL/EFL students did not have the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests stemmed from parents, students, and teachers. The solutions lay with the students and teachers. Students must learn and practice reading and test taking strategies so they are proficient enough to receive higher scores on their reading comprehension tests.

Chapter III: Outcomes and Evaluation

Goals and Expectations

The goal of the study was for ESL/EFL students at the junior and high school level to receive passing grades on reading comprehension tests in English. Teachers were to equip students with strategic tools to make their reading more effective. They were to guide them on how to apply relaxation and breathing techniques to help them cope with test taking anxiety.

ESL/EFL students were to learn how to use reading techniques and relax during the test. Students were to learn to feel confident during the tests. They were to become proficient with reading and test taking strategies so that they could cope with reading comprehension tests.

Expected Outcomes

Several specific outcomes were to result from teaching students how to apply reading skill strategies and relaxation exercises during reading comprehension tests. The immediate outcome was higher scores in the tests. ESL/EFL students were to receive passing grades on reading comprehension tests in English.

The following were the expected outcomes of the implementation phase:

1. 90% of all ESL/EFL students would receive passing grades (60% or above) on reading comprehension tests in English

2. 90% of all ESL/EFL students would receive passing grades on classroom reading assignments (Pass/C or above) in all their ESL/EFL tasks

ESL/EFL students were to complete their reading assignments on a regular basis:

1. 90% out of all ESL/EFL students would complete an average of 75% of their reading assignments (extensive reading and textbook reading) either at home or at school
2. 90% out of all ESL/EFL students would earn a passing grade in classroom reading comprehension tests based on classroom reading
3. 90% out of all ESL/EFL students would earn a passing grade (55 or above) in reading comprehension tests.

Measurement of Outcomes

The writer conducted two preliminary online (Deutsch, 2004c) and offline (see Appendix A) surveys to acquire a better understanding of how students felt about taking ESL/EFL reading comprehension tests. The online survey was available from May 20 to November 20, 2004 to the public or anyone who randomly found the link on the writer's website (Deutsch, 2003). The population included parents, teachers, and students of ESL/EFL.

In addition, the writer conducted interviews and questionnaires (see Appendixes C-F) for students in grade nine. ESL/EFL students answered all the questionnaires before the three-month implementation period to get a wider perspective of the problem. The writer used qualitative methods to evaluate the interview responses (see Appendix C).

The writer wanted to learn if there was a correlation between the offline and online surveys. For this purpose, the writer conducted an offline survey on an all boys grade nine class from a religious school (see Appendix A). The writer counted the number of yes, no and

undecided answers and added the data to Microsoft Excel for the percentages (see Appendix B). A comparison of both surveys showed a strong correlation on how ESL/EFL students felt when taking a reading comprehension test (QuestPro, 2004).

The results of both the online and offline surveys and the individual interviews helped the writer prepare a program to teach students reading and test taking strategies. The writer used quantitative methods to analyze the results of the online questionnaires for parents, students and teachers of ESL/EFL students (QuestionPro Survey Software, 2004).

The students received two reading comprehension tests before and after the 12-week implementation program in which they practiced reading strategies and test taking skills. After twelve weeks of training (see Appendix G), they took a reading comprehension test. The writer compared the test scores before and after the implementation program.

The study used quantitative methods to evaluate and compare student progress before (see Appendixes D-F), and after the program for reading strategies (Appendixes I-L), and relaxation exercises (See Appendix H).

Analysis of Results

The writer compared the pre- (See Appendixes D-F) and post-implementation survey responses and individual interviews (see Appendix C) to see if the students changed their attitude about the reading tests after the implementation period.

The questionnaires provided the writer with a more comprehensive view of what happened to ESL/EFL students during reading comprehension tests. The quantitative measurement of student surveys did not provide an accurate enough picture of the problem since teachers and students' answers did not coincide. Interviewing students gave a better perspective of the situation.

The author published the results of the online survey on Nellie's English Projects (Deutsch, 2003).

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of Problem

The problem was that ESL/EFL students in grade nine lacked the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests. Students did not have the tools to succeed in reading comprehension tests. They did not have effective reading strategies and test taking techniques to guide them on their reading tests. As a result, ESL/EFL students became anxious and received low and failing grades on their reading comprehension tests.

Discussion

A number of solutions appeared in the literature that included general ideas about reading and test taking techniques relevant to a first language, reading strategies for ESL/EFL learners and specific reading problems for Hebrew speakers. "Skilled comprehension requires ... the sounding out and recognition of individual words to the understanding of sentences in paragraphs as part of much longer texts. There is instruction at all of these levels that can be carried ... to increase student understanding" (Pressley, 2000, P. 3).

ESL/EFL learners need to cope with two elements when taking a reading test: decoding and understanding. Hebrew reading is unlike English. It reads from right to left and the alphabet is completely different from English. For Hebrew speakers, learning to read English demands acquiring a completely different set of alphabet codes. "Teaching student the skills necessary to recognize words increases the chances students will succeed in reading... The ability to understand a reading passage is greater when the reader can easily recognize or decode words" (Tollefson, 2003, p. 1)

There is a "relationship between general knowledge, skills in applying reading strategies and reading comprehension" (Kozminsky, 2001, p. 187). Reading becomes more effective when students have "background knowledge" (McNamara and Kintsch, 1996, p. 248). Students become "nervous when they have to read about cultural topics with which they are unfamiliar" (Saito, 1999, p. 214).

ESL/EFL students benefit from instruction in reading comprehension skills and reading strategies. In order for students to gain full understanding and become active readers (Pressley, 2000, p. 4), "they must strategically interact with the text. Strategic readers think about text, think with text, and think through text. Just Read Now contains effective strategies that will engage students and encourage them to become active participants in the reading process" (BLC, 1997). The literature revealed that, "reading researchers have developed approaches to stimulating active reading by teaching readers to use comprehension strategies" (Pressley, 2000, p. 5).

Learning to use these strategies in a first language helped learners in their ESL/EFL reading comprehension tests. Students were able to do reading assignments in class and at home when teachers adopt a "wide supplementary reading" (Green, 1998, p. 2) program "for adolescents and young adults who had not learned to read and write through traditional instructional methods" (Scheffel, Shroyer, & Strongin, 2003, p. 4).

ESL/EFL students received better grades on their reading comprehension tests when they learned to break down a text into paragraphs. An understanding of the purpose of each of the paragraphs helped ESL/EFL learners find the main idea and supporting proof (Simplicio, 2003, p. 6). ESL/EFL students received better grades on their reading comprehension tests when they applied KWL and other graphic organizers to the reading (Cutts, 2002, p. 1).

ESL/EFL students receive better grades on their reading comprehension tests when they were able to "recognize words automatically" (Tollefson, 2003, p. 9).

ESL/EFL teachers taught reading strategies in ESL/EFL (Steiner & Garb, 2003) similar to what language teachers do in the students' first language. ESL/EFL teachers taught strategies such as scanning and skimming for information (Thuss, 1999, p. 2). ESL/EFL teachers drilled reading strategies before, during, and after reading practice (Allen, 1999, p. 1).

ESL/EFL teachers were able to "encourage the development of sight words" (Tollefson, 2003, 5) so that students could read with greater ease and better understanding.

ESL/EFL teachers taught test-taking skills and test stress management (Macmillan, 2003). ESL teachers will practice test taking techniques skills with their students (McMahon, 2003). ESL/EFL teachers taught relaxation exercises for students to do before a reading comprehension test (Rozanski, 2002, p. 3).

Students claimed that relaxation exercises made them "feel comfortable before taking a test" (Goodman, 1996, p. 1). How students felt before a test was very important in how they did. "Teachers [said] the [breathing] exercises work[ed] wonders in calming antic kids and helping them to focus- especially before tests" (Guthrie, 2002, p. 2). Many schools who used Yoga and other relaxation exercises claimed that, "the technique ... worked so well that test scores soared" (Rozanski, 2002, p. 2).

ESL/EFL teachers used positive and supportive language with their students before reading comprehension tests to "reduce threat and stress in the learning environment" (Cutts, 2002, p. 4). ESL/EFL student success rates were higher in classrooms of teachers with positive and supportive attitude before a test (Saito et al, 1999, p. 216). ESL/EFL students did well on reading comprehension tests in ESL/EFL classes where teachers' attitudes were positive, they

received training in relaxation exercises, and they were familiar with reading strategies (Druker, 2003, p. 2). Teachers received training on the use of positive values and supportive teaching (Druker, 2003, p. 3). Students received training in relaxation and breathing exercises before the reading comprehension test (Guthrie, 2002, p. 5).

"Providing adolescents who are experiencing reading difficulties with clear goals for a comprehension task and then giving [positive] feedback on the progress they are making can lead to increased self-efficacy and greater use of comprehension strategies" (Alvermann, 2003, p. 1). ESL/EFL readers needed encouragement to feel they were capable of performing well on reading comprehension tests.

Paired reading and reading aloud were useful in helping "ESL/EFL students become fluent and accurate readers" (Ness, 2001, p. 8). It was useful to have strong administrative support for teacher training in reading strategies, implementing relaxation exercises and learning how to use positive and supportive language to facilitate learning (Smith).

ESL/EFL students received higher scores in their reading comprehension tests by becoming active as they read (Pressley, 2000). Reading strategies and test taking techniques helped them become proficient readers.

Selected Solutions

ESL/EFL students received preparations in reading strategies and test taking techniques in order to succeed in reading comprehension tests. They required reading strategies and skills for a better understanding of the text. ESL/EFL students need reading skills to cope with reading comprehension tests. This plan worked well if students got immediate feedback and encouragement from their teachers. This program helped ESL/EFL students acquire a positive attitude to reading and testing (Campbell, & Jacobs, 2003, p. 2).

ESL/EFL teachers received training in relaxation activities and in reading strategies prior to the implementation program. They learned about color and its influence on students' moods and the classroom. They learned how to perform meditation exercises. They used music and learned how to vary their voice so that they could help students relax before tests. Teachers learned how to comment on students' work with positive and encouraging words.

ESL/EFL teachers provided testing situations for students to practice stress management during tests. ESL/EFL students used relaxation exercises such as Yoga to improve concentration and relax during reading comprehension tests (See Appendix C).

ESL/EFL teachers used a weekly program during the implementation phase (See Appendix B). ESL/EFL teachers followed the plan. Students answered questionnaires (See appendix A, Figures 6-8) at the beginning and at end of the program.

The plan to improve students' performance on reading comprehension tests took 12 weeks. Teachers received lesson plans for each week (see Appendix B) on the objectives, resource material, activities, evaluation rubrics on how to assess students and guidelines on how to use supportive and positive language with their students.

Calendar Plan

In the first week, students learned how to use a KWL (Know, Want, and Learn) think sheet organizer. They received a written and empty KWL format (see appendix D, Figure 9). Teachers discussed the merits of the format. Students received a text and prepared their own KWL format for the reading. The reading passages were culturally familiar and relevant to the students' needs. The topic was of interest for most of the students in class. The writer provided a battery of texts for teachers to use if necessary. Students practiced the use of the KWL in four 45-minute lessons.

In week two, students learned how to scan for information. They received short and easy texts that were culturally relevant to Israeli students with charts to fill out (see Figure 9c). They scanned for dates, numbers, and other layout information such as the number of paragraphs in the passage. Teachers asked students to scan texts for information on numbers, capital letters, number of paragraphs and words. Students did these exercises orally and in writing. Students showed a sense of satisfaction in finding the information. The teachers used the lesson plans created by the writer for reading comprehension practice (Deutsch, 2005). The reading material was of interest to students. The writer used world events (see Appendix M) to make the reading interesting. The students found the article on the tsunami (Schlachter, 2003) interesting reading. Teachers evaluated students by using positive language and adding stickers to their students' work.

In week three, students learned about the paragraphs and the layout of the texts. They learned the functions of each paragraph: Introduction, body with supporting ideas, and conclusion. The teacher prepared two sets of passages with at least three paragraphs that clearly showed a distinction between each of the paragraphs. Teachers prepared a set of

passages, cut them so that each paragraph was on its own. Teacher handed them out to students in an arbitrary order as separate paragraphs. Students had to put the paragraphs in the correct order with the introduction first, body, second, and the conclusion last. This puzzle idea helped students understand the function of each of the paragraphs. By the end of the week, students coped with longer reading passages of four or five paragraphs and tried to put them back together in their logical order.

In week four, students learned about graphic organizers and finding the main and supporting ideas (see Appendix J). Students received a three-paragraph passage with the graphic organizers done and one handout that was empty for students to work on using another passage with three paragraphs. Teachers presented many kinds of graphic organizers (see Appendixes L & J). Students chose the ones they wanted to use. The procedure was to choose a worksheet, view an unseen text, and add the main and supporting ideas to the graphic organizer. Students worked in pairs. Each pair read to the other and shared the ideas. Teachers evaluated the students for carrying out the task and team collaboration.

In week five, students learned how to enrich their vocabulary by using a Vocabulary Word Map Chart (see Appendix K). Teachers encouraged students to keep a notebook or file with the new words they encounter in their reading. Students used a bilingual text or electronic dictionary. They peer-read a short reading passage and made a list of the new words. They used MS PowerPoint and added each new word to a slide. If computers were available at school, students did this in class. If they were not, students prepared the PowerPoint presentations at home, saved them on floppy discs, and brought them to class.

In week six, teachers worked on finding the main and supporting ideas. Students learned how to analyze a text, find the problem, and the solution in the reading (see Appendix

J). Teachers provided students with texts that had problems and solutions in them. Students worked in pairs, reading the text to each other, and finding the problems and solutions. They then found the main and supporting ideas in each of the paragraphs. Teachers evaluated students for finishing the task and collaborating with their peers.

In week seven, students learned a few techniques on how to reduce anxiety before and during exams. The materials for the lesson were paper, pencil or pens and a pair of scissors. Students used a round object such as a plate to make a circle. They cut the paper in the shape of a circle. They could also draw a circle on the paper. As they drew the circle, teachers discussed anxiety in different settings such as work, home, at school and other places. They sat in teams of four, in pairs or individually. Teachers allowed students to sit wherever they felt comfortable.

Students then drew a circle or used the circle provided and wrote in the circle starting from the centre and going outwards in a circular manner, the words: "I am getting high marks in reading comprehension tests or I am getting high marks in English unseen". The outcome looked like a snail. Students discussed their writing, and how they felt.

Next, teachers taught the students how to do breathing exercises. They closed their eyes and concentrated on the sound of their breathing. They then counted to ten while they were breathing (one count was for both inhaling and exhaling) and started counting again each time starting from 1 to 10. They were not to go beyond 10. This helped them concentrate on the numbering and ultimately their breathing and not on other things. This was like a game. Students said how many times they could count from 1-10 without making a mistake and going on to 11. The number one was for both inhaling and exhaling.

In week eight, students learned how to use Yoga and relaxation exercises. The materials needed were chairs, a cassette or disc player, computer with Internet access and sound for quiet background music (Deems, 2001). Students sat upright with their legs slightly apart (not crossed) and their eyes closed as the teacher used visualization exercises. The teacher used color imagery and discussed the seven chakras and the colors that related to each (see Appendix H) and the following site have information on the subject of Chakras and colors (Heart, 2000). Students explained the significance of each color.

In week nine, students practiced reading comprehension exercise drills and simulated a test situation. The material consisted of class texts, charts, and computers with Internet access. Students did individual, class and computer work. Teachers used online reading comprehension tests with audio cassettes for those who wished to listen as they read. Students had the options of listening to the questions and reading passages. This helped the students who found it easier to listen. Students peer read to each other and took the reading comprehension test in pairs.

In week 10, students sat in teams of four and prepared charts and graphic organizers to use on their first reading comprehension test. They received a reading passage and applied the techniques they learned. They used the charts and graphic organizers they prepared to make the reading text easier to understand. Then, they prepared questions for the other teams to do. Students practiced relaxation techniques on each other in their teams. Teachers evaluated students for doing the task and for team collaboration.

In week 11, students took a reading comprehension test. They used bilingual dictionaries. They prepared and applied graphic organizers for the reading passage. Teachers

evaluated students for their scores on the reading comprehension test and for making the charts. It was a fifty/fifty situation so that no one failed.

In the final week, students took a "reading comprehension test survey for ESL/EFL students" similar to the one online. Teachers could use either the class (see Appendix A, Figure 4) or online survey (Deutsch, 2004c). Students took the survey once again to find out how they felt. The class discussed the importance of surveys. After the students completed the questionnaires, they expressed how they felt then in comparison to how they felt before. What tools did they have now? Students prepared a list of the strategies they now possessed.

Teachers gave positive feedback in both writing and speaking throughout the lessons. Teachers assessed students for collaborating and finishing the tasks. Everyone in the class felt a sense of accomplishment.

Chapter V: Results

Results

The problem was that ESL/EFL students in a grade nine class lacked the skills to cope with reading comprehension tests. They did not have effective reading strategies to guide them on their reading comprehension tests. Consequently, ESL/EFL students felt anxious when taking reading comprehension tests.

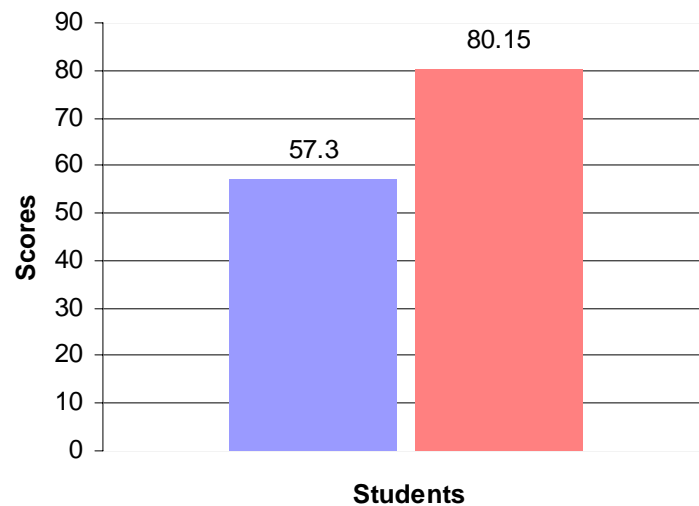
The goal of the study was to provide students with the skills. The desired outcomes were for students to acquire test-taking and reading comprehension strategies so that they could improve their performance on the reading tests.

The expected outcome of the study was for students to get higher scores after taking the 12-week implementation program (see Appendix G). The students would receive instruction and practice in reading strategies and relaxation exercises. They would become so proficient with the

techniques that they would focus better on the reading. The techniques would provide them with the tools necessary to cope with the reading comprehension tests. Knowing how to apply these skills would lower their anxiety and improve their performance on the reading test.

The implementation program achieved what it set out to do. The students received higher scores on their reading tests after taking the program. The result of the training showed an increase in student performance (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Comparison of student scores before and after the 12-week implementation



Students succeeded on their tests because they had the skills to cope with the reading and the test. They no longer exhibited signs of anxiety or lacked test taking and reading skills. Students' responses, which were all negative before the 12-week implementation program, were now affirmative. They had acquired the skills on how to approach the test and managed to receive higher scores. The weak students did not complain that the text was too difficult or that they did not want to take the test. They started applying the skills they practiced for 12 weeks without any noticeable signs of discomfort.

After the test, students completed the same form they had answered before the program (see Appendixes E, F). The author interviewed them after the final reading comprehension test using the same questions they had answered before the training program (see Appendix C). The results improved indicating that students had the tools to cope with the reading comprehension tests. The test scores showed a 23% (see Figure 1) increase in student performance.

Discussion

The students' average score before the implementation was 57%. After completing the program on reading and test taking strategies, students' test score average was 80%, a 23% increase over the pre-test (see Figure 1).

Although the study did not show a direct relationship between anxiety and test achievement, it did indicate the value of providing students with reading and test taking techniques. ESL/EFL students improved their scores on reading comprehension tests when they applied reading and test taking strategies they had learned in the 12-week implementation program.

There is no indication whether the improvement was due to the practice and drilling of reading passages, reading strategies, test-taking skills, or relaxation techniques. It could have been all of the skills or just the relaxation techniques. The author intends to carry out further studies to locate the variables responsible for the improvement.

The expected outcome that 90% of the ESL/EFL students receive passing grades (60% or above) on reading comprehension tests in English was met (see Figure 1). All the ESL/EFL students received passing grades on classroom reading assignments (Pass/C or above) in all their tasks. The students completed their reading assignments on a regular basis:

1. Of all the ESL/EFL students, 90% completed an average of 75% of their reading assignments (extensive reading and textbook reading) either at home or at school.
2. Out of all ESL/EFL students, 100% earned a passing grade on the classroom reading comprehension tests.
3. Out of all the ESL/EFL students 100% earned a passing grade (55 or above) in the reading comprehension tests (see Figure 1).

The implementation program was effective in raising student achievement on the reading comprehension tests. Reading and test-taking techniques prepared students for what will come. They knew what to expect and how to cope with the reading passage and questions. Anxiety decreased as the unknown became familiar territory. When stress appeared, students had the tools to handle it. They were proficient with relaxation techniques. The 12-week program provided students with the tools to cope with reading comprehension tests.

The outcomes suggest that students benefit from reading strategies and test-taking techniques in students who do not have diverse learning styles or personality traits. The study did not account for reading disorders or dyslexia. Students with reading difficulties in their first language may find second language reading difficult.

Hebrew learners may encounter difficulties in processing English phonology. Decoding English is from left to right while Hebrew is from right to left. This may pose problems. Hebrew is a consonantal system "mainly carried in the skeleton of consonants, and vowels are omitted [whereas] English is morpho-phonemic [with] meaning plus sound" (Chern, 2002, p. 5). This information is important to ESL/EFL teachers and students. Knowing about the differences between the first and target language may enhance learning and lower anxiety.

Students may experience first language interference when processing English phonology. They should be aware of the reasons.

Finally, teachers should differentiate between students' reading disability and language learning (Limbros & Geva, 2001). It is important to learn the origin of the student's anxiety. Does it relate to test, language, reading, emotion, or other anxieties? ESL/EFL learners should learn about Meta cognition and their learning styles. Teachers can provide the information by helping students become aware of the process of learning English.

Recommendations

Teachers at the outside presentations have shown an interest in replicating the study and using the test taking techniques in their classes. The study has indicated the positive impact of students learning test-taking strategies and relaxation exercises as effective and powerful tools in improving student scores on reading comprehension tests.

The author believes students will benefit from appropriate preparations on how to take reading comprehension tests and how to be better prepared to deal with the stress of the testing situation. Teachers are encouraged to instruct students on how to apply these skills in their ESL/EFL classes.

These are the author's recommendations for effective use of the solutions:

1. Teachers should conduct a needs assessment surveys to find out their students' needs, prior knowledge, reading abilities, and feelings on reading comprehension tests. The result of the questionnaires will provide teachers with information on how students feel about reading comprehension tests.
2. Teachers would benefit from conducting personal interviews to gain an added perspective on how students feel about reading tests.

3. Students may have different reading abilities. Teachers should speak to their first language teachers to find out how they score in Hebrew reading comprehension. Students who are not effective readers in their first language will need additional practice in reading strategies in their second language.
4. Students have different learning styles. It is important for teachers to learn about each student's learning preferences in advance to make sure that these needs are met during the reading and test taking lessons to enhance learning. Teachers should cater to all the learning styles: Kinesthetic, visual, and auditory. They should be aware of and multiple intelligences: Visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence
5. Teachers need training on how to make the lessons meaningful to engage students. The lessons should integrate technology by using productive tools such as MS Word and PowerPoint and the Internet for online reading and testing material. Many of these resources appear on the author's website (Deutsch, 2003).
6. The author has had ample experience in conducting relaxation exercises before tests but other ESL/EFL teachers have not. Teachers have expressed the need to learn and practice these techniques. They can practice them on each other prior to carrying them out in their own classes.
7. There is very little research on whether reading strategies lowered test taking anxiety in ESL/EFL students. The author encourages ESL/EFL teachers or educators to conduct a study on the affect of applying reading skills in reading comprehension tests. In addition, further research is necessary to document the

relationship between these skills and test anxiety. ESL/EFL students who exhibit test anxiety in other subjects may be different from those who only have language anxiety. The research should differentiate between ESL/EFL students who have feelings of anxiety in general and those who exhibit second or foreign language anxiety.

8. Relaxation techniques such as mindfulness and meditation are tools that seem to work. However, further research is necessary to prove the claim that they affect student learning and teacher instruction. There may be conclusive evidence to support the idea that they have a strong influence on both. The author hopes to conduct research on the subject and encourages others to do the same.
9. The author did not have students with learning disorders. However, teachers should find out whether any of the students have reading disorders or dyslexia in their first language. These students need special attention and individual programs on the reading strategies. The author suggests developing assessment tools to detect reading disorders in ESL/EFL learners.

Plans for Dissemination

The author plans to present the findings of the study to ESL/EFL teachers, parents and to the English Inspectorate. The process has begun at the author's school on June 15, 2005 for the faculty and at English Teachers Association in Israel (ETAI) conference on July 4, 2005 (Deutsch, 2005).

Students can cope with anxiety by learning to relax and practice skills on how to lower stress. Parents can help by learning to relax, too. The online survey results (QuestionPro Survey Software, 2004), showed that parents were also concerned about their children's ESL/EFL

reading comprehension tests. Parents should realize that their feelings directly influence their children. The author plans to speak to parents so that they become aware of how they can help.

The teachers and colleagues who have heard the presentation asked for training on how to apply relaxation techniques in their classes. The author hopes to conduct teacher-training workshops on how to teach these skills and encourage teachers apply action research projects in their classes.

The author has published an article based on the action research project on an online journal called Benzhi (Deutsch, 2004d). The article reviewed the research material on the relationship between anxiety and academic reading performance on English as a second language comprehension tests.

The author intends to continue a follow up of the study by training other teachers to implement the 12-week program on reading and test taking strategies and publishing the results in professional journals.

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Appendix A

Student Questionnaire on Reading Comprehension Tests in English

Circle your grade. 7 8 9 10 11 12			
Choose one answer only.	Yes	No	Undecided
1. I like to be tested on reading comprehension tests in English.	1	2	3
2. I feel comfortable taking reading tests in English	1	2	3
3. I think about failing when I take a reading test.	1	2	3
4. I prepare for reading tests.	1	2	3
5. I share the results of my tests with my parents.	1	2	3
6. My parents know when I have an English test.	1	2	3
7. English is a very important subject in school.	1	2	3
8. It is important to get high marks in English.	1	2	3
9. I get stomachaches before English exams.	1	2	3
10. I feel uncomfortable before English exams	1	2	3
11. I wish I could learn without having exams.	1	2	3
12. I like taking exams.	1	2	3
13. Do you look around at the other students in class during the test?	1	2	3
14. Do you find yourself thinking: "I can't do this"?	1	2	3
15. Do you suddenly "know" the answers?	1	2	3
16. Do you score much lower on tests than on homework or other assignments?	1	2	3
17. Do you become distracted during tests?	1	2	3
18. Does your mind sometimes go blank and do you forget what you knew during tests?	1	2	3
19. Do you have distracting thoughts of failure during tests?	1	2	3
20. Do you plan your time while taking a test?	1	2	3
21. Do you have negative thoughts about your abilities to succeed during the test?	1	2	3
22. Do you do relaxation exercises during tests?	1	2	3
23. Do you check your work before handing it in?	1	2	3
24. Do you tell yourself how smart you are during the test	1	2	3
25. Do you tell yourself that you are not smart enough to do the test?	1	2	3
26. Do you wish you had studied more?	1	2	3
27. Do you check your test when you finish?	1	2	3
28. Do you wish there were no reading tests in English?	1	2	3
29. Do you want to find ways of improving your reading comprehension tests?	1	2	3
30. Do feel that you cannot improve your reading in English?	1	2	3

Appendix B

Results of a grade 9 survey (May 20, 2004)

Circle your grade.	7	8	(9)	10	11	12
Circle one answer for each of the following:						
	Yes %	No %	Undecided %			
1. I like to be tested on reading comprehension tests in English.	54	31	15			
2. I feel comfortable taking reading tests in English	70	15	15			
3. I think about failing when I take a reading test.	0	62	38			
4. I prepare for reading tests.	54	38	8			
5. I share the results of my tests with my parents.	61	31	8			
6. My parents know when I have an English test.	47	38	15			
7. English is a very important subject in school.	100	0	0			
8. It is important to get high marks in English.	100	0	0			
9. I get stomachaches before English exams.	0	92	8			
10. I feel uncomfortable before English exams	31	69	0			
11. I wish I could learn without having exams.	38	31	31			
12. I like taking exams.	23	46	31			
13. Do you look around at the other students in class during the test?	31	38	31			
14. Do you find yourself thinking: "I can't do this"?	39	38	23			
15. Do you suddenly "know" the answers?	36	43	21			
16. Do you score much lower on tests than on homework or other assignments?	15	62	23			
17. Do you become distracted during tests?	47	38	15			
18. Does your mind sometimes go "blank" and you forget, what you knew during tests?	38	62	0			
19. Do you have distracting thoughts of failure during tests?	54	31	15			
20. Do you plan your time while taking a test?	62	23	15			
21. Do you have negative thoughts about your abilities to succeed during the test?	0	85	15			
22. Do you do relaxation exercises during tests?	8	77	15			

23. Do you check your work before handing it in?	100	0	0
24. Do you tell yourself how smart you are during the test	15	74	38
25. Do you tell yourself that you are not smart enough to do the test?	0	85	15
26. Do you wish you had studied more?	54	23	23
27. Do you check your test when you finish?	77	15	8
28. Do you wish there were no reading tests in English?	23	54	23
29. Do you want to find ways of improving your reading comprehension tests?	23	62	15
30. Do feel that you cannot improve your reading in English?	0	85	15

Appendix C

Interview questions for students ESL/EFL before and after the program on reading comprehension strategies, test management, and relaxation exercises.

Interviewer's Questions	Student's Answers
1. How would you rate your knowledge of English?	
2. What is easier for you; reading, writing or speaking?	
3. Why is that?	
4. How do you feel when you take a reading comprehension test?	
5. What do you do first?	
4. Do you read the text, or look at the questions first?	
5. Have you ever been taught how to approach a reading comprehension test?	
4. Would like to learn how to do a reading comprehension test?	
5. Do you feel anxious at any time before or during the test?	
6. When do you feel anxious?	
7. Why do you think students would feel anxious while taking a reading comprehension test (unseen) in English?	

Appendix D

General goals for ESL/EFL students

Students want different goals in school. Please study this list carefully and rate each item on how important it is to you on the scale indicated.

	1 Very Important	2	3	4	5 Not Important
1. Getting high marks					
2. Getting a passing grade					
3. Being at the top of my class					
4. Studying for reading comprehension tests in English					
5. Pleasing my parents by getting good marks					
6. Gaining knowledge					
7. Pleasing my teachers					
8. English is important to my future					
9. Marks are important to my future					

Of the above set of 9 values, which one is most important to you?

Thank you for taking the survey.

Appendix E

ESL students before, during, and after a reading comprehension test.

Circle the answer(s) that describes your situation.

1. How do you feel the moment you find out that you are going to have a reading comprehension test in English?
 - a. I feel fine.
 - b. I don't like it.
 - c. I start feeling uncomfortable.
 - d. I think about failing.
2. What do you do when after you find out?
 - a. I start preparing for the test.
 - b. I don't do anything.
 - c. I tell my parents about it.
 - d. I try to forget about it.
3. How do you feel in the morning before going to school on the day of the test?
 - a. I have a stomachache.
 - b. I feel fine.
 - c. I don't want to go to school.
 - d. I feel uncomfortable.
4. How do you feel while you are waiting for the test paper?
 - a. I feel fine.
 - b. I feel uncomfortable.
 - c. I feel that I don't know anything.

- d. I know I am going to do well.
5. What do you do once you have received the test paper?
- a. I check to see how many pages there are.
 - b. I look around the classroom at the other students.
 - c. I start the test.
 - d. I don't do anything.
6. What thoughts do you have during the test?
- a. I should have prepared myself better.
 - b. I won't have enough time.
 - c. I am doing great.
 - d. I wish I could be somewhere else.
7. What happens after the test?
- a. I feel that I could have done better.
 - b. I feel that I needed more time.
 - c. I feel fine.
 - d. I don't think about the test after I finish it.
8. What happens when you get home after a test?
- a. I talk to my parents about the test.
 - b. I talk to my friends about how I did.
 - c. I go about my usual routine.
 - d. I don't stop thinking about the test.
9. How do you feel on the day that you get your test back?
- a. I worry about the grade I will receive.

- b. I am fine.
 - c. I don't want to see my test.
 - d. I don't feel comfortable.
10. Why is it important to do well on reading comprehension (unseen) tests in English?
- a. Because English is a very important subject
 - b. I don't think it's important to do well on reading comprehension tests.
 - c. Because my parents expect me to get good marks in English
 - d. Because it shows my knowledge of English

Appendix F

Survey questionnaire for students of ESL/EFL before and after program on reading comprehension strategies, test stress management, and relaxation exercises

Choose one answer only. The questions apply to reading comprehension tests in English.	Yes	No	Undecided
1. I understand what is expected of me when I do a reading comprehension test (unseen) in English.			
2. I understand the main idea of the text.			
3. I can find supporting ideas for the main idea of the text.			
4. I understand the test questions on reading comprehension tests (unseens).			
5. I can focus on the questions and find the answers.			
6. I apply reading strategies such as KWL, scanning, and other skills when taking a reading comprehension test.			
7. I feel fine when taking a reading comprehension test.			
8. I pass (55 and up) most of my reading comprehension tests (unseens).			
9. My marks are improving in reading comprehension tests.			
10. I feel relaxed during a reading comprehension test.			
11. I use relaxation exercises and techniques to help me relax when taking reading comprehension tests.			

Appendix G

A weekly instruction program to improve student performance on reading comprehension tests

Week	Objectives	Resources and materials	Activities and procedures	Evaluation and assessment rubrics
1	How to use a KWL format	Handouts of KWL formats one empty and one filled in for comparison.	KWL format Discuss the merits of the format. Teachers encourage and support using very positive language.	Students will be evaluated for preparing their own KWL format on an assigned text
2	Scanning for information	1. handouts of short and easy texts 2. handout of grids for students to fill in	Look for dates, numbers, or other information that stands out, like capital letters. Fill in a grid with information found Teachers use positive reinforcements both verbal and written. These may include stickers.	Students will be evaluated for filling in the grid for each of their findings
3	Paragraphs: the layout of an essay Learning the functions of each paragraph: 1.Introduction 2.Body with supporting evidence 3.Conclusion	handouts of texts	The teacher prepares 2 sets of passages with at least 3 paragraphs that clearly show a distinction between the introduction, supporting evidence and conclusion. Students work in pairs. Each pair receives two different	Students are evaluated for carrying out the tasks as instructed

			<p>passages. Each cuts out the paragraphs of their individual texts and mixes them up. The other student has to put the paragraphs in the right order and explain the reasons for the order. The pair read to each other (Ness, 2001).</p>	
<p>4</p>	<p>Graphic Organizers and finding main and supporting ideas</p>	<p>handouts of a short 3 paragraph passage with the graphic organizers done and one hand out that is empty for students to work on using another hand out of a passage with 3 paragraphs</p>	<p>Present different kinds of graphic organizers and hand them out for students to view. Let the students choose one they prefer. The one they choose will be the one they will work with. The procedure is to choose a graphic organizer, view an unseen text, and add the main and supporting ideas to the graphic organizer. This is pair work where each pair reads to the other and shares ideas.</p> <p>Teachers use positive feedback throughout the lessons.</p>	<p>Students are evaluated for carrying out the tasks</p>

5	Enrichment of vocabulary	Vocabulary word map, dictionary, PowerPoint, computers	Fill in word map chart with new words from the text	Teachers evaluate students for tasks done
6	Finding main and supporting ideas	Cut up paragraphs in random order	Students put paragraphs in correct order	Teachers evaluate students on tasks done
7	Anxiety reducing techniques when taking exams	Paper, pencil or pens and a pair of scissors Something to use to make a circle like a plate or some other round object if you want the students to cut the paper in the shape of a circle. Otherwise, they can use the paper and draw a circle on it.	Discuss anxiety in different settings such as work, home, at school and other places. Have students draw a circle or use the circle you provided and write in the circle starting from the centre and going outwards in a circular manner, the words: I am getting high marks in reading comprehension tests or I am getting high marks in English <i>unseens</i> . The final product looks like a snail. Discussion on how students feel about it. Next, teach the students breathing exercises. Ask them to close their eyes and concentrate on the sound of their breathing. Then ask them to count to ten while they	Students are evaluated for the tasks done

			<p>are breathing (one count is for both inhaling and exhaling) and start counting again each time starting from 1 to 10. They should not go beyond ten. This helps them concentrate on the numbering and ultimately their breathing and not on other things. Make it a game. Ask them how many times they can count from 1-10 without making a mistaking and going on to 11. Count <i>one</i> for both inhaling and exhaling.</p>	
8	<p>Yoga and relaxation exercises</p>	<p>Chairs, an audio cassette or disc player, computer (if available with Internet access with audio listening) Quiet background music</p>	<p>Have students sit upright with their legs apart (not crossed) and close their eyes as the teacher uses visualization exercises. Use color imagery and discuss the 7 <i>Chakras</i> and the colors that relate to each (See Appendix C)and the following site for information on the subject of <i>Chakras</i> and colors http://www.sfhear</p>	

			t.com/color.html	
9	Practicing reading comprehension exercise drills, simulating a test situation	Class handouts computers, and Internet access	Individual class and computer work. Use online reading comprehension tests (http://testwise.com/readingindex.html) with an audio cassette or online listening opportunities for those who wish to listen as they read. This can be done in class with hand out reading passages and questions.	Students will be evaluated for computer work and for following instructions on the tasks.
10	Preparing charts and graphic organizers	Paper and pen/pencil, and passages	Students will work in teams. They will prepare charts and graphic organizers They will also practice relaxation exercise on each other.	Students will be evaluated for performing the tasks and team collaboration
11	A reading comprehension test	Handouts of a reading comprehension test	Ask the class to use all that they have learned as they take the reading comprehension test.	Students are evaluated for the task done and for the marks they receive. It is a fifty/fifty situation so that no one fails.
12	Take a reading comprehension test for ESL/EFL students: A survey (See Appendix A,	Use class survey (Appendix A, figure 4) or online survey for students (http://www.questionpro.com/akira/	Ask students to take the survey once again to find out how they feel. Discuss the importance of surveys.	Students are evaluated for the tasks done.

	figure 4.)	TakeSurvey?id=161974)	Use positive feedback and encourage students to participate.	
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Appendix H

The Seven Chakras and their Colors

Color	Red
Chakra	One
Link	http://www.sfheart.com/lovelight/rainbowRed.html
Information	The base chakra is about familial beliefs, superstitions, loyalty, instincts, physical pain, and physical pleasure.
Color	Orange
Chakra	Two
Link	http://www.sfheart.com/lovelight/rainbowOrange.html
Information	This chakra center is the center for sexual energy and pure emotion. It relates to sexuality, creativity, emotions such as anger, fear, and our feeling concerning food and sex.
Color	Yellow
Chakra	Three
Link	http://www.sfheart.com/lovelight/rainbowYellow.html
Information	This chakra holds our formed personality, our wishes and desires and our willing ability to manifest them. Here is our power for compassion, charity, and true justice.
Color	Green/Pink
Chakra	Four
Link	http://www.sfheart.com/lovelight/rainbowGreen.html
Information	This Chakra is the "center" of the system. The balance between the spiritual and the physical. It is about the ability to love freely and unconditionally and controls the creative process.
Color	Blue
Chakra	Five
Link	http://www.sfheart.com/lovelight/rainbowBlue.html
Information	This chakra governs our speech, hearing, and communication of self-expression. It is the beginning seat of our intuition. It is about the expression of the truth that we know in our heart.
Color	Indigo
Chakra	Six
Link	http://www.sfheart.com/lovelight/rainbowIndigo.html
Information	This is our source of intuition and insight. Our sense of spirituality, and inner awareness of self through inner and outer sight, visions, and dreams.
Color	Violet
Chakra	Seven
Link	http://www.sfheart.com/lovelight/rainbowViolet.html
Information	This is the chakra that gives us our sense of Oneness and connection to the cosmic consciousness. Here is the ability to receive light from the source and it is our connection to our higher self.

Appendix I

Figure 9. A KWL Chart (Teach-nology, 2005)

Topic: _____

K What I <i>Know</i>	W What I <i>Want To Learn</i>	L What I Have <i>Learned</i>

Appendix J

A Problem-Solution Chart (Jones, 1999)

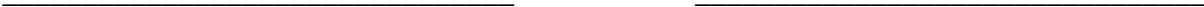
Problem-Solution Chart	
What Is The Problem?	
What Are The Effects?	
What Are The Causes?	
What Are Some Solutions?	

Appendix K

Vocabulary Word Map (Jones, 1999)

Definition or Synonym

Antonym



Vocabulary word



Draw a picture or add an image

Use it in a sentence.

Adapted from Raymond C. Jones

Appendix L

Scanning the text for information

Name: _____ Class: _____

Fill in the following chart by scanning the reading passage below for information.

Title	
Author	
Write the number of paragraphs	
When was the article written?	
Where did the report appear?	
Make a list of places that start with capital letters.	
Make a list of people's names.	
Make a list of numbers.	
What does each number refer to?	
Make a list of numbers written in letters.	
How many times does the word tsunami appear?	
Write the different forms of the word devastate.	
How many times does the word collapse appear?	

Appendix M

Canary Islands Earthquake Could Trigger Monster Tsunami

The eruption of a volcano in the Canary Islands could trigger a "mega-tsunami" that would devastate Atlantic coastlines with waves as high as 330 feet, scientists said on Wednesday. They said an eruption of the Cumbre Vieja volcano on La Palma, part of the Spanish island chain off West Africa, was likely to cause a massive chunk of rock to break off, crashing into the sea and kicking up huge walls of water higher than any other in recorded history.

The tsunami would be capable of traveling huge distances at up to 500 miles an hour, the scientists said in a research paper to be published in September's *Geophysical Research Letters*.

Simon Day, of the Benfield Greig Hazard Research Centre at the University College of London, said that as the volcano was not erupting at present, the short-term and medium-term risks were "negligible." However, Cumbre Vieja should be monitored closely for any signs of activity so that emergency services could plan an effective response, he said. "Eruptions of Cumbre Vieja occur at intervals of decades to a century or so and there may be a number of eruptions before its collapse," said Day, who collaborated on the research with Steven Ward of the University of California. "Although the year-to-year probability of a collapse is therefore low, the resulting tsunami would be a major disaster with indirect effects around the world."

The effects would spread north, west and south of the Canaries, with the west Sahara bearing the worst of the wave's energy. The energy released by the collapse would be equal to the electricity consumption of the entire United States in half a year. Immediately after the landslide, a dome of water 93,000 feet high and tens of miles wide would form, only to collapse and rebound. As the landslide rubble moved deeper under water, a tsunami would develop. Within 10 minutes, the tsunami would have moved a distance of almost 155 miles.

On the west Saharan shore, waves would probably reach heights of 330 feet. Florida and the Caribbean, the final north Atlantic destinations to be affected by the tsunami, would have to brace themselves for 165-foot waves some eight to nine hours after the landslide. Wave heights toward Europe would be smaller, but substantial waves would hit the coasts of Britain, Spain, Portugal, and France.

The research paper estimated water would penetrate several miles inland and that the devastation would cause trillions of dollars in damage.

Adapted from a news report by Susan Schlachter (2003)